

The Beginning of Knowledge

SERMON

By

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TEXT: Proverbs 1:7-19

PROP: The Bible is the necessary and only means to acquiring the fear of Yahweh and the beginning of knowledge therefore we must do all we can to make the Bible foundational to all that we come to know.

Proverbs 1:7-19 (ESV)

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The Enticement of Sinners

8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and forsake not your mother's teaching,

9 for they are a graceful garland for your head
and pendants for your neck.

10 My son, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.

11 If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
let us ambush the innocent without reason;

12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive,
and whole, like those who go down to the pit;

13 we shall find all precious goods,
we shall fill our houses with plunder;

14 throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse"—

15 my son, do not walk in the way with them;
hold back your foot from their paths,

16 for their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed blood.

17 For in vain is a net spread
in the sight of any bird,

18 but these men lie in wait for their own blood;
they set an ambush for their own lives.

19 Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors.

The book of Proverbs belongs to a group of Bible books known as wisdom literature also including Ecclesiastes and Job. The pursuit of wisdom has captured the attention of many in history. Solomon writes, *"I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."*" (Ecclesiastes 1:16, ESV) And the psalmist echoes the great theme verse of our text, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!"* (Psalm 111:10, ESV)

What are we to understand by the Wisdom which is the theme of these books of the Bible? How does it relate to the Law and the Prophets? Surely it covers the whole domain of what we know as science and philosophy. It is the diligent effort of the human mind which seeks to understand and to explain all that exists. Perhaps we may characterize wisdom as the search for truth. As the human mind searches for wisdom, however, it does not come to God and his revelation in Scripture to find it. Natural man invariably uses his own faculties and resources to come to know truth and his search for wisdom leads him to establish himself as the authority and fount of wisdom. By nature we wish to be autonomous. It is not our nature to need God and if we develop any concept of God at all it is merely an extension of our self. Nothing is too high for our search for wisdom and we inculcate our penchant for knowledge into our children and young people establishing for them a myriad of public schools and universities. But in the end it is just as Solomon tells us, *"I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind."* (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14, ESV)

The book of Proverbs begins with the statement, *"The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth–"* (Proverbs 1:1-4, ESV) But we must understand that his wisdom came from God and centered upon God. The wise men we think of so often in our modern culture, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, observed the world around them and their interpretation of their world informs much of modern thought. But they did not pass along to us any knowledge of the true and living God. Solomon, to the contrary, tells us, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."* (Proverbs 1:7, ESV) Indeed, it is the fear of Yahweh that is the foundation of all true knowledge. We spend hours watching the television discovery channel but while we may learn many things about the world around us we learn nothing of God. The starting point in our search for knowledge must be the

fear of Yahweh then what we come to learn in our schools and television programs will lead us to glorify and enjoy God.

The theme of the Bible and in particular the focus of the book of Proverbs is the knowledge of Yahweh and what our response to that knowledge must be. The knowledge of God not only brings us to a right understanding of the world around us but it also informs our ethics and our religion. We are informed of the necessary starting point in our search for knowledge but Solomon goes on to instruct us in what we must do with this knowledge. Of what value is the search for knowledge if it does not bring about righteousness, justice and equity? Of what value is the wisdom of this world if it does not deal with our sin against God?

We are told that the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge. That is to say, reverence for Yahweh is the pre-requisite of all scientific, philosophical or religious truth. No real knowledge or wisdom can be obtained apart from reverence for Yahweh. No consistent or satisfactory system to explain human life and the world in which we live can be constructed apart from Yahweh as he is revealed to us in the Bible. Yahweh is the one who exists. The name Yahweh means *existing one* or the "God who is there." (Francis Schaeffer) He revealed himself to Moses as, "I AM THAT I AM", the self-existing God. Because Yahweh is the self-existing one Moses was to obey him, to inform Pharaoh or his wishes and to trust him that he had the power to bring his will to pass. It surely follows from this that all of God's creation is obligated to do what God tells them to do. We are to obey the commandments of God just as Pharaoh was to obey the command of God through Moses to permit Israel to leave Egypt. We are to obey the God of the Bible because he is not merely a totem pole of carved image formed by the art and imagination of man. We are to obey him because he is the only self-existing, all-powerful God and because he is perfect we must be perfect. Therefore it is worthy advice to obey the wisdom and instruction of Yahweh. As Solomon puts it, "*Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.*" (Proverbs 1:8-10, ESV)

We are often enticed to serve false gods just as Israel was enticed and time after time God's people consented to the advice sinners. Not long after they had crossed the Red Sea on dry land God's people made a golden calf and they worshipped this false god as the god brought them up out of the land of Egypt. We read, "*And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' "* And the Lord said to Moses, "*I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-*

necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you." (Exodus 32:7-10, ESV) How can people so quickly and so easily be led into sin such as this? How could Aaron, with better knowledge of God than most and first hand eyewitness knowledge of the power of Yahweh, lead Israel into idolatry? It is no easy thing to refuse the enticements of sinners. Indeed, how could Solomon with all his God given wisdom consent to idolatry. We read, *"For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods."* (1 Kings 11:5-8, ESV) It is not an easy thing to refuse the enticements of sinners.

Sampson married a beautiful Philistine woman against the wisdom of his godly parents. "Get her for me", he said to his father, "for she is right in my eyes." Sampson was a ruler in Israel, brought up in the worship of Yahweh, yet he took a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines. And she enticed him into more sin. The Philistine leaders, *"-- said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" And Samson's wife wept over him and said, "You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people."* (Judges 14:15-17, ESV) Sampson was betrayed to the Philistines through the enticement of this pagan woman and we learn again that it is not an easy thing to refuse the enticement of sinners.

Sampson loved another Philistine woman named Delilah who enticed him to divulge the secret of his great strength. He was subdued by his enemies who claimed that their false god had given him into their hand. We know that Yahweh used Sampson to punish the ungodly Philistines for their gross idolatry but we also see that the enticements of the wicked are very difficult to refuse.

We read that the godly king Jehoshaphat was enticed to sin. Jehoshaphat, you see, had made a marriage alliance with wicked king Ahab and the two of them were desirous of waging war with the Syrians who held the city of Ramoth-Gilead in Gad. In order to recover it for Israel Ahab invited Jehoshaphat of Judah to accompany him in the campaign. Despite the discouragement of Micaiah, the royal pair set out on the disastrous enterprise. In their attack on the city Ahab fought in disguise, but was mortally wounded by an arrow shot at random. False prophets encouraged Ahab and

Jehoshaphat to wage this ill fated war but the godly Micaiah gave them contrary advice even though it led to his own imprisonment and torture. For our purposes we take note of God's message to the two kings through Micaiah. "-- *"Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab the king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will **entice** him.'will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to **entice** him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' (2 Chronicles 18:18-22, ESV)*

It is very difficult to refuse the enticements of lying spirits especially when they are dressed up in the glitter and glamour of Hollywood. Sexual immorality, violence and blasphemy are pandered to us in very appealing terms by the high tech media of our day. But when it is something that we really want to do the enticement is all the more tantalizing. James tells us that we are enticed by our own lust. *"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."* (James 1:14-15, ESV)

We are often enticed by the eloquence of great speakers to believe false doctrine or perhaps the great learning and academic pedigree of an eminent professor entices us. We may find appealing the beat of contemporary music or the wonderful artistry of a gifted musician and we are enticed into false worship. To the contrary Paul writes, *"And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."* (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, ESV)

If sinners entice us we must not consent. If they encourage us to take part in their violence and immorality, we are not to throw our lot in with them. We are not to walk in the way with them. We are not to take their counsel or put ourselves unduly under their influence. And why is this? Speaking of these sinners who entice us we read, *"but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors."* (Proverbs 1:18-19, ESV) The outcome of wickedness is loss of life, impoverishment, and death in hell forever. The pains and miseries of this life are not the result of godly living

but they are the inevitable outcome of wickedness. Their enticements may be attractive and their wisdom compelling but in the end it is all vanity; it is all futile. While we must refuse the enticements of sinners we must do everything we can to acquire the knowledge and wisdom of Yahweh. Fools despise the wisdom of God but the wisdom of God is the word of God, the sacred writings, which are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:15) It is to that end that we acquire all knowledge and that we come to faith in Christ Jesus.

Of course the Bible is not a textbook of philosophy or science or engineering or homemaking. Neither is it a novel to be read for entertainment. While there may be nothing wrong with reading for entertainment, or the study of any academic discipline, if we do not begin with the fear of Yahweh or make the reverence of Yahweh the foundation of all we come to know we will miss the whole point of knowledge which is the salvation of our souls and a right relationship to God. The Bible is the word of God and God is the God of the word. The Bible therefore is the necessary and only means to acquiring the fear of Yahweh and the beginning of knowledge. How can we ever refuse to let sinners entice us if we have little or superficial knowledge of the Bible? How can we ever know of Yahweh apart from the Bible? Therefore we must do all we can to make the Bible foundational to all that we come to know. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge and the Bible is our only source of the knowledge of Yahweh unto salvation for he reveals himself therein to that end. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

May God in his great mercy move each one of us to study the Bible as we should in order to fear him as we ought.

**All that I am I owe to thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul amaze.**

**Search me, O God, my heart discern,
Try me, my inmost thought to learn;
And lead me, if in sin I stray,
To choose the everlasting way.**