

Better is Little...

Proverbs 15:16

“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.”—Proverbs 15:16 (Cf. ver. 6; 16:16).

This is one of the passages in Proverbs that shows the immense wisdom of Solomon in a way that is particularly contrary to the way of men in our day, and perhaps from all days. Solomon was a tremendously wealthy man, as many “kings” have been, but Solomon was rich beyond virtually all of them. We might also note that it is likely that Solomon knew what he says in this verse in an experiential and practical sense as well as in a theoretical way. Just to comment, quite a number of the verses contained in Proverbs are what Solomon was taught by God via his walk and interaction with God over the years of his life. This is not to say that all that Solomon has to say is just empty pontificating. That is by no means so. What I mean here is that there may have never been a time when Solomon had “little”. It appears, from the testimony of the Bible that Solomon grew into the great wealth of his later days as he built the Temple.

We should also note that there were quite a number of times when Solomon was a good bit less than holy in his walk with the Lord, his God. We see him as quite self-indulgent and, not be snippety, quite the ladies man with 300 wives and 600 concubines. This, and other facts about his life, set the scene for what he has to say here and in other places in Proverbs. We see this especially when we notice that the contrast seems to be not between wealth and poverty, to the advantage of the latter, but between wealth without the fear of the Lord (attended with turmoil), and contracted means accompanied with that peace and blessing which true religion brings. A “little” under those circumstances is certainly better than great “revenues.” Little refers to the idea of a tiny bit of whatever is being talked about. We can think of it as few, or even that which does quite reach the needed amount. It is even used of physical movement to speak of going an insufficient distance that doesn’t quite meet the necessary and required distance. Of course, treasure has a known meaning. In the general sense it speaks that which has great value. Great multiples that idea to an immense size. That is why we started by noting the fact that this is an ancient King saying all of this.

As one last note, it has been plain throughout history that wealth does, perhaps bring some pleasure as that wealth is spent securing things that one desires. That too has been the case as person after person has gained wealth via means after means. Solomon’s point here is to contrast wealth gained simply for the service of human goals against wealth gained and held by one who fears God and perhaps even seeks to see to it that his wealth is used in a fashion that honors the Lord.

We're familiar with the idea of the "fear of the Lord". It speaks of one who knows God, understands His nature and Being, and who gives a right place to God's nature and "Godhood" in the living and walking of his life. His does not mean that the man who fears the Lord never falls and commits sin. Solomon was certainly guilty of his share. But it clear from the Scripture that he was a man know knew the Lord and who "feared" God with all of his heart. One interesting note is that in spite of the possession of this fear, he was still man with pronounced weakness and did, indeed commit a good bit of sin.

Looking at it from the other direction, we note that from here and other passages, we can clearly see that having even a besetting sin that plagues us in life does not forbid us from a real and abiding fear of the Lord.

By Way of Illustration:

- Perhaps no man ever possessed greater treasures than Solomon himself, yet his experience proved them to be but "vanity and vexation of spirit" after he had forsaken God (Eccles. 2:11).
- And no man was ever poorer than Job when deprived of all by a mysterious providence, yet how much, in reality, was his condition even then better than that of the apostate king, able as he still was to maintain his faith in God!
- Contrast Elisha, content with a "prophet's reward," "poor but making many rich," with his ungodly servant, grasping great treasure, and acquiring trouble therewith.
- But observe, too, how Abraham and Joseph of Arimathea, both wealthy men, were "rich" also "toward God."
- Also, how Judas Iscariot, a poor man (to whom thirty shekels was an object) was infinitely more poor in that he emptied his heart of Christ.

By way of application, we should note that religion is the sweetener as well as the sanctifier of life, is a truth hard to be received. It is a good and solid walk with the Lord that makes life makes life what God really intended it to be. I can't help but notice that there are so many who deny God that do NOT have a rich and satisfying life. They spend their lives snarling and slapping at God and believers despite what they know to be true (Rom. 1 & 2).

Yet this, the inspired Word teaches everywhere. The heart, in its alienation from God, craves happiness without Him, and thinks to find it in money and what money procures. Now, we know from the Scripture that "*the love of money is the root of all evil,*" but money itself is not. Let us admit its value, but insist that a religious use of it will immensely augment that value; so much so that "a little" under that condition is far better than a "treasure" without it. The possessor of wealth will allow that it involves great trouble and anxiety in its preservation, its investment, its expenditure. And doubtless there is a reward for the trouble if the money be husbanded and made use of religiously, so as to increase the happiness of its owner, by enabling him to do good. But if this be

not so, then the burden of management is greater than the return of satisfaction, and it may become a source of intolerable disquietude, as e.g. when litigation or family feuds arise out of it. Let me strive, then, to make good use of what God gives me. If much, and trouble therewith, yet a conscientious use of it will tend to sweeten life, and may even improve instead of darkening my prospects for eternity. If little, yet, religiously handled, it will bring less trouble and fewer temptations with it. Whether much or little, the great truth to be accepted is that only through the fear of the Lord can money become a real blessing.