

“Proverbial Purpose & Prerequisite”

Proverbs 1:1-7

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

- 2** *To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,*
- 3** *To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;*
- 4** *To give prudence to the naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion,*
- 5** *A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,*
- 6** *To understand proverbs and parables,
The words of the wise and their riddles.*
- 7** *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

**(See wise/foolish man in Matthew 7)
house on sand vs. Rock**

Philippians 2:12

“Continue to work out your salvation with FEAR and trembling.”

1 Peter 1:17

17 *If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, **conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;***
18 *knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, **19** but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. **20** For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you **21** who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

2 Corinthians 5:10-11a

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. **11** Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.*

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

“The beginning and end of wisdom is to fear God and avoid evil (1:7; 8:13; 9:10; 15:33). The world is a battleground between wisdom and folly, righteousness and wickedness, good and evil. This conflict is personified in Lady Wisdom (1:20-33; 4:5-9; ch.8; 9:1-6) and Harlot Folly (5:1-6; 6:24-35; ch.7; 9:13-18). Both “women” offer love and invite simple young men into their homes to sample their wares. Wisdom’s invitation is to life (8:34-36); the seduction of Folly leads to death (5:4-6; 7:22-27; 9:18).

“Mysteriously, Lady Wisdom speaks in public places, offering wisdom to everyone who will listen (1:20-22; 8:1-5; 9:3). Wisdom does not hide, but rather, stands there for all who seek her.”

- Holman Bible Dictionary

“Here (Proverbs) is not only milk for babes, but strong meat for strong men.”

- Matthew Henry

“This book will not only make the foolish and bad wise and good, but the wise and good wiser and better...”

- Matthew Henry

Without/before “understanding,” the Proverb(s) are *“like a nut un-cracked.”*

- Matthew Henry

See Philippians 1:10... New Testament application of Proverb’s purposes...

The FOUND are CALLED to GROW the 6 Purposes of the Church - Matthew 28:18-20

(P.S.W.O.R.D.)

Prayer

Service

Worship

Outreach

Relationships

Disciplines

Systematic Theology: Grudem's Foundational Christian Doctrines...

7 Major Christian Doctrines...

1. Doctrine of the Word of God
2. Doctrine of God
3. Doctrine of Man
4. Doctrine of Christ & the Holy Spirit
5. Doctrine of Salvation/Redemption
6. Doctrine of the Church
7. Doctrine of the Future

(Contrast "first order," "second order," & "third order" issues)

A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity

In every generation, the church is commanded to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." That is no easy task, and it is complicated by the multiple attacks upon Christian truth that mark our contemporary age. Assaults upon the Christian faith are no longer directed only at isolated doctrines. The entire structure of Christian truth is now under attack by those who would subvert Christianity's theological integrity.

Thursday, May 20, 2004

In every generation, the church is commanded to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." That is no easy task, and it is complicated by the multiple attacks upon Christian truth that mark our contemporary age. Assaults upon the Christian faith are no longer directed only at isolated doctrines. The entire structure of Christian truth is now under attack by those who would subvert Christianity's theological integrity.

Today's Christian faces the daunting task of strategizing which Christian doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary context. This applies both to the public defense of Christianity in face of the secular challenge and the internal responsibility of dealing with doctrinal disagreements. Neither is an easy task, but theological seriousness and maturity demand that we consider doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance. God's truth is to be defended at every point and in every detail, but responsible Christians must determine which issues deserve first-rank attention in a time of theological crisis.

A trip to the local hospital Emergency Room some years ago alerted me to an intellectual tool that is most helpful in fulfilling our theological responsibility. In recent years, emergency medical personnel have practiced a discipline known as triage—a process that allows trained personnel to make a quick evaluation of relative medical urgency. Given the chaos of an Emergency Room reception area, someone must be armed with the medical expertise to make an immediate determination of medical priority. Which patients should be rushed into surgery? Which patients can wait for a less urgent examination? Medical personnel cannot flinch from asking these questions, and from taking responsibility to give the patients with the most critical needs top priority in terms of treatment.

The word triage comes from the French word trier, which means “to sort.” Thus, the triage officer in the medical context is the front-line agent for deciding which patients need the most urgent treatment. Without such a process, the scraped knee would receive the same urgency of consideration as a gunshot wound to the chest. The same discipline that brings order to the hectic arena of the Emergency Room can also offer great assistance to Christians defending truth in the present age.

A discipline of theological triage would require Christians to determine a scale of theological urgency that would correspond to the medical world's framework for medical priority. With this in mind, I would suggest three different levels of theological urgency, each corresponding to a set of issues and theological priorities found in current doctrinal debates.

First-level theological issues would include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith. Included among these most crucial doctrines would be doctrines such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.

In the earliest centuries of the Christian movement, heretics directed their most dangerous attacks upon the church's understanding of who Jesus is, and in what sense He is the very Son of God. Other crucial debates concerned the question of how the Son is related to the Father and the Holy Spirit. The earliest creeds and councils of the church were, in essence, emergency measures taken to protect the central core of Christian doctrine. At historic turning-points such as the councils at Nicaea, Constantinople, and

Chalcedon, orthodoxy was vindicated and heresy was condemned—and these councils dealt with doctrines of unquestionable first-order importance. Christianity stands or falls on the affirmation that Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God.

The church quickly moved to affirm that the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ are absolutely necessary to the Christian faith. Any denial of what has become known as Nicaean-Chalcedonian Christology is, by definition, condemned as a heresy. The essential truths of the incarnation include the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who deny these revealed truths are, by definition, not Christians.

The same is true with the doctrine of the Trinity. The early church clarified and codified its understanding of the one true and living God by affirming the full deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—while insisting that the Bible reveals one God in three persons.

In addition to the Christological and Trinitarian doctrines, the doctrine of justification by faith must also be included among these first-order truths. Without this doctrine, we are left with a denial of the Gospel itself, and salvation is transformed into some structure of human righteousness. The truthfulness and authority of the Holy Scriptures must also rank as a first-order doctrine, for without an affirmation of the Bible as the very Word of God, we are left without any adequate authority for distinguishing truth from error.

These first-order doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself.

The set of second-order doctrines is distinguished from the first-order set by the fact that believing Christians may disagree on the second-order issues, though this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers. When Christians organize themselves into congregations and denominational forms, these boundaries become evident.

Second-order issues would include the meaning and mode of baptism. Baptists and Presbyterians, for example, fervently disagree over the most basic understanding of Christian baptism. The practice of infant baptism is inconceivable to the Baptist mind, while Presbyterians trace infant baptism to their most basic understanding of the covenant. Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as believing Christians, but recognize that **disagreement on issues of this importance will prevent fellowship within the same congregation or denomination.**

Christians across a vast denominational range can stand together on the first-order doctrines and recognize each other as authentic Christians, while understanding that the existence of second-order disagreements prevents the closeness of fellowship we would otherwise enjoy. A church either will recognize infant baptism, or it will not. That choice immediately creates a second-order conflict with those who take the other position by conviction.

In recent years, the issue of women serving as pastors has emerged as another second-order issue. Again, a church or denomination either will ordain women to the pastorate, or it will not. Second-order issues resist easy settlement by those who would prefer an either/or approach. Many of the most heated disagreements among serious believers take place at the second-order level, for these issues frame our understanding of the church and its ordering by the Word of God.

Third-order issues are doctrines over which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations. I would put most of the debates over eschatology, for example, in this category. Christians who affirm the bodily, historical, and victorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ may differ over timetable and sequence without rupturing the fellowship of the church. **Christians may find themselves in disagreement over any number of issues related to the interpretation of difficult texts or the understanding of matters of common disagreement.** Nevertheless, **standing together on issues of more urgent importance, believers are able to accept one another without compromise when third-order issues are in question.**

A structure of theological triage does not imply that Christians may take any biblical truth with less than full seriousness. We are charged to embrace and to teach the comprehensive truthfulness of the Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. There are no insignificant doctrines revealed in the Bible, but there is an essential foundation of truth that undergirds the entire system of biblical truth.

This structure of theological triage may also help to explain how confusion can often occur in the midst of doctrinal debate. **If the relative urgency of these truths is not taken into account, the debate can quickly become unhelpful.** The error of theological liberalism is evident in a basic disrespect for biblical authority and the church's treasury of truth. The mark of true liberalism is the refusal to admit that first-order theological issues even exist. Liberals treat first-order doctrines as if they were merely third-order in importance, and doctrinal ambiguity is the inevitable result.

Fundamentalism, on the other hand, tends toward the opposite error. The misjudgment of true fundamentalism is the belief that all disagreements concern first-order doctrines. Thus, third-order issues are raised to a first-order importance, and Christians are wrongly and harmfully divided.

Living in an age of widespread doctrinal denial and intense theological confusion, thinking Christians must rise to the challenge of Christian maturity, even in the midst of a theological emergency. We must sort the issues with a trained mind and a humble heart, in order to protect what the Apostle Paul called the “treasure” that has been entrusted to us. Given the urgency of this challenge, a lesson from the Emergency Room just might help.

Key Words of Proverbs 1:1-7 =

“The proverbs” (v.1)

“of Solomon...” (see 1 Kings 4... = divine credibility!)

“To know” (v.2)

- A. To know by observing & reflecting
- B. To know by experiencing (via the senses)
 - 1. Biblical synonyms:
 - a. *Hearing* – Exodus 3:7
 - b. *Seeing* – Genesis: 18:21
 - c. *Perceiving* – Job 28:7
 - 2. “Wrong hearts” hinder/prevent “knowing” (Ps.95:10)
 - 3. *Intimate/Personal “knowing”*
 - a. Adam “knew” Eve – Genesis 4:1
 - b. God “knew” Abram – Genesis 18:19
 - 4. God makes Himself known thru revelatory acts...
 - a. *Judgment* – Psalms 9:16
 - b. *Deliverance of His people* – Isaiah 66:14
- C. To “know God” is to have an intimate, experiential knowledge of Him
 - 1. To KNOW God is to FEAR God – Proverbs 1:7; 1 Kings 8:43
 - 2. To KNOW God is to SERVE God – 1 Chronicles 28:9
 - 3. To KNOW God is to TRUST God – Isaiah 43:10

“wisdom”

“The LORD gives wisdom (another gift of grace); out of His mouth comes knowledge with understanding” – Proverbs 2:6

Hence... WISDOM = KNOWLEDGE with UNDERSTANDING!

Application = “ability to make the right decisions.”

Job 28:28 = “*And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord (Adonai), that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.’*”

Note: “FEAR of the LORD” = WISDOM’s Pre-Requisite (Prov. 1:7)

Growth in “wisdom” = Maturing Sanctification (a.k.a. Christ-likeness)

“instruction” (a.k.a. “disciplines,” “warnings” or “chastisement”)

“As discipline, it teaches how to live correctly in the fear of the Lord.” - Holman Bible Dictionary

*“Admonitions are a shorter relative of the instruction”
- Holman Bible Dictionary*

Sayings = extremely brief, “tell it like it is” insights on reality

Careful **attention to “instruction” brings:**

- a. *Honor* – Proverbs 1:9
- b. *Life* – Proverbs 4:13
- c. *Wisdom* – Proverbs 8:33
- d. *God’s blessing!* - Proverbs 8:35

Rejecting instruction brings:

- a. *Death* – Proverbs 5:23
- b. *Shame* – Proverbs 13:18

See context in Jeremiah... 5:3 & 35:13

Jeremiah 5:3...

*O Lord, do not Your eyes look for truth?
You have smitten them,
But they did not weaken;
You have consumed them,
But they refused to take correction.
They have made their faces harder than rock;*

They have refused to repent.

Jeremiah 35:12-13...

*Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying,
13 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Go
and say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of
Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction by listening
to My words?" declares the Lord.*

“to discern” (a.k.a. “perceive”)

- Definition:
- to separate mentally, to differentiate.
 - to rightly understand, to “get it” (Job 6:30)
 - to choose correctly, to align properly
 - * **See Proverbs 26:4 & 5**
 - to not be fooled or deceived!

“Discernment defeats deception!” - JDP

“the words of understanding” – (a.k.a. speeches)

- Insightful, applicable truths...
- Proven, biblically helpful guidelines...
- *“Wisdom’s wrappings!”* - JDP

“To receive” (v.3)

- To TAKE unto one’s self
- To GRASP with intentionality
- To Take-Hold-of personally...
- To internalize effectively!

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(in) “**wise behavior**” (instruction leading to)

- Parallels “to know”
- Experiential wisdom in action...
- **GOD-HONORING BE-ing!**

(in) **“Righteousness”** (instruction leading to)

- RIGHT STANDING BEFORE GOD ALMIGHTY!
 - * Right Actions & Attitudes...
 - * Right hands, head, & heart...
 - * You can be BOTH “right” & wrong...
- Righteousness is ALWAYS right!

(in) **“justice”** / just (instruction leading to)

- “Rendering a proper verdict” – Holman B.D.
- **“Deciphering the details righteously”** – JDP
- *“Discerning & committing to what is right”* - JDP

(in) **“equality”/ fair** (instruction leading to)

- Finding what is “right” in the “gray-matter” - JDP
- **“The righteous side of right...”** – JDP
- *“Representing God in matters of disagreement”* - JDP

“To give” (v.4) (to generate... to create... to *“GIFT via God”*)

- **To “TRANSFER” with/for effect** from point “A” to point “B”

“prudence” (to the **“naïve”** -- those who ***think they know!***)

*** “Naïve” = “Simple” or “foolish”

- See **Matthew 10:16... Shrewd AND Innocent...**

- **Prudence** n. [L. prudentia.] (**WEBSTER’S 1828**)
Wisdom applied to practice. Prudence implies caution in deliberating and consulting on the most suitable means to accomplish valuable purposes, and the exercise of sagacity in discerning and selecting them. Prudence differs from wisdom in this, that prudence implies more caution and reserve than wisdom, or is exercised more in foreseeing

and avoiding evil, than in devising and executing that which is good. It is sometimes mere caution or circumspection. Prudence is principally in reference to actions to be done, and due means, order, season and method of doing or not doing.

“knowledge” (to the youth – young men / or next generation)

- the by-product of “to know”
- **“Truth... ascertained!”** - JDP

“discretion” (to the youth)

- SEPARATING FROM what is WRONG
- the opposite of “loose or lewd conduct” – Vine’s Word Study
- **“Filtering our Falsehood & Folly”** - JDP

“A wise man” (v.5)

- One whom God has gifted with wisdom...
- One that has embraced the gift of wisdom...
- See **Job 28:28!**

“will hear”

- **“To LISTEN attentively, diligently, & obediently”** – Strong’s

and increase”

- To add or multiply to the base...
- To SURPASS the original...
- More...

“in learning”

- Persuasive understanding of knowledge...
- Process of acquiring & growing in wisdom...
- ***“Positive Change”*** - JDP

“And a man of understanding”

- The man who can rightly discern & perceive God’s way...
- ***“The faithfully surrendered & appreciative servant of God”*** – JDP
- The one who has a healthy fear of God...
- The biblically wise man...

“will acquire”

- To create, to buy... to ascertain
- To add to one’s original status...

“wise counsel”

- Just as “iron sharpens iron” so the wise grow the wise
- Remember: “Garbage in = Garbage out!”
- ***“Who you learn from shapes what you learn.”*** - JDP

“to understand”

“a proverb”

“and a parable”

(to understand) ***“words of the wise”***

and (to understand) ***“their riddles”***

“The fear”

(The fear) “of the LORD”

“‘Fear of the Lord’ is biblical shorthand for an entire life in love, worship, and obedience to God.” - Holman Bible Dictionary

“is the beginning”

“of knowledge,”

“but”

“fools”

“despise”

“wisdom”

“and”

“discipline.”

Warning fertilizes Wisdom... - JDP

See MacArthur Study Bible: Book Introduction notes (Proverbs)...

Apply all to daily living = FAITHFUL DISCIPLE

- Love God, Love People, Serve the World
- KNOW

- GROW
- GO!
- Find the Lost, Grow the Found.

How we “do” church is NOT necessarily a “first order” issue... However, if and when the WAY that we “do” church... DEFINES “Church” – then it IS a first order issue!

Do church vs. Define Church

“Basically” believe vs. Biblically *believe*

The “good” book vs. God’s Book