

Proverbs 3.5-6 / COB / 12.01.13

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Herodian road]** Last month, some of us men went on a trek up Hawk Mountain. Kevin and his father chose the straight path up the mountain, a path made smooth and easy by the engineers.
 - The rest of us followed Matt. Now Matt is a good guide in that he knows where he is going, but he took us on a path that was more suitable for young gazelles than for older goats. So we meandered up and down hills, across brooks, up rock walls, and finally, with a great deal of relief, we made it to the top, having expended about fifty times more energy than Kevin and his father.
 - Sometimes, for fun, we want a challenging path. But in life, how much nicer it would be if God made our paths straight and smooth. This picture shows a path made straight by King Herod, or really by his slaves, but today we will talk about God making our paths straight.

- † **[Slide 2: seat of Moses]** These are the ruins of the second century synagogue at Corizim, in Galilee. I am sitting on what is called “the seat of Moses,” which is where the synagogue rabbi [or teacher] would sit. Jesus likely taught in the first century synagogue in this town, though In Jesus’ day usually a Pharisee would take this seat.

- † Last month, the Christian Service Brigade – which is like a Christian Boy Scouts – asked me to be a rabbi to the young men, and the older men, one Wednesday evening. They assigned me a passage to teach, Proverbs 3.5-6. I got very excited when preparing that teaching, it really spoke to me! That same week, one of our elders, Mark Balch, told me he had been reflecting on that passage, then I heard someone else speaking about the passage, then our administrator, Linda Wendling, put this passage on the sign out front.
 - Now I usually am not one to see messages from God in my circumstances, I would rather rely on scripture or at least a conviction from the Holy Spirit, but, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are going to study Proverbs 3.5-6 today! I found the hints overwhelming.
 - So let me pray and then we will get started...

Literary Context

- † **[Slide 3: engedi trail]** I will have the verses up here, but do feel free to turn to Proverbs 3.5 in your Bible; use the table of contents, if necessary.

- † When we were studying the book of Ruth, we saw how important it was to understand the historical context, the setting and background, because that historical context informed our understanding of the narrative. We really could not have understood the book of Ruth without knowing that context. There is a historical and a literary context for our passage today as well.

- † Most of the proverbs are a somewhat randomly organized collection of wisdom. But Proverbs 1-9 are different, they are one integrated unit, in fact we could see them as a narrative, like Ruth, or even more like an epistle [or letter] such as we have from Paul, Peter, and John, in the New Testament. What we have in Proverbs 1-9 is Solomon writing to his son about how to live a successful life. So we need to keep that in mind as we study this proverb.

- † NASB: ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart / And do not lean on your own understanding.
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, / And He will make your paths straight.

Poetic Form

- † Another literary aspect of the proverbs – indeed one that makes them distinct from narrative or epistles, is that they are written in poetic form.
 - Why do people write in poetry? why did God put poetry in the Bible? for that matter, why did God give us the Bible with poetry, songs, prophecies, narratives, and letters, instead of a simple theology book? You can think about all that on your own, but biblical proverbs are in poetic form to stimulate or provoke thought.
 - This too we need to keep in mind as we study this proverb.
- † **[Slide 4: four parts]** We might lay out our proverb into four poetic lines.
 - 5a: Trust in the LORD with all your heart
 - 5b: And do not lean on your own understanding.
 - 6a: In all your ways acknowledge Him,
 - 6b: And He will make your paths straight.
- † In Hebrew poetry, there are relationships in meaning between each line. What is the relationship between 5a and 6a?
 - They are parallel or similar, 6a gives us further information about 5a: to trust in the Lord with all your heart is somehow related to acknowledging the Lord in all your ways.
- † What is the relationship between 5a and 5b?
 - 5b elaborates on, provides a contrasting idea for, 5a: you either can trust in the Lord with all your heart or lean on your own understanding. If you trust in the Lord with all your heart, you will not lean on your own understanding.

What is the relationship between 6b and the rest of the proverb?

- 5a, 5b, & 6a lead to 6b: If you acknowledge the Lord in all your ways [if you do all of 5a-6a], then he will make your paths straight.

Verse 3.5a

- † **[Slide 5: 3.5a]** Let's take a deeper look at each part of our passage. We start with 5a: Trust in the LORD with all your heart. Do you know what it means when you see LORD in all capitals in the Old Testament? Anyone remember?
 - When you see LORD in all capitals in the Old Testament, that always refers to God. This is how translators render the name God gave himself. We have lost the knowledge of how to say God's name; all we have today are the consonants. We think it is something like Yahweh [YAH-way]. But tradition in English Bibles is to render this name as LORD all in capitals.
- † Solomon says we should trust in God. What does it mean to trust in someone? If a child puts his/her trust in a parent, what does that mean?
 - Put confidence in, put faith in / rely on, depend on
- † Why would Solomon say to trust in God, or rely on God, with all of your heart?
 - **[Slide 6: heart]** Heart is symbolic: the Hebrew word [לֵב] can mean your physical heart, but it also can symbolize your inner being, or even more specifically it can symbolize your conscience, your will, your mind or reason.

- † What is the point of saying trust in God with all of your heart?
 - This is exclusive: there can be no one else on which you depend, only God. You are not to depend on yourself, on the world's way of thinking, or even on your inherited ethical code: you must depend on the "person" of God, on Yahweh, the covenant keeping God of Israel.
 - So you have to rely on God, put your confidence in God, entirely, with all of yourself.
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Verse 3.5b

- † **[Slide 7: 3.5b]** 5b: And do not lean on your own understanding. When it says "do not lean" what does that mean? If I am physically leaning on someone, what am I doing?
 - I am supporting myself, so this verse might mean, "do not support yourself with your own understanding."
 - What about if I use the term metaphorically, like I say I lean on my wife when it comes to running our household?
 - In that case, I am relying on her, so the verse might mean, "do not rely on your own understanding."
- † Why would this father tell his son not to rely on his own understanding?
 - For starters, if we are trusting in God with all our heart, all our being, then we cannot be relying on anyone or anything else. If we are relying on God's wisdom to guide us then we are not relying on our own understanding.
 - **[Slide 8: 2.6]** As I said earlier, when studying Scripture, it is important to understand the literary context of the larger part of the Bible in which this passage occurs. Proverbs 1-9 is all one unit for study. So let's look elsewhere in this section, at v.2.6 [NIV]: "For the LORD [Yahweh] gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." You see the parallelism again: "For the LORD gives wisdom" is a parallel idea to "from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." What does this tell us? The Lord reveals wisdom to his people; in fact, God's revelation itself is what the bible calls true wisdom.
 - **[Slide 9: Solomon context]** The context of Proverbs 1-9 is that Solomon is advising his son. He wants his son to rely on a woman named "wisdom," which symbolizes the revelation of God. Solomon teaches that if his son relies on this woman "wisdom," then his son will have true spiritual life.
 - **[Slide 10: Satan context]** Solomon is countering the counsel of Satan, who advises the son to rely on a woman named "folly" which symbolizes fleshly human reasoning. Satan doesn't tell the son this, but Solomon does, that the woman "Folly" will lead the son to spiritual death. This is the situation in Proverbs 1-9.
- † So it appears that trusting in God with all of our heart, all of our being, is connected with trusting in God's revelation, in his promises and commands as we have them in Scripture.
 - So we rely on God's revelation in Scripture and do not rely on our own thinking, our rationality, our human wisdom, our philosophy. Why? The New Testament informs us that our corrupted human nature makes our own thinking unreliable.
 - Romans 1.21 NIV: For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

- Hebrews 3:13 NET: But exhort one another [in the church] each day, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ [before Christ comes back] that none of you may become hardened by sin's deception.
- Because of the corruption of our nature by sin, we have to check our thinking – it’s not that we never have a good thought, but we have to check our thinking – against God’s revelation in the Bible, to ensure we are on the right path.

Top Line / Bottom Line

† **[Slide 11: top line]** I want to pause here to connect this with something we learned in our study of the book of Ruth. I called this Top Line / Bottom Line, and it shows us the two paths we can take in in any decision or in life.

- If you have never received a handout about this graphic, please raise your hand and keep it up, and someone will bring you something to take home.

† Satan wants the son to take the bottom line. He wants the son to rely on his own corrupted fleshly way of thinking, and thus to use sinful human methods to attain [in Proverbs 1-9] sinful human desires.

† Solomon warns the son that taking this bottom line path will lead to spiritual death. We can walk with God, but if we are not walking with God, if we turn away from his path, then we are actually following Satan’s path, using our own thinking, our own methods, to chase after our own desires, regardless of what God wants. We are in this sense, walking away from God, choosing sinful darkness over God’s light, choosing to exist as a spiritually dead person.

† Solomon’s alternative is called the top line. You might still want the same blessing in this life. Sometimes the blessing we want is a sinful desire, but other times the blessing might have non-sinful aspects; it might be a better job, a spouse and children, better children, whatever. But now, you choose to give that desire up to God for him to decide.

- First, you absolutely refuse to use sinful human methods to go after fulfilling this desire. You commit that no matter what, you will live by God’s wisdom in his revelation.
- Then, you trust that God can give you the blessing you desire. You trust and obey, you do what is right and trust God with the results.
- You do this knowing that God might not give you what you want, or he might change the blessing, or he might delay it. By choosing the top line, you are submitting to God’s sovereignty in your life.

† What you will be certain of getting are the spiritual blessings associated with walking intimately with God, what Solomon would consider true spiritual life.

- You will obtain God’s help to endure your trials.
- You will grow stronger in faith, instead of weaker as you would on the bottom line.
- You will grow more spiritually mature, better equipped to handle life and to do God’s work.
- You will enjoy uninterrupted intimacy with God.
- You will experience a greater manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit.
- Your will be inspire others in the church and to non-believers.
- You will earn treasure in heaven, treasure you can enjoy forever.

- You will grow more enlightened about God and to be more Christ-like yourself.
- You will become a better follower of Christ, since he modeled obedience and dependence on God and taught obedience and dependence to his disciples.
- You will begin to understand how God looks at life and at you, which will help you make sense of what is happening in your life, which in turn will help you to rest in your hope in Christ.

† **[Slide 12: both graphics]** In the Bible’s wisdom literature, like Psalms and Proverbs, there are repeat characters: there is the “fool” who rejects or neglects God’s revelation and follows his own corrupted thoughts and desires, who follows the woman named Folly; and there is the “wise person” who acknowledges God’s revelation as wisdom itself and follows this woman instead.

- Solomon wants his son to see this distinction, and choose to be a wise person who lives by God’s revelation and experiences true spiritual life.
- God wants this for you too. Don’t make the mistake of ignoring or rejecting God’s revelation in the Bible. If you are living, making decisions, without using God’s Word, then you are deceiving yourself into a life of folly that leads to spiritual death.

Verse 3.6a

† **[Slide 13: 3.6a]** Returning to our proverb, 6a: In all your ways acknowledge Him... What does it mean here to “acknowledge” God?

- NIV²⁰¹¹ says “submit” to God; both “acknowledge” and “submit” actually are interpretations of the actual Hebrew word, rather than translations...
- **[Slide 14: to know]** The Hebrew verb [יָדַע] literally means “to know.” In the context of Proverbs 1-9, it means to know God intimately: So our verse is telling us, in all your ways, know God intimately; be in unity with God, be in intimacy with God, walk with God, on the top line.
- “In all your ways” is exhaustive: you are to walk with God in everything you do, say, even think.
- Remembering our parallelism, *this* is how you trust in Yahweh with all of your heart: you must in every moment “know” God intimately.

† When I was a child, one deterrent to bad behavior was that someone told me God is always watching. We are more likely to sin if we think we can get away with it, right? We often can get away with it in human terms, if nobody is looking; but if God is always watching, then that gives us pause. That is an effective negative motivation.

- Solomon says the positive motivation, the way of following the top line, the path of trust and obedience, is to watch back, to know God intimately in every moment.
- We have inserted into your bulletin a five-day devotion on this material. If you take ten minutes each day to reflect on this material, I really think you will be blessed!

Verse 3.6b

† **[Slide 15: 6b]** 6b: And He will make your paths straight. If instead of relying on your own thinking, you trust in God with all of your heart and in all your ways walk with him, then God will make your paths straight. What does it mean to make your paths straight?

- Does the term “paths” represent your behavior or your outcome? Is this about success or obedience?

- I want to look at another proverb; this one is outside of our immediate context of Proverbs 1-9, but it still is within the collection of Solomon, and I think it can help us.
 - **[Slide 16: 15.21]** Proverbs 15.21 [NIV²⁰¹¹]: “Folly [which is human understanding, which leads to spiritual death] brings joy to one who has no sense, but whoever has understanding [i.e. from God] keeps a straight course.”
 - Folly is human reasoning that leads to sin and spiritual death; the one with understanding is the one with God’s wisdom from his revelation, the one who is obedient. So then a straight course is the path of walking with God that leads to spiritual life or it could be the spiritual life itself. It could be that Solomon is saying that God helps this person avoid sin and the negative effects of sin, and instead enjoy true spiritual life walking with God.
- † **[Slide 17: paraphrase]** So... we could put Proverbs 3.5-6 into our own words like this: Trust completely in Yahweh and his revelation in the Bible, and don’t rely on your own faulty thinking; know Yahweh intimately in every aspect of your life, and he will bring you on the straight path of true spiritual life...

Conclusion

- † Now you have a decision to make. Every day, every moment of the day, you have a choice of walking on the top line, trusting in God, living by his wisdom in the Bible, knowing him intimately in everything, or of walking on the bottom line, trusting in yourself and obeying your corrupted flesh. God’s revelation through Solomon is that if you trust in God and walk with God, then he will make your paths straight, and you will experience true spiritual life!
- † But even before you approach that decision each day, you need to make one big decision first. The bottom line thinking of Satan, the world, and the flesh, is that you don’t need to know what the Bible says, that you don’t need Jesus, that you should not trust the accuracy of the Bible or believe in the divinity of Jesus and his sacrifice to pay the penalty for your sins.
- † The top line, which Solomon believed, is that we acknowledge we are corrupted in our nature, and that this causes flaws in our thinking. So we know we need God’s wisdom to truly experience spiritual life.
- The top line is to trust in what God has revealed, including our need for a savior who would redeem us from the power of sin, death, evil, and conviction by the law, who would even redeem us from the penalty for our own mistakes, or sins, so that we could be reconciled with God and have a spiritual rebirth such that we experience true spiritual life now and forever.
 - Are you ready for God to make your paths straight? Or will you continue to forge your own path? If you want to choose Jesus today, come let me know.
 - This could be the first time you have fully put your faith in Jesus as your savior; or it could be that as a believer you realize it is time to repent, to commit, submit, to reset yourself on the top-line so you can begin experiencing true spiritual life.
 - Let’s pray...