

WISDOM FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - Practical Studies From Proverbs

Part fifteen - Teaching #1859 - Sunday, January 24th, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

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AVOIDING THE PATH OF THE SCOFFER

To Scoff - "To treat with derision or contempt. To deride, mock, or jeer at." That's the way the dictionary defines *scoffing*. If you have the Old King James translation the same word will usually be translated with its exact English equivalent, *mocking*.

Scoffing is different from *criticism*. Criticism can sometimes be constructive and helpful. Criticism frequently has good reason behind it. Some things *deserve* criticism. Scoffing involves, not only the *thoughts* expressed, but the *attitude* behind the thoughts. The scoffer usually considers himself not only *clever*, but *funny*. There is a *proud resistance* in the heart of the scoffer to the truth he mocks. Scoffing, unlike criticism, is rarely, if ever, given to *help* the situation. Perhaps the closest cousin to scoffing would be the habit of *ridicule*.

But while the dictionary can give you the meaning of the term, only the Bible can give you God's attitude toward it. And nowhere is that more clearly done in the Scriptures than in the book of Proverbs.

1) THE GREATEST DANGER OF ALL IS TO SCOFF AT SIN AND AT GOD

Proverbs 14:9 - "Fools mock at the guilt offering...."

Here are religious people who mock at the need for cleansing from the actual guilt of sin. Behold the costliest habit in town. It's like setting your house on fire because you love roasting hot-dogs.

You've heard the mocker's questions. **"You mean to tell me God would actually send me to hell just for...."** Sin is always made to look small.

Why does the fool mock sin? Is his problem that he's *stupid*? No, that's not it. His real problem is he's *afraid*. He can't bring himself to honestly *face* his sin, or the reality of judgment. His only recourse is to *avoid the impact* of the truth by scoffing and mocking it off hand, without careful examination. Scoffing is the *nervous* response to dangerous truth. It only looks clever to others trying to dodge the same truth.

Scoffing is the defense mechanism behind Psalm 14:1 - **"The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good."**

Nothing reveals an ungodly heart more than the scoffing of truth. In other words, scoffing at sin makes a person *more unlike God* than anything else. It's one thing to be unholy. It's another thing altogether to scoff at being unholy.

We know how **God** views sin. He sent His own Son to die on the cross due to human sin. And we know how **Jesus** viewed sin and wickedness. He stood, looking over wayward Jerusalem one afternoon, and the tears flowed down his cheeks because of their wickedness and indifference to God. And then there are sinners - the ones for whom Jesus came and died - and the Bible says many of them *scoff* or *mock* at their own sin and the sin of others.

How twisted is that? When Jesus saw sin, He wept. He knew what response was suitable to the situation. Scoffers just don't get it. This is as accurate a test for your own soul as any I know. God never scoffs at sin. Jesus weeps over it. Angels never scoff at sin. Saints who know both the power of sin and God's great deliverance don't scoff at sin, but fear it. Only those who are still *numbed* by sin mock it's reality and curse. That's why the

scoffer is called a fool.

2) **SCOFFING BECOMES HABITUAL. THE WAY PEOPLE MOCK EARTHLY AUTHORITIES IS THE WAY THEY WILL MOCK GOD AS WELL**

Proverbs 13:1 - "A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."

The patterns of life at home quickly establish eternal consequences. Whether before *parents* (as in this verse), or *law enforcers*, or *educators*, those who grow up with a quick wit, but a deaf ear to authority, will find life quickly closing in on them.

We should note how closely and how frequently Solomon links up the response of youth to parents as an indicator of whether or not wisdom and the good life will be established before it's too late.

The important point here is that scoffing becomes *addictive*. As you start down the road of mocking truth it becomes your *natural, reflexive response* whenever truth confronts you and costly change is called for in your life. It's the standard "in the box" response - the natural defense - to human guilt and the undeniable knowledge of God.

Also, scoffing is deadlier the better you become at doing it. People won't be able to out-talk your quick responses. And, like the fool, you will think that winning the argument, or silencing your opponents, will mean you have won and are right. But that's all a delusion. The better you get at scoffing truth, the more you will pierce your own heart.

This is the main reason the Bible calls upon children to honor their parents. Paul calls it the "*command with promise*" in Ephesians because it brings blessings you can't even see yet. It's not that God thinks your parents are brilliant and absolutely incapable of error. He knows your parents as well as He knows you. He knows they need forgiveness and redemption just as you do.

Why then, does He call upon children to honor their parents? Because He knows that honoring authority, and listening deeply to advice, and submitting our will to another is something foreign and stretching for all of us. And unless this hard lesson is learned early in the home, it will never be learned, when it's even *more* important, on our knees with the Creator.

3) **FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE REASONS, THE SCOFFER CAN NEVER MAKE ANY PROGRESS WITH GOD**

Proverbs 14:6 - "A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding."

Remember, in Proverbs the root of true wisdom is always spiritual and moral in nature - "**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.**" This is the kind of wisdom the scoffer can't find.

But why can't he find it? Is it unavailable? Is it too difficult for him to understand? This verse says he "*seeks wisdom.*" But even that is very strange. Why would someone who only *scoffs* at wisdom bother to *seek* it? The key to this apparent riddle is to remember that there are two very distinct types of wisdom in this world:

2 Corinthians 1:12 - "For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you."

James 3:15-17 - "This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits,

impartial and sincere.”

There is a kind of wisdom that is **earthly wisdom**, or **fleshly wisdom**. That means, very simply, that people who crave this wisdom are people who seek after the fulfilling of their own desires. They desire to be wise in the sense of satisfying themselves in terms of the aspirations **of their senses**. That's why many translations call the earthly wisdom James writes of as being **“sensual wisdom.”** They want to establish their own desires and evasions of God. They seek out ways to do this.

The scoffer seeks the wisdom of **self-fulfillment**. In his empty search, he never finds the true wisdom that comes from submitting life to the will and way of Father God.

We all need to be very honest here. I've gone through seasons in my life where I worked harder to learn to hit a low draw on the golf course than deepen my prayer life. So, there is really no mystery as to why my apparent search for Godliness wasn't going to pay off. To be surprised at this is truly amazing.

4) **SCOFFING AT TRUTH IS NOT ONLY ADDICTIVE, IT'S CONTAGIOUS**

Proverbs 29:8 - “Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath.”

These are not literal flames. Scoffers and scorners are **spiritual pyromaniacs**. Haven't you noticed that popular Christians who deviate from Biblical truth almost always write best-sellers. They set others on the same witty path to destruction. This is why the call to Godliness **includes** a call to avoid mockers and scoffers:

Psalm 1:1 - “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers....”

Notice the emphasis on the **“pack mentality.”** If you want to take up God's Word the way the rest of Psalm 1 describes you will always have to reject the cynical majority.

You and I can't live close to God and close to scoffers at the same time. That is because, given our fallen bent to pride and self-preservation, if we try to maintain fellowship with the scoffer **and** digest the Word of God's truth, we will usually gravitate more toward the scoffer than to God.

5) **GOD'S JUDGEMENT AWAITS THE SCOFFER**

Proverbs 9:12 - “If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.”

This is a striking contrast to the last point. If scoffing truth brings a host of friends in this world, the time will come when the scoffer reaps his fruit all alone. The crowd gets narrowed down. The scoffer gets singled out. No attitude is ever ever lost in God's world.

This is important to remember. Mockers aren't all turned to pillars of salt in this world. This apparent silence can harden scoffers deeper into their sin, thinking they have silenced all voices against them. But this is only an **apparent** victory.

Proverbs 19:29 - “Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and beating for the backs of fools.”

Presently, the judgment for scoffers is only a **prepared** judgment. It is not actualized immediately in this world. But just as surely as Christians should rejoice because they have a kingdom being prepared for them while they are yet here on earth, so the wicked should be awakened from carelessness at the promise that judgment is prepared for them even now.

Romans 2:5 - "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

Very significantly, Paul reminds us all that, especially mockers, will not escape the consequences of their successful avoidance of redeeming truth in this world:

Galatians 6:7-8 - "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Remember, cynicism is always popular and contagious. It feeds pride. It feels like creativity and daring. It seems to cancel out accountability. But it always argues against that is known to be the truth. And it always brings spiritual darkness.