

JUXTAPOSITION OF SELECTED THEMES IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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Abstract

Many think that they can understand the book of Proverbs in one reading, but it is highly difficult. Because of the ample number of articles and books written on Proverbs, everybody has their own opinion on the book of Proverbs. Some consider it as a doctrine, some consider it as philosophies and some even term it as a book of free advice. The significance of this study is to discuss what does juxtaposition mean, and to throw insights into what this book of Proverbs all about is, in a less complicated way. This study also mainly deals with the juxtaposing of the selected themes 'Wisdom' and 'Foolishness' by highlighting the grave consequences one has to face for rejecting those themes in one's day to day life.

Keywords: Juxtaposition, Proverbs, Coextensive, Scornful

INTRODUCTION

Juxtaposition can be defined as placing things side-by-side to compare and contrast. It helps readers to understand the meaning of the text through contrasting images, ideas, motifs, themes etc. The reader's or viewer's attention is drawn towards the similarities or differences that are emerged after juxtaposing. A machine or urban environment can be juxtaposed against organic elements of nature, in order to contrast different qualities in the two. The way it is juxtaposed can dramatically change the meaning; we can describe the human created machine as representing safety and order against the uncontrollable strength of nature or we can reflect the beauty of nature with soul less uniformity of the urban world.

The Juxtaposition plays a major role in the book of Proverbs as a literary device. The book of Proverbs contains many themes which can be juxtaposed with their opposite themes.

The book of Proverbs, by King Solomon, was authored around three thousand years ago in an age that seems a million light years removed from our own. Reading the book of Proverbs is more over like exploring a treasure chest. At a quick look, its contents and composition will conquer you with their scope and variety. Some items are so strange, investigative and curious that they appear almost out of place and some items are valuable, can be cherished and worthy of closer examination. But the more and more you explore, the richer the treasure becomes.

In simple words, Proverbs can be explained as, 'collection of wise sayings to lead a happy life in God's way'. It talks about wisdom, truth, wise people and foolish people, about

responsibilities, worth of work, good ways and bad ways and so on. Dean Stanley called Proverbs, “the philosophy of practical life” (Christian Workers 297).

JUXTAPOSITION OF SELECTED THEMES IN PROVERBS:

The two prominent themes that can be juxtaposed in the book of Proverbs are ‘Wisdom’ and ‘Foolishness’. If you ask an individual are you wise? He might answer in different ways like yes, no, I don’t know or perhaps. Wisdom can be defined as the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise. Wisdom is a way of life. It is a way that wise man chooses to walk in. On the other side, a fool can be defined as a person who acts unwisely or imprudently takes a decision to walk in a completely different way. A way in which God’s instruction is not obeyed.

The word of God clearly describes wisdom and foolishness. It discusses the characteristics of wise man and talks about the behavior of a foolish man. To walk in God’s way, we must understand what true wisdom is, where to find it and how to use it in our daily ways.

“In the Bible, wisdom is always God-oriented and practical. It is not entirely coextensive with knowledge, for a knowledgeable person may be very deficient in wisdom. Wisdom is the right use of one’s knowledge, insight, and skill to the glory of God. It originates in the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10). Worldly wisdom is knowledge apart from divine revelation and is often God opposing in nature. True wisdom is the ordering of one’s life by God given counsel”. (Rubel Shelly).

Wisdom is not something to do; rather it is a way of doing things. Wisdom is finding, in your own circumstances, any specific opportunity to use a Proverb.

In Proverbs, wisdom plays a great role along with foolishness. In scriptures, the fool is the person who casts off the fear of the God and assumes that eternal principles of God’s righteousness are of no use. In the book of Proverbs, a fool is not someone with a mental deficiency but someone with a character deficiency. The fool is not stupid, but he or she is unable to tell right from wrong or good from bad.

The wise and the foolish are often contrasted in Proverbs. The characteristics, reputation, and results of each are worth knowing if wisdom is our goal. Let us take a deep look into wisdom and foolishness from the priorities of actions, reputation, and results.

ACTIONS OF BOTH:

Proverbs 15:14 says, “The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness”. A wise person is hungry for knowledge and he will have a passion for learning new things. He is willing to take advice from others. But the fools feed on unnecessary things and trash. They avoid instruction and advice. “What we feed our minds is just as important as what we feed our bodies. The kinds of books we read, the people we talk with, the music we listen to and the films we watch are all part of our mental diet. Be discerning because what you feed your mind influences your total health and well-being. Thus, a strong desire to discover knowledge is a mark of wisdom”. (Life Application Study Bible, NLT, 1027).

Proverbs 17:24 says, “Wisdom is before him that hath understanding but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth”. God fearing people keep their eyes on wisdom all the time. But a fool’s eyes wander here and there seeking worldly possessions.

Proverbs 17:10 says, “A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool”. This Proverb says that a single advice or a word can mean a lot for a person who has

the capacity of understanding but even hundred lashes on the back of a fool can never help him in understanding.

Proverbs 28:26 says, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered”. Those who trust their own insight are foolish, but anyone who walks in wisdom is safe. “For many people, the rugged individualist is a hero. We admire the bold, self-directed man and women who know what they want and fight for it. They are self-reliant, neither giving nor asking advice. What a contrast to God’s way. A person can’t know the future or predict the consequences of his or her choices with certainty. And so the totally self-reliant person is doomed to failure. The wise person depends on God.” (Life Application Study Bible, 1054).

REPUTATION

Proverbs 14:18 says, “The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge”. Simple in this verse reflects a lazy person who is clothed with foolishness. He receives no honor in whatever he does. But the wise are cautious and avoid danger; therefore they are crowned with knowledge. Proverbs 29:8 says, “Scornful men bring a city into asnare; but wise man turn away wrath”. It is an easy task for a foolish man to frustrate and irritate people but a wise man will calm the anger.

RESULTS

Proverbs 15:21 says, “Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.” Foolishness brings happiness to those with no sense but a sensible person, the one with wisdom stays on the right path.

CONCLUSION

Thus the book of Proverbs stresses the importance of gathering information from the teaching of elders and fearing God to obtain wisdom and understanding. It also talks about the disadvantages of foolishness in contrast to the advantages of having wisdom.

God wants his children to be wise. But there are two kinds of people who reflect two different contrasting paths of life. One is the fool, who is the corrupt, wicked and stubborn person who hates God and his word. The other is the wise person, who seeks to know and love God. But what is very important here is when we choose God’s way; he gives us wisdom that we need. His word leads us to live right, have healthy relationships and make perfect decisions. If you lead the life of a fool, there is no doubt that you see your own destruction.

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