

CHAPTER 2

Solomon, having foretold the destruction of those who are obstinate in their impiety, in this chapter applies himself to those who are willing to be taught; and,

I. He shows them that, if they would diligently use the means of knowledge and grace, they should obtain of God the knowledge and grace which they seek (v. 1-9).

II. He shows them of what unspeakable advantage it would be to them.

1. It would preserve them from the snares of evil men (v. 10-15) and of evil women (v. 16-19).

2. It would direct them into, and keep them in, the way of good men (v. 20-22. So that in this chapter we are taught both how to get wisdom and how to use it when we have it, that we may neither seek it, nor receive it in vain.

~~THE~~ PROVERBS 2:1-9

THE SEARCH AFTER WISDOM ENCOURAGED

Job had asked, long before this, *Where shall wisdom be found? Whence cometh wisdom?* (~~38:2~~ Job 28:12, 20) and he had given this general answer (v. 23), *God knoweth the place* of it; but Solomon here goes further, and tells us both where we may find it and how we may get it. We are here told,

I. What means we must use that we may obtain wisdom.

1. We must closely attend to the word of God, for that is the word of wisdom, *which is able to make us wise unto salvation*, v. 1, 2.

(1.) We must be convinced that the words of God are the fountain and standard of wisdom and understanding, and that we need not desire to be wiser than they will make us. We must *incline our ear* and *apply our hearts* to them, as to *wisdom* or *understanding* itself. Many wise things

may be found in human compositions, but divine revelation, and true religion built upon it, are all wisdom.

(2.) We must, accordingly, receive the word of God with all readiness of mind, and bid it welcome, even the commandments as well as the promises, without murmuring or disputing. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.*

(3.) We must hide them with us, as we do our treasures, which we are afraid of being robbed of. We must not only receive, but retain, the word of God, and lodge it in our hearts, that it may be always ready to us.

(4.) We must incline our ear to them; we must lay hold on all opportunities of hearing the word of God, and listen to it with attention and seriousness, as those that are afraid of letting it slip.

(5.) We must apply our hearts to them, else inclining the ear to them will stand us in no stead.

2. We must be much in prayer, v. 3. We must *cry after knowledge*, as one that is ready to perish for hunger begs hard for bread. Faint desires will not prevail; we must be importunate, as those that know the worth of knowledge and our own want of it. We must cry, as new-born babes, after *the sincere milk of the word*. ^{<GOD>}1 Peter 2:2. We must *lift our voice for understanding* lift it up to heaven; thence these good and perfect gifts must be expected, ^{<GOD>}James 1:17; ^{<GOD>}Job 38:34. We must *give our voice to understanding* (so the word is), speak for it, vote for it, submit the tongue to the command of wisdom. We must consecrate our voice to it; having applied our heart to it, we must employ our voice in seeking for it. Solomon could write *probatum est* — *a tried remedy*, upon this method; he prayed for wisdom and so obtained it.

3. We must be willing to take pains (v. 4); we must *seek it as silver*, preferring it far before all the wealth of this world, and labouring in search of it as those who dig in the mines, who undergo great toil and run great hazards, with indefatigable industry and invincible constancy and resolution, in pursuit of the ore; or as those who will be rich rise up early, and sit up late, and turn every stone to get money and fill their treasures. Thus diligent must we be in the use of the means of knowledge, following on to know the Lord.

II. What success we may hope for in the use of these means. Our labour shall not be in vain; for,

1. We shall know how to maintain our acquaintance and communion with God: “*Thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord* (v. 5), that is, thou shalt know how to worship him aright, shalt be led into the meaning and mystery of every ordinance, and be enabled to answer the end of its institution.” *Thou shalt find the knowledge of God*, which is necessary to our fearing him aright. It concerns us to understand how much it is our interest to know God, and to evidence it by agreeable affections towards him and adorations of him.

2. We shall know how to conduct ourselves aright towards all men (v. 9): “*Thou shalt understand*, by the word of God, *righteousness, and judgment, and equity*, shalt learn those principles of justice, and charity, and fair dealing, which shall guide and govern thee in the whole course of thy conversation, shall make thee fit for every relation, every business, and faithful to every trust. It shall give thee not only a right notion of justice, but a disposition to practise it, and to render to all their due; for those that do not do justly do not rightly understand it.” This will lead them in *every good path*, for the scripture will *make the man of God perfect*. Note, Those have the best knowledge who know their duty, ^{<3810>}Psalm 111:10.

III. What ground we have to hope for this success in our pursuits of wisdom; we must take our encouragement herein from God only, v. 6-8.

1. God has wisdom to bestow, v. 6. *The Lord* not only is wise himself, but he *gives wisdom*, and that is more than the wisest men in the world can do, for it is God's prerogative to open the understanding. All the wisdom that is in any creature is his gift, his free gift, and he gives it liberally (^{<3015>}James 1:5), has given it to many, and is still giving it; to him therefore let us apply for it.

2. He has blessed the world with a revelation of his will. *Out of his mouth*, by the law and the prophets, by the written word and by his ministers, both which are his mouth to the children of men, *come knowledge and understanding*, such a discovery of truth and good as, if we admit and receive the impressions of it, will make us truly knowing and intelligent. It is both an engagement and encouragement to search after wisdom that we have the scriptures to search, in which we may find it if we seek it diligently.

3. He has particularly provided that good men, who are sincerely disposed to do his will, shall have that *knowledge and that understanding* which are necessary for them, ~~4077~~ John 7:17. Let them seek wisdom, and they shall find it; let them ask, and it shall be given them, v. 7, 8. Observe here,

(1.) Who those are that are thus favoured. They are *the righteous*, on whom the image of God is renewed, which consists in righteousness, and those who *walk uprightly*, who are honest in their dealings both with God and man and make conscience of doing their duty as far as they know it. They are *his saints*, devoted to his honour, and set apart for his service.

(2.) What it is that is provided for them.

[1.] Instruction. The means of wisdom are given to all, but wisdom itself, *sound wisdom*, is laid up for the *righteous*, laid up in Christ their head, in whom *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and who *is made of God to us wisdom*. The same that is the Spirit of revelation in the word is a Spirit of wisdom in the souls of those that are sanctified, that wisdom of the prudent which is to understand his way; and it is sound wisdom, its foundations firm, its principles solid, and its products of lasting advantage.

[2.] Satisfaction. Some read it, He *lays up substance for the righteous*, not only substantial knowledge, but substantial happiness and comfort, ~~4083~~ Proverbs 8:21. Riches are things that are not, and those that have them only fancy themselves happy; but what is laid up in the promises and in heaven for the righteous will make them truly, thoroughly, and eternally happy.

[3.] Protection. Even those who *walk uprightly* may be brought into danger for the trial of their faith, but God is, and will be, *a buckler to them*, so that nothing that happens to them shall do them any real hurt, or possess them with any terrific apprehensions; they are safe, and they shall think themselves so. *Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield*. It is their way, the paths of judgment in which they walk, that the Lord knows, and owns, and takes care of.

[4.] Grace to persevere to the end. If we depend upon God, and seek to him for wisdom, he will uphold us in our integrity, will enable us to *keep the paths of judgment*, however we may be tempted to turn aside out of them; for he *preserves the way of his saints*, that it be not perverted, and so

preserves them in it safe and blameless to his heavenly kingdom. The assurances God has given us of his grace, if duly improved, will excite and quicken our endeavours in doing our duty. *Work out your salvation, for God works in you.*

~~<2010>~~ PROVERBS 2:10-22

THE BENEFITS CONFERRED BY WISDOM

The scope of these verses is to show,

- 1.** What great advantage true wisdom will be of to us; it will keep us from the paths of sin, which lead to ruin, and will therein do us a greater kindness than if it enriched us with all the wealth of the world.
- 2.** What good use we should make of the wisdom God gives us; we must use it for our own guidance in the paths of virtue, and for the arming of us against temptations of every kind.
- 3.** By what rules we may try ourselves whether we have this wisdom or no. This tree will be known by its fruits; if we be truly wise, it will appear by our care to avoid all evil company and evil practices.

This wisdom will be of use to us,

I. For our preservation from evil, from the evil of sin, and, consequently, from the evil of trouble that attends it.

1. In general (v. 10, 11), “When wisdom has entire possession of thee, it will *keep thee*.” And when has it an entire possession of us?

(1.) When it has dominion over us. When it not only fills the head with notions, but *enters into the heart* and has a commanding power and influence upon that, — when it is upon the throne there, and gives law to the affections and passions, — when it *enters into the heart* as the leaven into the dough, to diffuse its relish there, and to change it into its own image — then it is likely to do us good.

(2.) When we have delight in it, when knowledge becomes *pleasant to the soul*: “When thou beginnest to relish it as the most agreeable entertainment, and art subject to its rules, of choice, and with satisfaction,

— when thou callest the practice of virtue, not a slavery and a task, but *liberty* and *pleasure*, and a life of serious godliness the most comfortable life a man can live in this world, — then thou wilt find the benefit of it.” Though its restraints should be in some respects unpleasant to the body, yet even those must be pleasant to the soul. When it has come to this, with us, *discretion shall preserve us* and keep us. God keeps *the way of his saints* (v. 8), by giving them discretion to keep out of harm's way, to keep themselves that the wicked one touch them not. Note, A principle of grace reigning in the heart will be a powerful preservative both against corruptions within and temptations without, ^{<206>}Ecclesiastes 9:16, 18.

2. More particularly, wisdom will preserve us,

(1.) From men of corrupt principles, atheistical profane men, who make it their business to debauch young men's judgments, and instil into their minds prejudices against religion and arguments for vice: “It will *deliver thee from the way of the evil man* (v. 12), and a blessed deliverance it will be, as from the very jaws of death, *from the way* in which he walks, and in which he would persuade thee to walk.” The enemy is spoken of as one (v. 12), an *evil man*, but afterwards as many (v. 13); there is a club, a gang of them, that are in confederacy against religion, and join hand in hand for the support of the devil's kingdom and the interests of it.

[1.] They have a spirit of contradiction to that which is good: They *speak froward things*; they say all they can against religion, both to show their own enmity to it and to dissuade others from it. They are advocates for Satan; they plead for Baal, and *pervert the right ways of the Lord*. How peevishly will profane wits argue for sin, and with what frowardness will they carp at the word of God! Wisdom will keep us either from conversing with such men or at least from being ensnared by them.

[2.] They are themselves apostates from that which is good, and such are commonly the most malicious and dangerous enemies religion has, witness Julian (v. 13): *They leave the paths of uprightness*, which they were trained up in and had set out in, shake off the influences of their education, and break off the thread of their hopeful beginnings, *to walk in the ways of darkness*, in those wicked ways which hate the light, in which men are led blindfold by ignorance and error, and which lead men into utter darkness. The ways of sin are ways of darkness, uncomfortable and unsafe; what fools are those that leave the plain, pleasant, lightsome paths of uprightness, to walk in those ways! ^{<205>}Psalm 82:5; ^{<201>}1 John 2:11.

[3.] They take a pleasure in sin, both in committing it themselves and in seeing others commit it (v. 14): They *rejoice* in an opportunity *to do evil*, and in the accomplishment and success of any wicked project. It is sport to fools to do mischief; nor is any sight more grateful to them than to see *the frowardness of the wicked*, to see those that are hopeful drawn into the ways of sin, and then to see them hardened and confirmed in those ways. They are pleased if they can discern that the devil's kingdom gets ground (see ⁴¹³Romans 1:32), such a height of impiety have they arrived at.

[4.] They are resolute in sin (v. 15): Their *ways are crooked*, a great many windings and turnings to escape the pursuit of their convictions and break the force of them; some sly excuse, some subtle evasion or other, their deceitful hearts furnish them with, for the strengthening of their hands in their wickedness; and in the crooked mazes of that labyrinth they secure themselves from the arrests of God's word and their own consciences; for they are *froward in their paths*, that is, they are resolved to go on in them, whatever is said against it. Every wise man will shun the company of such as these.

(2.) From women of corrupt practices. The former lead to spiritual wickednesses, the lusts of the unsanctified mind; these lead to *fleshly lusts*, which defile the body, that living temple, but withal *war against the soul*. The adulteress is here called *the strange woman*, because no man that has any wisdom or goodness in him will have any acquaintance with her; she is to be shunned by every Israelite as if she were a heathen, and a stranger to that sacred commonwealth. A strange woman indeed! utterly estranged from all principles of reason, virtue, and honour. It is a great mercy to be delivered from the allurements of the adulteress, considering,

[1.] How false she is. Who will have any dealings with those that are made up of treachery? She is a strange woman; for, *First*, She is false to him whom she entices. She speaks fair, tells him how much she admires him above any man, and what a kindness she has for him; but she *flatters with her words*; she has no true affection for him, nor any desire of his welfare, any more than Delilah had of Samson's. All she designs is to pick his pocket and gratify a base lust of her own. *Secondly*, She is false to her husband, and violates the sacred obligation she lies under to him. He was *the guide of her youth*; by marrying him she chose him to be so, and submitted herself to his guidance, with a promise to attend him only, and forsake all others. But she has *forsaken* him, and therefore it cannot be

thought that she should be faithful to any one else; and whoever entertains her is partaker with her in her falsehood. *Thirdly*, She is false to God himself: She *forgets the covenant of her God*, the marriage-covenant (v. 17), to which God is not only a witness, but a party, for, he having instituted the ordinance, both sides vow to him to be true to each other. It is not her husband only that she sins against, but her God, who *will judge whoremongers and adulterers* because they despise the oath and break the covenant, ^{<378>}Ezekiel 17:18; ^{<324>}Malachi 2:14.

[2.] How fatal it will prove to those that fall in league with her, v. 18, 19. Let the sufferings of others be our warnings. Take heed of the sin of whoredom; for, *First*, The ruin of those who are guilty of it is certain and unavoidable, if they do not repent. It is a sin that has a direct tendency to the killing of the soul, the extinguishing of all good affections and dispositions in it, and the exposing of it to the wrath and curse of God and the sword of his justice. Those that live in forbidden pleasures are dead while they live. Let discretion preserve every man, not only from the evil woman, but from the evil house, for the *house inclines to death*; it is in the road that leads directly to eternal death; *and her paths unto Rephaim*, to the *giants* (so some read it), the sinners of the old world, who, living in luxury and excess of riot, were cut down out of time, and their foundation was overthrown with a flood. Our Lord Jesus deters us from sinful pleasures with the consideration of everlasting torments which follow them. *Where the worm dies not, nor is the fire quenched*. See ^{<418>}Matthew 5:28, 29. *Secondly*, Their repentance and recovery are extremely hazardous: *None*, or next to none, *that go unto her, return again*. It is very rare that any who are caught in this snare of the devil recover themselves, so much is the heart hardened, and the mind blinded, by the deceitfulness of this sin. Having once lost their *hold of the paths of life*, they know not how to take hold of them again, but are perfectly besotted and bewitched with those base lusts. Many learned interpreters think that this caution against the *strange woman*, besides the literal sense, is to be understood figuratively, as a caution,

1. Against idolatry, which is spiritual whoredom. Wisdom will keep thee from all familiarity with the worshippers of images, and all inclination to join with them, which had for many ages been of such pernicious consequence to Israel and proved so to Solomon himself.

2. Against the debauching of the intellectual powers and faculties of the soul by the lusts and appetites of the body. Wisdom will keep thee from being captivated by the carnal mind, and from subjecting the spirit to the dominion of the flesh, that notorious adulteress which *forsakes its guide*, violates the *covenant of our God*, which *inclines to death*, and which, when it has got an undisturbed dominion, makes the case of the soul desperate.

II. This wisdom will be of use to guide and direct us in that which is good (v. 20): *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men*. We must avoid the way of the *evil man*, and the *strange woman*, in order that we may walk in good ways; we must *cease to do evil*, in order that we may *learn to do well*. Note,

1. There is a way which is peculiarly the way of good men, the way in which good men, as such, and as far as they have really been such, have always walked.

2. It will be our wisdom to walk in that way, to ask for the good old way and walk therein, ^{<2016>}Jeremiah 6:16; ^{<2012>}Hebrews 6:12; 12:1. And we must not only walk in that way awhile, but we must keep it, keep in it, and never turn aside out of it: *The paths of the righteous* are the paths of life, which all that are wise, having taken hold of, will keep their hold of. “That thou mayest imitate those excellent persons, the patriarchs and prophets (so bishop Patrick paraphrases it), and be preserved in *the paths of those righteous* men who followed after them.” We must not only choose our way in general by the good examples of the saints, but must also take directions from them in the choice of our particular paths; observe the track, and go forth by the footsteps of the flock. Two reasons are here given why we should thus choose: —

(1.) Because men's integrity will be their establishment, v. 21. It will be the establishment,

[1.] Of their persons: *The upright shall dwell in the land*, peaceably and quietly, as long as they live; and their uprightness will contribute to it, as it settles their minds, guides their counsels, gains them the good-will of their neighbours, and entitles them to God's special favour.

[2.] Of their families: *The perfect*, in their posterity, *shall remain in it*. They shall dwell and remain for ever in the heavenly Canaan, of which the earthly one was but a type.

(2.) Because men's iniquity will be their destruction, v. 22. See what becomes of *the wicked*, who choose the way of *the evil man*; they *shall be cut off*, not only from heaven hereafter and all hopes of that, but *from the earth* now, on which they set their affections, and in which they lay up their treasure. They think to take root in it, but they and their families *shall be rooted out of it*, in judgment to them, but in mercy to the earth. There is a day coming which *shall leave them neither root nor branch*, ³⁹¹¹Malachi 4:1. Let that wisdom then *enter into our hearts*, and be *pleasant to our souls*, which will keep us out of a way that will end thus.