

# Lessons in Proverbs (Introduction)

*Proverbs*

By Michael Phillips

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Proverbs 1:1-7

**Preached on:** Wednesday, January 27, 1988

## **Grace Baptist Church**

37112 2nd Street  
Fremont, CA 94536

**Website:** [www.gracebaptist.ws](http://www.gracebaptist.ws)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/gbc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/gbc)

I will read tonight in Proverbs the first chapter and the first seven verses.

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion—A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.<sup>1</sup>

This evening I propose to begin a series of sermons from the book of Proverbs. In so doing I will not attempt a verse by verse exposition, for that would be both too long and somewhat redundant. Instead, I will try to expound the book thematically, that is, by its topics.

In the ensuing weeks, God willing, I hope to address some of its chief subjects such as wisdom, the fear of God, the home, work, wealth, anger, immorality and the like. These topics, of course, are of the greatest importance and therefore, I trust you will pray much for me that I will be enabled to speak the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

Before coming to any of the particulars, however, I think it is most useful to understand something of the whole idea of Proverbs. What are its origins? Who are its authors? What are its aims and how we may best apply ourselves to its study?

It is to these and kindred questions, therefore, that I would now turn your attention. Thus, our subject tonight is the Proverbs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 1:1-7.

And the first question that I ask is simply this. What is a proverb? That there is a book in the Bible called Proverbs we know and that proverbs are used throughout the Scripture in various places we are equally aware of. But what exactly is a proverb?

The word proverb is often and variously used in Scripture. But for our purposes it can be defined simply. A proverb is a simple summary of a complex subject. What is a proverb? A simple summary of a complex subject. This definition applies to every kind of proverb be it uninspired or inspired.

For example, there are many proverbs which we use constantly which trace their origin simply to the genius of man. The greatest scientists have long studied the relationship between diet and health. Medical journals and popular books teem and swarm with the subject yet long before any of these doctors were born a wise man summed it up with a proverb: An apple a day keeps the doctor away. A summary.

The most learned theologians have long debated the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. This is a mystery which mocks even the wisest. Yet an obscure Arab answers the riddle with his immortal proverb: Trust in the Lord and tie up your camel. Thus, you see the idea. It is a simple summary of a complex subject.

Such a definition also applies to the inspired proverbs. For instance, economists present extended theories on the relationship between credit and debt. Every day in the newspapers we read of the deficit, trade imbalance, tax cuts, increased revenue and the like. And yet no one ever explained economic theory more exhaustively than Solomon and no one ever did it in a more summary fashion. "The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender."<sup>2</sup>

Read all of the volumes of Adam Smith or Karl Marx, John Kenneth Galbraith or Milton Freedmen or anyone else and you will remain largely ignorant of sound financial principles. But read one sentence from the Proverbs and you will be firmly grounded in the study of the economy.

A proverb, then, is a simple summary of a complex subject.

From this a practical application because very obvious. Proverbs ought to be memorized. Proverbs, because they are so simple and short ought to be memorized.

At least five characteristics especially commend them to your memory.

First of all, proverbs are brief. To memorize an entire book, chapter or psalm is no easy matter. Yet what ordinarily intelligent person cannot memorize one sentence? But most proverbs are that short and, therefore, readily lend themselves to your memory.

How, for example, would God have you to deal with that loud mouth, opinionated neighbor? In seeking an answer you could go to the Sermon on the Mount, several of

---

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 22:7.

Paul's epistles, Peter's first letter, et cetera. You could compile a list of every obnoxious character in the Bible from Nabal to Diotrefe and see how each of these men were handled.

But most Christians do not have the scriptural breadth nor intellectual quickness to do that. But I believe every Christian can memorize one sentence, which is this. "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."<sup>3</sup>

The proverb's brevity, therefore, all but commands you to memorize it.

Secondly, proverbs are graphic. Solomon employed colorful language and surprising metaphors in order to impress the truth of the proverbs upon our minds.

How, dear parent, do you teach your children about internal restraint? They will understand, "Don't touch that vase. Don't run out into the street. Don't talk back to me."

But how do you teach them those abstract ideas of attitudes, dispositions and states of mind? These concepts are so abstract that they are difficult to understand, no less to memorize. But the most juvenile mind can understand and remember this proverb. "The eye that mocks his father, And scorns obedience to his mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it."<sup>4</sup>

The proverb's vivid and striking nature, therefore, well lends itself to our remembrance. Thus, we ought to memorize the proverbs because they are brief and because they are so graphic.

Thirdly, proverbs are plain. Some parts of the Bible almost defy human understanding. Our beloved brother Paul wrote many things and hard to be understood. Solomon, too, could write most philosophically as Ecclesiastes well proves. But here he writes to the most common of man.

What average Christian cannot understand and remember these plain proverbs?

12:1. "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid."<sup>5</sup>

Or chapter six verse six. "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise."<sup>6</sup>

Or, most solemnly, chapter 27 and verse one, "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 15:1.

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 30:17.

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 12:1.

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 6:6.

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 27:1.

The plainness of the proverb, therefore, should encourage you to memorize it.

Fourthly, proverbs are easy to study. Most verses in the Bible can only be interpreted within their context. In fact, many heresies have arisen because men have neglected to read the verse preceding or following their text. Moreover, many verses can only be understood when compared to other passages.

Most proverbs, however, stand alone and can be understood in and of themselves.

What context, for example, is needed to understand 21:19? “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.”<sup>8</sup>

What comparison need to be made to comprehend 21:23? “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.”<sup>9</sup>

In memorizing the Proverbs, therefore, you need only to remember one verse at a time with little attention paid to its context or anything else which ought to encourage you greatly to put it to memory.

And, fifthly, proverbs are immediately relevant.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,”<sup>10</sup> and, therefore, its every jot and tittle applies to our lives. Thus, no part can be ignored with impunity. But the immediate relevance of every part of Scripture is not very easy to demonstrate. But the Proverbs are immediately relevant to every reader for they practically apply to every part of your life no matter who you are and no matter how you live. The Proverbs have something directly to say about what you are doing.

Think of all of the problems in the world. I think, for example, one of the chief problems among teenagers in high school is what we call peer pressure. How often children or teenagers are taught godliness at home. But they go to school and they fall in with the wrong crowd and they begin acting sinfully.

How in the world can anyone overcome this peer pressure? Well there’s a proverb tells us how to do it. Here it is. “My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.”<sup>11</sup> “My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path.”<sup>12</sup>

There is the answer to peer pressure.

And then, of course, most of us work for a living and yet how should we work? How diligent should we be? And what will be the end result of our work? Well, it is answered

---

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 21:19.

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 21:23.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 1:10.

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 1:15.

very clearly in the proverb which reads as follows. ““In all labor there is profit, But [mere talk] leads only to poverty.”<sup>13</sup>

How do you rear your children? Well, you train up your child in the ways of the Lord, “And when he is old he will not depart from it.”<sup>14</sup>

What do you do with your money? Here it is. What do you do with your money? That is a relevant question that everyone is interested in. What do you do with your money?

Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, And attend to your herds; For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown endure to all generations.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, how is it that you should control your body? Even such a subject as that is dealt with very clearly. “Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, Lest you be filled with it and vomit.”<sup>16</sup>

Oh.

Now, these are relevant things, aren't they? We eat every day. We go to work most days. All of us have at least a little bit of income. We all have people around us who are trying to push us and pull us and mold us into their own images. Many of us have children. Most of us live with a wife or a husband. In short, the Proverbs never addresses abstract things far away out in the galaxies. The Proverbs address very clear, very relevant things and because you need to know these things every single day of your life, it is of the greatest importance to both learn and memorize the Proverbs. Not a single day will pass in which the Proverbs will be irrelevant. To memorize some, therefore, will pay immediate dividends.

Thus, what is a proverb? A proverb is a simple summary of a complex subject. And because they are so simple, so short and so relevant to our lives, every one of us ought to spend much time in learning them and, whenever possible, committing them to memory. That is especially important for parent to teach their children. Those colorful proverbs, those amazing metaphors, those surprising parables that are found there will do more to teach your children good character than all of the books which human wisdom has ever written.

What is a proverb? A simple summary of a complex subject.

Now, my second question is: Who is the author of the Proverbs? Who wrote this book. Thirty-one chapters in length, who wrote it?

---

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 14:23.

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 22:6.

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 27:23-24.

<sup>16</sup> Proverbs 25:16.

The internal evidence informs us precisely of its authorship. First, verses 1:1 to 22:16 was written by “Solomon the son of David, [the] king of Israel.”<sup>17</sup>

Two, chapters 22 verse 17 through 24 verse 34 was authored by a group of men known only as “the wise.” 22:17 reads, “Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise.”<sup>18</sup> And 24:23 reads, “These things also belong to the wise.”<sup>19</sup>

You see, within the theocracy of Israel there were three kinds of men who were related to the ministry. There were prophets like Elijah, Isaiah and so on. There were priests who were the sons of Aaron and the like. And there was another group of people whom we would describe as the scribes. These were wise men. These were sages who came together and compiled wise sayings for the instruction of the people of God.

Thus, 22:17 to 24:34 were written by the wise.

Chapters 25 to 29, the Proverbs of Solomon compiled posthumously by the scribes of Hezekiah. It is written, “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied.”<sup>20</sup>

Chapter 30 was dictated by Agur, the son of Jakeh to his friends Ithiel and Ucal.

Chapter 31 was written by King Lemuel from the lessons learned at his mother’s knee.

All of these men were great sages, especially Solomon. Thus, this book commends itself to our attention. But as wise as these men were, the authority for this book lies with another, even the only wise God our Savior. Therefore, the book of Proverbs is not simply to be respected as would be the writings of great men, but implicitly believed and universally obeyed. For no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, for it did not come by the will of men, but holy men of God spoke as they were carried about by the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, although the Proverbs has many authors, it has but one author who is God in whom is found all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and, therefore, by applying yourself to the study of this book and by becoming willing to live according to it, you will discover the real treasures of wisdom.

Who wrote the book of Proverbs? Various men, yet God is the ultimate author of it and all other parts of Scripture.

Then my third question is: What is the aim of the Proverbs? This question, too, is directly answered throughout the book, especially in the words of our text.

---

<sup>17</sup> Proverbs 1:1.

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 22:17.

<sup>19</sup> Proverbs 24:23.

<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 25:1.

<sup>21</sup> See 2 Peter 1:20-21.

To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding,  
To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; To  
give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and  
discretion—A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of  
understanding will attain wise counsel, To understand a proverb and an  
enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise  
wisdom and instruction.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, this book was written not simply to employ the immense talent of Solomon and other men, but rather this book was written to instruct you what to believe and how to live with an emphasis upon the latter. This book, therefore, is written for the purpose of instructing you, showing you how to live in your home and at work and in the places of worship and in all other ways. The aim of the Proverb, therefore, is immensely practical. It teaches us not only what to believe, but how to live accordingly.

Then, my last question tonight is this. Who is the intended audience of this book? To whom was this book written? Or, better yet, for whom was this book compiled?

Negatively, it is not written to great intellectual scholars and the like, for if this were true it certainly would have been written in a more esoteric style and with more learned allusions. For positively it was written for every sort of person. It was written for men of great power and wisdom.

“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine.”<sup>23</sup>

But it is equally written for the ignorant.

“To give prudence to the simple.”<sup>24</sup>

And a better way of putting it is this, “To teach discretion to the ignoramus.”

And, thus, it is written for every kind of person, men of great wisdom, men of great ignorance. It is written for housewives and it is written for young men desiring to marry. It is written for students in school. It is written for folks who make a living with the plow. It is written for every kind of person and without exception.

Therefore, no one is too intelligent to need the Proverbs. Neither is anyone too stupid to benefit greatly from them. Therefore, in short, the Proverbs is for you.

So, then, by way of recapitulation and conclusion, consider the following facts.

---

<sup>22</sup> Proverbs 1:2-7.

<sup>23</sup> Proverbs 31:4.

<sup>24</sup> Proverbs 1:4.

What is a proverb? Well, a proverb is a simple summary of some complex subject. In it the Holy Spirit pulls together all of the strands of divine wisdom and presents it in a way so simple that the most ignorant person can fully understand it.

Then, who are the authors of proverbs? Well, various men wrote the book, but ultimately the author is none other than the only wise God.

Then, what is the aim of the proverb? The aim of the proverb is to teach ignorant folks like you and me how to live according to God's will, how to get along with our wives, how to rear our children, how to get along with folks in the neighborhood, these and 1000 other things.

And who is the intended audience of this book? Well, it all men and, without exception.

And then, what is the key to understanding the book of Proverbs? How is it that we come to a more full understanding of it?

Well, let me say this. Because Proverbs is written so simply to understand the book does not require great intellectual acumen. But one thing is required to understand this book, indeed, the whole of Scripture. And what is it?

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”<sup>25</sup>

And, therefore, as we try to pursue this subject over the next weeks, God willing, the one thing that is necessary is not a knowledge of Hebrew, is not a comprehension of ancient culture and practices. In fact, it is not even exceptional mind, because it is so simple. But the one thing which is needful and the one thing which cannot really replace is a fear of God.

Therefore, tonight and every other time you open this book my prayer and my hope is that you would approach it reverently, a godly fear. For, you see, “The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him.”<sup>26</sup>

So we are going to study this book over the next weeks, God willing. May the Lord in his infinite goodness bless it to our edification for Christ's sake. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we pray now that you would bless this Word to the help of your people. Glorify yourself in it, Lord. Teach us how we are to live with those around us. Teach us how we are to approach your Word. Teach us, Lord, how better to worship you. Lord, we are an ignorant people and, thus, you have written this simple book for the likes of us. And yet, Father, except you give us your Spirit we will never understand*

---

<sup>25</sup> Proverbs 1:7.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 25:14.



*anything at all. So teach us your ways, oh Lord, impart wisdom to us. Instill within us that godly fear which is the very beginning of wisdom and knowledge. Lord, I pray now that you would mix these words with faith in the heart of each one of us that we might glorify you more acceptably. For we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*