

# The Will to Be Wise

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In the introduction to the Proverbs, Solomon uses several words that have a similar connotation, each having to do with wisdom. Listen to them: “To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity. To give to the young man knowledge and discretion...”

Wisdom is the ability to apply knowledge or experience to a given set of circumstances in order to bring about the best end for everyone concerned. It is the general theme of the Book of Proverbs, the underlying principle in all that is suggested in it.

“Perceive” is from a Latin word which originally meant “to seize.” It is kin to wisdom and that one who has it is usually a wise person, either from education or experience.

“Understanding” is kin to both wisdom and perception in concept. It literally means to have insight into a matter. Perspicuity, formerly an optical term, is its equivalent, meaning to look into something and see.

The words translated with our English words “wise counsels” has an interesting history. It’s the Hebrew word for “ropes.” As a seaman “knows the ropes,” even so a wise man knows which strings to pull. It obviously has to do with wise choices. The other words, justice, prudence, judgment, each have something to do with wisdom in their own way.

I have chosen a passage from some of these timely admonitions for your consideration. Stop now and read Proverbs 10:12-17. Once you’ve read it, rehearse briefly the words we’ve just discussed, and notice how wisdom is in every admonition.

Verse 12—“Hatred stirs up strife. But love covers all sins.” Anger and hatred agitate, love seeks peace. The wise man will not long tolerate anger of any sort, much less outright hatred or disdain. His intention is never in the direction of condemnation, but of justification. The direction he takes on any matter will be predicated on love, the kind that makes choices tending toward reconciliation, not separation.

Verse 13—“Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding. But a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding. A wise man will always try to understand before he makes any kind of choice. Understanding is actually what stands

under a matter; it is that which forms a basis for good decisions. It is the ability to grasp the meaning of a situation. It blots out bother, dispels trouble ahead of time, makes solutions to problems possible. Ignorance, on the other hand, is a harsh taskmaster. It's like a "rod to the back," invariably causing not only discomfort, but sometimes intense pain. It befuddles situations. It causes stupid choices, brings brainless decisions, and causes its holder continual amounts of trouble.

Verse 14—"Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." The admonition here is simple, but potent. It simply advises that one store up the good stuff. To store up knowledge is to make a foundation for making wise choices, no matter the situation. This kind of storage will not spoil. It is ready for use at any time, and is ready for any situation. Please note its connection to the mouth. Wisdom is never more obvious than in the mouth of a good man. Few things are more beautiful or wiser than a few well-chosen words. Conversely, few things condemn a man as soon as a few poorly said sentences.

Verse 15—"The rich man's wealth is his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty." How wise it is to use what you have with care and consideration. Nobody ever said that money was not important, only that it is necessary that it be well used. It can strengthen a man's opportunities, fortify his efforts, bring glory to God, when it is used wisely. Like a strong city, it makes for peace and stability. On the other hand, poverty is hard. A Yiddish Proverb says, "Poverty is no disgrace, but it has no honor either." Society actually rejects the poor, which is an indictment of how we live in this age. It has ever been the case. Solomon knew it early on. It should be remembered, too, that in many instances poverty is the result of laziness.

Verse 16—"The labor of the righteous leads to life, the wages of the wicked to sin." It's foolish to work for foolish things—things that have no lasting value, no true permanency—but how very sad that most people do. A wise man will work for right things. He will give his attention to the things that matter—both here and in the hereafter. A wise man recognizes the value of a righteous life, a value that cannot come when one foolishly chooses the way of the world. I read somewhere where "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life."

The sort of wisdom that is spent on wickedness is badly misspent. A life dedicated to mere enjoyment and pleasure is a ludicrous, unprofitable enterprise. On the other hand, a life spent in service to God is irrefutably wise. It not only provides quiescence and a settled mind here, but a joyful expectation of an eternal life so beautiful as to be indescribable.