

Observations from Proverbs chapter 28

One of the features of the book of Proverbs, is that it is made up of many individual short sayings, each of which forms a self-contained unit in themselves. This is an aid to reflection on spiritual things: the reader can take a few snippets, so to speak, and mull them over in their minds, to benefit from their meaning and significance. Proverbs chapter 28, which is part of our Old Testament readings for today is no exception: for our exhortation we shall consider just a few of those self-contained blocks, to see what observations emerge from them.

Verse Seven

Many, if not all of the parables taught by Messiah find their roots in the book of Proverbs. Verse seven of our chapter for today seems to form part of the basis of his Parable of the Prodigal Son. Consider this:

“Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but **he that is a companion of riotous men** shameth his father” (Prov. 28:7)

With the next chapter:

“Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but **he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance**” (Prov. 29:3)

And compare both with Luke chapter 15:

“... not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there **wasted his substance with riotous living** ...” (Luke 15:13)

And the elder son’s words in verse 30:

“But as soon as this thy son was come, which **hath devoured thy living with harlots**, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf ...”

The exhortation in the parable is not to leave the ecclesial house and be given over to the pleasures of this life, but rather to remain and be faithful to the Father’s requirements. But also, there is great encouragement in the way in which the repentant elder son found forgiveness from his father – even so, our Heavenly Father will forgive those who repent and turn back to him. Divine favour is extended to the repentant sinner, and there ought to be great rejoicing in the family of the saints over one such person who comes to his senses and recognises the benefits of returning to the Father’s house. All too often, we can be like the elder son, who needed not to repent, and resented the gladness of heart extended to his brother.

Verse Nine:

Verse 9 of our chapter directly challenges many of the assumptions made regarding Yahweh’s relationship to unrepentant sinners. It is commonly thought that He loves all men, and will always hear the prayers of those who come to him. However, this Proverb teaches otherwise:

“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, **even his prayer shall be abomination**” (Prov. 28:9).

Those who close their ears to the words of Yahweh's Laws, will themselves not be heard in Heaven. Their prayers are abominable to Him, and will go unanswered and unheard. So Ezekiel was told:

"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and have put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?" (Ezek. 14:3).

King Saul provides an example of one who failed to heed the requirements of Yahweh, and was not heard as a consequence:

"... and when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of Yahweh, **Yahweh answered him not**, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets ..." (1 Sam. 28:5-6).

Truly this one of the most desolate experiences a man can have. Being faced with seemingly insurmountable problems, we can have comfort in prayer, knowing that our Father knows what we have to endure, and will see us through it. But Saul, because he had turned away from the commandments of Yahweh was not heard: "Yahweh answered him not". Saul went forward to his own destruction, with no hope, and no help from Yahweh.

The people in Jeremiah's day were not better. On a number of occasions, he was told not to pray for the rebellious people, such as recording in chapter 7 of his prophecy:

"... therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me, for **I will not hear thee**" (Jer. 7:16).

And similarly, Messiah himself said:

"... I pray for them [i.e. his disciples – CAM]: **I pray not for the world**, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (Jno. 17:9).

We, therefore should not pray for the world either, but for those who seek to hear our Father's commandments.

Verse Thirteen:

Verse 13 states that:

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

When we consider examples of Scripture where individuals sought to cover their sins, our minds might well go back to the early chapters of Genesis. Following the sin of the first human pair, Adam and Eve sought to cover their new found awareness of nakedness before the Elohim:

"... and the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3:7).

They sought to cover their sins by a contrivance of their own devising, yet they could not escape the penetrating view of Divine scrutiny. Yahweh knew what they had done, they could not cover, or hid it from Him.

But ironically however, it was Yahweh himself that provided a covering for their sin:

“Unto Adam also, and to his wife did Yahweh Elohim make coats of skins, and clothed them ...” (Gen. 3:21).

Here is the point, we cannot cover up our own sins before Yahweh: only an offering of His Own Providing can accomplish that. As David expressed the situation following his sin with Bath-Sheba:

“... blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and **whose sins are covered**. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:7-8).

There is another thought that emerges from a consideration of these things: in order to benefit from the skins of Yahweh’s providing, both Adam and his wife had to firstly take off their old garments of fig-leaves. They had to lay aside their own contrivance, and attempt to appear righteous, and put on a new set of garments. Even so, we read the words of Paul to the Colossians, that we must lay aside our old garments, and put on the new garments provided by our Creator:

“... But ye now also **put off** all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that **ye have put off** the old man with his deeds; and have **put on** the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him ...” (Col. 3:8-10).

The exhortation here is obvious.

Verse Nineteen:

Verse 19 also brings us to consider the case of Adam and Eve:

“he that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough” (Prov. 28:19).

Just like the Prodigal Son who joined with vain persons, and squandered his Father’s goods, so those who do not till the ground will be brought to poverty.

The tilling of the ground comes from Genesis chapter 3 again:

“... therefore Yahweh Elohim sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to **till the ground** from whence he was taken ...” (Gen. 3:23).

Part of the curse upon man, is the need to engage in toil and labour in order to eat bread (see verse 19 of Genesis 3). But the slothful do not engage in their work, and so will not have the fruits that come from hard graft. As another Proverb has it:

“the sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing” (Prov. 20:4).

But there are spiritual principles to be discerned here, as well as the natural. We must not be slothful, but tend the ground of our hearts, that we yield fruit instead of thorns:

“... For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which

bearth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you ..." (Heb. 6:7-9).

So the writer proceeds to exhort us:

"... we desire that every one of you do shew the same **diligence** to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be **not slothful**, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises ..." (Heb. 6:11-12).

There is another point here: instead of being devoted to earning as much money as we possibly can, and the pursuit of worldly goods and possessions, we should attend to spiritual things, and labour in the word and in the doctrine. So Messiah taught:

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (Jno. 6:27).

The case of Laodicea also comes to mind in connection with this. They supposed that gain is godliness, and were concerned with accruing natural things – and did not perceive their spiritual poverty:

"Because thou sayest, **I am rich, and increased with goods**, and have need of nothing; and **knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked**: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see ..." (Rev 3:17-18).

Here, we have some of the threads we are considering being brought together: the pursuit of worldly enterprises to the expense of the precious treasure of the Truth. The need to have spiritual nakedness covered by Divinely provided garments. And the vital necessity of having our eyes opened to see our true situation, as it is before the Lord before whom we shall stand. Let us then, in the days that lie ahead, seek to pursue wisdom, knowledge and understanding, putting off the corruption of the Old Man, and put on the garments of righteousness, provided for us by our Maker. Then, we will have true riches for evermore, rejoicing and singing with joy the song of Moses and the Lamb, in glorious immortality and incorruptibility.

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