

A Lover of Knowledge or a Brute?

Proverbs 12:1

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“Whoso loves instruction loves knowledge: but he that hates reproof is brutish.” - Proverbs 12:1 (13:1).

Here in Proverbs 12 Solomon makes a contrast in relation to various conditions, namely in thought, words, in domestic relationships, and so on. It begins by encouraging the reader to be one who **loves knowledge** and not one who **hates reproof** or moral correction (v. 1); he goes on and that such an attitude produces a life that **will never be moved** (v. 3). It is interesting that he uses what might, in some contexts, be called an insulting term. The KJV term “brutish” is a word that we would render “**stupid**”. It comes from the Heb. term literally meaning “to graze”; and should be taken to see that Solomon is saying that the one in view is as stupid as the brute cattle (cf. Pss. 49:20; 73:22).

²⁰ *A man who is in honor, yet does not understand,
Is like the beasts that perish. (Psalm 49:20)*

²² *I was so foolish and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You. (Psalm 73:22)*

It is not only that the one in view is not the wisest person around. He/she is one who is deliberately or even purposely ignorant in knowing and doing. We can say this because “brutish” is set in contrast to the word at the beginning of the verse: “*instruction*” which speaks of a training gotten/given by word or deed. The one who is referred to as “brutish” is one who has been exposed to real and meaningful “instruction” given in a solid fashion. This one has not just received this instruction which has resulted in knowledge, he has done so because he recognizes that it is the way to real and valuable knowledge. The reference here is given some 90+ times in the OT. As here, it is used to speak of knowledge, as well as perception, skill, discernment, understanding, and even wisdom. and we see Solomon saying to us that...

“Whoso loves instruction loves knowledge: but he that hates reproof is brutish.”

“Whoso” (or Whoever - depending upon the translation) sets the general parameters within which Solomon has set what he is speaking of. The Hebrew word is actually the “*’ohēb*” and is used to speak of the idea of “to love” and at times refers to love for another, and includes family, and even, at times to sexual love. Interestingly, it is often used for the human appetite for objects such as food, drink, sleep, or even wisdom. In the spiritual realm it can speak of human love for or to God. Humanly speaking it is sued of the act of being a friend, or a lover (when a participle) or in a somewhat lesser sense to a friend (participle).

Again, in the spiritual realm, but in the opposite “direction” we see it referring to God’s love toward man as a whole or to individual men. Frequently, it speaks of God’s love to His people Israel.

Interestingly, the word used is also applied to man’s responsibility to cultivate and exercise a “love for righteousness. It is this sense in which it used here in Proverbs 12:1:

Whoso loves instruction loves knowledge...

It is not merely that we are to see value in the acquiring of knowledge; Solomon is telling us that the good thing here is to have a virtually spiritual love for knowing the truths and facts offered in the Word of God and the resulting knowledge that that results from taking this instruction in.

We want to note also that this is another place where Solomon uses one of his “contrasting” conjunctions to set what he said in the beginning of the verse over against what he will say in the second. You and I do this kind of thing quite often. It is particularly useful when we see it as it used here. The first thing is quite understandably true in virtually any circumstance. What makes the verse (or the concept in view) especially valuable to us is when that first idea is contrasted with a second truth. Here we see clearly the two things Solomon wants us to get good hold of:

1. Loving Instruction (and so pursuing it) is positive as it yields knowledge.
2. BUT - failure (or disdain and ignoring) the correction that instruction can yield results in becoming what Solomon calls “brutishness”.

The word in the second phrase, “hates” refers to failing to hold a thing in proper esteem; namely as much as setting it aside and refusing to pay proper attention to it and so give it the proper place in our lives. The verb used here is essentially in the present tense and is a participle which functions as what we could call a verbal adjective, i.e., a word that has characteristics of both a verb and an adjective or noun. And so we can readily see here “...*he who hates correction...*” shows this verb (hates) is functioning as a sort of adjective and modifies the subject of the sentence - “he who”. It actually lends a couple qualities to the “He” the sentence is pointing to...

- The hating is an active thing.
- Solomon wants us to see that it is an ongoing thing - not just an act in the past but one that carries on actively.
- It influences things that follow it...it has a result.
- It also has an object that it is exercised upon...here that object is correction.

I think one thing we all must learn and then keep in our minds is that any act of forsaking or setting aside of the Word of God and all that God intends for us take in and reap from taking it in has what could be a very negative affect on us. It is as if we make a foolish decision that has a result that can and will be seen as stupid and can make us more like a brute than as those instructed and

having knowledge as God intended. We ought to see to it that, in our lives, we NEVER fall into the second group and, as much as hate what we see and hear from the Word of God. It is only in this fashion that we will gain the knowledge that God intends for us to have.

To rehearse our interpretation let's add to our thinking that the word "instruction," as used by Solomon, contains the idea of discipline, and discipline involves reproof. The words above may be thus transposed:

"He loveth correction who loveth knowledge: and he hateth rebuke who is without reason,—as stupid as the brutish cattle."

The meaning clearly is that the man who loves knowledge willingly puts himself in the place of the disciple, and is thankful for reproof as a part of wholesome discipline. Whereas, he who will not bear to be corrected of his fault proves himself incapable of improvement, which, as a rational being, he ought not to be.

As always there are illustrations that can give light to what we are saying:

- David, by humbling himself under the reproofs of Nathan and the coarser rebukes of Shimei, accepted a godly discipline, and learnt to know himself.
- Ahab, by hating to hear the truth at Micaiah's lips, rushed blindfold to his own destruction.
- Asaph, being left to his own reasonings, essentially made himself foolish and ignorant as a beast before God; submitting to be guided by God's counsel, looks forward to glory (Ps. 73:22–24).
- Stiff-necked as the ox that eateth hay was Israel while turning away from God's guidance. To submit to His will as the angels in heaven do, is the prayer of the Israel of God.

By way of application we can say that man is distinguished above the most rational of the lower creation by being capable of improvement to any extent. But in this he is only by submitting to education, training, discipline. The youth who rejects these will fall very low in the scale of humanity. Men become brutes, yea, worse than brutes, who do not rise as men, and this from an intellectual and moral point of view alone. How much more when the spiritual part of man is taken into account also! The Church is the school of the Holy Ghost, and I am placed therein to be trained for heaven. How much there is to learn and to unlearn! What need of teaching, of correction, of restraint! Sometimes God chastens with His own hand, and utters His rebukes direct through the conscience of the individual. More often He employs men as His instruments, and even those who do the work in anger or out of envy. Let me not kick against a wholesome discipline which comes from God, however unworthy the instruments who administer it. Nature, indeed, hates reproof. 'Tis a bitter morsel at any time. But even when least deserved, I may extract good from it, for to submit in silence is a lesson in grace well learnt. Jesus Himself, as man,

consented to learn obedience by the things which He suffered (unjustly). How much more may I!

From hardness of heart, good Lord, deliver me!
