

Being Prudent Instead of Naive

“The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.”

Proverbs 22:3 NASB

Our verse comes from the book of Proverbs. This verse is repeated in Proverbs 27:12 with similar verses in Proverbs 14:15, 18.

Proverbs 22:3 contrasts two types of people, the *prudent* and the *naïve*. Furthermore, the verse contrasts the actions of these two types of people, the “prudent sees the evil and hides himself” while the “naive go on.” And lastly, the verse communicates the consequence suffered by the naïve.

1. The Prudent Person

The first type of person mentioned is the prudent person. The Hebrew word translated *prudent* is used both negatively and positively in the Old Testament. The word appears three times outside of the book of Proverbs (Gen. 3:1; Job 5:12; 15:5). These three occurrences of the Hebrew word constitute the only times the word appears in the Old Testament outside of the book of Proverbs and all three convey the negative use of the word translating it *subtle*, *crafty*, or *cunning*- Gen. 3:1 in the NKJV. The book of Proverbs uses the word eight times always in a positive sense, translating the Hebrew word each time as *prudent* (12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3 and 27:12). The positive qualities contained in the meaning of the Hebrew word are *sensible*, *practical skill*, *prudent*, *wise*, and *shrewd*. Thus, Proverbs 22:3 first sets before us the person who exhibits these qualities and refers to such a person as being prudent.

A. The Prudent Person’s Actions

The character of the prudent person is revealed by his/her actions. Proverbs 22:3 communicates two actions of the prudent:

i. Sees the evil – Recognition of evil

First, the prudent sees the evil. In the context of this verse the phrase “sees the evil” means to recognize, acknowledge, or be aware of something, in this case evil. *Evil*, has a wide range of meaning and can refer to that which is spiritually evil such as sins and wickedness or to those things that in a practical sense could be dangerous and/or result in a calamity, such as standing on a mountain peak in the midst of a lightning storm. The word in our verse is not limited to either and therefore, essentially encompasses both. However, for the sake of space and time we will confine our examination in this study to the priority of the spiritual application of this verse with an understanding that maintaining the spiritual as a priority has very practical implications.

Furthermore, the verse assumes a preexisting condition on the part of the prudent which enables him/her to recognize evil. This preexisting condition is *knowledge* of that which is considered spiritually evil. Although Proverbs 22:3 assumes the presence of knowledge without stating it explicitly, Proverbs 13:6 informs us that, “Every prudent man acts with knowledge.” Consequently, knowledge, spiritual knowledge in the context of our study, is clearly a preexisting quality in the prudent.

However, while the presence of knowledge in the prudent is a preexisting condition, it is not an innate condition. This is to say that knowledge regarding spiritual matters does not originate with the prudent. Instead, spiritual knowledge comes from God. Proverbs 2:1-10 explains to us that knowledge comes from the mouth of God (Pr. 2:6). That knowledge is said to come from the mouth of God is a reference to the Word of God. When God works in the life a person causing that person to heed His Word, God gives that person an understanding of the fear of the Lord (Pr. 2:5a) which is the beginning of true spiritual knowledge (Pr. 1:7 and 2:5b).

It is one thing to know about evil and quite another to identify it. Armed with such knowledge from the Word of God the spiritually prudent person not only knows the reality of evil's existence with its danger but also specifically identifies evil. This is what the spiritually prudent do. They are not merely cognizant of evil's existence. They recognize evil and identify it as such – “The prudent sees the evil...”

ii. Hides himself – Response to evil

The second action of the prudent pertains to his/her response to evil. True knowledge of the existence of evil leads to an immediate response on the part of the prudent. The prudent person sees the evil and hides himself. The word translated “hides” in this context is not meant to convey the negative sense of running away and hiding from something. Instead, the word is meant to communicate the positive responses to evil of biblical **preparation** and biblical **practice**.

In our study we will make a distinction between these two responses. Biblical preparation relates to the prudent person's response in light of the knowledge of evil's existence, while biblical practice relates to the prudent person's actual encounter with evil.

a) Biblical preparation

Knowing evil exists and knowing evil will be encountered, the prudent person prepares for the encounter (*hides himself*) even prior to its occurrence. Once again it is important to note the fact that Proverbs 22:3 communicates what the prudent person **will do** as opposed to what he merely knows or knows should be done. To know evil exists and know that it will be encountered and not prepare for the encounter is not prudent. Furthermore, biblical preparation in the light of the existence of evil is a necessary preliminary to the response of biblical practice once evil is encountered. Sadly, the experience of many indicates they are under the impression that turning to the Bible is something that is to be done once evil is encountered but not necessarily prior to encountering evil. While it is good to turn to Scripture anytime it is imperative that the believer do so all the time, especially when it comes to evil. Biblical preparation puts the prudent person in the better position of being able to respond proactively to sin or evil when it is encountered as opposed to reacting to evil upon encountering it.

Because evil exists in a multitude of forms it would be impossible in this brief study or any study for that matter, to list all the forms of evil and examples of preparation related to each. However, the Bible promises such preparation to those who study it, as the Bible alone brings to us the true knowledge of God. The ultimate response to evil is godliness

and there is no resource for godliness outside of the Word of God (Pr. 2:9-with context; Mt. 4:4; 2 Peter 1:2-3). Therefore, the prudent person meditates in the Word of God day and night. Because the Word of God effectually works in those who believe, the prudent person is prepared to encounter evil and therefore in many instances is protected from it (Ps. 1:1-3 and 1 Thess. 2:13).

Because the Bible is the only resource for preparation against evil let's briefly examine some basic truths from the Bible regarding evil and how knowledge of such truths prepares the prudent person for certain encounter with evil.

- *Personal Evil*

While spiritual knowledge is not an innate human quality evil is. The prudent person, in this case the biblically informed person, is aware of the fact that evil is first an internal reality. That is correct. Next to its enmity against God's holiness perhaps the most insidious truth about the existence of evil is that it exists internally. Scripture is replete with verses describing the internal reality of evil. The Bible says that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked and no one but God can know it (Jer. 17:9-10). Therefore, the prudent person knows that evil is not only internally present but that it exists at the core of one's being—the heart. Jesus said that evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness proceed out of the heart (Mk. 7:20-23). Even after a person is born again into the kingdom of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore no longer under the bondage of the sinful flesh (Rm. 8:9), while he remains in this life no good thing dwells in his sinful flesh (Rm. 7:18). Evil is still present (Rm. 7:21) even though evil is no longer his master (Rm. 6:12-14) as it formerly was (Rm. 3:9-19).

- *Public Evil*

From Scripture the prudent person knows evil is present in every human being (Rm. 3:9-18, 23), therefore, the prudent are aware that evil is a public matter as well as a personal matter. The reality of evil's presence in all people is evident through words and deeds whether carried out intentionally or unintentionally.

- *Principality Evil*

The Bible speaks of principalities that are evil. This refers to the fact that evil exists in the spiritual realm of demons and the devil. The KJV, NASB, and the NKJV use the word *principalities* (Rm. 8:38) to describe demons who rule in places of authority (Eph. 6:12). In the same verse the NIV translates the Greek word *arche* as *demons*. The devil and his angels (demons) constitute the unified spiritual coalition for evil. Scripture speaks extensively of their activities (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13; Eph. 2:2; 6:11-12; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; 1 Jn. 5:19, etc.) and warns believers against them (1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; Jam. 4:7).

b) Biblical practice

The second response to evil on the part of the prudent is that of biblical practice. While biblical preparation is a response in the light of the knowledge of evil's existence, biblical

practice is the response of the prudent upon encountering evil. It is one thing to know of evil's existence and be prepared but quite another story to respond biblically upon encountering evil. As stated earlier, biblical preparation is essential in order to respond with biblical practice. Because the prudent are prepared they can respond to evil in a biblical manner and thereby honor God. For instance, some practical responses to the evils mentioned above may be as follows:

- *Personal Evil*

How does knowledge regarding the personal presence of evil prepare the prudent? The prudent are prepared not to trust in their hearts but in God (Pr. 3:5-7). They are prepared not to follow a way that seems right to them (Pr. 14:12; 16:25). Instead, they obey the word of God. Thus, they are prepared for walking by faith in the Word of God as opposed to walking by feeling or other experiences (Hab. 2:4; Rm. 1:17; Heb. 10:38).

Prudent parents know this same evil principal is at work in the hearts of their children and therefore recognize the importance of not subjecting their children to environments that would encourage evil in their lives. Furthermore, they teach their children to avoid evil friendships. They bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Gal. 6:4).

- *Public Evil*

Knowledge of the existence of evil in one's personal realm as well as the public realm prepares the prudent to not be lead astray by others. Proverbs 2 addresses both forms of evil (personal and public). The exhortations in this chapter to seek wisdom (vs. 1-5) demonstrate the fact that spiritual knowledge is not an intrinsic quality. God gives wisdom (vs. 6-8) so as to enable one to exercise discernment of righteousness, justice, equity, and every good course (v. 10). Wisdom enters those who seek it from the Lord and it delivers one from the way of evil (11-12a) and from evil people (vs. 12b-19).

Furthermore, knowing evil is a public matter the prudent prepares his tongue to speak grace to others (Eph. 4:29) for it is only by grace that others can be delivered from evil (Eph. 2:8-9).

- *Principality Evil*

Because evil exists in the realm of principalities believers are commanded to be clothed in the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-13). The prudent take this command seriously so as to not give the devil opportunity (Eph. 4:27). Instead, they resist him steadfast in their faith (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Believers know from Scripture that Satan's servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Therefore, the prudent test all things (1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 Jn. 4:1).

2. The Naïve Person

Opposite of the prudent are the naïve. The Hebrew word translated *naïve*, and sometimes *simple*, *foolish* and *folly* depending on the translation, comes from a root word which means to be

open in the sense of space or being roomy. In the case of our verse the word depicts a person whose mind is open and accommodating to all kinds of information. One might even refer to this person as being open-minded—a phrase that has been given a positive twist in the culture of the day. However, when compared to Scripture, especially in the light of the meaning of the Hebrew word translated *naïve*, being open-minded when it comes to evil is not a positive quality.

A. The Naïve Person's Action

The character of the naive person is revealed by his/her action. Proverbs 22:3 communicates a single action of the naïve.

i. Go on

Unlike the prudent who see the evil and hide themselves, the naïve simply go on (pass on-KJV). The Hebrew verb translated *go on* occurs more than 500 times in the Old Testament and conveys the idea of movement from one place to another. We might say that in the light of the danger of evil the naïve just keep right on going. Whether the naive recognize the evil as do the prudent or not, because they love being naïve (Pr. 1:23), they take no precautions and make no preparations.

Essentially, because the naïve fail to fill their minds with the revelation of the Word of God, they lack discernment regarding evil and end up believing everything (Pr. 14:15). Thus, they fill their spacious, accommodating and open minds with everything but the one thing that that will deliver them from evil—the Word of God.

- The naïve believe they can follow the wisdom of their own hearts which is failure to prepare and act in the light of the existence of personal evil. Thus, they inherit folly (Pr. 14:18).
- The naive maintain that people are basically good, which is a failure to acknowledge the reality of public evil. Thus, they end up in dangerous conditions committing more sin (Pr. 1:10-19).
- In multiple ways they dabble in various forms of spiritism and by doing so ignore the existence and effects of principality evil. Thus, they are held captive by the devil to perform his will (2 Tim. 2:26).

B. The Consequence of Being Naïve

The naïve are punished. The Hebrew word translated *punished* means “fine”. The word communicates a negative consequence to being naïve. Note the verse indicates that the naïve **are** punished. The verse does not communicate punishment as merely a potential consequence experienced by the naive. Their punishment is a certainty as opposed to merely a possibility. Thus, the naïve pay the fine for being naïve.

Paying the fine for being naïve should not be understood as a trivial matter. Such an understanding would itself be naïve. In some instances the consequence is death (Proverbs 1:32; 7:7 and 23, see context of entire chapter). In the cases of those who are naïve when it

comes to personal sin, the punishment is spiritual death in the lake of fire which is the ultimate punishment. For such people do not acknowledge their sin against God and their need for the Savior Jesus Christ. One could say that the epitome of being naïve is to think that God, Who is absolutely holy, would in anyway minimize sin so as to either not judge it or minimize His judgment of it.

Being naïve regarding evil is the natural condition of all people. It is not until one heeds the truth of Scripture that being naïve is replaced with prudence. If the mind is not continually being filled with the Word of God the default condition is always that of being naïve, therefore the exhortation of Scripture for all to receive the Word of God (Ps. 19:7; 119:130; Pr. 1:4; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:15-16).

Furthermore, being naïve is a deluding condition. Scripture says that the naïve actually love being naïve (Pr. 1:22). By God's grace they must forsake this condition and receive instruction from the Word of God if they are to be freed from such a condition (Pr. 1:23; Pr. 9:6).

Scripture addresses every aspect of our lives (2 Pet. 1:2-3) and is effective in making the simple (naïve) wise (Ps. 19:7). May the Lord bless you with wisdom of Proverbs 22:3.

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