

Introspection: The Wise Heart Knows Itself

Getting focused

Our previous study led us to three qualities we must possess in order to obtain the true riches of wisdom: dedication, diligence, and discernment. As we continue to allow God to lead us in the path of righteousness, we must learn yet another characteristic of truth, wisdom, and righteousness: the conscience. A term often used in Scripture to identify conscience is the heart. An activity of the conscience is to think. Within this chapter we find the frequently quoted verse, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death" (14:12).

One of the single most important elements in living the Christian life is being honest with yourself. The previous lesson taught us that being honest with others is the right way to do business. In this lesson we will be introduced to the conscience. The conscience is the element within your heart that considers good and bad and will either excuse or condemn thoughts and intentions. To be deceived by worldliness is to allow our conscience to be hardened against the truth. The result of deception will lead us into spiritual blindness.

An open mind finds wisdom

Read Proverbs 14:1-9

The scoffer of verse 6 is one who despises authority. Such a one may seek wisdom but will never find it. Herein lies the difference between a future filled with spiritual blessings from God and a life filled with the bitterness of the world.

The attitude of one that rejects authority is contagious. Thus, we are instructed to avoid contact with such men (v. 7). We are to identify those who reject authority by listening to what they say. Fools mock at sin (v. 9). You can know those whom you must avoid by their attitude toward sin.

Friends, music, and entertainment that make light of sin lead us in the way of vain pride, confusion, and deceit.

"Leave the presence of a fool, or you **will not discern** words of knowledge."

- Proverbs 14:7

Memorize and meditate

“There is a way
that seems
right to a man,
but its end
is the way of
death.”

- Proverbs 14:12

The volatility of the conscience

Read Proverbs 14:10-14

The conscience can condemn or approve anything you do. Self-awareness of guilt resides in the conscience. Though one may deceive himself or cover up his true feelings, the heart knows its own bitterness (v. 10).

The convicting element of the conscience can bring bitterness or joy. The reality of either is realized in the response to guilt. We can excuse ourselves by self-justification or be satisfied from above (v. 14).

The failure to respond properly to our conscience will produce:

- Bitterness (v. 10)
- Spiritual death (v. 12)
- Sorrow and grief (v. 13)

A deceptive avenue through which worldliness lures us is laughter and what appears to a good time—both of which are superfluous expressions that mask the hardened heart. In the quiet moments separated from pseudo-happiness, we find true sorrow and grief (v. 13).

The danger of backsliding is losing sight of reality and allowing sinful, destructive behavior to become an acceptable way of life (v. 14). We must ever acknowledge that God is greater than our heart and knows all things (1 John 3:20).

The walk of the wise looks carefully where he steps

Read Proverbs 14:15-25

Honest self-examination in light of God’s inspired revelation is the only method for knowing one’s conscience. The only proper response is to depart from evil (v. 16).

However, a common response to guilt is anger and denial. Our only release from such foolish deception is mercy and truth. Mercy and truth belong to those who devise good (v. 22).

Good intentions lay the foundation for knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and happiness. One rich in character is also rich in relationships. The kind of relationships you have with others will give you insight to properly see yourself.

Oppression, anger, and envy: a reproach to any people

Read Proverbs 14:26-35

To be in control of your emotions is to be in control of your body, soul, and spirit.

The essence of religion is a benevolent disposition and control over our desires (James 1:26-27). All of these are revealed in our actions toward others.

A healthy spiritual heart is produced by proper respect and reverence for God. The result is a form of confidence that has no place for anger or envy. Anger and envy are produced when one lacks understanding. G. K. Chesterton wrote, "Bigotry may be roughly defined as the anger of men who have no opinions."

Questions to consider

1. What two elements are essential in gaining understanding (vs. 6b, 29)? _____

2. Discuss how we identify being filled with our own ways as opposed to being satisfied from above. _____

3. Read and discuss Philippians 4:6-7, 11-13. _____

