

Pleasantness and Peace

Proverbs 3:17

*“Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” -
Proverbs 3:17*

The first thing that we ought to do is establish the leger context and frame of reference in which the passage is speaking to us:

*¹³ Happy is the man who finds wisdom,
And the man who gains understanding;*

*¹⁴ For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver,
And her gain than fine gold.*

*¹⁵ She is more precious than rubies,
And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.*

*¹⁶ Length of days is in her right hand,
In her left hand riches and honor.*

*¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace. (Proverbs 3:13–17)*

Solomon is, once again personifying wisdom to make what he says about it more easily related to by his readers. It is much easier to feel a connection and a sense of reality to a “person” that to a concept and so Solomon (and other Bible writers) paints a picture of them as human beings which suggest the qualities that Solomon and the other writers of the particular Book in question want to elicit from the reader. Personification may be defined as the act of attributing a living, conscious, and active personality to inanimate natural objects (from the smallest object to complete portions of the physical world, and even the whole world itself), to forces and phenomena, to manufactured objects, or to abstract ideas and words.

Verse 14 is a good example of Solomon’s use of personification joining wisdom with the picture of a human woman.

*¹³ How blessed is the man who finds wisdom
And the man who gains understanding.*

*¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver
And her gain better than fine gold.*

*¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels;
And nothing you desire compares with her.*

*¹⁶ A Long life is in her right hand;
In her left hand are riches and honor.*

*¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways
And all her paths are peace.*

*¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are all who hold her fast.*

Notice the various references to “she” which points to “wisdom” introduced in verse 13a. then proceeds to attribute human attributes to “wisdom” in order to make the points he is trying to make clear concerning just what is true concerning what wisdom is like and how it works and shows itself in the life of one pursuing and seeking to build it in their lives.

For our purposes here, notice that verse 17 says that Wisdom has “ways”. The word refers, in its basic sense, to the idea of what moves ahead or accomplishes progress toward an aim. It can speak of one’s tread on a “way” or a path. It can speak of a road, or, metaphorically, a journey. Humanly, it can speak of bending a bow, for instance. Perhaps to pressing or reaching.

Solomon often uses the idea of “ways” to describe the manner or path in which one takes or follows whatever is the object of what he is speaking of. The concept that, most often, he is seeking to convey is that of the direction and manner in which a road takes to lead from one place to another.

Here in verse 17 Solomon speaks of the “ways” in which Wisdom “leads” the one who adapts and takes advantage of what “she” communicates to them. In this case Solomon speaks of her ways being “pleasant” and her paths are those of peace.

Pleasant can refer to anything that is lovely, delightful or even friendly. It isn’t used but 7 times in the OT (Beauty - 4x; Pleasant - 2x; and pleasantness - 1x). Interestingly, a slight variation of this word is used for a person’s name 5 times, many referring to women, wives of various OT characters 5x. In this context the word simply refers to loveliness or one who is lovely.

- One was the daughter of Lamech by his wife Zillah and sister of Tubal-Cain in the days before the flood.
- Another was the Ammonite wife of Solomon and mother of king Rehoboam of Judah. Given this truth, one can understand Solomon’s enjoyment of the concept.
- It was also the name of a town in the lowlands of Judah in Philistia.

This is the picture that Solomon wants us to see here in 3:17. Wisdom is like a lovely, pleasant wife who is simply wonderful to be with, giving great pleasure and joy. He goes and uses much the same personification to speak of the “paths” in which wisdom will lead the one who embraces “her”.

*¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways
And all **her paths are peace.***

A “path” speaks of pretty much the same kind of thing it speaks of in our day. It is a “trail”, namely a way that leads from one place to another and is trodden with the feet (as opposed to a horse or cart). It is much the same as

“way” in the first phrase, but the “path” is a more formal, laid out pathway. In this case, this “path” leads the one following after wisdom into the style and experience of life that is that of “peace”.

The term “peace” can speak of anything that sets aside emotional upset of physical disturbance. For instance, turbulent water, given the right circumstance, can become “peaceful”. It can speak of safety, welfare, success, even the idea of salvation (the absence of turmoil and antagonism with God). It can also speak of that which grants or gives peace. For instance, speaking of prosperity, success, welfare (not the state kind), state of health, friendliness, and the like. It can also refer to speak of an extended effect accomplished by these things. We see it in the senses of completeness, soundness, safety, prosperity and other like ideas.

Notice that this is another place where Solomon is looking and this is generally true of everyone who seeks and develops the wisdom that God offers. He says that this pleasantness and peace or to be considered true of “all” of those, particularly, who walk “paths” of wisdom. There is the implication that the first part (the ways of wisdom), the reaping of “pleasant ways” are corporately true as well.

It seems very clear that what Solomon is seeking to do is assure and encourage his readers that wisdom is a great rewarder of those who grasp and seek “her”. He wants to encourage his readers to do so and to, then, continue to pursue and walk “her” path and ways.

It is of Wisdom these words are spoken. Now, it is very legitimate to understand that Wisdom is ultimately a personification of the Son of God. Therefore, the life that is “hid with Christ in God” can be seen to be here implied. As we said, “ways” and “paths” are Scriptural figures for courses and manners of action. By walking is meant doing, and the methods of doing are spoken of as the ways in which men walk. “Pleasantness” may signify here the joy and gratification which *accompany* a Christian life; “peace,” the content and satisfaction which *ensue* upon it. The course of life intended is said to be delightful, both in its practice and in its result. Or if “peace” be taken to mean “peaceable,” then the fruits of true religion, as promoting peace in the world between man and man, are here adverted to.

By way of illustration:

- David’s Psalms written previous to his great sin betoken “joy and peace in believing” in the midst of sore trials, and even those which begin (as it were) in a minor key generally wind up with a note of praise.
- “Hezekiah rejoiced,” “there was great joy in Jerusalem,” when the people, led by their king, returned to Wisdom’s ways (2 Chron. 29:36; 30:26).
- “With gladness of heart” the early Christians partook of food one with another, having first dedicated themselves anew to Christ in the Holy Communion (Acts 2:46).

- Even “in heaviness” the Apostles addressed by Peter were able to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:6, 8).

To think by way of application - the devil who accuses man to God has also slandered God to man. As in Paradise, so still, he would persuade that the heavenly Father is a hard Master, and His service a grievous bondage. In contradiction of this stand forth both many an inspired word such as this one of Solomon's, and the experience of all who have walked in Wisdom's ways. Let me ask, who else is competent to judge? Further, has any believer ever found himself disappointed of the promises of happiness and peace made to such as live godly? True, there are some whose melancholy temperament will not allow them at all times to realize the bright side of religion. And that it has its dark side, of temptation, of chastening, of “hope deferred,” what Christian will deny? Still, the way of keeping God's commandments, all included in His will that we believe in His dear Son (John 6:29), is not “grievous,” but pleasant. Wisdom's work is its own reward (Ps. 19:11). Toil is sweetened by love (Gen. 29:20). Trials, rightly understood and borne, contain the elements of sublime pleasure. Sacrifice made for principles brings noblest recompense. Peace is offered *by* the way as well as at its *end*—a peace which surpasses understanding. The world sees what religion takes away, not what it gives, and how much less what it gives in the sunny home beyond!