

WISDOM UNIVERSITY

PROVERBS 2

IS CHRISTIANITY WORTH IT?



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

Is Christianity worth it? What are the benefits of Christianity? Apart from the promise of eternal life at the end, what good will it do me? How will it help me here and now? To put it more popularly, is it all "pie in the sky when you die" or is there also "steak on the plate while you wait?"

Effects

If people think that Christianity is all and only about future reward in heaven, it will have the following results:

1. **Dangerous delay:** People will delay faith as long as they can and then sign up for their heavenly insurance policy just before the end.
2. **Half-hearts:** People will not pursue Christ or holiness with vigor because there's no immediate advantage in it.
3. **Gritted teeth:** Christians adopt a "grin and bear it" approach to the Christian life. We just have to put up with present losses in the hope of eventual heavenly gain.

4. **Cold legalism:** We instruct our children to do things merely because they are commanded, which runs the risk of legalism.
5. **Spiritual Blindness:** We don't see the glory and beauty of Christian ethics, but just bare commands.

Solution?

The question then is, can we add motivation to our morals? Morals are about what we should do or not do; motivation is about the why. Morals are the rules; motivations are the rewards.

The good news is that God has attached motives to his morals to stimulate and empower obedience. In other words, Christianity is worth it, not only for future rewards but because of present rewards.

We shouldn't be surprised at this because motivational science has found that unless there is some present reward it's very hard to keep going at anything. God knew that before they did (e.g. Exodus 19:5-6; 20:12)

CONTEXT

The book of Proverbs is a culturally sensitive application of the moral law of God. As such it has many answers to the "What" question: "What is right and what is wrong?" But it goes further. It also introduces a number of motivations, answering the question, "Why should I do what is right and avoid what is wrong?"

That's how Wisdom University's curriculum begins. Not so much with the morals but the motivation. We sit down in class and the first thing Professor Wisdom says is, "I want to tell you the why behind the what." He then proceeds to list four motivations:

- The **moral** benefits of Wisdom (2:5-21)
- The **material** benefits of Wisdom (3:1-12)
- The **emotional** benefits of Wisdom (3:13-20)
- The **social** benefits of Wisdom (3:21-35)

We'll look at these benefits or motivations in the next few sermons, beginning with this sermon on the moral benefits of Wisdom.

But before exploring the first **why** of seeking Wisdom, verses 1-4 tells us **how** to seek Wisdom.



How should we study Wisdom?
Like a treasure hunter.



1. STUDY WISDOM LIKE A TREASURE HUNTER (1-4)

Wisdom is God's treasure (1,4)

(1) My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you...(4) If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures...

Last Sunday morning, in our study of Colossians 2:1-5, we explored and enjoyed Christ as the one in whom God hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I don't want to repeat what we discovered there and then.

Instead, let's simply note that by calling his Wisdom "treasure," God places a value on Wisdom above all money, wealth, and property. I know that's not the world's valuation, but it is God's.

So the question is: Whose valuation will you trust? Who is best qualified to tell you what's most valuable?


Be a desperate treasure hunter (2-4)


(2)...So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; (3) Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, (4) If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures...

Again, we looked at treasure-hunting last week, so here I just want you to note the words used to describe how we are to look for wisdom. "Incline your ear, apply your heart, cry out for discernment, lift up your voice for understanding, seek her, search for her."

These are extremely active words, words full of energy, enthusiasm, intensity, focus, determination, and passion. They are the opposite of passivity, waiting, etc. There's desperation here. The person who searches like this is someone acutely aware of their need.

APPLICATION

 How does the miner search for gold? Have you ever seen "Gold Rush" on the Discovery channel? It follows small groups of men who work in some of the most hostile terrain in Alaska to try to find gold. The amount of work required is extraordinary, especially when you see how little all the hours, tears, talents, stresses actually produce. May God give us the same spirit and create a "Wisdom Rush" among us. Imagine what we might discover if we took this attitude to our daily Bible reading, to our church attendance, to our family worship.

 "Treasure my commands within you" requires that we not just obey because God has commanded, but because we truly see the value of his commands. We see how precious and beautiful God's morals are. Do you say, like the Psalmist, "O, how I love your law!" (Ps. 119:97). Do we value it more than gold (Ps. 19:10)?

WISDOM IS GIVEN TO CRAFTERS
NOT DRIFTERS.



That sounds like a lot of hard work. Why should I put so much into it?
Look at the moral benefits of Wisdom.



2. STUDY WISDOM FOR MORAL BENEFITS (5-21)

Now we come to the payoff. Here's why you should study God's Wisdom so strenuously and seriously. There are moral rewards, moral benefits. There are four "ifs" in verses 1-4. Verse five starts with "then." Verse five tells us the consequences, the outcome of turning the hypothetical ifs into realities. "If, if, if, if...then..."

You'll get a greater awe of God (5a)

(5) Then you will understand the fear of the Lord...

A few years ago, we were required to change our syllabi at the Seminary to be more student-centric rather than teacher-centric. We used to state on our syllabi, "This is what I will teach," and then list the lessons. Now we have to state, "This is what the student will learn," and then list the knowledge and skills they will acquire. These are called, "Student Learning Outcomes." We then have to design a teaching plan to achieve these outcomes, and assignments to test them. If the the assignment results are poor, then we know we have to change the teaching plan to get closer to the desired outcomes. It's trial and error.

But this passage is telling us that there are guaranteed student learning outcomes. Why? Because in Wisdom University the curriculum is perfect, the lessons are perfect, and the teacher is perfect. If you commit to this course of study with gold-rush zeal, you will experience greater awe of God. That's what "understand the fear of the Lord" means. It's not just cognitive (more knowledge) but emotional and spiritual.

This is a wonderful reward. God made us with a longing for the transcendent, something bigger, higher, and greater than ourselves. A life without that is described as "life under the sun" in Ecclesiastes (1:9; 7:20), a life that is empty and vain and dissatisfying. But here, we're told of a way to get "above the sun," that if we pursue Wisdom we will encounter the awesomeness of God, we will experience that astonishing, stunning, incredible, wonderful, thrilling presence of God.

A GOLD-RUSH SPIRIT
MAKES FOR AN AWE-STRUCK STUDENT.

You'll get better theology (5b-7)

Then you will....find the knowledge of God. (6) For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (7) He stores up sound wisdom for the upright, he is a shield to those who walk uprightly.

A few years ago, the late R.C. Sproul wrote a book, "Everyone's a Theologian." How true! The only question is, are you a good or bad theologian? This passage tells us that if we seek Wisdom like a treasure hunter we will become a good theologian, we will find the knowledge of God.

But, remember, Wisdom in Proverbs is practical skill in living, it's not just sitting in a library reading books. In other words, practical Christianity is the way to greater theology. We don't become better theologians just by reading books but by living out our faith in the world. The best theologians are the most practical Christians (John 7:17).

A GOLD-RUSH SPIRIT
PRODUCES GOLD-STANDARD THEOLOGY.



You'll get better judgment (8-9)

(8) He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. (9) Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

If you're a parent, you'll know how hard it is to sort out family disputes. How do we know who's right and who's wrong. It gets more complicated in schools with students, and even more complex in employment situations, church discipline, and in our civil and criminal courts. I was reading recently about how many judges agonize over their decisions, and sentences and are often haunted by them in the weeks, months, and years later. Every day, they make decisions that have massive consequences for people and their families. To a greater or lesser extent, we have to do the same in the family, the workplace, the church, etc.

But here we are told, that study of God's Wisdom will shield, guard, guide, and preserve us when it comes to making judgments about people and situations.

A GOLD-RUSH SPIRIT
PRODUCES JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS FOR ALL

You'll get greater safety (10-19)

(10) When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, (11) discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you. (12) to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things...(16) To deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words...

The previous chapter described the tremendous danger of choosing the wrong kind of friends, especially of choosing to follow peers instead of parents. So, how do we hold firm? How do we resist? That brings us to our last moral and spiritual motivation. A gold-rush spirit will deliver you from wicked men (2:10-15) and wicked women (2:16-19).

There's much that can be said about these two characters and we will meet them again in later chapters. The descriptions are quite lengthy. But I want to highlight just one common characteristic. Their temptations begin with words, perverse words and flattering words.

Perverse words are blatant, proud, and forceful rejection of God's Wisdom. These are intimidating people who deliberately and defiantly bully people to follow their evil ways. It relies on intimidation. **Flattering words** are false and seductive words. This is a much more subtle and covert rejection of God's Wisdom. It relies on attraction.

But if we have a gold-rush spirit when it comes to God's Wisdom, we will not be intimidated and we will not be attracted. We will not be bullied and we will not be flattered. We will be given courage to resist the pressure of the bullies and discernment to resist the seductions of tempters.

A GOLD-RUSH SPIRIT
WILL BE A TITANIUM SHIELD.



APPLICATION

♥ Consider the multiple moral benefits of seeking Wisdom with a gold-rush spirit: greater awe, better theology, better judgment, and greater safety. Does that not motivate you to seek Wisdom or to seek more of it?

♥ Seeking Wisdom is not always easy. There are many obstacles in the way. There are sacrifices. There's sometimes a cost. But there are also great rewards. There are also good reasons. When you are discouraged and about to give up, remind yourself of the present moral and spiritual benefits of Wisdom (John 14:21).

♥ Use this motivation in evangelism too. We can't promise the physical benefits of health, wealth, and prosperity. But we can promise something even better: the spiritual benefits of awe, theology, discernment, and moral safety.

♥ Is Christianity worth it? Yes, yes, and yes. It's not only "pie in the sky when you die; it's also steak on the plate while you wait." The steak of greater awe, better theology, better decisions, and greater safety.

♥ A great vision of moral excellence and progress summarizes this chapter to drive home the moral benefits of wisdom, and to bring us to worship God for designing such a beautiful and beneficial salvation:

(20) So you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness. (21) For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; (22) but the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

MORAL BENEFITS FOLLOW WISDOM,
AS SURELY AS MORAL EVILS FOLLOW FOLLY.



Do you see how much you gain if you seek Wisdom with a gold-rush spirit?



CONCLUSION



FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [Interview with Mark Coppenger on Moral Apologetics](#)
- [Neurophysiological Benefits of Worship](#) by Michael Liedke
- [The Power of Prayer for Families](#) by Alyse ElHage

Books

- [Moral Apologetics for Contemporary Christians](#) by Mark Coppenger
- [The Morals of the Story: Good News about a Good God](#) by David and Marybeth Baggett
- [Everyone's a Theologian](#) by R C Sproul

Discussion Questions

- How would you explain the connection between ethics and theology, Christian practice and Christian knowledge?
- What motivates you in your Christian life?
- What verbs would you use to describe your seeking of Wisdom?
- What do you enjoy about worshipping God? What helps you to be in awe of God?
- Who is the modern equivalent of the wicked man and the wicked woman? Are you most at risk from bullies or flatterers?
- How will you use the moral benefits of Christianity in your own spiritual life? and in evangelism?

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Christianity is only about future reward in heaven?

- Dangerous delay
- Half-hearts
- Grittied teeth
- Cold legalism
- Spiritual blindness

Biblical answer?



Study Wisdom like a Treasure-Hunter

- Wisdom is God's Treasure
- Study Wisdom like a desperate Treasure-hunter

WISDOM IS GIVEN TO GRAFTERS NOT DRIFTERS.

Hard work. Any benefits?



Motivate study in Wisdom University with the present moral benefits

PARENTS PRESSURE YOU TO THE PODIUM, BUT PEERS PRESSURE YOU TO PERDITION.



Study Wisdom for Moral Benefits

- Greater Awe
- Better Theology
- Better Judgment
- Greater Safety

MORAL BENEFITS FOLLOW WISDOM, AS SURELY AS MORAL EVILS FOLLOW FOLLY.

Action?



A GOLD-RUSH SPIRIT WILL BE A TITANIUM SHIELD

A GOLD-RUSH SPIRIT MAKES FOR AN AWE-STROCK STUDENT.