

Being Wise in Your Latter End

Proverbs 19:20

“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.” - Proverbs 19:20 (Cf. 12:15).

It seems that everyone is concerned for some gain and some viable progress between now and their future. Likewise, everyone has their own idea about what the best way to achieve their desired future might be. Solomon recognized the normality of this in people’s lives and, in several areas of Proverbs, addressed the idea and clearly, not to mention relatively simply. This one of those places. The desire to be wise, he recognizes here is both normal and able to be achieved in a relatively direct fashion. It can be realized, Solomon tells us, with three basic steps in place:

I. Seeing to it that we “hear” the counsel of God as best and as often as we are able.

The first step, we’re told, is to see to it that we are “hearing” the counsel of God. That means two things for us to consider. First, the word “listen” means to take in via the ears (or perhaps, by reading, by means of the eyes). Implied in the word is the idea of intention – we listen to the “counsel” of God with the intention of taking action upon what we hear. It is NOT just a matter of bulk take in. We should also note the this verb (listen to or hear) is in the imperative mood. It is not a suggestion but rather it is a command. It is something that, if we are to achieve the stated goal (being wise in our latter end) we MUST accomplish, else we will not achieve the goal. It is essential to the goal that we take in the counsel of God with the goal of application and understanding for the goal to accomplished. Just to think a bit, we should also note that the manifestation of this “listening” does not occur immediately, it occurs when we approach our “latter end” or the end of our lives. The “hearing” here can be understood to refer to hearing preaching, hearing teaching, our own study, discussion, etc. It is NOT referring to hearing the professional speaking of the Prophets or Apostles. It has more to do with recognizing that the speaking is coming from God and paying it due attention and respect.

Solomon goes on and tells us that we are to “receive instruction”. This idea tells us that this “counsel” is “instruction” that we are to “receive”. In many versions instruction means virtually the same thing as “discipline”. It is used in a couple of senses in the OT. It can refer to discipline or to correction with the obvious implication in those ideas. It can also mean, however, the idea of training or even exhortation with the point of those two words being changing ones’ behavior or thinking and ordering it to be in line with the counsel just heard. Keep in mind that this entire section is imperative and is presented as that which is necessary and, in a sense, not optional; it is something that the believer MUST pursue. We are to “accept” this discipline (many versions translated this phrase differently). This word has to do with an aggressive grasping or taking hold of the object in view; in this case, the discipline mentioned. The word “discipline” can be translated as chastisement, training, even warning. It is speaking of the various functions of the counsel of God, the Word o God in our day and age. The Word of God can give counsel and instruction/discipline and, as Solomon says here, can make us wise as we head on in and arrive at our “latter end” or that time we live out at, at end of life.

One of the other powerful implications is that true wisdom that serves God and makes us over in the image over in HIS image is available ONLY by this means. Like it or not, we cannot appropriate in any other fashion! So many these days imagine that they either are or can be wise by their own means. The haughtiness and arrogance of much of the world is both astounding and a bit frustrating. This is one of the truly mystifying and upsetting things we see in the world around us. Men, albeit very smart men, think of themselves as possessing far more wisdom than they ultimately have. They, ultimately, have trusted their own resource, rather than seeking the counsel of God (which like all men – they know exists and they need badly). But there is none righteous, no not one. All have gone out of the way...

II. Seeing to it that we take in and apply the counsel and, yielding understanding.

Secondly, we need to be sure that what we learn and how were are instructed by the Counsel of God is taken in and applied to our particular situation. The Scripture is very clear that the Word of God profitable for every good work, and that, obviously, includes mine and yours. It doesn’t just happen though. It is not as though we hear it and BOOM! We change. It is necessary for us to seek to take it in, ponder it and deliberately look for and then apply it to whatever particular issue in our lives that God leads us to consider. This take thinking the matter through and then, as Solomon says here, “yielding” our understanding as is applicable. This is, as I am sure all are already aware of, not just a matter of ‘click’ and we are yielded and all is well. There is an aggressive idea wrapped up in the matter we see in this verse. We need to hear the counsel and then aggressively and deliberately take it to heart and seek to see that our lives (heart will mind and emotions, not to mention our actions) reflect whatever change it asks of us.

“Discipline” speaks of correction, training, instruction or even chastening. The idea is that we hear the Counsel of the Word and take it in, then we, upon understanding what it asks of us, we go out and get the changes and build in the traits and character qualities toward which it sends us. If these are corrections in behavior or thinking, we alter what goes on in our minds. If they are training or instructions, then we apply what we have learned. If it turns out that they communicate chastening or correction, we alter the characteristics of our lives to fit what we have now come to know.

III. Be consistent, continual and complete in that reception through throughout our entire lives.

The word of God and the counsel that it communicates to us, seeing what the goal of it is, is something that it most often, as we have said, takes pursuit and a bit of time to realize and see as a completed matter in life. As we noted, they do not just automatically occur, or, very often, happen quickly. We must pursue them with diligence and great effort through unto their finish and accomplishment. Quite possibly, this could take the greater portion of our lives.

This is why Solomon refers to being "...wise the rest of your days". This phrase speaks of both the effort that it takes in an ongoing manner and the end result that comes from the exercise of that consistency. One implication that we can see here, based on the testimony of the rest of Scripture is that, throughout our lives there is always, not just this, but other matters that present themselves and add weight to what we struggle with and need to seek out the counsel of God for. Consistency is and durability in our pursuit of the counsel of God is a thing that speak everything that we grapple with.

And so we see the sense of what Solomon has to say here by thinking about other places where he has said similar things. For instance, over in ver. 2, and 18, the duty of parents to chasten a son now and again is set forth. Thinking of the chapter as a unit, we can see that it Solomon's view that it is the duty of a son to submit to parental discipline, and imbibe in early years that counsel and instruction which shall make him wise *in his future*, both for this life and the next. This proverb is the summing up of much that has gone before.

Three are a number of illustrations that speak to this idea:

- Daniel is an example of a youth not only submitting to be taught and governed, but disciplining himself, and through human and divine counsel and instruction becoming competent to govern a hundred and twenty provinces, and wise with that wisdom which should enable him to stand in his lot at the end of the days (Dan. 12:13).
- What a rich harvest resulted from Timothy's early attention to his mother's teaching, so that he was found meet to bear rule in the Church, and "wise unto salvation"!
- But Rehoboam and Amaziah, because he did not heed advice, spoiled their prospects in the future. What a pitiable spectacle was Rehoboam, at the age of forty, with no more wisdom or force of character than a boy (2 Chron. 13:7), spite of all the counsel and instruction offered him!
- How little deserving of respect was that "old prophet," who, employing his wits and his experience to cajole a younger prophet, stored up bitter remorse for his future (1 Kings 13)!

By way of application - I think that we can see this lesson is primarily for the young. To them it is of unspeakable importance to be willing to be taught, reprov'd, disciplined, while the character is plastic and capable of being molded on a right pattern. But youth is apt to resent correction, to weary of instruction, and to despise the counsels of experience. Unless, however, this tendency be overcome betimes, the whole future of the boy must suffer. An unprofitable life, an old age lacking respect from those around them, follow after, as a rule, early days misspent. Yet, there have been instances of time redeemed, and seed late sown yielding a surprising harvest - enough to encourage the penitent, but not the careless. Most worthy to be admired and imitated, however, is the career of the wise man, commencing with "*the day of small things*," then, like a river augmented increasingly by its tributaries, acquiring more and more the dignity of knowledge and experience, benefiting others in its course, and admired of men, till it terminates upon earth, only to expand in infinite grandeur beyond this earth. Who would not desire so to live as to have wisdom to impart to others, and wisdom wherewith to meet the tremendous crisis? Most men die as they live. Be it mine so to cultivate wisdom, that I may be found wise, not a fool, at my end (Jer. 17:11)!

*¹¹ "As a partridge that broods but does not hatch,
So is he who gets riches, **but not by right**;
It will leave him in the midst of his days,
And **at his end he will be a fool.**"*
