

A number of years ago I sat in a Bible class on the Book of Proverbs and then later a class on the Book of Ecclesiastes. Both are categorized as books of wisdom. As much as I loved these writings, I was sorely disappointed with the presentation of each teacher. In both cases passages were examined and the teachers then began telling stories related to the text.

I did not object to the stories; many were great *illustrations*. However, the stories were not given as illustrations of the truths found in scripture, they were offered to *validate* what was written.

Think for a moment...

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

—2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

—2 Peter 1:20-21 (NASB)

We accept that the Bible is the inspired word of God. That means that ultimately, even though written by the hand of men, even though written with the style language and vocabulary of men, the Bible was authored by God through the Holy Spirit.

We may still have questions about the inspiration of the Bible, yet we do not question whether it is God's word or not. For that reason we must adopt and maintain an attitude of reverence toward the word of God. We really should imagine in our minds that God is speaking to us through the many writers of scripture.

Now, back to class...

The personal stories were offered to validate the things written in scripture. Does that seem backwards to you? It is one thing to use an illustration to *clarify* a difficult proverb. It is quite another thing to *evaluate* the truth of the proverb on the basis of one's life experience.

God's word is not presented for evaluation. We must not take the word of God and then compare it to the sum total of human experience and knowledge. Remember...

In the beginning...God.

God is the starting point of man's existence. He is the backdrop against which we must discover ourselves and find meaning. His word is the standard by which we evaluate our lives.

Applied to the wisdom of the Proverbs, we must accept the truth of God's word and then evaluate our own life experiences. It is the truth of God's word that validates my life, not the other way around. If my personal experiences are necessary to validate God's word, then 'I' have become the standard by which truth is known and understood. We should use human experiences only to *illustrate* and perhaps *explain* the truths in God's word.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joint and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. —Proverbs 3:7 (NASB)

We need to be a people who listen to God's word. We need to accept it at face value. We need to adjust our lives to conform to God's word, not make it conform to our lives.

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