

One Thing

Proverbs 30

Father's Day, 2010

God is the God of ORDER! This should be abundantly clear to even the casual observer. Look at the stars! The laws of science that govern the universe! The incredible *bodies* in which we exist! Even *everyday life* is governed by principles of order (When you do the same thing over and over, you get the same results. To think otherwise is the definition of *insanity!*). God is the God of order, and everything that he creates, including this world and this life, is orderly.

Here's the good news: ***God reveals the order of this world and life to us in his word.*** He gives us *wisdom* for living.

With that in mind, we're going to spend this Father's Day looking at Proverbs 30, which contains the final deposit of wisdom from a man named Agur. He's an old man, likely at the end of his life, when he pens these words. He's writing here to his sons, Ithiel and Ucal (not great names, but neither is the name "Agur"). So Agur writes as if to say, "Sons, if you forget everything else that I've taught you, please remember this one thing..." and then he gives us Proverbs 30 (all 33 verses!). It's in the form of a riddle.

Why a riddle? Doesn't he want his sons to clearly understand this last big "one thing" that he wants to say to them? Yes! But he also wants them (and us) to remember this last big "one thing" and so he makes them (and us) work hard to tease it out of the text. This is not an easy passage of scripture to interpret; but, hey, it's Father's Day, and we guys love a challenge. We'll see many "sayings," but only one message and it is worth the extra effort to find it.

Proverbs 30:1-3 (NASB)

***¹The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:
²Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. ³Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.***

Please note that there are many "words" or "sayings," but only one "oracle" or "prophetic burden." (see v. 1) Agur is going to drop a lot of sayings on us, but he really has only one message. He then goes on, in some sense, to debase himself. He calls himself "stupid," lacking in understanding and wisdom, and as being without "the knowledge of the Holy One." What he is saying is that, left to himself (e.g., apart from God), this is who he is (stupid, etc.).

1) What do you think that Agur is trying to communicate here about himself (and all of the rest of us, for that matter)?

Proverbs 30:4 ⁴Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!

Having placed the focus of his advice properly on God and not on his own wisdom, he then gives a series of questions that ending poignantly. He asks, "What is his name? Or, his son's name?" He's inviting us, God's "sons," or disciples, to call upon the *name* of God for wisdom. We are to submit to God and seek His direction alone.

2) What does it mean to be a disciple?

3) Why is it important to be, specifically, *God's* disciple?

Proverbs 30:5-6 ⁵*Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶Do not add to His words or he will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.*

4) How is God's word "tested?" How is it a "shield" in our lives?

5) Why are we prone to change God's word? To "add to" or "subtract from" it?

Agur is now finally going to give us his "sayings," but first he prays. Note his request:

Proverbs 30:7-9 ⁷*Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die: ⁸Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, ⁹That I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God.*

First he asks that God make him truthful so that he would never be proved a liar. Then he asks God to help him with his appetites. He knows that when our appetites are unbridled from God's boundaries—His principles and precepts for this world and life—we face our own peril, by our own hand.

6) Can you give some examples, either from your own life or the lives of others (think, Tiger Woods here) where one's appetites have caused him or her to transgress the God-ordained boundaries of life and society in this world? (Please be very careful with this one and keep it to yourself, or in your group setting, don't use names. One form of loving people, especially those who have fallen, is to contribute to the restoration of their dignity rather than contributing to its destruction through gossip).

7) What is the inevitable result of "appetites run amuck" in someone's life?

Proverbs 30:10 Do not slander a slave to his master, or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.

The "slave" here is likely an indentured servant (someone who owes another person money and, thus, hires himself off to that person for a defined period of time in order to pay off the debt) as opposed to someone who is literally owned by another person (a piece of property, or chattel). Nevertheless, this is a marginalized person, with very little recourse for slanderous comments made to their "master" about them. Agur says that the servant will curse you if you for this slander, and that God will the honor the curse.

A boundary God has set: Beware abusing the disadvantaged. God Himself will protect them.

8) What appetite(s) might we be trying to satisfy by slandering another person? What does Agur say is the inevitable result of such a violation of this boundary?

Proverbs 30:11-14 ¹¹There is a kind of man who curses his father and does not bless his mother. ¹²There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, yet is not washed from his filthiness. ¹³There is a kind--oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance. ¹⁴There is a kind of man whose teeth are like swords and his jaw teeth like knives, to devour the afflicted from the earth and the needy from among men.

Here Agur describes the person driven his or her appetites. People driven by their appetites, like a man who would curse his father and mother, are rebellious against God-ordained boundaries of authority.

9) From Proverbs 30:11-14 above, what are some other qualities of people driven by their appetites?

Proverbs 30:15-17 The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give." There are three things that will not be satisfied, four that will not say, "Enough": ¹⁶Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire that never says, "Enough." ¹⁷The eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.

Did you notice how he escalates things numerically (one leech, to two leeches, to three, etc.)? These are things that cannot be satisfied. They simply cannot get enough!

10) Is there anything in your life that you seemingly "cannot get enough of" which causes you to violate one or more of God's boundaries?

Did you notice that "the eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother" (the eye of the dissatisfied, rebellious son who throws off the God-ordained authority of his parents) is visited by judgment from **above**? Agur is writing poetically of a judgment that comes down from the heavens, like the ravens or young eagles.

11) Do you think that there is a fear of heavenly judgment nowadays? What is the effect of such a fear or lack thereof in people's lives and/or in society in general?

Agur now turns from the negative to the positive. He's shown us people who are overrun by their appetites and thus violate God's boundaries. Now he gives us some positive examples. Notice that he describes them as "wonderful."

Proverbs 30:18-19 There are three things which are too wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: ¹⁹The way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.

An eagle in the air is free (and wonderful); a snake on the rock is free (and wonderful); a ship on the sea is free (and wonderful); and there are delights (freedoms) that are only found within the confines of marriage as well. ***Each thing or person is free, but only as long as it stays within its God-ordained boundaries.*** That is to say, the eagle soars in the sky, but isn't much of a swimmer.

Proverbs 30:20-23 ²⁰This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done no wrong." ²¹Under three things the earth quakes, and under four, it cannot bear up: ²²Under a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is satisfied with food, ²³Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.

Another problem with violating God's boundaries is that it leads to social collapse (the eagle drowns, so to speak). The adulterous woman leads to the collapse of the home. The slave who unlawfully usurps and kills the benevolent king, leads to the reign of a dictator (governmental collapse). The lazy fool who will not work and yet is fed by society, leads to social collapse). The woman without the character to raise children and govern a home, or who undermines the mother/wife she serves, leads to the collapse of the family.

12) Can you give any examples of things that you've seen collapse as a result of a persons or nations violations of God's boundaries?

Here again, Agur turns from the negative to the positive. He returns again to the natural realm to give us examples of creatures who know their place or station in life (the boundaries that God has established for them) and who, by staying within them, thrive.

Proverbs 30:24-31 ²⁴Four things are small on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: ²⁵The ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer; ²⁶The shephanim are not mighty people, yet they make their houses in the rocks; ²⁷The locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks; ²⁸The lizard you may grasp with the hands, yet it is in kings' palaces. ²⁹There are three things which are stately in their march, even four which are stately when they walk: ³⁰The lion which is mighty among beasts and does not retreat before any, ³¹The strutting rooster, the male goat also, and a king when his army is with him.

Then Agur concludes with these words to his sons...

Proverbs 30:32-33 If you have been foolish in exalting yourself or if you have plotted evil, put your hand on your mouth. ³³For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of anger produces strife.

He's saying: "If you, in your appetites, are exceeding the boundaries (moral or otherwise) that God has established for you, then stop, because the consequences are predictable."

Why? Because God is a God of order. All that he creates is orderly, and therefore predictable (you can navigate by the stars, etc.). When you allow your appetites to push you outside of God's boundaries, judgment, chaos and collapse are, essentially, a mathematical certainty.

13) With all of the above in mind, how would you formulate the "one thing" that Agur is trying to communicate to his sons? What is the answer to the riddle?

14) Lastly, how does one curb his or her appetites? How did Agur do it? (see vs. 7-9)