

A Way That Seems Right to a Man

Proverbs 14:12

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“There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” – Proverbs 14:12 (Cf. 7:27; 12:15; 16:2, 25; 21:2).

Once again, we consider one of the more famous of Solomon’s Proverbs. It is a part of a section where he is considering some fairly significant

- In Chapter 14:1–35 we see him draw a contrast between the wise and foolish, the rich and poor.
- Next, in Chapter 15:1–33 He talks about the better course (as opposed to the thoughts in the prior chapter) of wisdom and serving God.
- In Chapter 16:1–33. He speaks of the better way of life through serving the Lord.
- Then, in Chapters 17:1–18:24 we read of the various maxims regulating good conduct.
- Finally, in chapters 19:1–22:16 we find listed various Proverbs regulating personal conduct.

Here in chapter 14 we note that our verse is framed by verses that contrast

- the approach of the **prudent** (vv. 8a, 15b) with that of **fools** (v. 8b) and the **simple** (v. 15a).

Solomon believed that it is prudent to recognize that appearances can be deceptive (a person’s exterior vs. the state of the **heart**, vv. 10 and 13; the solidity of the **house** vs. the **tent**, v. 11; and a **way that seems right**, v. 12). He makes it clear that whatever the appearance, the path of one’s life has consequences consistent with how it is walked.

This is a VERY important concept to get into our heads as well live out our lives. We should note that it was one that Solomon learned by experience as throughout his life he made choice after choice that had terrible circumstances. He is NOT seeking to exalt a sense of superiority over his readers (and neither should we!!) but rather is using his personal experience as an example of the principle set forth here so that you and I might learn from it and avoid the kinds of trouble that he, sadly suffered in his life.

¹² *There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)*

Just to lay a foundation for what the verse tells us we find that the first phrase speaks of both a way determined by a “man” (not referring to the gender but to the entire male and female group) and to the decision and/or approval of

that “way”. We remember that the word “way” often refers to a path of road in the OT. The sense is that it speaks of the concrete directions that lead from where one is to where one desires to be. Solomon well knew the idea here and, likewise, he knew what he is getting at when he concludes the verse with...that this “...*is the way of death...*”. Essentially, what he is saying is that this particular road can ONLY lead to a result other than the “life” or pleasure that the individual was seeking!

Interestingly, it seems like the hint of the verse is that there are a number of possible verses that could be more than just one verse:

¹² *There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)*

The issue we need to see is that, though this particular verse points to a single idea, there are many, many “roads” upon which we might stray if not careful. The word “way” is often seen as being “general” and quite possibly pointing to one of many ways. The intent is to cause us to sort through the different ways available and choose the one that is the best.

In this case, the best is cast in the best light in two regards:

- The first is that it is seen to be a right “way” that will take us in the direction we need and ought to go.
- A second way is for us to take into account that there are, possibly, a number of ways that might satisfy our desires, but that we need to think our way through them so that we can discern the proper decision amongst them.

It seems that this is precisely Solomon’s point here...namely that we, as godly men and women, need to take an earnest look at all of the possible “ways” that present themselves to men and make our decision from whatever has present itself.

There is one more truth there that we need to be certain to be aware of as we are making our choices. That is that, like the vast majority of people, that which we see as the ideal choice is necessarily the best of whatever lies before us. What is desperately needful is that our choice be that which does NOT lead as Solomon is pointing for us here. Just because one is persuaded that a “way” that is right does not MAKE it so. We need, Solomon says, are ultimately what he implies are “the ways of life” and NOT what he says are the “ways of death”.

It does not really make a defining difference to how we evaluate if it just seems good to us. Food, surely, can make a difference that way...but spiritual truth? Is not “right” because it seems to “taste good” or seems right to us. What matters, according to Solomon is that it BE RIGHT – namely that it be according to what God has proclaimed in His Revelation! Solomon made this “way that seems right to a man” hundreds of times...with wives and concubines. And though, a couple of them yielded a profit for the Kingdom of God, none of them survived and blessed the Lord (perhaps with the exception of the birth of Bathsheba – David). Solomon knew this by experience! And it is certain that

there are many results that are certain and reaped by men in this same manner (not to mention many other manner).

It is important that we learn this lesson. It is not sufficient for us to simply make our favorite choice or root our choices on preferences. In that regard...it is likely that some, if not an alarming number of those choices with the "...ways of death" as Solomon says. We need to recognize that this is NOT talking about physical death, but the terrible results that can come from ungodly and dishonorable choices that do not serve the Lord. We, as believers, need to be aware that our choices and/or preferences for the way things might go (whatever is in our minds as the "way" in which we should go) can have a very negative and detrimental effect the direction whatever it I takes us. It is not physical death, as we have said, but it seems likely that the direction we might choose to go is more detrimental and even seriously wrong than any godly fashion in which we might have chosen to go.

Like so many Proverbs in the Book, this one speaks volumes about Solomon experiences in life and what we can learn from his teaching and example. Let's see that we do so, not just here but throughout the rest of this great Book as well.

Just to rehearse and underscore the interpretation of the passage we have seen – we note that it is a way of life, a course of action, that is meant and is referred to. Through deception or self-deception, it is made to appear right, at least justifiable to a man. But it is not right, and so, through various bye-paths and turnings, it leads to death. The end is certain, though the beginning was deceptive, and whether it be a course of error in faith or in morals, death spiritual and eternal must be its end if persisted in, and sometimes temporal ruin goes before.

Thinking, as always, of illustrations to drive the point home to us:

- Eve was persuaded that she was doing a good and a wise thing when she was really bringing death into the world.
- Jeroboam convinced himself that it was policy to do that which, as it turned out, disestablished instead of establishing his throne, besides affixing an eternal stigma to his name.
- Even the good Josiah lost his life (though not, we may be sure, his soul) by persistence in a foolish design which seemed good in his own eyes, though God discouraged it (2 Chron. 35:20–24).
- The persecutors of old time (as now) think they do God service, though their spirit and their actions we're convinced and they prove that they know not God (John 16:2).

- Many professors of religion (like those of the Laodicean Church) will not (it must be feared) have their eyes opened till the day of judgment, to see how they have mistaken the way of death for that of life (Matt. 7:22, 23).

Thinking in terms of application - Conscience has shared in the derangement of man's moral nature caused by sin. Hence, the many people say that it is not now *of itself* a safe guide for man, but requires to be informed and regulated by God's Holy Spirit and Word. So that, though I may say, with one of old, "I verily thought in myself" this or that, it by no means follows that the thoughts which seemed to be right may not be altogether wrong, and lead to the worst consequences. If it be wrong in mind, it must, in a huge many people this day, end in evil, for the result will not accord with the false opinion, but with the absolute truth. This is the case in matters apart from revelation. Implicit confidence, *e.g.*, in a commercial bubble or in an unsound vessel will not save me from being involved in the disastrous effects of the failure or the wreck. And not less, but even more certainly, though I may have persuaded myself or been persuaded that that is good or harmless in faith or morals which by inevitable laws must lead into the ways of death—my peril is not thereby diminished. The infatuation of vice, of formalism, of self-righteousness, of heresy, may blind my eyes to the end; but certainly that end, though I approach it in various ways, and may stop short of it, must needs be death, seeing that all those ways lead from God. False guides will mislead. But there is a way that is right, and the meek shall be taught that way (Ps. 25:9).

This one of the more significant and purposeful directions we see in the Book of Proverbs. It is one we all need to heed and must keep in the front of our minds as we walk through life faces the many variety of things we all face. We all have to make evaluations and selections concerning what choices with which we are faced so regularly. Let's see that we take the greatest care we are able to take to see that we are not selecting one that leads to a detrimental, even destructive direction!! Let's make the right and the productive choices in life!!