

# Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

## Lesson 7 – Wisdom Literature

**Proverbs 9:10** – "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

We have walked through the prophetic voices in Lesson 6, where God's messengers confronted Israel's divided heart and exposed how rebellion in belief and action led to national exile. Yet there was always a thread of promised restoration. Those calls to covenant faithfulness now give way to a quieter, more personal arena: the wisdom literature. Here, in books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, we shift from thunderous warnings and visions to everyday counsel, drawn from the raw observations of life under the sun. These writings, penned largely by Solomon, do not expose new revelations. Instead, they distill principles for navigating a fallen world, where consequences are demonstrated through relationships, work, and society. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are God-inspired evaluations of human behavior.

The prophets aimed to realign a nation, explaining God's explicit will, often through supernatural judgment and deliverances. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes do not highlight this framework. They operate in the shadow of the Law and covenants, urging individuals to live wisely amid corruption. No miracles are highlighted, no divine fire falls as reward or judgment. Rather, the focus lands on natural consequences, the kind that unfold through human interactions and the created order itself. A wise choice sows seeds of stability in family and community; folly invites discord and regret. This is observed in the marketplace, the home, and the courtroom. As we unpack these texts, we'll see behavior not as isolated acts but as threads woven into the fabric of daily existence, revealing God's desires for humanity. He wants them to be content, loved, and prosperous. Do you believe that God knows us better than we know ourselves? Do you think He can tell us how to achieve what will truly make our lives better?

### The Foundation of Wisdom: Fear of the Lord and Discernment of Life

Wisdom literature rests on a simple yet profound starting point: true insight begins with reverence for God. Proverbs opens with this truth in our key verse, where *fear* (יִרְאַת, yir'at) carries the sense of awe-filled respect, not terror, but a posture that honors God's holiness as the lens for all decisions. Solomon, writing as a king who tasted both unparalleled wisdom and its tragic abuse, invites readers to *know* (יָדָע, yada') God truly and fully. This sets the stage for behavior: actions flow from what we value most.

Ecclesiastes echoes this, though with a sobering twist. The Preacher, Solomon again, surveys life "under the sun," a phrase repeated 29 times, grounding his reflections in the observable world without any divine interaction. He concludes that without God, all pursuits are *vanity* (הֶבֶל, hebel), like vapor or breath, fleeting and insubstantial. Yet this vanity is not nihilism; it's a call to recognize the true nature of this world. *Qoheleth* probes why humans chase wind,

# Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

## Lesson 7 – Wisdom Literature

wealth, pleasure, and wisdom alone, only to grasp emptiness. Behavior, then, becomes a quest for meaning amid toil, where fearing God aligns our steps with eternal purpose (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Notice something subtle here, often overlooked: both books treat wisdom as skill, not supernatural endowment. Proverbs personifies Lady Wisdom crying in the streets (Proverbs 1:20-21), accessible to anyone who listens, while Folly lurks nearby, seductive and destructive (Proverbs 9:13-18). Ecclesiastes tests this skill through experience, admitting that the righteous sometimes suffer and the wicked prosper (Ecclesiastes 7:15), yet wise conduct still yields better odds in human affairs. This invites the reader to question their own pursuits: do my choices stem from truth and an awe of God, or from chasing shadows?

### Proverbs: Practical Principles and the Ripples of Conduct

The Book of Proverbs shines as a handbook for proper living, a collection of sayings that link behavior to outcomes in the social sphere. Unlike the prophets' focus on covenant breach, these proverbs assume a general audience—young men, rulers, and traders—and emphasize natural rewards or pitfalls. The structure clusters around topics: family, work, speech, wealth, and relationships. Each proverb functions like a seed: plant wisely, harvest stability; sow recklessly, reap chaos.

In Proverbs, there are very few statements of supernatural blessing or curse. It is important to remember that when they are mentioned, they are speaking from the perspective of the Law for Israel (Proverbs 3:33).

Consider speech, a frequent target. Proverbs 12:18 notes, "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing." Words wound or mend, a hasty retort shatters trust in a marriage or marketplace deal, while measured counsel builds alliances. Similarly, diligence in labor promises provision: the lazy yield nothing, but the diligent obtain surplus (Proverbs 13:4). It's the farmer who rises early that reaps full barns, while the lazy neighbor starves in famine. Solomon observes the created order's mechanics: effort compounds through seasons and community exchange.

On relationships, Proverbs warns against folly's pull toward immorality. The adulteress in chapter 7 beckons with flattery, but her path leads to "the depths of Sheol" (Proverbs 7:6-10, 25-27); falling into immorality (adultery) shatters homes and results in social exile. Contrast this with the virtuous woman of chapter 31, whose industry blesses her household and earns community praise. These are natural trajectories: sexual integrity fosters lasting bonds and trust; betrayal erodes them. Even anger gets dissected: "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,

# Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

## Lesson 7 – Wisdom Literature

But the slow to anger calms a dispute" (Proverbs 15:18). Tempers ignite feuds that divide families or topple kings, while restraint diffuses tension, preserving peace.

What emerges is a pattern: wise behavior and discernment anticipate positive natural consequences. Proverbs 22:3 states, "The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it." The prudent (those attuned to God's truth and instruction) spot danger in a bad alliance or hasty vow, avoiding ruin. The naive plunge ahead, paying the price in regret or loss. Solomon does not promise exemption from hardship; rain falls on just and unjust roofs alike. But he insists that folly invites self-inflicted wounds, while wisdom navigates them toward flourishing.

### Ecclesiastes: Vanity, Toil, and the Weight of Godly Perspective

If Proverbs offers crisp maxims for the daily grind, Ecclesiastes wrestles with its futility, forcing us to confront "the why" in life. *Qoheleth's* quest ("I have seen everything that is done under the sun" - Ecclesiastes 1:14) exposes human behavior's absurdities: the wise die like fools (Ecclesiastes 2:16), oppression crushes the innocent (4:1), and death is a constant (9:2-3). Yet this despair clarifies: without eternity's horizon, behavior devolves into chasing wind.

Toil exemplifies this. The Preacher tests labor, amassing wealth and works, only to find "vanity and a great evil" (Ecclesiastes 2:21); you build, then leave it to another who may squander it. Greed drives ruthless gain, but "the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (Ecclesiastes 5:12). These are human dynamics: overwork breeds envy and breakdown, while contentment, enjoying simple gifts like bread and wine (Ecclesiastes 9:7), sustains joy. Behavior here ties to perspective: the miser hoards, alienating kin; the grateful shares, weaving contentment through generations.

Even justice falters under the sun. "I have seen servants on horses and princes walking like servants on the land" (Ecclesiastes 10:7) – folly in power inverts order, breeding injustice. *Qoheleth* urges timely action: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10), not in despair, but recognizing opportunities (Chapter 3). Wisdom discerns when to speak or keep silent, plant or pluck, turning potential vanity into purposeful rhythm.

A keen observation: Ecclesiastes critiques wisdom when God is not the author. The Preacher praises it for prolonging life and easing strife (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12), yet admits its limits against death and mystery (8:16-17). True behavior balances enjoyment of God's gifts with fear of Him, as in 12:13: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His

# Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

## Lesson 7 – Wisdom Literature

commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." This duty yields peace, a quiet life, love, and contentment.

### Timeless Principles: Behavior's Echo in Human Realms

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes converge on core truths for any era. First, wisdom is relational, rooted in fearing God and stewarding interactions. Behaviors, like honesty in speech or generosity in toil, create cycles of trust and provision, while deceit or sloth unravel them. Second, consequences are woven into natural human responses, not bolts from heaven, but the steady outworking of choices in family, community, and justice. The sluggard starves not by curse, but empty fields; the wise parent reaps honored children through patient guidance.

These books notice the heart's role much like the prophets, but they apply it practically. Proverbs 4:23 urges, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Guard your mind and practice good volition, then you will live (live well). Ecclesiastes adds humility: we cannot master all outcomes, so release control to the God of creation. For us today, these principles transcend Israel's monarchy. At work or at home, folly still invites fallout; wisdom still builds bridges. They remind us that under grace, we pursue these, not for divine blessing or avoidance, but as a grateful response to choose well.

### Conclusion

Wisdom literature rounds out the Hebrew Scriptures' portrait of human behavior, showing how God's principles play out in the ordinary. From Proverbs' sharp insights to Ecclesiastes' honest gaze at vanity, we learn that wise conduct harvests natural flourishing amid a tilted world, all under the fear of the Lord. These texts do not promise utopia, but they equip us to live meaningfully, our choices echoing into eternity.

As we turn to Lesson 8, where Christ emerges as the ultimate embodiment of wisdom – the Word made flesh who lived these truths perfectly – we carry forward this call: let reverence shape our steps, turning potential vapor into lasting legacy.

# Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

## Lesson 7 – Wisdom Literature

### Case Study

1. **Speech and Conflict (Proverbs 15:1):** "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger." Here, the choice is in how we respond to others. Speaking controlled and gently de-escalates tension, preserving relationships and opening doors for understanding in a heated conversation or negotiation. Harsh words, though, fan flames, deepening rifts with family or colleagues, turning minor disputes into lasting grudges.

2. **Diligence in Work (Proverbs 10:4):** "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich." Solomon points to the effort's role in provision. Steady, focused labor builds skills, opportunities, and resources over time, leading to financial stability and respect in one's trade. Neglect, by contrast, erodes reputation and leaves one scrambling, as unfinished tasks compound into dependency on others.

3. **Friendship and Loyalty (Proverbs 18:24):** "A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." The behavior involves discernment in relationships. Cultivating deep, reliable bonds offers unwavering support through trials, fostering mutual encouragement and resilience in community. Chasing superficial connections, however, spreads one thin, inviting betrayal or abandonment when real need arises.

4. **Patience and Self-Control (Proverbs 14:29):** "He who is slow to anger is a man of discernment, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly." Patience here means pausing before reacting, which maintains clarity and earns trust from those around us, smoothing paths in leadership or family life. Quick anger, on the other hand, clouds judgment, alienating allies and creating a cycle of bad relationships.

5. **Generosity and Reciprocity (Proverbs 11:25):** "The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered." Acts of sharing, whether time or resources, build networks of goodwill, drawing reciprocal help and abundance through grateful exchanges in society. Stinginess, though, isolates, as withheld aid breeds resentment and leaves one without the support that comes from mutual care.