

Intermeddling With Wisdom

Proverbs 18:1

“Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeks and intermeddles with all wisdom.” - Proverbs 18:1.

This is one of verses in the Scripture that is used to justify and even encourage the idea of the benefit of seclusion oneself in a monastery or other place to absent and protect yourself from the negative and detrimental effects of the world around us. From out of these verses has come the practice of giving your life and attention to the denial of social world so that you can “give yourself” to God and to contemplation and prayer. Now, while the general thought there might seem good, that is NOT what the Lord Jesus meant when, during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) he spoke of the various “blessed” ideas(9 of them) in the Sermon.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all
kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in
heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

None of those were intended to encourage one to absent him (or her) –self from society all together. Rather, it is clear and thus, certain that the Lord wished for those hearing His sermon to live out and pursue these character qualities in the very midst of their walking and living in society. It seems likely,

if not definite, that Solomon had the same idea in quite a number of His statements here in Proverbs. In both sets of principles it is evident that it is the intermingling with society that acts as the superior, more effective “draw” to the world and brings them toward the Lord.

Looking back to the verse we are contemplating:

Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeks and intermeddles with all wisdom.” - Proverbs 18:1.

It is interesting that this is yet another place where Solomon tells us that the “pursuit” of our own desires, that is, what we think correct and right, is, in fact, pretty much the opposite of what God and His purpose would actually have us do. He is telling us that that this “separation” is the result of a negative application of our OWN desires, not the following of the leading and direction of God. Separate speaks of scattering abroad, dividing, even severed or stretched. It is not ever translated as the act of removing oneself or hiding oneself away from society. In fact, it seems to be saying just the opposite.

“Desire” is a rather harsh word and is never used in a clearly positive fashion in the Book of Proverbs. It has a gamut of meanings from desire (13x) to lust, greed, or that which is pleasant (1x each). It basically speak of the exercise of the longings or appetite of ones’ heart.

The point here is that if one separates oneself it is to follow his own desire or will. There are two qualifications to this:

1. First, it the following of ones own selfish gratifications. As we said, it can refer to everything from lust to various applications of greed.
2. The implication that such a one accepts advice or guidance from no one BUT his own mind or will. Such is NEVER a positive thing in Solomon’s mind.

It is interesting that the Essenes, in Jesus day, also basically had the view that the world had nothing to offer, and so, anyone who wanted to be acceptable to God must needs completely separate themselves from the world around them. It was evil and could act to drag one down and into the same sort of defilement that these unbelievers lived in. We’ve seen a number of groups throughout history take the same basic view. I live in the area just outside of Philadelphia, PA. I’m not far from Lancaster, PA which is one of several homes to one of the Mennonite populations in the US. It is their view that, to be godly and to rightly serve the Lord, one has to separate themselves from world and from the things of the world. They basically don’t use telephones, automobiles, farm devices that are driven by something with an engine. They try and stay away from anything that uses electric, and on and on. It is not unusual to drive through that area and see a farmer moving along behind a plow drawn by a horse (or 2). The sad part of the Mennonite experience is that their theology is much like that of the Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus day. They think of terms of pleasing God and doing so by obedience and earning His pleasing through that obedience. Their separation has gained them very little, spiritually speaking. What is

interesting in actually a sad kind of way is that the one from whom the sect arose, Menno Simmons, an Anabaptist leader who actually did quite a lot in the Lowland region of Germany in the time immediately after Martin Luther. But the Anabaptists pursued the idea of earning the pleasures and blessing of God, more and more, by means of obedience and actions. What they believed was not far from the truth, but it was, apparently, far enough to have a lasting and, sometimes, quite negative effect. The idea of severe separation from the world around them is one of those negative practices that they adopted.

We should also note that Solomon could be referring to the act of “separating” oneself in the sense of being unfriendly to those around us instead of the concept mentioned of entering some facility designed for separation. As Solomon implies here and as Our Lord says in His Sermon of the Mount, it is the responsibility of the children of God to interact and to do so in a positive and, thus, an effective fashion in order to be the witness and testimony to God’s mercy and grace and be the “draw” toward the Lord that God intended His people to be.

There are a number of illustrations that we can use to speak of the matter. Separation both from Church and State were not un-known to Solomon.

- The rebellion of Korah and his party had been a distinct act of schism, as also the worship of Micah (Judg. 17).
- In Solomon’s time Jeroboam was seditious. After Solomon he established the schismatical worship at Dan and Bethel.
- In our Lord’s time there were Pharisees and the Essenes, or separatists from the ordinary Jewish worshippers.
- The spirit of schism began to betray and develop itself in the time of the Apostles, and is thus described in its fruits:

“These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19).

Thinking of the matter of application of the idea, we might see here that the matter of schism in its essence is here curtly described. It is the seeking after one’s own pleasure and opposing one’s self to counsel. This, certainly and clearly true of politics, is so equally of religious, separatists. Trace modern dissent to its origin, and you will find it sprang mainly from self-pleasing. Other and better motives there may have been, but that one, combined with impatience of authority, was the ruling motive of its leaders. The teaching, or the mode of worship, or the clergyman for the time being of a particular church, did not please them. Their hearts were set upon something different, which approved itself more to their own ideas, based upon their own (perhaps very circumscribed) reading. To be told that the Church taught this, or the Prayer-book enjoined that, revolted their pride and independence of spirit. Why should they be bound to believe and to worship as the primitive saints had done? Why

should not an immediate evil (though, perhaps, purely local) be removed at once, though the axe laid to its root might sorely wound both truth and unity for generations yet to come? So, setting their teeth against all good counsels, have reasoned heretics and schismatic in every age. But, let me, a Churchman, abhor the thought of becoming a separatist under whatever provocation!

*Be it my great aim, in harmony with my Lord's last prayer, to
maintain the unity of His Church (John 17)!*
