

Wisdom Literature—Proverbs

Christ's Community Study Center

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The Book of Proverbs

The Author

Prov. 1: 1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

Prov. 10: 1 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

Prov. 25: 1 These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.

Prov. 30: 1 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:

Prov. 31: 1 The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him:

The headings in the book of *Proverbs* list four authors and multiple editors: Solomon (1: 1; 10: 1); the editors of Hezekiah’s reign (25: 1); Agur (30: 1); and King Lemuel (31: 1). The historical texts of the OT verify that Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom, a request which was abundantly granted. As a result of the gift of wisdom granted, Solomon’s reputation for wisdom became legendary (cf. 1 Kings. 3: 5-28; 4: 29-34; 5: 7; 10: 1-10, 23-25; 11: 41. The student may also use his study bible to consult the corresponding texts of 2 Chronicles). Notice that 1 Kings 4: 32 specifically states that Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs.

Bruce K. Waltke has noted that “No attribution of authorship within the Old Testament has been proved spurious.” This naturally brings up the question of the authorship of *Ecclesiastes*—attributed to Solomon—to which he responds, “Although many allege that *The Sayings of Qoheleth* claims Solomonic authorship, in truth the late editor of that work credits *Qoheleth’s* words to a Solomon-like figure, not to Solomon himself, in what appears to be a studied attempt to avoid the morally questionable practice of pseudonymity [using an assumed name of a well-known person]”¹. Waltke and Tremper Longman III are agreed on the non-Solomonic authorship of *Ecclesiastes*.

In contrast to *Ecclesiastes*, where Solomon’s name is never mentioned, the book of *Proverbs* specifically mentions Solomon as one of its authors (1: 1; 10: 1; 25: 1). Rejection of Solomonic authorship, therefore, implies the rejection of the witness of the Bible itself as passed down to us in the oldest and most reliable copies of the *autographa*, the original manuscripts. To repeat Waltke’s assertion, “No attribution of authorship within the Old Testament has been proved spurious.” We will proceed upon the assumption of Solomon’s authorship of the largest portion of the *Proverbs*.

Structure of Proverbs

A casual reader of *Proverbs* may wonder why we must bother with the structure of the book when it appears on the surface to have little, if any, real structure. Waltke believes otherwise, and has gone to some length in demonstrating this structure in its seven collections.² But before we summarize Waltke’s conclusions, we should take another look at the book ourselves and notice the literary differences throughout the book.

¹ Waltke, *Proverbs*, I. p. 35; words in brackets mine

² Waltke, *Proverbs*, I. pp. 9-28

A. *Diversity in the Book of Proverbs*

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: ²To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, ³To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; ⁴To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, ⁵A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, ⁶To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles. ⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:1-7 NASB)

1. The very beginning of the book (1: 1-7) stands out from the rest of it and provides the normative (standard) definition of wisdom and the purpose of the book. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...” (v. 7a)—a concise definition of wisdom. Notice however that Solomon does not say that the fear of the Lord is the *end* or *conclusion* of wisdom, but the *beginning*. The faint of heart will give up too early and will not grow wise, but “A wise man will hear and *increase* in learning, And a man of understanding will *acquire* wise counsel” (v. 5). Furthermore, the positive definition receives more clarification by Solomon’s use of the negative definition of fools who “despise wisdom and instruction” (v. 7b). The purpose of *Proverbs* is “To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion....To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles” (vv. 2-4, 6).

2. The reader should also take note of *major headings* throughout the book which indicate separate sections known as *collections* (see discussion below). The most obvious are 1: 1, 10: 1a; 25: 1; 30: 1, and 31: 1. Less obvious are the headings of 22: 17 and 24: 23 which could be doubted as formal headings.

3. It is clear that the early chapters of *Proverbs* do not consist of short, pithy (concise and to the point) statements about wisdom; but rather consist of longer sections inviting the reader, “My son”, to receive the wisdom offered in the book (cf. 1: 8-19; 2: 1-15; 3: 1-35; 4: 1-27). All of these extended sections are addressed to “My son”, and while the addresses to “my son” continue throughout the book (Prov. 19: 27; 23: 15, 19, 26; 24: 13, 21; 27: 11; 31: 2), the extended invitations to wisdom are replaced by short proverbs.

Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching; (Prov. 1:8 NASB)

4. Notice also that Solomon uses the literary device of *personification* several times in the early chapters. Wisdom is treated as a female who addresses people in the town square and extends her public invitation to receive wisdom even as Solomon offers his private invitation to his son (1: 20-33; 8: 1-36; 9: 1-6). Solomon also speaks of wisdom personified in other parts of the earlier chapters (Prov. 2: 4; 3: 14-18; 4: 6, 8, 13), but these personifications are lacking after chapter 9.

5. The first several chapters also contain *extended warnings about the seductions of the adulterous woman* which appear later, not as extended warnings, but only as short, pithy (concise and to the point) statements mixed with other types of proverbs. Compare 2: 16-19; 5: 1-23; 6: 24-35; 7: 1-27; and 9: 13-18 (long sections) with 11: 22; 14: 1; 23: 27-28; 27: 13; and 30: 20 (short statements with no clear connection with the proverbs surrounding them).

B. Summary of Waltke on the Structure of Proverbs

Moving from the less technical to the more technical divisions, Waltke divides the book into seven collections, noted as follows³:

- I. Collection I (1: 1—9: 18)
- II. Collection II: Solomon I (10: 1—22: 16)
- III. Collection III: The Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22: 17—24: 22)
- IV. Collection IV: Further Sayings of the Wise (24: 23-34)
- V. Collection V: Solomon II (25: 1—29: 27)
- VI. Collection VI: The Sayings of Agur Son of Jakeh (30: 1-33)
- VII. Collection VII: The Sayings of Lemuel (31: 1-31)

Collection I (1: 1—9: 18) sets the context for the entirety of the book and is made up of *extended poems in praise of wisdom* which serve to motivate the reader to receive the wisdom offered in all seven collections.⁴

Waltke offers the following *chiastic* arrangement (which he labels, *concentric*) for Collection I.⁵

A—Rival invitations of the father and the gang to the son	1: 8-19
B—Wisdom’s rebuke of the gullible	1:20-33
C—Janus ⁶ : The father’s command to heed teaching as a safeguard against evil men and the unchaste wife	2: 1-22
D—The father’s commands to heed teaching	3:1—4:27
D’—The father’s warnings against the unchaste wife	5: 1—6:35
C’—Janus: The father’s warnings against Wisdom’s rival	7:1-27
B’—Wisdom’s invitation to the gullible	8:1-36
A’—Rival invitations of Wisdom and the foolish woman to the gullible	9:1-18

By way of contrast, **Collection II** (10: 1—22: 16) consists of *aphorisms* (short, one-verse statements of truth) which are divided into two parts called *versets*—two halves of a single verse.⁷

The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.² Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death.³ The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked.⁴ Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.⁵ He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, *But* he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.⁶ Blessings are on the head of the righteous, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. (Prov. 10:1-6 NASB)

Notice that these six proverbs are *antithetic*. The second part of the proverb is introduced by **but** introducing a thought which is the opposite of the first half of the verse.

³ For a complete outline, see Waltke, pp. xi-xviii, Vol. 1, and pp. vii-xvi, Vol. 2. We will be following his outline in Collections I, VI, and VII of our study of *Proverbs* with various modifications.

⁴ Waltke, p. 10

⁵ Proverbs, Vol. I. p. 12

⁶ A transitional statement looking forward and backward to the context

⁷ Waltke, p. 14

Collection III (22: 17—24: 22) is set apart from Collection II not only by the heading, “the words of the wise” (22: 17) but also by the change from one verse aphorisms to “more extended, flowing sayings” which may cover two or more verses. Compare the following: Proverbs 10: 2 of Collection II, “Ill-gotten gains do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.” This short, pithy saying from Collection II consists of a single *aphorism*—a one verse statement of truth—divided into two *versets*. (Another feature of this verse is *antithetic parallelism* in which two opposing statements are made clarifying a single thought.) Proverbs 22: 22-23 from Collection III:

Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their case, and take the life of those who rob them.

Notice that this selection consists of two verses, not one, and flows more smoothly than the short aphorism from Collection I. Furthermore the sayings of Collection III take the form of *admonitions or imperatives* (commands) followed by the *motivations* for obeying the commands. “Don’t rob the poor [command], for if you do, the Lord will do worse to you! [motivation for obeying the command]”⁸

Collection IV (24: 23-34) is delineated (set apart) by 24: 23a, “These also are sayings of the wise.” The end of this collection is determined by 25: 1, “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.” Collection IV is concerned primarily with three areas: (1) behavior at court—vv. 23b-25, 28; (2) speaking and thinking—v. 26, 29; and (3) behavior at work—v. 27, 30-34.⁹

These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good.²⁴ He who says to the wicked, “You are righteous,” Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;²⁵ But to those who rebuke the *wicked* will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them. (Prov. 24:23-25 NASB)

Do not say, “Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.” (Prov. 24:29 NASB)

I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,³¹ And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down.³² When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction.³³ “A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest,”³⁴ Then your poverty will come *as* a robber And your want like an armed man. (Prov. 24:30-34 NASB)

Collection V consists of two main sections: 25: 2—27: 27 and 28: 1—29: 27. In the first section we find primarily *synthetic* or *comparative* proverbs with the exception of 25: 2; 27: 6, 7, 12.¹⁰ One example is 25: 6, “Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of great men.” The idea contained in the first half of the verse (verset) is *compared* to the idea in the second half, thus completing the meaning of the proverb. Claiming honor in the presence of the king is essentially the same thing as taking your place in the presence of great men. In other words, don’t think too highly of yourself (cf. Rom. 12: 3). Another example is 26: 3, “A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools.” A whip for the horse and a bridle for the donkey are *compared* to the rod for the fool. Furthermore, horses and

⁸ Waltke, p. 14

⁹ Waltke, p. 24

¹⁰ Waltke, p. 25

donkeys which must be controlled by external means are compared to unmanageable fools who, having no self-control, must be controlled by external force. The exceptions noted above are *antithetic* proverbs in which the first idea is *contrasted* to the second to complete the idea. The two halves of the verse are often separated by the adversative, “**but**”. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, **but** deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (27: 6). It is better to be rebuked by a friend who truly loves you and has your best interests at heart than to receive the greeting and flattery of an enemy who is only trying to manipulate you.

Collection V also possesses a very large number of similes and a lesser number of metaphors. The simile is an *explicit* comparison between two things of unlike nature but have something in common with one another. The simile generally uses the word “like” or “as”, or one of them is implied if not explicitly stated. One of these two words in the English Bible either occurs or is implied roughly 25 times in Chapters 25-27 (cf. 25: 13-14; 26: 2).

Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters.¹⁴ Like clouds and wind without rain
Is a man who boasts of his gifts
falsely. (Prov. 25:13-14 NASB)

Metaphors do not use “like” or “as” and are *implicit* comparisons between two things of unlike nature but yet have something in common.¹¹ They are less common in Collection V than similes. Three examples are 27: 17, “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”; 27: 21, “The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is tested by the praise accorded him;” and 27: 23, “Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds,” where flocks and herds may be metaphors for the people who are under your care.

The second section of *Collection V* (28: 1—29: 27) consists primarily of *antithetic proverbs* which are defined above. “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (28: 1). “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father” (28: 7) (cf. 28: 10, 28; 29: 2, 7, 15, 23). This section is also characterized by a relatively high number of references to “Yahweh” (the Lord), used five times from chapter 28-29, while “Yahweh” is used only once (25: 22) in chapters 25-26.¹²

Collection VI (30: 1-33) are the words of Agur which are primarily distinguished by two characteristics: (1) numerical sayings, and (2) sayings which pertain to the social order.¹³ An example of the former is vv. 7-9, “**Two** things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That 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.” Another is vv. 18-19, “There are **three** things which are too wonderful for me, **Four** which I do not understand: The 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.” Agur’s words are replete (well-supplied) with the use of *two’s, three’s, and four’s*.

Secondly, his work is pre-occupied, it seems, with the *established social order* which should not be upset by aberrations (departures from what is right) of that order. Examples of this social

¹¹ cf. Waltke, pp. 39-40 for the different literary devices used in *Proverbs*

¹² Waltke, p. 25

¹³ Waltke, pp. 26-27

concern are v. 11: “There is a kind of *man* who curses his father And does not bless his mother”, v. 17: “The 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”, and vv. 21-23 which are a combination of numerical sayings and sayings about the social order: “Under *three* things the earth quakes, And under *four*, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.”

The final section of *Proverbs*, **Collection VII** (Prov. 31: 1-31) is possibly the best known of all containing the oracle of King Lemuel about the valiant wife in vv. 10-31, an oracle learned from his mother. The first part of this collection consists of advice about ruling wisely.

C. Hebrew Parallelism

The predominant characteristic of Hebrew poetry is not rhyme and meter, as in English poetry, but parallelism. Parallelism is the “cornerstone for meaning, not merely an adornment”.¹⁴ Consider the following proverb, “Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well.” The first half of the verse, called verset A, is complemented by the second half of the verse, verset B, which in this case presents essentially the same idea in a different way. This is known as *synthetic* or comparative parallelism, as noted above. Metaphor is also used in this verse. Drinking water from your own cistern is a metaphor for enjoying sex with your own wife rather than having sex with the adulteress. I will be pointing out other figures of speech as we go along.

Antithetic parallelism has also been defined above. Another example is Proverbs 28: 11, “The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him.” The first part of the verse is contrasted by the second part to complete the meaning. A man may take great pride in his riches and thereby reason that his riches prove that he is a very wise man. But since wisdom is defined as the fear of the Lord, a poor man who truly fears God will “see through” the pomp and arrogance of the rich man and will understand that he is only a rich fool (cf. Lk. 12: 16-21).

Thus, by understanding the use of parallelism we have an important key to the interpretation of *Proverbs*. There are other important keys to understanding them which will be pointed out as we go along.¹⁵

¹⁴ Waltke, p. 41

¹⁵ Waltke, “Forms of Proverbs”, pp. 38-63

Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

I. Collection I (1: 1—9: 18)

A. Title with Preamble (1: 1-7)

1. Title (1: 1)

2. Preamble (1: 2-7)

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:² To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,³ To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity;⁴ To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,⁵ A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,⁶ To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:1-7 NASB)

Although Solomon did not write the whole book, the editor of *Proverbs* ascribed its authorship to Solomon since he was its most distinguished contributor.¹⁶ This ascription differs markedly from that of *Ecclesiastes* which does not specifically mention Solomon but only a Solomon-like figure named Qohelet (cf. notes on *Ecclesiastes*). As mentioned earlier, the purpose statement is found in the Preamble which consists in a series of infinitives beginning with “to” with the implied meaning, “in order to”: “To [in order to] know wisdom...to [in order to] discern...” etc.

“To know wisdom” should be understood within the framework of Hebrew culture, not the Greco-Roman view of *knowledge for its own sake*, or theoretical knowledge. For the Hebrew, knowledge was not merely *head-knowledge*, but *heart-knowledge*, the ability to apply knowledge to the practical experiences and problems of life without which true knowledge was lacking. Thus, one was not only to know wisdom but to understand it (v. 2b, 6). One of the things which characterizes the whole of *Proverbs* is its practical orientation to life and the emphasis on *individual* righteousness rather than the *national* righteousness of the whole nation.¹⁷ There are in *Proverbs*, therefore, subtle variations of righteousness which are not present in the *more formal declarations* of the Law of God in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. ***Thus the Proverbs serve to round out the Hebrew’s instruction in the Law of God.*** Likewise, modern neglect of the Proverbs results in an inadequate understanding of Mosaic Law found in the Pentateuch.

From the standpoint of biblical theology, Proverbs—as well as other OT wisdom literature—stands out as somewhat of a conundrum (puzzle) to some OT theologians. Whereas most of the Bible is about the sudden invasion of the kingdom of God into the fallen world of man and God’s calling out of his elect people from the rest of humanity, wisdom literature does not mention the election of Israel or God’s covenants culminating in the coming of Christ and the messianic age. However, the apparent silence concerning God’s covenantal relationship is only superficial. The fear of ***Yahweh***, God’s covenant name, is the beginning of wisdom, and to fear him means to obey his law in the practical experiences of covenant life.¹⁸

Wisdom focuses “more on everyday life than history, more on the regular than the unique, more on the individual...than the nation, more on personal experience than sacred tradition.”

¹⁶ Waltke, I. pp. 173-174

¹⁷ Waltke, p. 65

¹⁸ Waltke, *OT Theology*, p. 901

Kidner begins his commentary *The Proverbs*: “There are details of character small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broadsides of the prophets, and yet decisive in personal dealings. Proverbs moves in this realm asking what a person is like to live with, or to employ; how he manages his affairs, his time and himself.”¹⁹

Wisdom, furthermore, requires the humility to receive it (v. 3). The attainment of wisdom is not an individualistic, autonomous (self-governing) *achievement*, but a humble *reception* of practical knowledge which others can offer us *if* we yield ourselves to their instruction. The whole book is addressed to the “son” who must humble himself under the authority of his father and mother. We are instructed to not lean on our own understanding if we wish to be wise (Prov. 3: 5). The assumption throughout is that there is a certain amount of naiveté or gullibility which is characteristic of youth who often give themselves too much credit for wisdom. “Prudence” (v. 4) is “cunning” used in a positive way to get around in life.²⁰ Having grown up in the Deep South, I would call it walking-around sense sanctified by Biblical knowledge. While young people are often over-confident in their ability to perceive the best course of action, older people have been around the block enough times to have their self-confidence shattered many times. To them, wisdom is not as easily obtained as they once thought when they were young.

The wise will, furthermore, never be content with *present* wisdom but will *keep on learning* (v. 5). The fear of the Lord is the “beginning” of wisdom, not the *end* of it which rests only with God who alone is all-wise. As stated earlier, the wise man will not depend on his own autonomy, but will consult with others to help him in his acquisition of wisdom (v. 5a, “will acquire wise counsel”).

The book’s “theological and epistemological foundation” is found in v. 7—“**the fear of the Lord**”.²¹ Epistemology is the study of the “origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge” (Webster’s New World Dictionary). Said another way: How do we know what we know? And how much can we know? These are not idle questions especially today within the context of modern philosophical skepticism which doubts even the reliability of sensory experience and the possibility of knowing anything, even cause and effect and the meaning of words. But in ancient thought, too, there were serious doubts about the reliability of absolute truth. The fear of the Lord, which includes submission to His word and to the interpretation of creation in His word, brings us to a studied confidence that true knowledge can be acquired, and should be. God has not created the world to deceive us but to evoke the praise of His glory. The fear of the Lord includes *obedience to His Law* as well as the proper *emotional response of love and awe*. While most men “fear God” in the sense of dreading His judgments upon their behavior (Rom. 2: 15-16), the fear of the “Lord” (Yahweh) acknowledges that He should also be trusted and worshipped. The love of the Lord and the fear of the Lord are synonymous and should never be opposed to one another in the consciousness of the believer.²²

¹⁹ Waltke, *OT Theology*, p. 902, citing John Goldingay, “The Salvation History” Perspective and the “Wisdom” Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology *EvQ* 51 (1979): 194-207 and Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*

²⁰ Waltke, p. 95

²¹ Waltke, pp. 180-181

²² Waltke, pp. 100-101, where he compares the fear of “God” in Ex. 1: 17 and Gen. 20: 10-11 with the fear of “the Lord” in Deut. 5: 29; 6: 2 and 6: 5.

As people in general are motivated to obey their consciences out of fear of God, so saints respond to the moral imperative of Scripture apart from either legal or ecclesiastical sanctions. For them the fear of the Lord is just as real as their love for him (see 14: 27). Both psyches are rooted in their faith: they believe his promises and love him; they believe his threats and fear him. In sum, C. Bridges says: “[The fear of the Lord is] that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law.”²³

B. Prologue (1: 8—8:36)

The prologue gives the reader the context from which all the other collections in *Proverbs* must be interpreted.²⁴ In the prologue we find *two world-views* contrasted in three different ways: wisdom and folly, good and pseudo-good (or the pretense of the “good life”), and life and death. ***Wisdom is praised throughout these nine chapters as the means of motivating the son to choose the way of wisdom, good, and life and to reject the seduction of folly, the pretense of the “good life”, and death.*** Just as the father teaches his son at home, lady wisdom (wisdom personified) teaches the gullible youth in the public streets. The alternative world-view is presented in the seductions of the gang (“sinners who entice you”, 1: 10-19) who tempt the son with “easy money” and the adulterous woman who tempts the son with “easy sex”.²⁵ Thus, the father is set in apposition (side by side with) to the gang, and lady wisdom is placed in apposition to the adulterous woman.

1. Lecture 1: Exhortation to Listen and to Reject the Gang’s Invitation (1: 8-19)

Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching;⁹ Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head And ornaments about your neck.¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause;¹² Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit;¹³ We will find all *kinds* of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil;¹⁴ Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,"¹⁵ My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path,¹⁶ For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood.¹⁷ Indeed, it is useless to spread the *baited* net In the sight of any bird;¹⁸ But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives.¹⁹ So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors. (Prov. 1:8-19 NASB)

Although the male image dominates *Proverbs* up to chapter 31, the importance of the female cannot be discounted. The instructions of both father and mother are here treated equally (v. 8), an equality which must be assumed throughout the book whenever the father speaks. References to the mother (1: 8; 4: 3; 6: 20; 10: 1; 15: 20; 19: 26; 20: 20; 23: 22, 25; 28: 24; 29: 15; 30: 11; 30: 17), and to a virtuous wife in the latter part of Proverbs 31 indicate that women have an important pedagogical (teaching) role alongside the men.²⁶

Youth are vulnerable to peer pressure, a universal trait in all cultures and in all times. ***Everyone is looking for some form of community.*** God has sovereignly created the family unit as the basic societal community with father and mother for the proper transmission of moral values and the socialization of children. The alternative community and transmitter of values is the community

²³ Waltke, I. p. 101

²⁴ Waltke, I. pp. 10, 181; review the summaries of the different collections given above and review the outline.

²⁵ Prov. 2: 16-22; cf. Waltke, p. 182

²⁶ Waltke, p. 117

of one's peers who lack experience and wisdom, a community which may malfunction as a gang.²⁷ (What does this have to say for the common practice of sending children to boarding schools where their peers are the primary socializing influence?) Likewise, the lure of easy money transcends all times and all cultures. Why work when you can steal? The father uses graphic language only to highlight the real intentions of the gang which may be more cleverly concealed than the father's description depicts.²⁸ He only does so to make his warnings more emphatic and to reveal the ultimate intentions of the gang. Likewise, I don't think we should limit such warnings to violent behavior as if only this extremity were in view. The father warns the son of *any peer group* which operates outside the acceptable boundaries of the law of God—behavior which may logically lead to violence. Such people will fall into their own traps (v. 17) and ambush their own lives (v. 18). Writing in the 20th century context of the failed social welfare experiment of the United States, George Gilder observes,

In the welfare culture money becomes not something earned by men through hard work, but a right conferred on women by the state. Protest and complaint replace diligence and discipline as the sources of pay. Boys grow up seeking support from women, while they find manhood in the macho circles of the street and the bar or in the irresponsible fathering of random progeny.²⁹

[First Interlude (a temporary pause from the original thought): Wisdom's Rebuke of the Gullible (1: 20-33)]

Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square;²¹ At the head of the noisy *streets* she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:²² "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing And fools hate knowledge?"²³ "Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you."²⁴ "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;²⁵ And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof;²⁶ I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes,²⁷ When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you."²⁸ "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me,²⁹ Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD."³⁰ "They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof."³¹ "So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices."³² "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them."³³ "But he who listens to me shall live securely And will be at ease from the dread of evil." (Prov. 1:20-33 NASB)

As the father appeals to the son at *home*, so Lady Wisdom cries out in the *streets*. In her audience are various kinds of people who have rejected wisdom in one degree or another. There are those who are *gullible* or simple who are easily influenced by people more hardened in their resistance to wisdom, the scoffer and the fool who delight themselves in hating everything good and pure. The gullible man has little spiritual weight or substance and is easily influenced by others. He is not interested in serious conversations about ultimate issues: life and death, heaven and hell, right and wrong, and quickly changes the subject when these issues are mentioned.

The *scoffer* goes to the next level. While the simple person is somewhat passive in the hands of evil, the scoffer is active in his opposition against good. He goes out of his way to scorn or ridicule

²⁷ Waltke, p. 189

²⁸ Waltke, p. 191

²⁹ George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 115

people who are conscientious about doing the right thing. He ridicules people who contemplate the meaning of life, moral purity, the existence of God, and God's purpose for their lives. The scoffer says to such people, "Lighten up! Don't be so serious all the time! Go out and have some fun and live life to the fullest. Go party, get drunk, have sex with whomever you can, and enjoy yourselves! God and morality will wait until we are old and can't do anything else. But now we are young and should not let life will pass us by!"

Then there are the *fools* who hate knowledge. The attitude toward wisdom in this verse seems to be progressive. First you have the simple person who just doesn't care about anything; then you have the scoffers who make fun of serious-minded people; then we find those who positively hate anything associated with godly wisdom or with living a righteous life. They may even go out of their way to oppose people or to persecute people who love God or his church. When all is said, however, the *spirit* of the gullible, the scoffer, and the fool is the *same*, for whoever fails to *love* wisdom will hate it. All three will suffer the same fate if they remain heedless of Wisdom's invitation to repentance. Hebrew parallelism is evident in the verse. Gullible, scoffer, and fool are *three ways* of describing the same spirit of one who will not listen to Wisdom; yet, we are justified in seeing some progression in their resistance.

Wisdom is shouting in the streets to all people. You see her all the time even though you may not recognize her. Wherever the truth of God is being spoken or practiced, Lady Wisdom is there. She is in the church on Sunday morning; she is in the secondary school on Monday morning. She is in on the streets of Kampala on Friday night personified in believers who know how to behave themselves after dark, who fear God and keep His commandments (v. 29). She is personified by people who live godly lives in the midst of a perverse and wicked generation who think all day long of ways they can lie and cheat their way through life.

She invites the sinner to repent of his *independent spirit*—the spirit of Adam and Eve who believed that they could decide for themselves the difference between good and evil—and to receive her spirit, the spirit of wisdom. Judging from the context, she has offered her invitation on a number of occasions only to be rebuffed (v. 22, "how long"; v. 24, "because I called and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no one paid attention.") But Wisdom's patience is not without limit, and one day the extended invitation will be withdrawn. The gullible, the mocker, and the fool would not listen, and when disaster comes upon them, Wisdom will laugh at their calamity. In Psalm 2: 4, the Lord laughs at another group of fools, rebellious kings who will not acknowledge his right to rule over them: "He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them." We cannot separate Wisdom from its source, for the rejection of Wisdom is at the same time the rejection of the Lord from whom she comes. Thus, when those who hate Wisdom are overcome with dread—whether in this life or the next—Wisdom will laugh and the Lord will laugh with her (v. 26; an anthropopathism). This is retributive justice, the law of sowing and reaping legitimately applied to the fool. The fool sows to the flesh and from the flesh reaps corruption (Gal. 6: 8).

Trouble will come upon the gullible, the scoffer, and the fool like a "storm", like a "whirlwind" (v. 27). Other than flash flooding, serious weather patterns are rare in Uganda. God has richly blessed this country with mild weather. But in Mississippi, where I come from, we have tornadoes and hurricanes, storms with which most Africans are not familiar. A tornado can have winds up to 200 miles an hour, the kind that will literally carry you away. Such wind causes houses to explode. They can pick up an oil tanker truck and throw it hundreds of meters away. Winds that strong can take a soda straw and force it through an electrical pole. They can extend a mile wide,

and they destroy everything in their path. Figuratively, this is the kind of storm v. 27 is talking about—a storm that can sweep one’s whole life away and leave him nothing but ruin and destruction. Anguish, distress, fear and weeping will come upon him all at once.

In this hour of utter despair and darkness fools will call upon the Lord for deliverance, but they will be met with stone-cold silence. The Hebrew parallelism heightens the intensity of their abandonment.

“ <i>They will call on me,</i>	A	
<u>but I will not answer;</u>		B
<i>they will seek me diligently,</i>	A	
<u>but they shall not find me”</u> (v. 28).		B

At one time Wisdom was fully accessible and available, calling out to them in the streets and in the public places, but when the fool is pinned down under an overturned bus and bleeding to death, Wisdom will not rescue him. When his body is wasting away with AIDS, she will be silent. When the village mob is beating him senseless for stealing, Wisdom will not turn them away. When he is a lonely old man whose wife left him for repeated infidelity, Wisdom will not comfort him. The fool is now getting from Wisdom the *same* treatment she received from him. For a long time he spurned her calls to repentance and laughed at her reproofs. She is now laughing at him, and finally abandoning him to his just fate. He was warned that this day would come, and now it is here (vv. 29-30). He is past the point of repentance and faith.

Verse 28 is not talking about genuine repentance and searching for God. The proverb does not contradict Matthew 7: 7. When the scoffing fool cries out to God for help and “seeks” the Lord, he is only asking Him to deliver him from a bad situation. He is suffering the consequences of his own actions, and he desperately wants deliverance from his suffering; but he is not asking for deliverance from the sinful condition of his heart which caused the suffering. We must not apply this passage to the *sincere penitent* who genuinely cries for mercy. Jesus did not laugh at the dying thief on the cross who confessed the justice of his fate and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom” (Lk. 23: 40-42). Nor did Jesus ridicule the penitent tax collector as the main point of His parable; rather, Jesus says that the man went to his house “justified” (Lk. 18: 9-14).

Fools will “eat the fruit of their own way. They will be gluttoned with their own devices” (v. 31). The idea is that fools will be *gorged* on the fruit of their own sinful ways. This is not the pleasantness of being satisfied from a delightful meal, but the sickness we have when we have eaten too much, and we are miserable from it (cf. Num. 11: 1-35). The description is carried forward in v. 32, “the waywardness of the foolish will kill them, and the carelessness of fools will destroy them.” A person’s appetite can kill him. If you love too much alcohol, then alcohol will destroy your life. If you love immoral sex, immoral sex may kill you—and it has killed millions of people all over the world. If you love money, the love of money will destroy you. You will end up gorging yourself on alcohol, immoral sex, and money—any number of things—until one of them or all of them take your life away from you. Your life will be swept away by the very thing you wanted most in life. Hell is filled with the broken lives of people who got what they wanted.

But the fool has not loved the very thing he should have loved—the wisdom and knowledge of God.

But Wisdom does not end her sermon in despair, but hope (v. 33). If the fool should once again consider the folly of his ways and repent, Wisdom is there to deliver him from the dread conclusion of his foolish way of life. Rather than dreading the warnings of vv. 26-32, he will live securely and at ease.

The reader can see in Wisdom's speech the difference in perspective between *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* in which Qohelet insists that there is only one fate for both the righteous and the wicked (Ecc. 9: 2). Wisdom would seriously debate Qohelet on this assumption and insists vigorously that while the dread of evil comes upon the wicked, the righteous will dwell securely. The timing of judgment for the wicked and rewards for the righteous is left indefinite, and we will discover a much different orientation toward the after-life in *Proverbs* than in *Ecclesiastes*—that is, until we get to the conclusion of *Ecclesiastes* where Qohelet's conclusion is consistent with *Proverbs*.

2. Lecture 2: Safeguard against the Wicked (2: 1-22)

My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you,² Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;³ For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding;⁴ If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures;⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God.⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding.⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk in integrity,⁸ Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones.⁹ Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity *and* every good course.¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;¹¹ Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you,¹² To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things;¹³ From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness;¹⁴ Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil;¹⁵ Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways;¹⁶ To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words;¹⁷ That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God;¹⁸ For her house sinks down to death And her tracks *lead* to the dead;¹⁹ None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life.²⁰ So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous.²¹ For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it;²² But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it. (Prov. 2:1-22 NASB)

The father's second lecture to his son begins in chapter 2. The entire address is an *if-then* proposal. *If* the son will receive the father's instructions, treasure it, listen to it, cry for it, seek it, treasure it, etc. (vv. 1-8), *then* this same wisdom will protect the son from evil (vv. 9-22). In essence the message is a restatement of the promise in 1: 33 that "he who listens to me [Wisdom] shall live securely, and shall be at ease from the dread of evil." Wisdom's *cry* in the streets and lifting up her voice in the square is now paralleled by the father's admonition to the son, "For if you *cry* for discernment, *Lift your voice* for understanding...." (1: 20 compared with 2: 3). Though Wisdom has called out to fools who would not listen, the son is now advised to take a pro-active approach, not waiting for Wisdom to find *him*, but actively pursuing *her*.

Wisdom will not magically swoop down from the sky whenever the son is in trouble. The wise man does not have ongoing revelations from God. Rather, Wisdom will give him the *discretion*

needed to avoid ruinous situations and harmful people. The wise son will not enter business deals with liars and cheats because he will have discernment about a man's character (v. 12). He will not lose his money on get-rich-quick schemes or frivolous living. He will not become involved with the adulterous or loose woman who will one day abandon him as easily as she abandoned her previous husband (vv. 16-17). Avoiding the companionship of scoffers and fools who can only get him into trouble, he "will walk in the way of good men, and keep to the paths of the righteous" (v. 20). It is his *own* discretion—produced by wisdom—which will guard him, and his *own* understanding which will watch over him (v. 11).

But such promises do not belong to the half-hearted seeker. The search for wisdom is likened to a mining operation in which wisdom lies buried deep beneath the surface (v. 4). Gold and precious gems are not lying along the way-side waiting to be picked up by the casual stroller. If they were so common, they would be worthless since they would be possessed by all. Rather, they are rarely found and only by those who spend considerable time and energy pursuing them. So it is with wisdom; she must be sought diligently, and she will only be sought in such a manner by those who value her as hidden treasure. The Lord desires us to have wisdom, but he will not lavish his gifts upon those who despise them. Our actions will prove our true desires. Just as we will spend our money on the things we value most, we will also spend our time seeking what is truly important. At the end of the search, however, it is not our own efforts which must be praised for finding wisdom, but God's grace, "For the Lord gives wisdom: from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (v. 6)."³⁰

Lasting permanence in the land is promised to those who are upright and blameless—that is, those whose lives have been influenced by wisdom (v. 21). The land was an important sacrament (something sacred) to the OT Israelite, the inheritance from the fathers who were originally given the land as part of the promise made to Abraham. To give it up or sell it without necessity was a sacrilege (a violation of something sacred) as the story of Naboth shows (1 Kings 21: 3). Loss of the land due to poverty was devastating, and provision was made through the Jubilee Year and the kinsman redeemer to restore lost land to the original owners (Lev. 25: 10, 25).

'You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. (Lev. 25:10 NASB)

'If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold. (Lev. 25:25 NASB)

Thus, the father promises his son lasting permanence on the land as the reward for pursuing wisdom with all his heart. Contrasted with this is the uprooting of the wicked who do not have lasting permanence but will be cut off from the land.

For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.¹⁰ Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be *there*.¹¹ But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps. 37:9-11 NASB)

³⁰ Waltke, I. p. 223

Therefore, the father's instruction provides the son valuable continuity with the covenant promises of the OT. In the NT, this continuity is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and the Revelation of John.

"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:5 NASB)

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Rev. 22:14-15 NASB)

3. *Lecture 3: The Lord's Promises and the Son's Obligations (3: 1-12)*

My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; ² For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. ³ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. ⁹ Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine. ¹¹ My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, ¹² For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3:1-12 NASB)

The promises of this section serve as an introduction of all the promises of Proverbs. Since individual and corporate experience often seems to contradict these promises, the reader must read them within the context of all the promises of Scripture which are not limited to earthly existence. Waltke gives us a general framework for understanding the promises of Proverbs.

[“Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?”, *An Old Testament Theology*, pp. 910-913, Bruce K. Waltke; bold italic emphasis, except for “*I AM*”, and bold italics in brackets are mine. I have interjected some clarification of Waltke’s statements.]

These heavenly promises of life, health, prosperity, and honor seem detached from earth’s harsh realities. The promises seem false to human experience under the sun, as Job (9:22-23) and Qoheleth (Eccl. 9: 2-3) complain, and contrary to sound doctrine.³¹

[Job 9: 22-23 reads, “It is *all* one; therefore I say, 'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'”²³ “If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent.” Ecclesiastes 9: 2-3 reads, “It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.”³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they *go* to the dead.” Thus, Job and Qohelet interpret life in contradiction to Proverbs as if God’s treatment of the righteous and the wicked is all the same.]

³¹ Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 910
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Eliphaz resolves the conflict by the doctrine of original sin (Job 4: 17), but the narrator of Job disallows the argument (1: 8), and so does *I AM [Yahweh]* (42: 7).³²

Eliphaz interprets Job's troubles as the consequence of his sin, but at the very beginning of the book, God declares that Job is a righteous man, disallowing Eliphaz' argument that Job's suffering is deserved. Moreover, at the end of the book, God disapproves of the way Job's friends have handled him. He justifies Job and puts his friends at his mercy to pray for them.

Solomon, however, adds to the covenant obligation in Proverbs 3:1-10 that *I AM* disciplines those he loves (Prov. 3: 11-12), probably to motivate a person to keep his covenant obligations to make him or her fit to experience covenant blessings. If anyone should reckon that Solomon and other sages [*wise men*] are dullards [*stupid people*] who cannot see or think straight, let them recall that keen observation and cogent reflection mark the sage. Kenneth Aitken takes an exceptional misstep when he suggests the sages were too optimistic in their promises: "There is a strong suspicion here Israel's sages have confused their belief about what *ought to be the case with what actually is the case.*" Von Rad goes further, suggesting Qoheleth accuses the sages of so-called "old wisdom" of becoming "entangled in a single false doctrine." James G. Williams shares that opinion: "His [Qoheleth's] primary mode of presentation of contrasting proverbs... is in order to contradict traditional wisdom." These solutions deconstruct with Proverbs, which calls for truthful speech, and the canon, and so undermine Christ's and his apostles' claims that all Scripture is inspired of God, who does not author confusion, and that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10: 35; 1 Cor. 14: 33; 2 Tim. 3: 16).

[In other words, the idea that the Proverbs misrepresent the truth is inconsistent with the belief that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for instruction and training in righteousness. If the writers of the Proverbs are "too optimistic" in their promises, this cast doubt upon the rest of Scripture.]

The popular evangelical solution that these are *probabilities*, not promises, though containing an element of truth, raises theological, practical, and psychological problems by *stating the matter badly*. According to this wording the human partner is expected to keep his obligation perfectly (Prov. 3: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9), but God may keep his imperfectly (3: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10). In truth, however, "if we are faithless, he will remain faithful" (2 Tim. 2: 13). Moreover, a sober person would like to know the probabilities, and a psychologically well person could scarcely trust the *I AM* with all his heart (Prov. 3: 5), knowing God *usually, but not always*, keeps his obligations.

[In other words, should we read the proverbs from the point of view that we must "hedge our bets" if the promises don't work out? How much incentive will we have in keeping His commandments if the promise of long life applies only to life on earth in the here and now?]

Other steps, however, can be taken toward a resolution. First, the promises are *partially* validated by experience. The sober, not the drunkard (cf. Prov. 23: 29-35), the cool-tempered, not the hothead (15: 18; 19: 19; 22:24; 29: 22), and the diligent, not the sluggard, *usually* experience health and wealth.

Second, the epigrammatic nature [short and to the point] of the proverbs often cause the audience to overlook the counterproverbs that qualify these promises. "There are many proverbs," says Raymond Van Leeuwen, "that assert or imply that the wicked prosper... while the innocent suffer."...The wicked has treasures gained by wickedness for a season (10: 2a), but they will not deliver him from death (10: 2b). At that time the wicked's craving will be frustrated (10: 3b). In contrast, the righteous one who is afflicted at death will be delivered from death (10: 2b) and be fed (10: 3a). The several "better-than" proverbs assume the reality that *at present* the wicked have material presents and the righteous do not:

³² Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 911

“Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice” (cf. Prov. 16: 8, 19; 17:1; 19: 1, 22; 21: 9, 19; 22: 1; 25: 24; 28: 6; Ps. 37: 16; Eccl. 4: 6). *Without these qualifying sayings, one could legitimately accuse Solomon of being guilty of spouting half-truths.*

[Waltke acknowledges that the Proverbs are only “partially”, not completely, validated by corporate experience. As a general rule, they are accurate; but they allow for some exceptions. Moreover, *the “counterproverbs” provide documented evidence that the writers themselves acknowledge such exceptions.* The “better-than” proverbs at the outset admit that some of the wicked have “great income” while the righteous have “little” (16: 8). Some of the righteous are “lowly” while the wicked enjoy the “spoil” (16: 19). The peaceful house of the righteous may have only a “dry morsel” to eat while the house of the wicked, full of strife, partakes of a feast (17: 1). A poor man walking in his “integrity” is superior to a rich man (implied in the text) who is “perverse in speech and is a fool” (19: 1). If all these counter-proverbs are taken into account, it can hardly be said that the Proverbs are unrealistic and promise too much.]

Third, the genre effect of being a primer [a basic reader] on morality for youth cause Proverbs *to focus on a future when the righteous rise, not on a present when they fall*: “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down in calamity” (Prov. 24: 16). “Seven” symbolizes completeness, like the “count of ten” in boxing and the proverbial “nine lives” of a cat. In a word, “the righteous are regarded as knocked out for good.” Yet the saying throws away the harsh reality in a concessive clause for the greater reality that the righteous will rise. By contrast, the genre effect of *empiricism* causes Job and Ecclesiastes to focus on the sufferings of the righteous *before* they rise.

[Regardless of what happens to the righteous, they will rise again. On the other hand, the wicked fall but ultimately do not rise. Naboth appears to fall, but the retribution against Jezebel and Ahab imply that his fall was not permanent since God vindicated him in the judgment against the king and queen. In this section, Waltke is getting closer to his conclusion that the promises of Proverbs must transcend the expiration of earthly life or what he calls “clinical death”. When viewed as promises transcending this present life, the proverbs are not “probably true” but absolutely true apart from empirical verification (experience); and they give us all the incentive we need for absolute obedience and trust. Job’s and Qohelet’s statements mentioned earlier focus on the righteous when they fall, but ignore the righteous when they rise—a fact not always susceptible to empirical verification. Only at the end of both books do we see resolution and balance.]

Finally, as pointed out above, the righteous rise in a blessed future that *outlasts death*. In addition to the exegetical arguments presented there, Proverbs’ concept of justice *demand[s] such a hope*. Like so much of the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs is a masterpiece of indirection, preaching its message through the theological reflection of those with ears to hear. Instructively, the opening situation depicted in the father’s first lecture resembles the first situation of humanity outside of the Garden of Eden. Even as Cain murdered righteous Abel, sending him to a premature death, after which Cain lived out a normal life span, so the father represents a traveler’s “innocent blood” (Prov. 1: 11-19) as being dispatched to a premature death by venal sinners who walk on top of his grave and plunder his house. *These initial situations discredit the popular interpretation that life and death in Proverbs refer respectively to living to an old age and to a premature death. For justice to be done, as Proverbs assures it will be (e.g., 3: 31-35; 16: 4-5), Abel and the innocent traveler must be vindicated and delivered from death in a future that lies beyond their clinical deaths.* If clinical death is the last word for the waylaid innocent, then the father’s first lecture, along with other biblical stories about the deaths of martyrs, *deconstruct the Bible’s claim that God upholds justice*. Kathleen A. Farmer rightly comments: “One either has to give up the idea of justice or one has to push its execution into some realm beyond the evidence of human experience.” Obviously that future is not accessible to

verification, as Jerry Gladson notes critically, but without that kind of faith one cannot please God. *If these promises could be validated by experience, why does the father command the son to trust in the I AM* (3: 5)?

[This is a profound statement. Essentially, if God is a God of justice—and, of course, He is—then the innocent traveler’s blood (Prov. 1: 11-12) and the blood of Abel (who died young while his murderous brother’s descendants built cities and established culture—Gen. 4: 17-22) must be avenged. If not avenged, the father’s promises to the son in chapter 3 are empty (e.g. 3: 2, 25). Thus, promises of long life in Proverbs must extend beyond clinical life. If they speak only of temporal life, they offer insufficient incentive for righteousness which may or may not pay off.]

If God rewarded virtue immediately, the son would *confound pleasure with piety*, using piety and ethics to satisfy his prurient [*lustful*] interests. He would substitute eudaemonism (i.e. the system of thought that bases ethics on personal pleasure) for the true virtues of faith, hope, and love. God develops the character of his saints by calling them to suffer for the sake of righteousness, while living in hope of eternal life. In this way he teaches them virtue while upholding justice (Rom. 5: 3-4; 2 Peter 2: 3-11).

In sum, Proverbs characterizes the wise as living by faith entirely (“with all your heart,” 3: 5), exclusively (“lean not on your own understanding”), and exhaustively (“in all your ways acknowledge him,” 3: 5-6a).

[This is the answer to believers who ask, “Why do Christians often have it so hard while the wicked often have it easy?” Christians must be taught to “trust” God, “to walk by faith and not by sight”. As they trust, they become men and women of character who love God for *unseen* promises. If all believers had it easier than unbelievers, people would become “Christians” in name only because of its temporal benefits which are easily seen. But faith looks beyond empirical verification (visual “proof”). God is not a God to be worshipped to satisfy our every conceivable want. He is a God to be trusted when the waves of trouble flow over us like they did Job. In the end, he never cursed God. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and if our paths were consistently smooth, faith would become impossible because never needed.]

²For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

Returning to the text, the promises of v. 2 reflect back upon the blessings of obedience promised in the Ten Commandments, the covenant document of Israel: “Honor your father and your mother, that *your days may be prolonged in the land* which the LORD your God gives you” (Ex. 20: 12; cf. Prov. 2: 21-22). The contrast with Qohelet in *Ecclesiastes* is apparent here who complained, “I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who *prolongs his life in his wickedness*” (Eccl. 7: 15). Qohelet was preoccupied with the *exceptions* to the rule, but if it was possible to do a statistical analysis of the situation—and it isn’t—we would find Solomon’s assessment to be the more accurate one. Obedient children live longer as a general rule. Teenage children who listen to their parents’ admonitions about safety don’t drive carelessly down highways and end their lives prematurely in traffic accidents. They don’t abuse alcohol and drugs, ending up dead with overdoses or throwing their lives away with drunken incompetence (inability) or dead brain cells numbed with drug dependency. Obedient children don’t run with the wrong group of people who get into criminal activity and trouble with the law. They don’t indulge themselves in promiscuous sex which often ends in AIDS or any number of other sexually transmitted diseases which can end a person’s life prematurely. Furthermore, it is far more likely that the righteous *youth* will grow up into the righteous *adult* who continues to prolong his life with clean living, staying out of

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trouble, and choosing wise companions who encourage him in his walk along the straight and narrow path. Solomon is correct; keeping the commandments of wise parents will prolong your life. It is advisable that we not live our lives according to the exceptions to the rule (Eccles. 7: 15) but according to the general rule provided here.

But there is an additional reward added to this one. Even if an obedient person falls into the exceptional category and dies early in life—and this happens often enough to elicit Qohelet’s complaint—his years on earth are adorned with peace and contentment. Better to have a short life filled with peace than a long one riddled with discontent and strife (cf. the “better-than” passages of *Proverbs*: 15: 16, 17; 16: 8, 19, 32; 17: 1; 21: 9, 19; 25: 24). Jim Eliot, the famous young missionary who was murdered in an attempt to evangelize the unreached Indian tribes of Peru, once recorded in his prayer journal, “Lord, I don’t ask for a long life but a full one.” God took him to heaven at 27 years of age; He granted Eliot’s wish.

³Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Kindness and truth (v. 3) are metonymies—associated terms which represent the whole of the father’s teaching and commandments.³³ To be effective in the son’s life, the father’s commandments must be his constant companions, adornments around his neck and written on his heart through constant reflection and contemplation (cf. Deut. 6: 6-9). If only occasionally remembered, the commandments will not shape his thinking and behavior. They must become habitual or second-nature to be useful. Once the commandments have shaped his conscience and behavior, the obedient son will discover that his transformed life is rewarded with favor from God and man. God loves his chosen people no matter what their behavior, even Abram who lies about his wife Sarai (Gen. 12: 10-20) and Jacob who steals his brother Esau’s birthright. But it is poor theology which ignores or marginalizes (sets aside) the blessings of God for obedience. If we lump all believers together into the same group, those who are careless about obedience with those who conscientiously listen to instruction and make a serious attempt to pattern their lives after Biblical teaching, we eliminate the incentives for godly living. While it is true that there is nothing we can do to make God love us any more than He loves us already in Christ, it does not follow that we can do nothing to make God more pleased or less pleased with us. God is displeased with us when we ignore His teachings; He is pleased with us when we follow them. This is not legalism, but the law of sowing and reaping found throughout *Proverbs* and in the NT (Gal. 6: 7-8; Matt. 5: 3-12).

⁴So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.

Obedience brings favor from God, but what about from men? Even if the righteous are sometimes hated and persecuted by the wicked, they may yet be respected for their integrity. By God’s common grace most people, even if unconverted, respect a person of integrity whom they can trust to say what he means and to mean what he says—a truthful person. They also respect someone who is kind and generous. “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16: 7). The Lord prepares a table for the righteous man in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23: 5). When Jesus was growing up He “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2: 52), a passage which is an obvious

³³ Waltke, I. p. 241

reference to Prov. 3: 4. Even evil men are made in the image of God, and by God’s common grace to them, they are not as bad as they could be. They recognize truth when they hear it and kindness when they see it.

⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.

Whatever treatment the son receives from man, he must believe that God’s ways are the best ways even if they seem to contradict his own understanding (v. 5). He must not lean on his own limited understanding—the way of *independence*—but recognize that the wise way is the way of trust and *dependence*. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Prov. 12: 15), particularly the counsel of a wise father or someone older and wiser than he, someone who has been tested in the crucible of life yet has maintained his faith. This is especially good counsel for young people—to whom *Proverbs* is addressed—who commonly overestimate their own ability to think things through to proper conclusions and are “wise in [their] own eyes” (v. 7). Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, learned the hard way that he and his young counselors were not as wise as they thought they were, and their deficiency ended in a divided kingdom (1 Kings 12). Solomon’s counsel in *Proverbs* apparently fell on deaf ears. Trusting in our own wisdom instead of God’s wisdom is like a man crossing the desert with a small jar of water and by-passing the frequent oases of springs scattered along the way. To be dependent in our thinking is to think God’s thoughts after him. This is not passivity, but active trust and application of what He has said.

Elvis Presley was an American idol of the late 1960’s whose name is still a house-hold word in America and throughout the world. One of his most popular songs (written, I think, by Frank Sinatra) was “I Did It My Way”. Elvis died of consistent drug abuse in his early forties, but he did it *his* way. “There is a *way which seems* right to a man, But its end is the *way of death*” (Prov. 14: 12); but “In the *way* of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no *death*” (Prov. 12: 28).

⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

In *all* our ways we are to acknowledge that God’s way is better than our way (v. 6a). The word *all* indicates that Biblical wisdom is not limited to church or personal bible study and prayer, but encompasses all of life. The Apostle Paul said, “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking *every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10: 5). This is God’s world and not man’s, and if we succeed in relating to this world in a meaningful and successful way, we must acknowledge that all the laws of the universe and every fact must bow to the sovereign will of God who created the world in wisdom (Ps. 104: 24). Thus, we go astray in our thinking if we fail to yield to God’s wisdom in economics, science, and politics as if these areas exist exclusively on man’s “turf” under his dominion. God desires His people to be *pious*, to live godly lives, but not *pietistic*—the error of thinking that a Christian is only as good as his devotional life. The result of this acknowledgment will be *straight* paths (v. 6b). The idea here may be that a straight path will get the person to the appropriate destination in the shortest amount of time and with the least amount of danger, as opposed to a crooked one with many blind bends and curves in the road where thieves and robbers may be lurking. Or it could be an allusion to the self-conscious focus of the righteous person who steadfastly sets his face to please God rather than diverting his attention to many worthless paths which lead him in all directions.

⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

The ethical dimension of wisdom is always in the forefront. When all is said and done, wisdom is defined by the action of fearing God and turning from evil. Without moral practice, wisdom is only a theory; and if only a theory, a delusion. Without love for God and love for one's fellow man, "all knowledge" renders a man only a "noisy gong or a clanging cymbal", "nothing" really (1 Cor. 13: 1-2).

⁸ It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones.

Moreover, there is a physical dimension to wisdom. Not only does it give long life as a general promise, but physical health while one lives. There are exceptions, of course. Some of the godliest people who ever lived have been sickly (David Brainerd, John Calvin, to name only two), and poor health is not necessarily or even generally to be interpreted as a curse. But we should not gloss over the promise by focusing on the exceptions. Godly practice avoids the excesses which often ruin the health: drunkenness, over-eating, continual strife in the home and in other relationships which causes high blood pressure and heart disease. Depression causes sleeplessness, and anxiety causes all sorts of medical problems. The "refreshment to the bones" is a *synecdoche*, a part representing the whole;³⁴ in this case, the bones representing the whole body. When David had sinned against the Lord by taking Bathsheba, he records his spiritual and emotional sorrow in his physical pain—"bones which Thou hast broken" (Ps. 51: 8; 32: 1-5). In another Psalm, the fierce opposition from others so demoralizes him that he is physically exhausted: "I am poured out like water, And all my *bones* are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me" (22: 14). A person's physical well-being is closely connected to his spiritual and emotional well-being. The old American proverb, "laughter is the best medicine", now has modern medical support. Generally speaking, if you want to be happy, be holy. Even if righteousness will not spare you from a multitude of sorrows and bad health, it will surely help you to endure them with some measure of joy.

⁹ Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.

The connection between vv. 8 and 9-10 seems a bit awkward, but perhaps Solomon expected the reader to make an obvious deduction. True righteousness will affect the way a person views his money. We have a saying in America, "The last thing converted is the pocket book." A person may be converted to Christ and come to the realization that he belongs to God, but it may take years for him to recognize that his money also belongs to God. Some professing Christians never seem to come to this conclusion, but for Solomon (at least at one point in his life) God's honor (literally "weight") is registered in the believer by his willingness to part with his money for the glory of God. The "first" of the produce is representative of the best and the whole of the harvest, and it was gathered up and given to the Lord before the rest of the crops were gathered. Thus, the tithe of the crops represented trust and confidence in the Lord's continued provisions (Ex. 23: 16, 19). According to *Proverbs*, such confidence is not unfounded, for if we honor God with our money, there will be plenty left over for our needs and the needs of others (vv. 9-10). It should be noted that material prosperity is represented not in gold and silver but in barns filled with grain

³⁴ Waltke, I. p. 40

and wine presses filled with wine, commodities which have practical usefulness. As Matthew Henry notes,

He does not say thy *bags*, but thy *barns*, not thy *wardrobe* replenished, but thy *presses*; God shall bless thee with an increase of that which is for *use*, not for *show* or ornament; for spending and laying *out*, not for hoarding and laying *up*. They that do good with what they have shall have more to do good with.³⁵

(For the African Christian, it should be noted that an abundance of freshly squeezed grape juice, anticipated as “new wine”, is considered a blessing, not a curse.)

¹¹ My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, ¹² For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights.

The father realistically anticipates *the possibility of the son’s rejection* and deals with it accordingly in vv. 11-12. Just as obedience to the father’s will is accompanied by blessings, so disobedience is accompanied by discipline. Notice that the true son is not the object of the Lord’s curse, but receives His benevolent correction. It is, rather, *lack* of discipline that is a sign of rejection and abandonment by the Lord whose neglect would prove lack of love. The son’s attitude toward the Lord’s discipline is an accurate measure of his spiritual condition. Not only his actions, but his mental attitude must be governed and submitted to the Lord’s will. We are therefore commanded to monitor our feelings and adjust our attitudes as needed.³⁶ This can most easily be accomplished when we remember the motives behind the discipline—love not hate.

C. S. Lewis illustrates the truth by noting that an artist may not take much trouble over a picture drawn to amuse a child, but he takes endless effort over his great work of art that he loves. Lewis argues that were his *magnum opus* [masterpiece] sentient [capable of feeling], as “the artist rubbed and scraped off and recommenced for the tenth time” it would cry out in pain. He drew the conclusion that when we complain of our sufferings we are not asking for more love, but for less...C. S. Lewis says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.”³⁷

The son, the believer, is the Lord’s masterpiece whom He is conforming to the image of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8: 29). When we are disciplined we cry out in pain for God to stop, but stopping implies coming short of the perfection God intends for His children—the magnum opus, the great work of art He is creating us to be.

Notice that there is implicit (not explicitly stated but nevertheless implied) identification between the father’s discipline and the Lord’s discipline. God has so ordered society that parental reproof should be taken seriously as one of God’s disciplinary means to godliness. Most often God uses the medium of human activity to accomplish His sanctifying purpose. Accountability to others is a necessary means of grace to keep us growing in the right direction. Were this not so, He would not have appointed elders in the church for the shepherding and oversight of His sheep (Acts 20: 28; 1 Cor. 5). There is no promise here of parental infallibility—nor the infallibility of elders—but unless there is compelling proof to the contrary, the son (even an adult son) should seek to know how God is speaking to him vicariously (representatively) in His parents. The preliminary discipline of the Lord through the parents is given to forestall (prevent) the more severe, perhaps

³⁵ Cited by Waltke, p. 247; emphasis mine

³⁶ Waltke, p. 247

³⁷ Waltke, pp. 249-250; citing C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp. 30-33, and Aitken’s citation of Lewis in *Proverbs*, p. 44; words in brackets mine.

ultimate, judgment of the Lord toward those who apostatize from the faith. In that quintessential (perfect manifestation) passage of God’s benevolent discipline in Heb. 12, the apostle quotes *Proverbs* in vv. 5-6 and adds to it, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.... Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification *without which no one will see the Lord*” (vv. 11, 14). The discipline of the Lord, directly or vicariously through others including godly parents who love their children more than anyone on earth, is not a luxury easily done without. It is God’s means of grace.

It should also be mentioned in this context that the book of *Proverbs* assumes both the responsibility of parents *and* children. “Parent-bashing” has become popular in many evangelical churches in the West partly due to the cultural imbalance of our time which shifts virtually all the blame for incorrigible (uncorrectable) children upon the neglect of parents. Parents can even sometimes be prosecuted for the crimes of their teenage children. Much of this blame is certainly justified, and the lawlessness and lack of respect for parental authority is threatening to disintegrate Western society. Yet, it cannot be denied that Solomon calls for the proper response from his son who is held fully responsible for his acceptance or rejection of his father’s teaching and the Lord’s discipline. While most delinquent (lawless) children grow up in non-covenantal homes, very many grow up in Christian homes where the parents have tried—although with many mistakes and deficiencies—to rear their children in the discipline of the Lord. As a result of this lopsided view which places virtually all the blame on the parents, many Christian parents (including me) end up beating themselves over the head for all their failures as parents—and we have failed in many ways. While repentance for failure is appropriate, false guilt is not. Wayward children sometimes are more than happy to accommodate parents in our self-condemnation, not willing to acknowledge their own failures in listening to and applying what their parents have taught them along the way (Deut. 6: 6-7). As Waltke has noted, *Proverbs* is written to children, not parents.

They concentrate or distill truth and so by their nature cannot express the *whole truth* about a topic. “Dedicate a youth according to what his way dictates, and even when he is old he will not depart from it (22: 6) expresses the truth or promise that parental rearing affects a youth’s behavior for his entire life, but it does not express the whole biblical truth about child pedagogy. Rather, it is a single component of truth that must be fit together with other elements of truth in order to approximate the more comprehensive confused pattern of real life. *The book assumes the youth’s responsibility to accept the sage’s teaching (see 1: 4) and threatens apostates with death* (e.g., 1: 20-33; 2: 12-15; passim [in various parts of the book]; cf. Ezek. 18: 20), *assuming some parental failure*. Were parental training the whole truth about the child’s rearing, *why is the book addressed to youth instead to parents?* A lack of recognition of the genre characteristic of terseness and its function to assert truth baldly has led to many errors in interpreting Proverbs.³⁸

4. Lecture 4: The Value of Wisdom (3: 13-35)

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding.¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold.¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her.¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor.¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace.¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast. (Prov. 3:13-18 NASB)

³⁸ Waltke, pp. 38-39; emphasis mine
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The fourth lecture is marked off by a new heading. Though little has been said thus far about the continual use of Hebrew parallelism, the reader should be constantly alert to this literary device throughout the study of *Proverbs*. Looking back over the last three and a half chapters, not a single *antithetic* parallel has been used; all have been *synthetic or comparative* in which the last half of the verse is synonymous (means essentially the same thing) to the first half. This kind of parallelism forms a *synthesis* of the two halves of the verse rather than an *antithesis* to complete the thought. So also in v. 13. The man who finds wisdom is synonymous with the man who gains understanding.

The value of wisdom is the predominate thought of this section. Wisdom is valuable (1) *to man* (vv. 13-18), (2) *to the Lord* (vv. 19-20), and (3) *to the son* (vv. 21-26). Some of the same themes emerge in this section which have been seen before. Wisdom is more valuable than silver, gold and jewels (vv. 15-16), compared with 2: 4. In 2: 4, wisdom is to be sought as if she *were* gold and silver, while here she is valued *above* gold and silver. Money can buy a lot of things, but the most valuable things in life cannot be bought with money. Back in the 1960's, a British singing group known as *The Beatles* came up with the song, "Money Can't Buy Me Love". Very true, and after making tens of millions of dollars, *The Beatles* also discovered that money could not buy spiritual contentment. All of them became heavy drug users, and when the drugs didn't help they resorted to various strands of Eastern mysticism, including Hare Krishna. John Lennon learned that money could not buy marital contentment and left his wife for Yoko Ono, an Asian woman. As Waltke observes, "...money can put food on the table, but not fellowship around it, a house but not a home, and can give a woman jewelry but not the love she really wants."³⁹

On the other hand, Solomon does not belittle money as "meaningless" as Qohelet does in *Ecclesiastes* (chapters 2-3). He doesn't say money has no value, only that its value cannot be compared with that of wisdom (v. 15b). In the very next verse he says that in Wisdom's right hand is long life and in her left hand riches and honor. We recall that Solomon once asked for wisdom rather than riches and honor, and God gave him all three as a bonus (2 Chron. 1: 10-12). Apparently then, God does not consider money to have *no* value at all, else He would not have showered it upon Solomon who pleased him by asking for wisdom; and He would not offer it as one of the rewards for gaining wisdom. Short life and poverty are never presented in the Bible as promises or blessings for obedience (Deut. 28: 15-68). This would be eschatologically inappropriate since the new heaven and earth is a place of everlasting life and material abundance—no shortages!

In Prov. 30: 8-9, Agur specifically requests of the Lord to give him neither poverty nor riches, lest his poverty tempt him to steal or lest his riches tempt him to forget about the Lord. Agur recognized something very important about riches—though they are not sinful in themselves, and can be positive blessings, they are, nevertheless, potentially dangerous. Depending upon our response to them, they can be for cursing or blessing. If they are used positively for the good of others and the promotion of the kingdom of God, they are blessings. Our Lord Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 35). One cannot *give* what he does not *have*; thus, to receive the blessing of giving, one must have previously received the gift which is to be given away. If riches are hoarded and sought for their own sake, they become a millstone around our necks which will sink us to the bottom of the ocean.

³⁹ Waltke, p. 257

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Tim. 6: 9-10).

But Paul follows this warning not with a blanket condemnation of either riches or those who are rich, but an exhortation.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (1 Tim. 6: 16-19).

Money, therefore, is a “mixed bag” for blessing or cursing depending on the recipient.

The promise of long life in v. 16 is a repetition of 3: 2a, and the promise of peace in v. 17 is a repetition of 3: 2b. Long life, peace, and wealth are presented to us in *Proverbs* as positive blessings, while in Qohelet’s speech death is considered better than life (4: 2) and wealth was meaningless. The hope of peace was impossibly naive except for Qohelet’s fleeting moments of *carpe diem* (“seize the day!”) advising us to grab whatever happiness we could, whenever we could.

Wealth and long life are nothing without the Lord’s *peace*, and throughout the book we are given the “better-than” proverbs about the superiority of having integrity, a good name, and peace—particularly peace in the home—rather than money in the *absence* of these things (15: 16-17; 16: 8, 19; 17: 1; 22: 1). The old hymn is true, “I’d rather have Jesus than silver and gold”, but if the Lord is pleased to give us Jesus *and* silver and gold, then we should be grateful, “generous, and ready to share”!

¹⁹The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, By understanding He established the heavens. ²⁰ By His knowledge the deeps were broken up And the skies drip with dew.

Secondly, *wisdom is valuable to the Lord* for by wisdom the Lord created the heavens and the earth (vv. 19-20). The psalmist says, “O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions” (104: 24). God’s speech in Job 38 implies His wisdom in all creation, wisdom which cannot be questioned by Job regardless of his outward circumstances—or ours!

My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, ²² So they will be life to your soul And adornment to your neck. ²³ Then you will walk in your way securely And your foot will not stumble. ²⁴ When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. ²⁵ Do not be afraid of sudden fear Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; ²⁶ For the LORD will be your confidence And will keep your foot from being caught. (Prov. 3:21-26 NASB)

Thirdly, *wisdom is valuable to the son* (vv. 21-26). The predominant idea in this section is security and freedom from fear. Great confidence comes from knowing that we are in the right, that our motives and actions are pleasing to God. Proverbs 29: 25 says, “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.” Men will do all sorts of evil and mistaken things

because they are afraid of other men—either fearing their opposition, or wishing to be esteemed by them. Wishing to please men, they will forego the pleasure of God. Genuine security rests in the wisdom of God, and there can be no haven without it.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do *it*.²⁸ Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give *it*," When you have it with you.²⁹ Do not devise harm against your neighbor, While he lives securely beside you.³⁰ Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm.³⁰ Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm. (Prov. 3:27-30 NASB)

The last part of the chapter is a departure from the praise of wisdom to the practical use of wisdom. In vv. 27-30, the son is instructed to deal kindly with his neighbor. If his neighbor is in need, he should make a conscientious effort to meet that need without unnecessary delay. Deferment (delay) of kindness is often used as an excuse not to show kindness, perhaps in hopes that the need will go away or the needy person will go away and not disturb us any further. Sometimes needs are urgent and can't wait, like the need of the distressed traveler in the parable of the Good Samaritan.⁴⁰

The son is also advised to be trustworthy and honest with his neighbor who lives close to him (v. 29). In order to function and carry on a normal routine in this world, a certain level of trust and confidence is essential toward one's neighbor. You can't function if you are always having to watch your back to make sure your neighbor is not stealing from you or ready to harm you. It would be an easy thing for you to plan a scheme against someone who trusts you. Thus, it is a very evil thing for a neighbor to conspire against another neighbor. I cannot help but think of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 when radical Hutu neighbors conspired against and murdered their Tutsi neighbors living right next door to them, neighbors they had known for years. Treachery of this magnitude is an abomination to the Lord.

³¹ Do not envy a man of violence And do not choose any of his ways. ³² For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright. (Prov. 3:30-32 NASB)

Solomon then turns the son's attention from the neighbor to the violent man who apparently amassed much wealth through violent means. He is not to be envied for his wealth. This verse is an acknowledgment that sometimes the wicked *do* prosper, but their prosperity does not come with the Lord's blessings, and it dies with them.

5. Lecture 5: Get the Family Heritage (4: 1-9)

Hear, *O* sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding,² For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction.³ When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,⁴ Then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live;⁵ Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.⁶ "Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you.⁷ "The beginning of wisdom *is*: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding.⁸ "Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her.⁹ "She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty." (Prov. 4:1-9 NASB)

⁴⁰ Waltke, p. 268

Lecture five basically consists of the retelling of the father's heritage of wisdom from his father, the son's grandfather. Just as the father wishes to teach wisdom to his son, so his father before him taught him the same tradition of wisdom. Many of the previous themes of *Proverbs* appear in this retelling of the family heritage. The grandfather, David, commanded Solomon to accept his teachings (v. 10; cf. 2: 1; 3: 1); to “keep the commandments and live” (v. 4; cf. 3: 1-2), to acquire wisdom (v. 7; cf. 3: 13); and to be adorned with wisdom (v. 9; cf. 3: 3). It is clear from the comparisons in this chapter with the teachings of Solomon in the previous three chapters that he is repeating the wisdom taught him by his own father. There is no difference in substance. In this way Solomon wishes to teach his son that his wisdom is nothing new, but the established tradition which he received from his own father, and that his son should not attempt to innovate (believe something different) by digressing from the established traditions.

If we accept Solomonic authorship—and there is no reason to doubt it—the father's father could be none other than David. David often gets bad press for his fathering skills, and his affair with Bathsheba certainly ended badly for him and his family. David's first son by Bathsheba died shortly after childbirth; Amnon raped Tamar, his half-sister and Absalom's full sister; Absalom killed Amnon in revenge and later rebelled against David; David almost loses his kingdom but loses his son, Absalom, instead). God's promised judgment against David surely came to pass just as Nathan the prophet foretold (2 Sam. 12: 9-14).

On the other hand, David was obviously not all bad since all the kings Judah are judged by the standard of David who “did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chron. 28: 21; 2 Kings 18: 3; 22: 2). He is described as a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13: 14), and many of the Psalms were written *after* his adulterous affair with Bathsheba (Ps. 51). Apparently, he was also not a complete failure as a father and showed intense concern that Solomon follow the ways of the Lord (1 Chron. 29: 18-20; Prov. 4). Solomon did just that for much of his reign until his foreign wives turned his heart away from the Lord “when he was old” (1 Kings 11: 4). The final assessment of his life is stated in terms of an unfavorable comparison with his father, David (v. 4, 6), “...and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been....For Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done.” Adultery and murder are serious offenses, and David committed both; but he repented and came back to the Lord and continued to set the standard of what a godly king should be. David was a great sinner, but he had a greater Savior who salvaged his broken life and made him useful even after a serious downfall—an important truth all of us should keep in mind and apply to ourselves and others who have fallen. The difference between David and Solomon is that there is no historical record that Solomon ever repented of apostasy, a glaring and unaccountable omission by biblical historians if, indeed, he did repent. The book of *Ecclesiastes*, as Tremper Longman III, Craig Bartholomew, and other conservative theologians have shown, is itself no proof of Solomon's repentance since it begs the question of Solomonic authorship (cf. your notes on *Ecclesiastes*).

6. Lecture 6: Stay off the Wrong Way (4: 10-19)

Hear, my son, and accept my sayings And the years of your life will be many.¹¹ I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths.¹² When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; And if you run, you will not stumble.¹³ Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life.¹⁴ Do not enter the path of the wicked And do not proceed in the way of evil men.¹⁵ Avoid it, do not pass by it; Turn away from it and pass on.¹⁶ For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; And they are robbed of sleep unless they make *someone* stumble.¹⁷ For they eat the bread of wickedness And drink the wine of violence.

¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.
¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble. (Prov. 4:10-19 NASB)

This lecture may be compared with other previous sayings. It is marked off from the father's lecture about the family heritage by v. 10, "Hear, my son, and accept my sayings"; otherwise, we would be inclined to include this section as part of the "heritage" lecture. Solomon once again advises his son to lengthen his life with wisdom (v. 10; cf. 3: 16); and to avoid evil men who would divert his path from wisdom (vv. 11-19; cf. 1: 10-19; 3: 31-35).

Verse 18 indicates that the righteousness of the wise man is not a static quantity; it "shines brighter and brighter until the full day" of the believer's ultimate salvation. This is what the NT calls "sanctification" (Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 12:14). Specifically, it is *progressive* sanctification. The path of the righteous becomes clearer as he grows in conformity to the image of Christ. This does not remove the complexities of God's providence—as Job discovered—but it does enable the maturing believer to surrender to God's providential ways and means, however painful. As Job says,

"For He performs what is appointed for me, And many such *decrees* are with Him. (Job 23:14 NASB)

But while the path of the righteous gets brighter, enabling him to avoid the sinful stumbling blocks of life—many of them, at least—the path of the wicked gets darker, causing him to stumble over things he cannot see or understand, dangers lurking in the night (like the adulterous woman). Life is a continual enigma for the wicked, and he does not understand why it is so hard.

The point of the simile is made clear in 4: 19b. Without the moral light of either conscience within or of revelation without *they do not know...the cause of their calamity...*, for they see no connection between sin and death...The ignorance of both the nature and consequences of wickedness is the mark of absolute moral failure (cf. 24: 12; 28: 22). What trips them up...refers to any agent that brings about the fatigue and death of the wicked. For example, many today see no connection between venereal disease and sexual immorality, between indulgent greed and national debt, between war and tribal thinking. Ultimately the agent is the Lord, who connects evil deeds with evil consequences (cf. 5: 21-23; Deut. 28: 28-29; Job 12: 24-25; 5: 13-14; Jer. 13: 16; 23: 12). The wicked, however cannot see the connection and die.⁴¹

Life for the righteous is also hard, but the Lord has given him written revelation explaining man's fallenness and the curse upon the ground. Life is hard because man sinned, and believers are not immune from life's harsh realities brought upon them through personal sin and the sin of others. Yet, at least, we are progressively learning why we should expect difficulty and how we may avoid much of it by walking the path of righteousness.

7. Lecture 7: Don't Swerve from the Right Way (4: 20-27)

My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.²¹ Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart.²² For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body.²³ Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.²⁴ Put away from you a deceitful mouth And put devious speech far from you.²⁵ Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.²⁶ Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established.²⁷ Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil. (Prov. 4:20-27 NASB)

⁴¹ Waltke, I. p. 292

Similar themes emerge: to be truthful (v. 24; cf. 3: 3); to watch his steps and follow the correct path (vv. 25-27; cf. 1: 15; 2: 20); and to guard his heart (v. 23; cf. 2: 2, 10; 3: 1, 3, 5). The motivation for obedience is also similar: health to the whole body (v. 22; cf. 3: 8). The connection between physical and spiritual health emerges once more. The separation of the spirit from the body is an aberration caused by sin which leads to death, but apart from the Adamic sin no such separation would have occurred. The bible treats spirit and body as a completed whole with physical and spiritual “health” and “life” connected. The heart is the receptacle of the father’s words, and from the heart proceed the “springs of life” or the actions which are determined by what the heart believes. “What one is and what one does are inseparable.”⁴² The actions of the body include the lips which speak lies; thus, “devious speech” must be put away. The eyes must not be allowed to wander upon things (or people) which are not intended for them (Job 31: 1). They must be fixed upon God and his moral will. Likewise, the feet must not turn to the right or the left of moral behavior. As the eyes are fixed straight in front of you, so also the feet should follow the fixed path of the eyes.

8. Lecture 8: Folly of Adultery, Wisdom of Marriage (5: 1-23)

¹My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding; ² That you may observe discretion And your lips may reserve knowledge.

As usual, the lecture is set apart from the previous lecture by the heading, “My son”. Solomon is now back to the subject of the adulteress. He is addressing his son and not his daughter, and everything said in the book is from a man’s perspective until we get to Lemuel’s speech in chapter 31, and even then his mother addresses her son. Thus, we do not have warnings in *Proverbs* against a faithless husband though such warnings should certainly be implied from the text. Furthermore, it is acknowledged in *Proverbs* that males are more prone to be test the limits of tradition and authority than their female counterparts.⁴³ The science of male hormones was not known then, but it was surely observed and taken into account. Men are sexually aroused more easily than women, and their appetite for sex is less easily satisfied. This is not a fault of men, but simply the way men are “wired”. (The business of prostitution is a multi-billion-dollar industry world-wide, but very little of it is driven by *male* prostitution.) But because of the way men are put together by their Maker, they must be careful not to allow their hormones to eclipse (darken or obscure) their better judgment. Although being “wired” for sex is not their fault, the way they use this urge can be damnable.

³ For the lips of an adulteress drip honey And smoother than oil is her speech; ⁴ But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. ⁵ Her feet go down to death, Her steps take hold of Sheol. ⁶ She does not ponder the path of life; Her ways are unstable, she does not know *it*.

The lips of the adulteress are contrasted with the lips of the wise which reserve knowledge (vv. 2-3). The adulteress is the smooth-talking, smooth-walking, eye-flashing woman who knows how to seduce with her speech (2: 16; 7: 12-20).⁴⁴ Her seductions drip from her lips like honey from the honey comb, but she is not what she seems to be. The words of her mouth are not sweet after all, but like wormwood, a bitter plant; and her seductions will cut you to pieces like a two-edged

⁴² Waltke, I. , p. 296

⁴³ Waltke, I. p. 117

⁴⁴ Literally, the word rendered “speech” can be translated “lip”. W. G. E. Watson believes that Solomon may be referring to the woman’s external genitalia or vulva. Quoted from Waltke, I. p. 309.

sword (v. 4). Her paths are the way to Sheol, the realm of the dead (v. 5; cf. 2: 18). She is a very unstable person—a married woman (cf. 6: 24, 29, 34)—who doesn't know *who* she wants, *what* she wants or *where* she is going (v. 6).

The unfaithful wife, having no home and no future hope, staggers about in her sin...*She does not know it* expresses her total moral failure. Lacking external instruction and an inner conscience, she can no longer distinguish between right and wrong, and so, without a moral compass to give her direction to true life, she strays to her death.⁴⁵

If the son is wise, he will conscientiously steer a wide path far away from her house.

⁷ Now then, *my sons*, listen to me And do not depart from the words of my mouth. ⁸ Keep your way far from her And do not go near the door of her house, ⁹ Or you will give your vigor to others And your years to the cruel one; ¹⁰ And strangers will be filled with your strength And your hard-earned goods *will go* to the house of an alien; ¹¹ And you groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed;

Verses 9 and 10 may refer to giving the adulterous the best of one's youthful years and youthful strength, or it could refer to the offspring produced by the adulterous relationship, called "strangers". At the risk of being speculative, could this be a reference to black-mailing the adulterous man who must now support his mistress and his illegitimate children or else suffer the wrath of his wife and/or the adulteress' husband, as well as public humiliation? At any rate, sin makes life complicated, none more than the sin of adultery. The consuming of the young man's body and flesh may also refer to financial destitution (v. 11), but in light of the physical diseases which result from sexual promiscuity, this could be a reference to wasting disease. Against this interpretation is the fact that the woman in question is not a paid prostitute, but another man's wife who seeks other lovers (vv. 3, 20).

¹² And you say, "How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! ¹³ "I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to my instructors! ¹⁴ "I was almost in utter ruin In the midst of the assembly and congregation."

The penalty of not avoiding such a woman is registered in vv. 12-14. Not only is there financial loss and possible physical sickness, but there is public humiliation "in the midst of the assembly and congregation", a phrase which Waltke interprets not as a religious assembly but a "legal assembly at a public court hearing (also 26:26)...including the leaders of the people sitting in the gate of the city...(Jer. 26: 9-10)."⁴⁶ Adultery was punishable by death in the Mosaic economy (Lev. 20: 10), but this penalty may have been discontinued by the later date in which *Proverbs* was written. But at the very least some kind of fine was attached to it and the guilty party and his family would suffer public humiliation.

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love. ²⁰ For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?

⁴⁵ Waltke, I. p. 310

⁴⁶ Waltke, p. 316

Rather than searching for “companionship” and sexual enjoyment elsewhere, the son is encouraged to find these things within the moral, covenantal boundaries of marriage: “Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well” (v. 15), a metaphor for sexual satisfaction within the marriage covenant. His fill of sexual pleasure should be private, drawn like water from his own private cistern, not something he “disperses” or spreads around publicly on the city streets with every adulteress or prostitute who comes around (v. 16)—like public wells and fountains meant for everyone to use. Solomon presents adultery in the worst possible light while presenting marital love in the best possible light. (Too bad Solomon was not satisfied with one woman.) The son should rejoice in the wife of his youth, allowing himself to become “intoxicated” (v. 19) with her love, drinking his fill of sexual enjoyment from the breasts of his wife. “The father admonishes that inhibitions be left behind in the marriage bed”; moreover, the encouragement to be fulfilled in marital sex implies the moral obligation of both the husband *and* the wife to provide access to that love.⁴⁷ The Apostle Paul reiterates this obligation very frankly in 1 Cor. 7 where he alludes to the obligations of marital sex found in Mosaic law.⁴⁸

¹Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

²But because of immoralities,

each man is to have his own wife,	A
and	
each woman is to have her own husband.	B

³ The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife,	A
and likewise also	
the wife to her husband.	B

⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body,	
but the husband <i>does</i> ;	B
and likewise also	
the husband does not have authority over his own body,	
but the wife <i>does</i> .	A

(Structural analysis from Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 277; translation from NASB)

⁵ Stop depriving one another , except by agreement	A		
for a time,		B	
so that			C
you may devote yourselves to prayer,			D
and come together	A		
again		B	
so that			C
Satan will not tempt you			D
because of your lack of self-control.			

(Structural analysis mine)

⁴⁷ Waltke, p. 322

⁴⁸ See Ex. 21: 10 which notes the sexual obligations of a husband toward a slave wife after he has taken an additional wife. Rushdoony, following other scholars, believes Paul is alluding to the requirements of the law in 1 Cor. 7. See my comments on this passage in “The Doctrine of Man”.

⁶ But this I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷ Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. (1 Cor. 7:1-7 NASB)

In v. 6, Paul is not implying that husbands and wives may ignore his instructions about providing marital sex. All the verbs (“is to have”, “must fulfill”, “stop depriving”) are Greek imperatives; therefore, it would be self-contradictory to present the list of imperatives and then turn around and say that they were not commands. What IS NOT a command is his suggestion that the husband and wife may refrain from sex for a time for the purpose of prayer. Temporary abstinence as a means of devoting oneself to prayer is perfectly legitimate, but it is not commanded. What IS commanded is marital sex on a regular basis lest Satan take advantage of the unfulfilled sexual urges of husbands and wives through sexual temptations. Verse 7 simply means that Paul had the special gift of celibacy which enabled him to carry on his work as an apostle (see vv. 32-34); and he wished others also had this gift. However, he also recognizes that marriage is also a gift and the normal state of man. Paul read the OT: “It is not good for man to be alone.”⁴⁹

Returning to Proverbs 5, note well that the text does NOT say “rejoice in your **youthful wife.**” Rather, “rejoice in the wife of your youth.” It is assumed here that sexual fulfillment must be sought “at all times”—including middle and old age—from the woman who becomes his wife in his youth. But she will no longer look as good in old age as she once did in her youth. Everyone who lives long enough will lose their youthful good looks—including husbands, who often don’t look in the mirror long enough to see that they are aging as well. Later on, *something* must kindle the male sexual urge besides a youthful face and figure. That *something* is marital love, fidelity, commitment, and the desire to please your wife, all which come from a fundamental commitment to please Jesus Christ. Jesus said it was “more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20: 35). Paul mentions this quotation (found only in Acts) in the context of being generous with time and money; yet, the principle applies to the marriage bed. Enjoyment in sex comes partially from giving enjoyment to the other. Men are not the only qualified receivers in the sexual act. They must also seek to please their wives (1 Cor. 7: 33); and the best way this can be done is not by some sexual technique they learned on a pornography website (stay away!), but by loving their wives as Christ loved the church. Treat your wife the way Christ treated his church, giving himself for her; and see if she might be more responsive to you in bed. You will also find as a bonus that the more you love your wife, the prettier she becomes to you. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and if you are valuing your wife as you should, you will see the beauty she still possesses.

²¹ For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths. ²² His own iniquities will capture the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin. ²³ He will die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray. (Prov. 5:1-23 NASB)

Does the adulterer and adulteress believe that their ways are hidden? Verse 21 teaches otherwise. So then, what if their adulterous affair is never discovered? But God knows, and He will punish wickedness with its own consequences (vv. 21-23). In the same way the eyes of the Lord move throughout the earth to support those whose hearts are committed to obey Him (2 Chron. 16: 9), his eyes are also set against those who spurn Him and his law (Jer. 24: 6; Amos 9: 4).

It is true that God made men with the fires of intense sexual drive in their members. What better way to populate the earth? Yet he did not do so without giving them the proper channels for satisfying those drives. God could have made man and woman with the capability of procreating

⁴⁹ For a detailed explanation of this text, see Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*
christcommunitystudycenter.org

without sexual intimacy and without much enjoyment. Female fish lay their eggs in the water while the male fish come along later and spread their sperm on top of the eggs. We can only speculate how much gratification fish get from this method of procreation. My guess is: not much. But it is not so with men and women. Sex is fun, and it's fun because God made it that way on purpose. He, therefore, invites us to enjoy as much of it as we can to the point of intoxication, but only within the proper boundaries of marriage. Because we are made in His image and have the work of the law written on our hearts, this is the only meaningful and lasting way we can enjoy it, whether we are believers or unbelievers. Many people falsely conclude that sex is no longer *fun* when it becomes *legal*—the forbidden fruit fallacy. A whole book, *The Song of Solomon*, has been written to dispel this myth, but it is also disputed here. Sex is *more* fun when it's legitimate and confined to the marriage bed, for then you can enjoy it with a clear conscience before God and with the confidence that you and your lover are truly committed to one another and not simply to the selfish enjoyment of sex.

[Appendix: Three Inferior Types of Men (6: 1-19)]

My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, Have given a pledge for a stranger,² If you have been snared with the words of your mouth, Have been caught with the words of your mouth,³ Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor.⁴ Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids;⁵ Deliver yourself like a gazelle from *the hunter's* hand And like a bird from the hand of the fowler. (Prov. 6:1-5 NASB)

The father warns his son against *becoming surety for his neighbor*. In becoming surety, a person pledges himself as a guarantor for a loan taken out by his neighbor. If the debtor defaults on the loan by not making the payments, the responsibility for the loan falls upon the person who becomes surety. This situation can become precarious (uncertain and insecure) for the one who co-signs for the loan or becomes surety for various reasons. He could fall out of favor with his neighbor and be left holding the note (being responsible for paying off the debt). Second, the *neighbor could be irresponsible* or incapable of paying off the debt leaving the debt to the guarantor. Third, if his neighbor is a personal friend and cannot repay the loan, the friendship could be jeopardized. In any case, if the guarantor for the loan could not pay the debt, he could be liable to becoming the lender's slave for six years or until the Year of Jubilee (2 Kings 4; Lev. 25: 39-41; Ex. 21: 2).

Sometimes men make verbal agreements which entrap them (v. 2). If possible, they may be able to plead their way out of the initial agreement (v. 3) and deliver themselves from the hands of the hunter (implied) or the fowler—metaphors for the lenders who are likely to be ruthless businessmen. Here in the US we call them “loan sharks” who devour their debtors with impossible interest rates (sometimes 36%) which must be collateralized with valuable items (cars, houses, land, etc.). The hope of the loan shark is that the debts will NOT be paid and that they will receive even higher returns—as if 36% wasn't enough—on the lost collateral.

This is not likely a blanket condemnation of becoming surety for *anyone*, as some have interpreted it. Some people have proven themselves to be good credit risks, but they do not have a long credit history and thus need someone to vouch for them. Furthermore, Ex. 22: 25 forbids lending to the poor with interest, but it does not forbid making loans to the poor, loans which would necessarily be very risky with a high probability of nonpayment. Lending to the poor and, therefore, exposing oneself to the possibility of never being repaid, is a generous act which receives the Lord's approval (14: 21). The wisdom of this proverb consists of choosing your credit risks wisely, not

becoming surety for someone who has an unknown reputation or a poor reputation for repaying his debts. It is a warning against being gullible or naive in our financial transactions. If the son has entered into such an unwise arrangement, he should go immediately and get out of it.

Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise,⁷ Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler,⁸ Prepares her food in the summer *And* gathers her provision in the harvest.⁹ How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?¹⁰ "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest"—¹¹ Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man. (Prov. 6:6-11 NASB)

The second type of inferior man is the sluggard who refuses to work, one who prefers habitual rest to making a living. Poverty will one day overtake him like an armed thief in the night, for it is the sleeping man who is most vulnerable (most susceptible) to being overtaken by a thief. He lacks the diligence (carefulness) and the vigilance (watchfulness) to take the ordinary precautions to retain his wealth for purchasing the necessities of life. Americans may have more trouble understanding this verse since there are many government programs subsidizing the laziness of those who prefer not to work. These programs are a constant source of irritation to the working man, and through legislative means some of them were phased out when politicians discovered that welfare destroys a person's incentive (sense of necessity) to work. Why work when the taxpayer will fund your sloth? This startling discovery is not exactly rocket science, but it took our politicians many decades to figure it out, and some still haven't caught on—or maybe they ***have*** caught on to the fact that votes can be bought with OPiUM (Other People's Money). Africans do not have the luxury of welfare money, and many hard-working Africans live from day to day making just enough to feed their families; but they at least have their dignity.

The *Proverbs* which condemn the poverty of the lazy man (e.g. 6: 9-10; 10: 4) are ***never*** addressed to the poor who suffer poverty for no fault of their own. The retributive theology of Job's three friends—if applied consistently—would have to condemn ***everyone*** who was poor ***regardless*** of the reasons. According to a rigid doctrine of retributive theology, God blesses the righteous with prosperity and curses the wicked with poverty—no exceptions. *Proverbs*, however, distinguishes between the poverty of the sluggard and the poverty of the working man who may be poor because of political oppression or the oppression of other powerful people (13: 23) or from other causes like plagues or famines.⁵⁰ We could also include poverty which is due to an unfavorable economic climate caused by unwise government policies (e.g. high taxation) discouraging capital investment in businesses. The poor man who walks in his integrity is far superior to the rich man or the perverse man who makes his money dishonestly (19: 1; 28: 6). Being poor is not a sin, but being poor because you are ***lazy*** is a sin.

A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth,¹³ Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers;¹⁴ Who *with* perversity in his heart continually devises evil, Who spreads strife.¹⁵ Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing. (Prov. 6:12-15 NASB)

The ***third type of inferior man is the swindler or the con man*** (vv. 12-16). To your face he will tell you whatever lies are necessary to win your confidence, but behind your back he is signaling—winking his eyes, pointing fingers, or making signs with his feet—to his co-conspirators who are cooperating with him to con you out of your money or possessions. He is the kind of guy about

⁵⁰ Waltke, I. p. 340

whom people say, “Yea, I know him. Better watch your back while he’s around!” But as usual, *Proverbs* assures us that such a man will one day receive the just consequences of his deceptions (v. 15).

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness *who* utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19 NASB)

The description of the con man naturally leads Solomon into a catalog list of six things which the Lord hates, plus one more making seven which are an abomination to him. Among such hated things are pride, lying, murder, scheming to harm others, lack of hesitation in the participation of evil behavior, bearing false witness, and spreading strife or ill feelings among brothers. Notice that all of these involve the improper use of the body⁵¹—the proud eyes, the lying tongue, the hands which murder, the heart—a synecdoche, or a part representing the whole—which plans evil against others, the feet which run to evil without any sense of hesitation, bearing false witness with your tongue, and spreading strife and ill-feelings with a slanderous tongue. No wonder James singles out the tongue as the deadliest of all body parts (James 3). Note also that lying is mentioned *twice* in two different contexts—lying in general (v. 17), and lying as a witness (v. 19). These are not things which *annoy* the Lord; they are things which the Lord *hates*.

9. Lecture 9: The High Price of an Unchaste Wife (6: 20-35)

My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; ²¹ Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. ²² When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. ²³ For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life ²⁴ To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. ²⁵ Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids. ²⁶ For on account of a harlot *one is reduced* to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life. ²⁷ Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? ²⁸ Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched? ²⁹ So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished. ³⁰ Men do not despise a thief if he steals To satisfy himself when he is hungry; ³¹ But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house. ³² The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. ³³ Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out. ³⁴ For jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance. ³⁵ He will not accept any ransom, Nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts. (Prov. 6:20-35 NASB)

Solomon introduces another lecture with the characteristic, “My son”. The commandment of the father and the teaching of the mother (v. 20) which is a lamp and a light (v. 23) pertain specifically to the “evil woman” or the adulteress who is married to another. We have already been introduced to the adulterous woman in chapters 2 and 5, but apparently, she is dangerous enough to merit additional warnings from the father and the mother (cf. 7: 1-27 where she is again the object of severe warnings). The adulterous man is dangerous, too; but men are particularly vulnerable to the advances of a beautiful woman who flatters them.

Along with the smooth tongue, the adulteress also uses good looks (v. 25a) and seductive eyes (v. 25b) to catch her prey. It is an amazing thing just how well a person can communicate with his

⁵¹ Waltke, I. pp. 345-346

eyes alone. This is especially true of women whose eyes are far more beautiful than men's. A long seductive glance—the “Come on, I'm willing” look—can often subdue a simple man more than the repeated blows of a fist, weakening his resolve and “reducing him to a loaf of bread” (v. 26a). Solomon paints the picture of the seduced man in the worst possible light, as a “sucker” (a gullible person) who will believe anything she says, including her lies about his good looks.

But you can't play with fire and not be burned (v. 27), and you can't walk over hot coals without scorching your feet (v. 28). Thus, the consequences of seduction are as certain as the physical effects of heat. You cannot play with an adulterous woman without suffering sure consequences (v. 29). Those deadly consequences are noted in vv. 30-35, the fierce, unquenchable anger of an enraged husband who finds out you've been sleeping with his wife. A thief who steals to satisfy an empty stomach will not be despised; nevertheless, he will be treated without mercy when caught, paying sevenfold (v. 31). The actual penalty for theft was normally double up to five-fold (cf. Ex. 22: 7, 9; 22: 1; Lk. 19: 8), but *Proverbs* is emphasizing the full extent of compensation which he will now apply to the adulterer.⁵² But while the thief will not be despised for satisfying his nutritional hunger, the one who satisfies his sexual hunger with another man's wife will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law—possibly the death sentence (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22: 22).⁵³ Even though a pagan court may be inclined to disgrace the adulterer with beating and loss of property (vv. 31-33)⁵⁴, the enraged husband will not be satisfied with such half-measures, but will demand the death penalty (v. 35).

A *ransom* could be paid to someone whose loved-one had been killed by a goring ox which had the reputation for being dangerous (Ex. 21: 30, where the same word for “ransom” is used).⁵⁵ The *owner* of the ox was liable to execution in this situation (according to the *lex talionis*—“life for life”) but the person bereaved of his loved-one could demand a ransom of any price as a substitute for the owner's death (v. 31). However, in the case of the wronged husband, a ransom price for the adulterer's life will not be accepted, nor will he accept any gifts or bribes (cf. Ex. 23: 8 where the same word for “gift” is used for “bribe”; cf. Waltke, p. 361). In other words, the adulterer will not be able to use either *legal* or *illegal* means to pacify the husband's wrath. “The cuckold [husband of an adulteress] will exact his full pound of flesh through the court, for in fact he will accept no financial compensation.”⁵⁶

Solomon has every intention of striking fear into his son's heart. If he will not avoid illicit (illegal) flesh because of his love for God and His law, or even because of his fear of God, then maybe he will at least avoid it because of his *fear of death*. There is a lesson here. Evangelicals are often squeamish about using the fear of serious consequences as a deterrent (discouragement) to sin. Such motives are viewed as substandard to the NT Christian whose obedience should flow out of love. Well, our obedience *should* flow out of our love for God and His law, but often such incentives for obedience are not enough for sinful evangelicals who enjoy sinning. If we accept *Proverbs* as currently applicable to the modern Christian—and it is—we have to face up to the

⁵² Waltke, I. p. 358

⁵³ Cited in Waltke, I. p. 360

⁵⁴ Waltke, pp. 359, 361

⁵⁵ Waltke, I. pp. 359, 361

⁵⁶ Waltke, I. p. 360

unavoidable fact that the Bible often stares us in the face with the cold, hard consequences of sin. And they are often quite miserable and final. King David would testify to this fact.

Of course, the temporal penalty for adultery is no longer death, and casual adultery has become rampant in many (most?) cultures since it no longer carries serious legal consequences. But the most dreadful penalty of all will never be rescinded (done away with). God will still exact His “pound of flesh” in hell for any unrepented offense of adultery, and He will not accept any ransom or bribe. The only ransom available is the one paid by His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross; and if that ransom is rejected there is nothing else available. There are also hosts of other social, emotional, and spiritual consequences for any society given over to adulterous life-styles. Children are paying the worst price through broken homes and leader-less families which provide no examples of godly marriages or godly behavior, leaving young people without an anchor to give them moral and social stability. The family is the most effective laboratory for learning; and when it crumbles, the fabric of society begins to unravel into chaos and anarchy (lack of rule).

But what about fornication between two unmarried, consenting adults? Proverbs does not specifically mention fornication; thus, are we to conclude that fornication is an acceptable lifestyle? Both the OT and NT say otherwise.

"If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be* his wife. ¹⁷ "If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins. (Exod. 22:16-17 NASB)

Notice that this is a **virgin who is not engaged**. It is a case of fornication, not adultery or rape; for the man **seduces** the woman. Rape is punishable by death (Deut. 22: 25). The seducer is forced to pay an expensive dowry regardless of whether he marries her or not, but the father may demand marriage at his discretion. How many young men in any society would risk easy sex with a woman if he were legally forced to marry her and/or pay an expensive dowry for her? All of a sudden, easy sex would not be so easy, and the law would reduce the incidence of fornication. Adultery received a heavier penalty in the OT because it was destructive of the family unit, the basic building block of a just society.

'If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Lev. 20:10 NASB)

But what about the NT?

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither **fornicators** [*pornos*], nor idolaters, nor **adulterers** [*moichos*], nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Such **were** some of you; but you were washed, but you were **sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NASB)

Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage bed is to be* undefiled; for fornicators [*pornos*] and adulterers [*moichos*], God will judge. (Heb. 13:4 NASB)

Notice that the words for **adulterers** and **fornicators** are different, proving that they are two different sins. Adultery is worse than fornication—evidenced by the stiffer penalty in the OT—but both persistent adultery and fornication will be punished in hell short of repentance and

forgiveness. Note also that **some** of the Corinthians were guilty of these sins, but they were forgiven through repentance and faith and did not return to these sins—**Such were some of you**, not “such **are** some of you.” They were no longer pursuing these sins because they were **sanctified** (set apart) by the Holy Spirit for holy living.

'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.²³ 'Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.²⁴ 'Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled.²⁵ 'For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, **so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.**²⁶ 'But as for you, you are to **keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations**, *neither* the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you²⁷ (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled);²⁸ **so that the land will not spew you out**, should you defile it, **as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.**²⁹ 'For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do *so* shall be cut off from among their people.³⁰ 'Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do G practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God.'" (Lev. 18:22-30 NASB)

'If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. (Lev. 20:13 NASB)

Homosexuality and bestiality are sins because they are violations of the created order and likewise destructive of society. The passage indicates that there are ***national consequences*** for immorality. God will judge not only individuals for immorality, but whole nations given over to immorality. As God owned the land of promise, he also owns the whole world; and He has the prerogative to either permit or disallow the existence of any people groups or nations within ***His*** land. God kept his curse-promise to Israel to remove them from the land if they did not obey his law (Deut. 28: 15-68), but since God is the Lord of the universe, not just the church, He can judge ***any nation*** for violating his law (cf. Dan. 5, where Belshazzar, king of Babylon, lost his kingdom because his rule was weighed on the scales of God's law and found deficient; and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah).

The question naturally arises: Then why does God keep blessing the US financially which has killed 60 million unborn babies since 1973, is rife with pornography and sexual immorality, and a host of other sins? But what makes you think that God is **not already** judging America? Depression, suicide, drug abuse and overdose, and even wide-scale poverty, are common to American life. Even those with enough money are generally dissatisfied with life. The US and Japan have two of the highest suicide rates among young people aged 15-19. More American young men and women are dying in foreign conflicts than those of any other nation. So, who says that God is blessing the US? According to the “better-than” Proverbs, money isn't everything.

10. Lecture 10: The Unchaste Wife's Seductive Tactics (7: 1-27)

My son, keep my words And treasure my commandments within you.² Keep my commandments and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye.³ Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart.⁴ Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," And call understanding *your* intimate friend;⁵ That they may keep you from an adulteress, From the foreigner who flatters with her words.⁶ For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice,⁷ And I saw among the naive, *And* discerned among the youths A young man lacking sense,⁸ Passing through the street near her corner; And he takes the way to her house,⁹

In the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and *in* the darkness.¹⁰ And behold, a woman *comes* to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.¹¹ She is boisterous and rebellious, Her feet do not remain at home;¹² *She is* now in the streets, now in the squares, And lurks by every corner.¹³ So she seizes him and kisses him And with a brazen face she says to him:¹⁴ "I was due to offer peace offerings; Today I have paid my vows.¹⁵ "Therefore I have come out to meet you, To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.¹⁶ "I have spread my couch with coverings, With colored linens of Egypt.¹⁷ "I have sprinkled my bed With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.¹⁸ "Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with caresses.¹⁹ "For my husband is not at home, He has gone on a long journey;²⁰ He has taken a bag of money with him, At the full moon he will come home."²¹ With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him.²² Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool,²³ Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know that it *will cost him* his life.²⁴ Now therefore, *my sons*, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth.²⁵ Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths.²⁶ For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain.²⁷ Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death. (Prov. 7:1-27 NASB)

The story of chapter 7 is plain enough and needs little explanation. It is the story of a stupid, gullible man who is seduced by another man's wife. In addition to beauty and seductive speech, this woman is also the wife of a wealthy merchant who goes off on a journey with a bag of money (vv. 19-20).⁵⁷ She could be lying about how long he will be away—and probably is—but the luxurious setting for their one night stand reveals a woman of means—a house with furniture (a couch or bed, something not affordable to the average oriental), and the expensive accessories of colored linens imported from Egypt, myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon (vv. 16-17).⁵⁸ All else being equal, a rich adulteress is more tempting than a poor one.

While being deceptive about the safety of this sexual marathon, she is very forthright and honest about her commitment. This is just for pleasure—nothing serious—and she has no intention of leaving her wealthy husband and all the “perks” (material advantages) for a momentary fling with her “throw-away” lover. The husband is coming home eventually, after all, and when he does the affair will be over until he makes another journey. And the next time, her partner will most likely be someone else, so don't get too comfortable in bed.

The young man follows her to her home like an ox following his owner to the slaughter—not exactly the same description of the night given him by his adulteress. He is on his way to his own lynching (hanging), following in the footsteps of many others who have fallen victim to her charms (v. 26). Earnestly warning his son, the father says, “Don't do it!” (v. 25).

[Second Interlude: Wisdom's Self-Praise to the Gullible (8: 1-36)]

Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice?² On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;³ Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:⁴ "To you, O men, I call, And my voice is to the sons of men.⁵ "O naive ones, understand prudence; And, O fools, understand wisdom.⁶ "Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things.⁷ "For my mouth will utter truth; And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.⁸ "All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.⁹ "They are all straightforward to him who understands, And right to those who find knowledge.¹⁰ "Take my instruction and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold.¹¹ "For wisdom is better than jewels;

⁵⁷ Waltke, I. p. 379

⁵⁸ Waltke, I. p. 379

And all desirable things cannot compare with her. ¹² "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge *and* discretion. ¹³ "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate. ¹⁴ "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. ¹⁵ "By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. ¹⁶ "By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly. ¹⁷ "I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me. ¹⁸ "Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness. ¹⁹ "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield *better* than choicest silver. ²⁰ "I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, ²¹ To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries. ²² "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. ²³ "From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. ²⁴ "When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ "Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; ²⁶ While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. ²⁷ "When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, ²⁹ When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; ³⁰ Then I was beside Him, *as* a master workman; And I was daily *His* delight, Rejoicing always before Him, ³¹ Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And *having* my delight in the sons of men. ³² "Now therefore, *O* sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways. ³³ "Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect *it*. ³⁴ "Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. ³⁵ "For he who finds me finds life And obtains favor from the LORD. ³⁶ "But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death." (Prov. 8:1-36 NASB)

The seducing adulteress meets the naive young man on a secluded street in the middle of the night (7: 8-9), but **Lady Wisdom** calls out in the most strategic and important places during the daytime—the city heights, the busiest intersections, and at the city gates where she is sure to be heard (vv. 2-3). Unlike the adulterous woman, she has nothing to hide. Clearly, the adulteress' seduction is set in apposition (side by side) with Lady Wisdom's appeal; and while the adulteress seduces with lies and deception, Lady Wisdom speaks "noble things" (v. 6a). When she opens her mouth, "right things" come out (v. 6b); truth prevails (v. 7a); and wickedness finds no expression (v. 7b). No deception here, but only straightforward truth (v. 9). The value of wisdom is repeated in vv. 10-11, far above jewels, silver and gold—far more valuable than the sexual pleasures of a one-night stand. Thus, Lady Wisdom is competing with the adulteress for the love of men; and to gain their love, she is praising her own virtues and rewards.⁵⁹

The **fear of the Lord** is defined in v. 13—to **hate evil** with all of its manifestations: pride arrogance, the evil way, the perverted mouth, all of which characterize the adulteress of chapter 7. Anyone who fears God must also hate evil, and anyone indifferent to evil is a stranger to grace and devoid of wisdom. This definition of fearing the Lord assumes that such a thing as **evil** has an objective meaning; but without the word of God, we have no means of distinguishing evil from good. It's only a matter of opinion. Unbelievers often challenge the Christian faith by saying that if God existed, He would not allow so much evil in the world, yet the unbeliever has no basis for defining good and evil.⁶⁰

There can be no neutrality when it comes to wisdom. There are many who hold to some form of moral code who are indifferent to the moral defects of others who hold to a different moral code. "Live and let live" is their motto. "Live your own life, and I'll live mine without bothering each other. We should not force our morality on others who think differently. After all, there are no

⁵⁹ Waltke, I. p. 392

⁶⁰ See my "Christian World View" course
christcommunitystudycenter.org

moral absolutes to which everyone must be conformed.” Wisdom thinks otherwise. Justice and righteousness can only prevail by *absolute wisdom*, not by the *absolute rule* of the autocrat (dictator) (vv. 15-16). The same wisdom by which princes and nobles have “judged rightly” (v. 16) is offered to the common man on the street to the end that he may discipline *himself* and rule his own *passions*, quite the contrary of the naive fool who has yielded himself to the adulteress and his own selfish lusts.⁶¹ Thus, the wisdom which rules whole nations is offered to all. The only alternative is the folly of autonomous self which leads only to ruin.

Autonomy (self-rule) which leads to anarchy has a short history in comparison to Lady Wisdom. Men were created *at* the beginning of the world, but wisdom existed *before* the creation (vv. 22-31). Wisdom is presented here as an *attribute* of God through which He created the world, not as *God* Himself. It is also not equated with Jesus Christ, but is a type of Christ in which the Christ, the antitype, is superior to the type. The Lord “possessed” wisdom before the creation, “before His works of old” (v. 22), but *Proverbs* does not say that the Lord *was* wisdom. John’s Gospel equates Christ with the *logos* who was *with* God before the world was made and who *was* God; but in *Proverbs* wisdom is “brought forth” or “born” (v. 24). The Arians of the fourth century used this passage as a primary text to support the heresy that Christ was not eternally begotten of the Father but came into existence at His birth. But the *logos* of John 1 is not brought forth by God but *is* God. Furthermore, while Wisdom is witness to the creation (v. 27), the *logos* is the Creator (Jn. 1: 3).⁶²

As the naive young adulterer **takes the way** to the adulteress’ house (7: 8-10), the wise man is **watching daily at [wisdom’s] gates, waiting at [her] doorposts** (8: 34b). When found, Wisdom awards the man with **life** (v. 35) while the adulteress awards the fool with **death** (v. 35; cf. 7: 27). Hating Wisdom is synonymous (the same as) with loving death (v. 36b). We should note that while Wisdom is calling out in the gates, it is our responsibility to **listen** (v. 32). Furthermore, the twin tasks of **watching** for her and **finding** the way to her door is left to the individual (v. 34). She woos us to her door step, but she will not force us to enter her house.

Suppose some reliable friend informed you of a rich benefactor who was waiting at the bus station in Kampala to give you a gift of 10 million shillings. And suppose you looked for him for four hours without finding him. Would you wait any longer, or would you give up? My suspicion is that if you believed the report to be truthful, you would wait as long as it took to find this benefactor. Wisdom’s reward is far greater, but our zeal in finding her is often lacking.

C. Epilogue: Rival Banquets of Wisdom and Folly (9: 1-18)

Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars;² She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table;³ She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city:⁴ "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says,⁵ "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed."⁶ Forsake *your* folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding."⁷ He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man *gets* insults for himself.⁸ Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.⁹ Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning.¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy

⁶¹ Waltke, I. p. 402

⁶² For a thorough discussion of this subject, see Waltke, I. pp. 127-133, from whom this comparison is taken.

One is understanding.¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you.¹² If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And if you scoff, you alone will bear it.¹³ The woman of folly is boisterous, *She is naive and knows nothing.*¹⁴ She sits at the doorway of her house, On a seat by the high places of the city,¹⁵ Calling to those who pass by, Who are making their paths straight:¹⁶ "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here," And to him who lacks understanding she says,¹⁷ "Stolen water is sweet; And bread eaten in secret is pleasant."¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead are there, *That* her guests are in the depths of Sheol. (Prov. 9:1-18 NASB)

Wisdom's invitation continues in chapter 9 in which she builds her house and prepares a banquet for all who will attend. This banquet is paralleled by the competing banquet of "Woman Folly" (v. 13; we dare not call her "Lady Folly") who also is sitting at the doorway of her house calling for men to "turn in here". Her message is: "Stolen water is sweet; and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (v. 17), the same essential message of the adulterous woman in chapter 7.

The language of v. 10 gives us a clear indication that Solomon has reached the *epilogue* in the *First Collection* of *Proverbs*. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" parallels "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (1: 7a). Furthermore, the warnings about correcting a scoffer and reproving a wicked man in vv. 7-8 parallels the pessimism of 1: 7b—"Fools despise wisdom and instruction." Continuing this comparison, the optimism about reproving and teaching a wise man who will increase in wisdom (vv. 8b-9) directly parallels the optimism of 1: 5, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel." Thus, there is purposeful repetition in this section to conclude this first collection.

II. Collection II: Solomon I (10: 1—22: 16)

As stated in the introduction, *Collection I* (1: 1—9: 18) sets the context for the entirety of the book and is made up of *poems in praise of wisdom* which serve to *motivate* the reader to receive the wisdom offered in all seven collections. By way of contrast, *Collection II* (10: 1—22: 16) consists of *aphorisms* (short, one-verse statements of truth) which are divided into two parts called *versets*—two halves of a single verse.⁶³ The versets form two parts of a parallelism in which two things are either compared with one another or contrasted to one another, making a *synonymous* or *comparative* parallel or an *antithetic* parallel. In the *synthetic* parallel the thought of verset A is expanded in verset B, not simply repeated. In an antithetic parallel, the thought of verset B is the opposite of verset A; nevertheless, it helps explain Verset A and vice versa.⁶⁴ Most the parallelism of *Collection I* has been synthetic or comparative. We will encounter many antithetic parallelisms in *Collection II*.

The introductory words of 10:1 alert the reader to this new collection: "*The proverbs of Solomon.*" The characteristic second-person address of the previous collection—"My son"—will not be seen again until 19: 27 and will reappear again only in 23: 15 in Collection III. Thus, the address, "My son" is used only once in Collection II. Collection III is marked off from Collection II by the language of 22: 17-21.

Beyond the structural outline given above in which the *Proverbs* are gathered into distinct *collections* with discernible headings, I am not convinced that there is a discernible structure within

⁶³ Waltke, I. pp. 10, 14

⁶⁴ Waltke, I. p. 44

each collection. Most certainly Collection I has a discernible structure with its longer poems and its division into distinguishable topics with extended treatment like the personified speeches of wisdom, warnings against the adulteress, the long invitations to seek wisdom, warnings against following the gang, etc. On the other hand, based on the diverse parallels of Collection II in which a different topic follows another in rapid succession with little or no evidence of context for many verses, I do not feel obliged to follow interpretive outlines of the material which lack compelling authority. I am willing to admit that knowledge of the Hebrew language enables scholars like Waltke to discern connections and structure within the *Proverbs* that the English reader cannot see.

By knowing the poetics biblical narrators and poets of all sorts, including sages, used to give their compositions coherence and unity, the interpreter can discern *unstated and often implicit, not explicit, connections between the verses*....new insights into the poetics of biblical authors have opened new windows enabling the interpreter to see hitherto *invisible connections* between the proverbs or sayings.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Waltke admits that the *Proverbs* are mostly independent sayings.

In contrast to a poem, the proverbs of Solomon and the sayings of the wise are mostly collections of primarily independent sayings, expressing by themselves a complete thought and secondarily to be interpreted in connection with other sayings. These groupings lack the normal syntactic links [relationship of words and sentences to one another to form ideas] of a poem, and the connections between the verses is less obvious....

The poetics of most units are not as transparent as this textbook example [26: 1-12, “The Mirror of Fools”], but there are sufficient instances of poetic transparency in many units to prejudice viewing the editors of Proverbs as authors, not merely collectors. In other words, it is more probable than improbable that the ancient Hebrew editor logically arranged all proverbs to protect and enrich them, though that logic is not transparent to the modern reader.⁶⁶

Many questions arise. How did Solomon write this section of *Proverbs*? Did he sit down for extended periods of time to compose several proverbs together, or did he keep his writing tablet close at hand to capture whatever singular, individual thoughts came to him at the existential moment (the experience of the moment) without attempting to arrange them in any logical order? (Jonathan Edwards cultivated such a habit but ordered his thoughts later.) It is clear that Solomon was a keen observer of human nature who also had the luxury of long hours of contemplation—and not at the end of a hard day’s labor from 8 to 6 o’clock. It is quite likely that he made many mental notes of observable events and situations which came to him on the spur of the moment, writing them down as soon as he could. While Waltke believes that it is “more probable” (he does not say “certain”) that the final editor arranged these proverbs logically, the diversity of topics from one verse to another prejudices my opinion in the opposite direction.

Also, could it be that the various topics (e.g. poverty and wealth; the power of the tongue, etc.) are scattered throughout the book in order to avoid a stifling monotony (sameness) which would discourage careful and enjoyable reading? As it is, many of the same ideas about wealth and poverty, humility, lying, etc, reoccur in many places, and the repetition of those same ideas

⁶⁵ Waltke, I. pp. 45-47

⁶⁶ Waltke, I. pp. 46-47, 50; words in brackets mine

enhance the learning process. Repetition is the best teacher as long as it can be done in an interesting way. This begs the question of whether the reader should feel obligated to read the *Proverbs* in Collections II, III, IV, and V in the order in which they come down to us in the Bible. Would we mess things up if we examined these proverbs topically? Even if Solomon and the other editors did not have a logical arrangement in mind, perhaps the Holy Spirit did. However, the Holy Spirit did not inspire the Bible mechanically but through the human medium, and when there is no evidence for the human author's logical arrangement of ideas other than a scholar's outline, there is no compelling reason to presuppose (assume) it. At any rate, I cannot teach others from an outline which I cannot discern for myself.

For the reasons given above, we are departing from Waltke's outline of this section and looking at it from a different vantage point—that of a topical arrangement. It is hoped that such a treatment will help the student look at the whole forested landscape of *Proverbs* without getting lost in the trees—or even the branches. Then, as we attempt to understand the individual proverbs in comparison with other similar proverbs, the book can be read and studied in the order it comes to us, but with enhanced understanding. It should go without saying that the categories provided are *by no means exhaustive*, and the topical arrangement at times may be strained. Sometimes the proverbs are grouped together indicating a connection between them, and I have made use of Waltke's logical arrangement in a number of places. Many of the proverbs, perhaps most, will not fit into tight categories but speak to several issues. The arrangement below recognizes this difficulty and places some of the proverbs in more than one category. However, if the arrangement is too general, the whole process is negated. The student is encouraged to argue with my arrangement and formulate new categories which will aid his understanding of the *Proverbs*. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, will come from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition.

A. *Anger and Self-Control*

14:16 A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless.

14: 17 A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.

14: 29 He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

14: 30 A tranquil heart is life to the body, But passion is rotteness to the bones.

Note the parallel between vv. 16 and 29. **Arrogant and careless** are synonymous with **quick-tempered** and **folly**. Considered together, we see that a quick-tempered man is also an arrogant man and that a careless man is also foolish. Since the Bible is always ahead of its time in every field of knowledge, we also see the relationship between uncontrolled anger and physical and psychological health. A person who is chronically angry will shorten his life (v. 30)—perhaps with high blood pressure or heart disease.

Quick-tempered people often act impulsively and wickedly. Rather than allowing themselves time to “cool off”, they are governed by emotion rather than wisdom. Rather than being **cautious**, they are **careless** (v. 16). Consequently, they often do the wrong thing, thus **stirring up strife** (v. 18) among others through sharp language or careless behavior. They also shorten their own lives with the wrong kind of **passion** which increases blood pressure, leading to a variety of medical disorders (v. 30, **rotteness to the bones**), or even violent actions which land them in prison or in the morgue.

But why does one demonstrate **great understanding** by being **slow to anger** (v. 29a)? He is wise enough to wait upon the Lord to give him the understanding he needs to discern the proper response. Wisdom is the ability to apply information; it's not the same as intelligence. Knowing that God is sovereign is not enough. One must obey this doctrine. To use a personal example, my temperature rises when I get stuck in a traffic jam in Kampala, Uganda. These interruptions in my busy schedule are generally caused by traffic policemen who don't seem to use any common sense in their procedure. Rather than methodically allowing one lane of cars to move for a minute and then another, they wait five to ten minutes for one lane to move while stacking up a busier lane for half a mile. (This statement demonstrates my **arrogance** in believing that I could do better, rather than my **understanding** of the situation.) I know intellectually that God is in control of this traffic jam; yet, I commonly fail to ask the question: What is God trying to teach me here? One answer, of course, is patience. But I didn't want a lesson in patience that day, nor any day. I wanted to get out of Kampala as soon as possible and get on with my *real* work. God's *real* work, however, is making me into a better person—one with patience. But I often don't **understand** this. A person with great understanding—but not me, it appears—knows that God doesn't waste any time. So, don't “waste” your traffic jam (cf. John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*). There is a hidden purpose in traffic jams. There is also a hidden purpose in injustice against us and the people we love. There is a reason why we get overlooked for job promotions when we believe we are working harder and are more capable than the person being promoted. We assume it's just bureaucracy, and some of it is; but God had a plan, and this plan is perfect. The Biblical answer to unjustified anger is joy and thanksgiving.

Rejoice always;¹⁷ pray without ceasing;¹⁸ **in everything give thanks**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NASB)

Why should we rejoice? Because whatever happens is God's will for us in Christ. In Christ we are safe and secure in the love of God and nothing can separate us from this love (Rom. 8: 38-39). Therefore, we rejoice in seemingly pointless, purposeless interruptions in our busy schedules and in inevitable injustices. Only a sovereign God is capable of using these things to conform us to the image of His son, but this is precisely what He does (Rom. 8: 29-30).

15: 1 A gentle answer	A	
turns away wrath,		B
But a harsh word	A	
stirs up anger.		B
15: 18 A hot-tempered man	A	
stirs up strife,		B
But the slow to anger	A	
calms a dispute.		B

(Note the ABAB parallelism in both of these verses. The A's are synonymous to one another as are the B's.)

It's very difficult for someone to maintain a heated argument when the other person refuses to respond in like kind. Store clerks, managers, bank tellers, and anyone whose job involves working with the public are often trained to defuse irate (angry and dissatisfied) customers who cause trouble. Rather than screaming back at the customer, well-trained employees speak to him with soft, controlled words which help him to calm down and see things more clearly. They do this as professionals who must keep their jobs. Nevertheless, it works; and it works because it is biblical.

Quiet, controlled responses bring order and intelligence to an otherwise volatile, irrational situation. A **harsh word**, on the other hand, stirs up *more* **anger** from the person who is already angry. (Notice the word **wrath** in 15: 1. The gentle response is directed to someone who is already showing signs of anger.)

The wise have tongues controlled by loving emotions and sound thought and so speak in a way that makes their internalized knowledge of the moral order attractive. Instead of brutalizing people with their knowledge of the cause-effect relationship in God's ordained moral order, the wise state it kindly, sensitively, and gently with an aim to save their audience, not to condemn and destroy it. Their content and their form of speech make them convincing (see 25: 1). By contrast, the mouth of fools who are out of control, excitedly and heatedly *gushes forth...naked folly...an abstraction for their morally insolent speech that destroys a person and /or the community.*⁶⁷

While the proper response **calms a dispute** (15: 18) and creates an atmosphere encouraging further dialogue, the **harsh word** cuts off the conversation, interrupting the listening process and causing the other person to search for some means of defending himself against aggressive attack.⁶⁸

This proverb fits in with the general teaching in Proverbs that cool-headedness is superior to hotheadedness. This proverb also illustrates the book's concern for social cohesion. The proper response is one that maintains and promotes relationships.⁶⁹

16: 32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Joab, David's general, was a man who could **capture a city**. He was a superb army commanding chief and proved himself to David many times—possibly the reason David could not see fit to have him executed after Joab's uncontrolled vengeance led him to murder Abner (2 Sam. 3: 27). Joab could conquer a city, but he could not rule his own spirit. In this proverb the battle inside a person's soul is compared to the battle outside the person. Compared to the internal battles, the one outside is little in comparison.⁷⁰

The biblical historian who wrote 2 Samuel illustrates the principle of Prov. 16: 32 vividly. Like Joab, David was also a man who allowed his passions to rule his spirit rather than the other way around. When we examine the structure of 2 Sam. 10—12, we find that this section begins and ends with Israel fighting Ammon. The details of David's adultery and murder are found between the two accounts of the war. Ralph Davis depicts the structure in the following way:⁷¹

David sends Joab against Ammon, 11: 1
 Sexual relations with Bathsheba—pregnant, 11: 2-5
 Manipulating Uriah, 11: 6-13
 David's successful scheme, 11: 14-27
 The story that reveals, 12: 1-7a
 Yahweh's severe word, 12: 7b-15a
 Submitting to God, 12: 15b-23
 Marital relations with Bathsheba—birth, 12: 24-25

⁶⁷ Waltke, I. p. 614

⁶⁸ Tremper Longman, p. 312

⁶⁹ Tremper Longman, p. 312

⁷⁰ Waltke, II. p. 37

⁷¹ *2 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, p. 123

Joab summons David against Ammon, 12: 26-31

Commenting on the text, Davis says,

Yet coming back to the Ammonites after reading all of 11: 2—12: 25 does strike the reader as anti-climactic. Perhaps that is intended. After the writer has walked you through the sin and shame and severity of the whole story, perhaps he wants you to think that the Ammonites really don't matter that much. Comparatively. Of far more weight is the obedience and holiness of Yahweh's anointed. The conflict with Ammon was won, but the *real battle* was lost. It reminds one of Robert Murray McCheyne's reflection on his role as pastor: "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness"⁷²

According to James—the most difficult thing to tame is the tongue (James 3). "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19 NASB). If we are determined to make our point and win a battle with words, we are likely to win the battle but lose the war. Generals who win battles and capture cities are admired by everyone, even their enemies; but the priority of Proverbs is personal self-control. This doesn't mean that capturing cities was not important. God gave victory to King David over many cities of the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites and Arameans, and His pleasure with these victories is registered by the narrator's repetitive statement, "And the Lord helped David wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8: 6, 14). However, when we examine the text from 2 Samuel 10 through 2 Samuel 12, much more press (reporting) is given to David's adultery, murder, and cover-up than his military victories over Ammon and Syria (the Arameans). He captured cities but failed to rule his spirit. Proverbs 16: 32 is primarily concerned with ruling one's temper, but we are justified in applying the Proverb to other forms of self-control.

I grew up in the deep South in the 50's and 60's. The measure of a man, according to many, was the number of fights he won and the number of women he slept with. We usually get things backward if we pay no attention to the Bible. There were other men in my home town who were incapable of defeating the bullies roaming the school yards, but they were men of character and self-control—the measure of a true man. They are now the ones who are happily married.

17: 27 He who restrains his words	A	
has knowledge,		B
And he who has a cool spirit	A	
is a man of understanding.		B

The structure has been included to remind the reader that virtually all the proverbs of Collection II are aphorisms (short, concise statements) written in either synthetic (synonymous) or antithetic parallelism.⁷³ A person with **knowledge** and **understanding** is one who thinks about what he is going to say before speaking.⁷⁴ He controls his passions with a **cool spirit**. The fool is one who speaks before he thinks. The ability to restrain one's speech is coordinate with the ability to restrain one's temper. They generally go together.

19: 11 A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

⁷² Davis, p. 132; emphasis mine

⁷³ Cf. McNeill, *Biblical Interpretation—Old Testament Poetry*. Also review the characteristics of Collection II.

⁷⁴ Longman, p. 351

This is not a blanket recommendation to sweep every offense under the rug and forget it. Repeated offenses must be addressed for the sake of the offending brother to prevent a downward spiral of sin. The sheep who wanders astray must be protected from his own folly, for Christ has the utmost concern for His “little ones” (Matt. 18).⁷⁵ Conflicts are rarely resolved just by ignoring them.

However, love covers a multitude of sins (Prov. 10: 12; 1 Pet. 4: 8). Often it is best just to overlook the offense and move on as long as this offense is not a harmful pattern. Will my response be for my brother’s good, or am I just making sure I win an argument or obtain satisfaction for the offense? But why does **discretion** make a person slow to anger? **Discretion** (or “wisdom”, NIV; “good sense”, ESV) involves not only the ability of discerning the good or evil actions of another person, but of oneself. When we take a long look at ourselves, we should recognize that many of our thoughts and acts are evil, and this reality should give us pause from speaking or acting too hastily against the infractions of others. As God has been patient with us and has forgiven us so much, we must be willing to forgive others by overlooking minor flaws, the point of Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18: 21-35).

19: 19 *A man of great anger will bear the penalty, For if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.*

A hothead is usually a repetitive offender whose mouth is always getting him into trouble. Therefore, bailing him out of trouble is usually a waste of time; you will only have to do it again. Therefore, he will **bear the penalty** no matter how many times you rescue him.

Whereas the son is corrected by parental discipline, the hothead must be corrected by allowing the consequences of his own foibles [mistakes] to punish him. The wise father does not interfere in the operation of the cause-consequence of the divinely established penal and remedial moral order. Ironically, the person who ‘rescues’ the hothead becomes caught in the unhealthy dynamics of his way.⁷⁶

Those of you who have attempted to help hotheads can identify with Waltke’s description of the situation. People like this will consume more time and energy than we can imagine with very little positive results to show for all our effort. It’s better to let the hothead sit it out in jail, for such people will only learn life’s lessons the hard way—if at all.

As with all the Proverbs, we must avoid absolutizing the principle without considering the situation. Scripture must be compared with Scripture. Would it be possible that the hothead would one day come to repentance because of the patience of others? God has saved many hotheads. The proverb encourages restraint in formulating easy solutions of false grace (which turn out to actually harm people) without considering the necessity of God’s severe providence upon the evil-doer. For discipline to work, it must be painful, and we dare not soften God’s rod prematurely. In the parable of the prodigal son (better called the parable of the elder brother), Jesus recognized that even a loving father cannot always correct his children. Better to turn them over to God who will often allow them to be disciplined by the world.

17: 10 A rebuke goes deeper
 into one who has understanding
 Than a hundred blows

⁷⁵ Cf. Matt. 18: 15-20 and McNeill, “Synoptic Gospels”, on that text.

⁷⁶ Waltke, II. p. 113, explanation in brackets mine

into a fool.

The man with **understanding** has a sensitive conscience trained by the word of God (Heb. 5: 14). Therefore, when someone he trusts offers a rebuke, he takes it to heart and seeks to correct his error. In contrast is the fool who has no understanding and who refuses to admit his guilt even in the face of severe punishment.

“A word was enough for David (2 Sam. 12: 1-7...). A look entered more in Peter’s heart (Luke 22: 61, 62) than a hundred stripes into Pharaoh (Ex. 9: 34, 35), Ahaz (2 Chron. 28; 22)”⁷⁷

20: 3 Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.

Rather than seeking peace and community, the fool will seek personal honor first and foremost. To the fool, being right is the main thing and any sign of backing down will be interpreted as weakness.

Paradoxically, the way to honor is to abstain from defending one’s honor. Contrast Gideon’s humility, when he was contended against, which healed society (Judg. 8: 1-3) with his revenge when he was the contender (Judges 8: 7-21), showing how complex in fact an individual can be. The wise are more concerned to bring peace than to be right, but the fool cannot restrain himself and at the first opportunity explodes and shows his teeth. This demeanor to forgo defending one’s pride when insulted demands that one be humble and submissive (cf. 10: 12; 12: 16; 14: 29; 15: 18; 17: 27, 28; 19: 11; 29: 11; cf. Jas. 3: 13-18).⁷⁸

Jesus insisted that we should be willing to turn the other cheek rather than seek personal honor (Matt. 5). This should not be interpreted as a blanket refusal to defend ourselves against physical or moral attack, but the willingness to be insulted if patience would serve a better end. The man who must always win the argument is insecure; otherwise, he would not be overly concerned about his reputation for winning.

20: 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.

24: 29 Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."

Part of controlling one’s anger is forgiveness and the wisdom to lay the transgressions of others at the feet of God to do with them what He wishes. Paul refers to this proverb in Romans, also quoting Deut. 32: 5 and Prov. 25: 21-22.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:18-21 NASB)

Waiting for the Lord is equivalent to Paul’s **leave room for the wrath of God**. Moreover, **He will save you** is paired with **“I will repay evil”** in Prov. 20: 22 and is equivalent to Paul’s **Vengeance is mine, I will repay**.

⁷⁷ Waltke, p. 52, citing Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 261-262.

⁷⁸ Waltke, II. p. 129

Believers do not have to repay evil because God is a God of justice. Either in this life or the life to come, all evil will be repaid. If the one doing evil is a believer, he will be accountable for his deed in some way (2 Cor. 5: 10), but his evil will also be paid in full by the blood of Christ. If the evildoer is never forgiven, his evil deed will be repaid by his punishment under God's wrath and judgment. Either way, repayment is God's business, not ours. Evil cannot be overcome with evil, but only with good; otherwise, men would be left to destroy themselves through reciprocal vengeance, like feuding families or tribes who repay one another's murder with an additional murder. How much blood has been shed in Africa by tribes unwilling to seek legal justice but rather, taking matters into their own hands?

B. The Better...Than Proverbs

12: 9 Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant Than he who honors himself and lacks bread.

The formula for many *better-than* proverbs is the following:

A (negative situation—e.g. “lightly esteemed”) + **B** (positive—e.g. “has a servant”) than **C** (positive—“he who honors himself”) + **D** (negative—“lacks bread”) or (- + + -).⁷⁹

The NIV reads, “Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.” The person who can afford a servant may not care about being esteemed by others or having social status which comes from flaunting his wealth. He is also wise in that he does not live above his means.⁸⁰ On the other hand is the one who shows off before his friends and relatives by living at a level far above his means—what we call in the US, “keeping up with the Joneses”, or keeping up with the next-door neighbor. Human nature being what it is, Africa probably has a similar expression. If your neighbor has one cow, you want two cows.

In their book, *The Millionaire Next Door—the Surprising Secrets of America's Wealthy*, Stanley and Danko demonstrate that *most* millionaires in the US would never be identified as millionaires by examining their life-styles, which are surprisingly simple compared with those who are lavish consumers but who have very little net worth. Instead of consuming their money with needless luxuries, most millionaires are careful investors who spend their money on appreciating items (real estate, equities, businesses, etc.) rather than depreciating consumer items like cars, clothing, and extravagant vacations.

I remember reading a story about a journalist who sought a home interview with Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart who became a multi-billionaire and whose family currently owns more wealth collectively than Bill Gates. As the journalist passed through each neighborhood looking for Walton's address (no GPS in those days), he was sure that he would find Walton's home in the up-scale neighborhoods. He was surprised to find it in a very non-descript neighborhood exuding ordinariness rather than wealth. Expecting to find Walton's butler answer the door, he found his wife. Expecting to see a Rolls Royce automobile (costing \$250,000) in the garage, he found only an old bent-up Ford truck in the driveway. I have seen this truck myself in the Walmart museum in Arkansas. It's very rough and rusty. When questioned why a billionaire still drove an old truck,

⁷⁹ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 525

⁸⁰ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 125

Walton responded, “What am I supposed to use to carry my hunting dog, a Mercedes Benz?” Well, he could have; and when the seat got torn, he could have bought another one the next day with cash. The appearance and frivolous use of wealth apparently meant nothing to Sam Walton.

This proverb seems to be an implicit affirmation of *frugality and delayed gratification*. By resisting the urge to flatter oneself with excessive goods and services, the wise man has expendable income to help the less advantaged and to pass on to his heirs.

One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed. (Proverbs 19:17 NASB)

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous. (Proverbs 13:22 NASB)

The first proverb, 19: 17, is hyperbole (exaggeration for effect). How could anyone **lend** to the Lord who already owns everything? Yet, God never forgets any good deed, and the generous man will find that he has never done anything good for which God has not repaid him many-fold. Jesus instructs us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth (Matt. 6: 20). One way to do this is to give intelligently to the poor. Giving must be done intelligently lest we do the poor more harm than good.

The second proverb, 13: 22, acknowledges the virtue of saving for one’s children. In the ancient Israelite context, this virtue was particularly connected with land inheritance (see Judges). However, its virtue continues today. Rather than consuming one’s wealth, he should pass it on to his heirs. This, of course, assumes that one’s heirs are wise rather than foolish (Eccles. 2: 18-19). 15: 16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

It is **better**, partly, because the one who fears the Lord is granted the gift of contentment. He enjoys what little he has more than the wicked whose life is often filled with strife and hatred. This is one of many proverbs acknowledging that often in this life the wicked are more affluent and prosperous than the righteous (cf. Ps. 37: 16; Ps. 73). Therefore, the authors of the Psalms and Proverbs cannot be accused of the rigid doctrine of retribution formulated by Job’s three friends, a doctrine which demands that God *always* bless the righteous and punish the wicked *in this present life*.⁸¹ This is true as a general rule, but with enough exceptions to confuse Job’s friends and provoke them to accuse a righteous man.

15: 17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred.

This is true for the reason offered above: the gift of enjoyment and contentment is given to the righteous, but withheld from the wicked.

Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and **rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God**. (Ecclesiastes 5:19 NASB)

⁸¹ For a further explanation of retributive theology, see McNeill, “Job”. Also see John E. Hartley, *Job*, from which I have drawn many of my conclusions.

If a man fathers a hundred *children* and lives many years, however many they be, **but his soul is not satisfied with good things** and he does not even have a *proper* burial, *then* I say, "Better the miscarriage than he, (Eccl. 6:3 NASB)

The implication of Ecclesiastes 5: 19 is that *if* someone enjoys his wealth, the reason is that he has also received the gift of enjoying it. But this gift is not bestowed on everyone, and Qohelet makes this very clear in the first few chapters. He had every material thing he could possibly want, but life was still meaningless. If this gift of enjoyment were automatic, there would be no strife and hatred attending the extravagant feasts of the wealthy; and money would always make a person happy for the long run. But everyone knows that money alone does not bring contentment—at least, not for long (Ps. 37: 20).

Ironically, a dish of vegetables is also nutritionally superior to the red meat of the fattened ox. As always, the Bible is ahead of its time scientifically. Although the poor are often malnourished, it is often *what* they eat rather than *how much* they eat. Some cultures become fixed into traditional diets with very little nutritional value. In Uganda, for instance, steamed bananas called matoke is a major staple food. It fills the stomach with carbohydrates, but doesn't do much else. When Fran and I encouraged people to eat more green vegetables like dodo, they replied, "Dodo is poor man's food." Social respect was more important than health.

16: 8 Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.

Sometimes, not always, great income is made by walking over people and cheating them out of their money, ideas, jobs, or material possessions. But income of such kind will provide no long-term profit and will not deliver a person on the day of judgment (10: 2)—as the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12: 16-21) and Lazarus (Lk. 16) prove. Throughout *Proverbs*, wisdom and righteousness are valued more than silver and gold (cf. 16: 16). Wisdom prolongs life (Prov. 10: 27). The word "life" is used over 40 times in Proverbs, and it mostly refers to a quality of life extending beyond the grave.

16: 16 **H**ow much **better** it is

to get **wisdom**

than gold!

And to get **understanding** is to be chosen

above silver.

16: 17 The **highway** of the upright

is to depart from evil;

He who watches his **way**

preserves his life.

16: 18 **Pride** goes

before destruction,

And a **haughty spirit**

before stumbling.

16: 19 **I**t is **better**

to be humble in spirit

with the lowly

Than **to divide the spoil**

with the proud.

The better...than proverb of v. 16 forms an *inclusio* with the better...than proverb of v. 19. An *inclusio* is a repetition of a phrase at the end of a section which is synonymous with a phrase at the beginning of a section. This ties the texts together. Verse 16 is also a further elaboration of 16: 8 above. Verses 17 and 18 provide the explanation of why wisdom, understanding, and humility are better than dividing the spoil with the proud. **Understanding** the way of God—and staying on this **highway**—helps the receiver **depart from evil** and **preserve his life**. This carries forward the theme of the two ways often portrayed in the wisdom literature of the OT (cf. Ps. 1: 6). **Pride**, on the other hand, precedes **destruction** and haughtiness precedes **stumbling**. The **spoil** could possibly refer to the gain from a military victory. Pride comes from the mistaken belief that the victory comes through man's efforts alone.⁸² On the other hand, the context and structure seems to dictate that **spoil** has a negative connotation. In the father's first speech to his son, he warns him of thieves who plunder innocent travelers and divide their stolen goods among themselves.

My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause;¹² Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit;¹³ We will find all *kinds* of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with **spoil**;" (Proverbs 1:10-13 NASB)

Handling the text more philosophically, silver and gold will not help a man understand the meaning and purpose of life. For many people—rich, poor, and in-between—life amounts to nothing more than the acquisition of more material wealth—the folly of the rich fool (Luke 12: 13-20) and the meaninglessness of Qohelet (Eccles. 2: 1-11). The father has already admonished his son to seek wisdom as if it were silver and gold, implying that the son should abandon any search for riches in order to devote his efforts to the search for wisdom.

My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you,² Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;³ For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding;⁴ If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures;⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5 NASB)

The assumption here is that precious metals and stones have intrinsic (inherent) value which no one questions. After thousands of years of human history and after hundreds of years in which monetary units (the US dollar, the British pound, etc.) have come and gone, gold and silver still have enduring value. People hedge (protect) their fortunes in stocks and bonds by purchasing gold and silver. In case the economy crashes and normal monetary units fail, gold will retain its buying power. In this passage, it is the enduring and intrinsic value of gold and silver that is compared with the *more* enduring, intrinsic value of wisdom and knowledge. The latter two are incomparably more valuable than the former because of the quality of durability. The wisdom and knowledge of God will have value long after silver and gold have no value at all. Wisdom and understanding will outlast death, but gold and silver will have no value after death. Yet, while everyone acknowledges the intrinsic value of gold and silver, very few acknowledge the intrinsic value of wisdom; and for this reason, very few seek it in comparison with affluence.

Jesus calls into question the duration of gold and silver with a startling metaphor, and James the apostle extends this metaphor as a warning to rich land-holders who were withholding wages from their laborers.

⁸² Longman, p. 334

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21 NASB)

Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!⁴ Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (James 5:3-4 NASB)

The metaphor is startling since gold and silver are inert, that is, inactive to physical and chemical forces causing rust and decay. Gold and silver may be stolen by thieves, but they do not rust or rot. Yet, Jesus and James tell us not to put our trust in them or to be preoccupied with them because they are perishable. They have not missed the scientific fact that gold and silver are not affected by the forces of nature. Their point is that every treasure in this world is perishable because it is *affected by the force of time*. Time as we know it will come to an end, and the time will come when gold and silver have no more value than the leaves of a tree or the grass of the field.

Even today, various circumstances render material wealth useless. To a man dying of thirst in the desert, all the gold in the world would not be as valuable to him as one life-saving cup of water. Rich men dying of cancer may be willing to trade all their worldly wealth for good health. Dead men cannot benefit from gold or real estate. Therefore, worldly wealth of any kind has value to particular individuals only within a narrow window of time, the length of their biological life or the lives of loved ones. Beyond that, they are worthless. When Jesus returns in power, glory, and judgment, gold, silver, and land will likewise be worthless to those who have lost the gift of enjoying them; and men who own them in abundance would be glad to exchange them for God's pardon.

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:26 NASB)

Proverbs 16: 19 is another proverb acknowledging that not all the righteous are blessed with material abundance. **The lowly** more often refers to the lowly in spirit, and the context with vv. 17-18 appears to support this interpretation. Those who are lowly are synonymous with the **upright** who **departs from evil** and **watches his way**. The unrighteous, on the other hand, rush headlong into schemes of violence and theft which eventually takes away their own lives rather than preserving them (v. 17). The lowly does not necessarily exclude those who are rich and powerful; however, with wealth comes power, and with power, often pride and arrogance. Otherwise, why would Jesus say that it was difficult (not impossible) for the rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19: 23)? Those belonging to a lower socio-economic status are not guaranteed to be lowly in spirit, but often their lower social position is used by God to draw them to their greater need of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Luke is filled with examples of Jesus' outreach to the poor while not excluding rich people like Zaccheus.

17: 1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.

Great wealth with its common companion, strife, is contrasted with the quiet contentment of the righteous man who is poor, having only a dry piece of bread to eat. Contentment, therefore, cannot

be purchased; it is the property of God who alone can grant it to anyone He wishes, including the poor. Once again, the enjoyment of anything material is God's gift, not an entitlement to everyone. The proverb does not mean that the wealthy cannot also be content. What is meant is that so often those who seem to have every reason to be content are filled with vexation and unhappiness since they have attempted to replace God with material substitutes.

Contentment is the great equalizer between the have's and the have-not's. It is the commodity of inestimable value. In His inscrutable providence, God distributes His wealth in surprising ways, often lavishing the wicked with great opulence (wealth) while parceling out small pieces to the righteous. There are many possible explanations for this mystery, but one is that God wishes to prove that the righteous will love Him in the absence of material wealth. They look for no substitutes. Satan wished to prove that Job loved God only for what he received from Him, but Job proved Satan wrong; and we hear no more of Satan past the second chapter. He slips away from the scene like a beaten dog with his tail between his legs.

The proverb dispels the idea that God's purpose is to satisfy His people through material prosperity. He intends, rather, to satisfy us with a relationship to Himself which transcends material circumstances. Apart from this relationship, no amount of earthly wealth will fill one's life with meaning.

19: 1	Better is a poor man	A	
	<u>who walks in his integrity</u>		B
	Than he [<i>a rich man</i>]	A	
	<u>who is perverse in speech</u>		B
	and is a fool .	A	

The formula for this better...than proverb is *negative (a poor man) + positive (walks in integrity) + negative (perverse in speech) + negative (is a fool)*. The structure is a *forward parallel* in which being **perverse in speech** is antithetically parallel with **walks in...integrity**. The **poor man** and is antithetically parallel to the **fool**. The structure implies that the one perverse in speech is either rich or at least better off financially than the poor man with integrity; otherwise, the statement becomes a truism:⁸³ "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a poor man who is perverse in speech and is a fool." Well, what else is new?

Here is another proverb dispelling the health and wealth gospel (which is not really another; Gal. 1: 7) since it teaches that a **poor man** can be a man of integrity. He is not poor because he lacks the faith necessary to acquire wealth. Moreover, the implied rich man is not a man of integrity simply because he is financially superior to the poor man. Factors other than material wealth must indicate a man's character.

19: 22 What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.

This is what Waltke calls an "imprecise antithetical parallel" in which the parallel is not immediately understandable. In this case, a man in need of kindness had counted on someone who had promised help but had not carried through. The one who had promised help is the liar. Therefore, it would be better to be a poor man, from whom no one expected any help, than to be a

⁸³ A truism is a statement which is obviously true, demanding no explanation.

wealthy man who could not be counted on to make good on his promises.⁸⁴ Or the thought could be that it would be better to give away your income to the point of poverty than to be a man of no integrity who makes promises of help he has no intention of keeping.

21: 9 It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

21: 19 It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman.

The corner of a roof is not the dark attic of a house built with rafters and a sloping roof. The roof Solomon had in mind was a flat roof with a guest room built on one corner (cf. 2 Ki. 4: 10), a common architectural plan in the ancient Middle East. Therefore, it is better for the husband to live in the small guest room on top of the house than to live in the main part of the house with a contentious, argumentative woman who could never be pleased (cf. Prov. 25: 24). Another possibility is offered by Waltke who envisions the poor husband living on the corner of the roof *without* a guest room and, thus, exposed to the weather. This situation would be compared with Prov. 21: 19.

It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman. (Prov. 21:19 NASB)

At any rate, the peace and solitude of living *alone* is considered preferable to living in non-community with a contentious wife. The irony is that the wife, who is called to help her husband (Gen. 2: 18), is acting as the head of the home in the main part of the house while the rightful head is cowering in the corner of the roof attempting to get some peace and quiet.⁸⁵ Thus, the proverbs depict an aberration of the proper order of creation. Single men, beware! Choose wisely!

The woman (or wife) in this proverb is contrasted with the wise woman in Prov. 14: 1a, “The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.” The nagging, contentious wife, while attempting to maintain control of her house—and her weakling husband—actually tears it down with her own hands. Sometimes husbands who are subdued by their wives seek the companionship of another woman—inexcusable but, nevertheless, understandable since men seek the companionship of women who will submit to their leadership.

God gave women the subordinate role of helping their husbands. When they do this, they are often rewarded for their obedience with husbands who love them and appreciate their labors (Prov. 31, written by King Lemuel). This is not a guarantee, and often husbands abuse their privileges no matter what kind of wife they have; but the wife who submits to her husband as unto the Lord will often, not always, be rewarded accordingly with a home which is edified by godly order and authority, having children who grow up understanding the proper authority structures of home and society.

The second proverb, v. 19, carries the thought further by implying that it is better to live away from the promised land, that flows with milk and honey, and live in the desert than to live with a contentious woman. The blessings of covenant life in Israel would not be realized in the presence of constant bickering and contentiousness. Better to live in a pagan land with a godly wife who demonstrates fidelity to the covenant.

22: 1 A *good* name is to be more desired A+

⁸⁴ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 115

⁸⁵ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 175

than great wealth,		B+
Favor is better	A+	
than silver and gold.		B+

The formula for this proverb is: positive (a good name) plus positive (great wealth) plus positive (favor) plus positive (silver and gold).

Thus, all of these things are good, but some are **better** than others. Wealth measured in silver and gold is presented in a positive light; otherwise, the comparison with a good name breaks down and becomes meaningless. But however valuable, gold and silver do not favorably compare to the value of a good name. Wealth can be a fleeting thing and easily lost, but a good name endures forever (Prov. 23: 4-5; 10: 7).⁸⁶ My grandfather was such a man. He had little material wealth at the end of his life, but you couldn't find anyone in Winston County, Mississippi who would give you a negative account of the man.

C. *Discipline and Reproof*

10: 8 The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined.

The contrast is between the person who is willing to accept wise counsel and the fool who is too busy running his mouth to take time to listen to someone wiser. Because the fool will not sit still and listen, his life will be ruined by his own foolishness—a tragedy which could have been avoided. Receiving **commands** is not simply the willingness to listen, but the desire to obey the commands heard.

“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and **does not act on them**, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.²⁷ “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. (Matthew 7:26-27 NASB)

The fool may have heard wise counsel but was only thinking of his next foolish rebuttal (argument) while hearing it.

10: 17 He is *on* the path of life who heeds instruction, But he who ignores reproof goes astray.

Waltke renders the verse, “Whoever keeps instruction”, thus, agreeing with the KJV and NKJV. To “keep” means to retain in the memory and to practice, not just occasionally, but as a way of life.⁸⁷ The son who does this (see context in 10: 1, 5) is on the path to a successful life which values the cumulative wisdom obtained by others who have more experience. On the other hand, the son who ignores instruction will veer off course in many foolish and harmful directions which could have been avoided had he been humble enough to question his own understanding (3: 1-5). The proverb is a further elaboration of 16: 18.

Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

The basic reason people don't listen to instruction is pride. They pride themselves for having things figured out when they really don't. The wise person, particularly a wise young person, will humble himself by admitting to himself and to others that he needs the advice of those who have learned

⁸⁶ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 199

⁸⁷ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 465

from their own mistakes and the mistakes of others. Making mistakes in life is inevitable. Everyone does. Mistakes are inevitable even if you do nothing, because doing nothing is sin (Matt. 25: 24-30, the worthless slave who hid his master's money in the ground). The believer can minimize his errors by listening. In the West, individualism prevails whereby everyone is his own man, independent and isolated from the community. He makes his own decisions and is not supposed to receive counsel from others. This individualism has also radiated into African culture to some extent, especially in urban areas where young people have become detached from their village culture and the restraint of social mores. The results of this westernization have not been impressive.

12: 1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid.

Discipline and reproof are synonymously parallel to one another. To the modern mind, **discipline and reproof** have a negative connotation, an unpleasantness to be avoided. Contrary to much popular child psychology, discipline in the Bible is not limited to positive reinforcement of good behavior but extends to negative treatment of poor behavior (Prov. 23: 13). Both are needed. The essential ingredient of both positive and negative discipline is love. Through the loving discipline of the parent—or another wise counselor—the person disciplined is hopefully taught to love (value) unpleasant reproof because he knows it is good for him—like distasteful medicine. Solomon is attempting to stir up his son's earnest desire for any instruction which will lead to wisdom and true success in life. In order for discipline to take hold of the son's life, he must have the proper motivation—not simply to avoid pain, but to love the knowledge that will ensure a good life. At the beginning of Proverbs, wisdom (or knowledge) is personified as a woman whom the son should pursue as a lover (2: 4-5).

As always, **knowledge** is not merely intellectual understanding, but applied knowledge which leads to changed behavior. The son who does not act upon his father's instruction will build his house on sand leading to ruin (Matt. 7: 26).

13: 1 A wise son *accepts his* father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

The **scoffer** is the **mocker** who goes beyond the point of ignoring his father, but proceeds to the point of ridiculing his counsel. Agur has strong words for such a person who upsets the moral and social order and threatens to unravel an orderly community by scoffing at parental authority.

The 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. (Proverbs 30:17 NASB)

This was a well-known sign of the covenant curse upon the rebellious son stoned to death for persistent disobedience (Deut. 21: 18-21). Upon being stoned to death, the body was hanged on a tree as a sign of the curse, thus exposed to birds which would rest on the shoulders and pluck out the eyes (cf. 2 Sam. 21: 10). Obviously, the context of Deuteronomy 21: 18-21 does not allow an interpretation which would include small children or even young adolescents. Therefore, the implicit teaching is that due respect toward parents was necessary into adulthood.

13: 18 Poverty and shame *will come* to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored.

This proverb deals with the long-term implications of receiving or neglecting discipline and reproof. The son who neglects his father's discipline will come to **poverty and shame** while the obedient son **will be honored**. In Proverbs, obedience results in a successful life—success defined not in terms of great wealth but in terms of a good name. It is apparent however, that honor and relative wealth go together. A wise man is industrious, not lazy; and he is conscientious (diligent) about providing for himself and his family. He may not be rich, but he manages to provide for his household and is **honored** by those who know him to be a man of integrity and hard work. On the other hand, the disobedient son will often pursue a lifestyle resulting in shame and poverty—possibly through excessive drinking, illicit sex, laziness and unwillingness to work. It is ironic that the son who refuses to be disciplined by his father will instead be disciplined by poverty and shame.⁸⁸

13: 24 He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

There are different methods of discipline which can be effective, but the rod mentioned here is a physical rod which cannot be spiritualized by modern psychology, even the evangelical variety which has become far more secularized than its practitioners care to admit. There is nothing unloving about controlled corporal (bodily) punishment. The absence of it is hatred.

Discipline becomes abusive when done without the proper motivation of love and correction and when it crosses the line between being disciplinary and abusive. Quite the contrary to popular opinion today—and apparently much popular opinion even in Solomon's day—the one who withholds discipline is the unloving father who may one day see his son disciplined by other authorities who have no love for his son at all. Thus, the overly lenient father actually hates his son, even unconsciously desiring his death which may result from reckless and criminal behavior. Eli failed to discipline Hophni and Phineas, and this practical hatred proved fatal (1 Sam. 3: 13). Proverbs 19: 18 and 15: 10 should be considered together.

Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death. (Proverbs 19:18 NASB)

Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die. (Proverbs 15:10 NASB)

Obviously, the need for corporal punishment should be seldom and temporary. If a son has not been disciplined corporally during the early years, it will not be effective when he becomes older. To be effective, punishment must produce discomfort. For an older male, only abusive strokes of the rod would be effective in producing the pain necessary for correction; and, thus, would be self-defeating, humiliating, and provocative (Eph. 6: 4).

Massive elephants can be held in place with a simple stake in the ground only because they were held in place with the same method as baby elephants. The baby elephants tested the stake but could not dislodge it. The big, older ones remember the restraint without testing it. While older children are more intelligent than elephants—at least most of the time—they remember that Dad (Papa) does not budge easily and will not tolerate insubordination, either his or the mother's. Compare this situation with older males—“large elephants”—who have never been restrained in childhood. What will it take to restrain them now—a fistfight, a gun, the police? Such children grow up to be dangerous adolescents and more dangerous adults.

⁸⁸ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 568

15: 10 Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.

See the comments above which include this reference. However, the reference to death in this Proverb (as in 19: 18) goes beyond physical death and includes eternal death. Failure in the matter of temporal punishment on earth leads to the everlasting punishment of the son in hell. **The way** in the first half of the verse is the way of obedience, but it also has eschatological (end-time) implications. It is the way of life versus (as opposed to) the way of death (16: 25).

In the way of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no death. (Proverbs 12:28 NASB).

No death cannot be a reference to physical death since everyone who is born must die physically (excepting only believers who are alive at the return of Christ, plus Enoch and Elijah). There is, therefore, a positive correlation between righteousness and eternal life and unrighteousness and eternal death.⁸⁹ If a person hates reproof—one of the means of obtaining righteousness—he also hates the way which leads to eternal life (5: 23).

15: 12 A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, He will not go to the wise.

The context with 15: 10 is evident. Because he is foolish the **scoffer** does not know how to appreciate the person reproving him. He avoids him whenever possible, wasting time with the gang of his peers who lead him into further trouble (cf. 1: 8-19, the father’s first lecture to his son). Ironically, the scoffer does not **love** the one who loves *him* enough to reprove him. He loves those who affirm his reckless lifestyle. The scoffer does not know the meaning of real love; instead, he confuses love with lenience and indulgence, the willingness to let him do what he wants without reproof. Verse 12 shares a context with v. 7, “The lips of the wise spread knowledge, But the hearts of fools are not so.”

The mocker is without excuse because all the wise have been freely and broadly scattering their saving knowledge (15: 7). Arrogantly shunning their knowledge, however, the mocker remains on the dark way of death...not the right way of life....⁹⁰

Choosing the way of death, the scoffer will not seek out those who could show him the way of life (v. 12b)—**he will not go to the wise**. He fears their judgment upon his lifestyle. Further, the scoffer will not take the time to dust off his bible and read about the only way of salvation in Jesus Christ. He has other “more important things” to do. Solomon goes to great lengths to show that the fool, the scoffer, the mocker, or the disobedient are fully responsible for their own sin and will suffer the consequences of their negligence. On the day of judgment, they will not be able to transfer guilt to anyone else—not even their parents.

15: 31 He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise.

This proverb shares a similar meaning with 15: 12. Contrary to the scoffer who shuns the community of those who would correct and reprove him, the one who listens to reproof seeks the company of wise people. He is not a rugged individualist who listens only to his own thoughts. He recognizes the value of cumulative wisdom passed on from generation to generation by community sages. To carry the idea further, he **will dwell among the wise** who will welcome him into their

⁸⁹ Waltke, I. p. 622

⁹⁰ Waltke, I. p. 623

company in the future. By implication, the scoffer who shuns the company of the wise will have only selfish fools like himself to dwell with—not an ideal community. The promise may be extended eschatologically into the eternal community of the righteous, **the wise**, living together in the new heavens and new earth.

15: 32 He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.

Since the fool will lack the necessary skills to survive, neglecting discipline is a form of suicide.⁹¹

17: 10 A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.

Corroborating (supporting) 19: 19, this proverb teaches that a fool scarcely learns anything, even if his lessons are hard. He has become so hardened and insensitive to reproof that he scarcely notices it, and even body blows and near-death experiences are easily forgotten. **One hundred blows** is *hyperbole* or exaggeration, since 40 blows minus one, or 39, would almost kill a man, and was the maximum penalty allowed by law for scourging. One hundred blows would mean certain death. The proverb may be implying the certain, eternal death of the fool who will not listen to rebuke.

The one who has understanding, however, is sensitive even to mild rebukes. His conscience is alert to any infraction or violation of God’s law and to any harm done to others. His ultimate goal in life is to be pleasing to the One who saved him.

A word was enough for David....A look entered more in Peter’s heart...than a hundred stripes into Pharaoh...Ahaz...Israel.⁹²

19: 18 Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death.

See commentary on 13: 24 above. Death can be taken both physically and spiritually. While most proverbs are directed to offspring, this one is directed to parents.⁹³ Parents, particularly fathers, who neglect the discipline of their children unwittingly (unintentionally) participate in killing them both physically and eternally. **While there is hope** implies that there will come a time when there is no hope—or very little hope—of reforming his moral character. Time is moving on quickly, and the time to discipline cannot be postponed to a later time when his character is less pliable (less subject to influence).

19: 20 Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.

The NIV reads, “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and **in the end** you will be wise.” The **end** implies the finality of one’s physical life. However, Waltke translates the second part of the verse as follows:

⁹¹ Waltke, II. p. 8

⁹² Bridges, quoted in Waltke, II. p. 52

⁹³ Waltke, II. p. 111

“You may be accounted among the wise in your final destiny”...The proverb motivates the son to internalize the teaching with the certain hope that he will enjoy all the benefits of being wise in a future that outlasts death itself.⁹⁴

If the only reward for seeking wisdom was to be wise at the end of one’s physical life, it would not be much of a reward. Why not eat, drink, and fornicate, for tomorrow we will be dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 32). If wisdom does not extend beyond physical life, then why not simply live for the present moment? The Hebrew word for **end** is *acharith* used in Prov. 5: 11; 14: 12; 20: 21; 24: 20 (translated “future”).⁹⁵ In the introduction to his commentary on Proverbs, Waltke makes the following observation about the meaning of life and death presented in the book.

These rewards are fairly self-evident apart from “life,” whose meaning in Proverbs is commonly misrepresented and/or misunderstood. At issue is whether “life” (*hayyim*) refers to eternal life or temporal life terminating finally in clinical death. To put it another way, Is the threatened death of the wicked in Proverbs an eternal death or a premature death?

The noun *hayyim* occurs 33 times and the verb *haya* four times. Sometimes it refers to clinical life. In 27: 27 it refers to clinical sustenance for female servants...and in 31: 12 “all the days of her life” refers to the noble woman’s “lifetime.”...

Most often, however, *hayyim* is unqualified and refers to “life” that is added to clinical life, apparently an abundant life of health, prosperity, and social esteem (3: 21-22; 4: 13; 8: 35; 16: 15; 21: 21; 22: 4). Apart from 16: 15, these passages and others hold out life as wisdom’s reward, a reward never said to be tarnished by death (4: 22; 6: 23; 10: 17; 11: 19; 12: 28; 13: 14; 15: 31; 19: 23; 22: 4). This is true also of all four uses of the verb (4: 4; 7: 2; 9: 6; 15: 27). “Tree of life” figuratively represents perpetual healing insuring eternal life (3: 18; 11: 30; 13: 12; 15: 4, cf. Gen. 2: 9; 3: 24)...

[Proverb 16: 15 reads, “In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain.” In this verse, the king is an earthly king who cannot bestow eternal life. But being in the good graces of an earthly king can make physical life much easier.]

By contrast, the wicked enjoy their plunder during their clinical lives, but death is their certain destiny (1: 10-19). “The wage of the righteous person is surely life; the earnings of the wicked person are surely sin and death” (10: 16). Here “life” by its opposition to “sin” implies spiritual life...In biblical theology abundant life, which is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the breath of life and symbolized by the tree of life...is essentially a relationship with God. According to Gen. 2: 17, disruption of the proper relationship with the One who is the source of life means death. Wisdom is concerned with this proper relationship (Prov. 2: 5-8) and thus with experiencing life in his favor. ***In sum, “life” in the majority of Proverbs texts refers to abundant life in fellowship with God, a living relationship that is never envisioned as ending in clinical death in contrast to the wicked’s eternal death (see 2: 22-23).*** As Jesus said, “He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is a God of the living, not the dead” (Matt. 22: 32).

Solomon never describes the clinically alive wicked as in the realm of light and life; rather, they are in the realm of darkness and death, a state of being already dead because they have no relationship with the living God. The texts predicting death represent that present state terminating with a tragic, final end, not necessarily a premature death. The lascivious regrets his incorrigibility [lack of correction] “when his flesh and body are spent” (5: 11). The pursuit of Wisdom and the practice of righteousness save the wise from the realm and destiny of death, but nothing can deliver the wicked (1: 4, 19; 10: 2;

⁹⁴ Waltke, II. p. 114

⁹⁵ All verses cited by Waltke, II. p. 114

13: 14; 14: 27; 15: 24). Their clinical death is a land of no return, without a second chance (1: 20-33: 2: 19, 22...). If death is the final end of the wicked, we should assume that life is the final end of the righteous (cf. Matt. 25: 46).

Other texts teach more explicitly that this abundant life outlasts clinical death. In Prov. 12: 28 the righteous are rewarded with “immortality”...Prov. 14: 32 says, “Even in death the righteous seek a refuge in God,” and 23: 17 asserts that their future hope will not be disappointed; in contrast, the wicked have no future hope (11: 7a; 12: 28; 24: 19-20).⁹⁶

19: 25 Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, But reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.

21: 11 When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.

The blows upon the **scoffer** become the educational tool for the **naïve** who may not learn discipline any other way (cf. Deut. 13: 7-11; 17: 12-13).⁹⁷ When he sees the scoffer punished, it is a tangible lesson that such behavior should be avoided even if his heart has remained unchanged. The same principle applies when convicted criminals get jail time; their buddies take note and learn, and some of them correct their course of action to avoid punishment. On the other hand, for **one who has understanding**, severe punishments are not necessary to deter him from poor behavior. All he needs is simple **reproof** and an explanation of why his behavior needs correction. The proverb is parallel to 17: 10 except for the fact that the **naïve** do not need to suffer the blows themselves to make a behavioral correction. They watch the scoffer and the fool take the blows and learn their lessons more easily.

In earlier societies, public punishments and executions were common—hanging, whipping, the stocks, etc. They would be abhorrent today in modern “enlightened” societies which isolate punishments to the gas chambers or jail cells which are hidden from public view. As a result, fear of punishment is diminished among those contemplating crime. These verses imply public punishment which serves to enforce the laws of the land even if they fail to change hearts. The duty of the civil magistrate is not to change hearts but to punish evil-doers (Rom. 13). The English word, “penitentiary”, is derived from the word, “penitent”, implying that the prison system is a “correctional facility” designed to change behavior and make the incarcerated prisoner fit for readmission into society. This idea is a social fallacy based upon the notion that a person is basically good, but goes “bad” because of his flawed environment. He can be improved through social and psychological conditioning in prison.

20: 30 Stripes that wound scour away evil, And strokes *reach* the innermost parts.

This is true of those who are not fools, in which case even a hundred blows will do no good (17: 10). The verse may have reference to the corporal punishment of the young before they are entrenched in disobedient adulthood, in which case it speaks of literal corporal punishment. The seriousness of sinning against God is vividly impressed upon the child’s body in a manner he will not likely forget. Proverbs does not shy away from bodily punishment of the young as long as the end-goal is obedience, righteousness, and eternal life. The verse may also have a metaphorical meaning in which **stripes** could refer to affliction of many kinds which severely wound the

⁹⁶ Waltke, I. pp. 104-107, emphasis mine

⁹⁷ Waltke, I. p. 122

recipient, but leave him morally improved. Possibly after his sin with Bathsheba, David was inflicted with various unnamed afflictions, some of which may have been bodily (Ps. 32: 3-4).⁹⁸

22: 15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

This verse describes “the doctrine of ‘original folly’”.⁹⁹ Children are innately sinful, and both physical punishment and reproof are essential in purging the child of a long list of foolish tendencies.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5 NASB)

The superscript of this psalm says that David wrote this after being rebuked for adultery by Nathan the prophet. David was not shifting blame to his mother, as if she conceived David before her marriage to Jesse; nor is he blaming his sin on total depravity, as if he really had little choice in the matter. Rather, he is acknowledging that his sin is but one expression of a nature whose root is sinful.

It is wicked wrestling of Scripture to deny that original sin and natural depravity are here taught. Surely men who cavil at this doctrine have need to be taught of the Holy Spirit what be the first principles of the faith. David’s mother was the Lord’s handmaid, he was born in chaste wedlock, of a good father, and he was himself “the man after God’s own heart;” and yet his nature was as fallen as that of any other son of Adam, and there only needed the occasion for the manifesting of that sad fact. In our shaping we were put out of shape, and when we were conceived our nature conceived sin. Alas, for poor humanity! Those who will may cry it up, but he is most blessed who in his own soul has learned to lament its lost estate.¹⁰⁰

D. Drunkenness

20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

21:17 He who loves pleasure *will become* a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

As God’s creation, wine is a blessing given along with other blessings, including food.

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,¹⁵ And wine which makes man’s heart glad, So that he may make *his* face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man’s heart. (Psalm 104:14-15 NASB)

However, like any other blessing—including money, food, and sex—wine must be used wisely; otherwise, the blessing becomes a curse. Many of the references to wine in Proverbs are negative (Prov. 20: 1; 21: 17; 23: 20, 29-35). However, wine is also mentioned in a positive light (3: 9-10), and Lady Wisdom invites those who love knowledge to partake of her mixed wine, a metaphor for biblical wisdom (9: 1-5). (The word used is the same in both the positive and negative references; therefore, it is fermented wine that is in view, not grape juice.) It is unlikely that the Holy Spirit would inspire such a metaphor if wine were inherently evil, or that God would offer the reward of overflowing wine vats for the virtue of tithing.

⁹⁸ The superscript of this psalm does not give us the historical occasion. His interpretation of these afflictions as the consequence of unrepented sin would have occurred after Nathan’s rebuke.

⁹⁹ Waltke, II. p. 215, quoting Whybray

¹⁰⁰ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1, p. 408

Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce;¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Proverbs 3:9-10 NASB)

It is perplexing that many Christians will label as evil the consumption of any amount of alcohol while preserving the consumption of sex as good and acceptable within the boundaries of marriage. I have heard of no one condemning all sex as evil because of fornication, adultery, or prostitution.

E. Friendship

17:9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

The proverb is not speaking about an illegal cover-up in which a serious offense like murder or theft should be prosecuted. Nor is he speaking about an offense as serious as adultery in which the victimized spouse has a right to know if his or her spouse is being unfaithful.

He who conceals a transgression is contrasted with **he who repeats a matter** (or “he who gossips”). The one who **seeks love** or friendship is the person who attempts to cover the friend’s moral failure through further friendship rather than broadcasting the moral failure to others—an act which further alienates the transgressor from others.¹⁰¹ An additional nuance of meaning: The person who often brings up past offenses will destroy a relationship, but the one who practices love will be willing to let such offenses remain in the past where they belong.¹⁰² I prefer the first interpretation. Many friendships have been destroyed by third parties who disclose an unkind remark which was intended to be secret. The unkind remark should have remained unsaid, but when it comes out in the open, love will attempt to cover it.

The verse could be misinterpreted to mean that a person’s misconduct should never be aired. If there were no exceptions, then church discipline would always be inappropriate—and most evangelical Christians would hold this unbiblical position. Obviously, there are exceptions (Matt. 18: 15-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3: 6-10). In the last example, Christians who were living unruly lives had their names published to the other members in order for Paul’s instructions to be followed. Paul warns Timothy of people who had done him harm and were dangerous to the ministry.

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (2 Timothy 4:14 NASB)

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my* son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20 NASB)

As always, Scripture must be compared with Scripture to get the whole picture. This is the task of systematic theology, in this case the theology of ethics and church discipline. In which situations would it be appropriate to remain silent or to disclose the names of the offenders?

¹⁰¹ Waltke, II. p. 50

¹⁰² Longman, p. 345

17: 17 A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.

The “fair-weather friend” is the person who seeks the friendship of another only when times are good, but when his friend falls into adversity or sin, he is difficult to find. The true friend loves in good times or bad—during prosperity or poverty, sickness or health. His friendship is based on love, not a mercenary spirit which seeks its own advantage—“what can I get out of this friendship—money, social prestige, a good job?” A true friend can be closer than a brother (18: 24) because the love of God’s people is—or should be—more reliable than filial, biological kinships. “The proverb supports eyeball-to-eyeball charity, not impersonal and institutionalized agencies.” The **brother ...born for adversity** [trouble] is a biological brother (cf. 18: 24 below, where friend and brother are also compared). While the friend loves at all times, a relative serves as a safety net in difficult times, perhaps due to a sense of obligation.¹⁰³

18: 24 A man of *too many* friends *comes* to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

The translation of this verse in the NASB, NIV, and ESV is vastly different from the KJV and NKJ. The New King James reads, “A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother.” Following the NASB, the meaning is that the *number* of friends a man has is inconsequential (unimportant). The real question is: What *kind* of friends are they? The proverb envisions a man who is very out-going and popular with people, but his friendships are shallow and *unreliable*. When difficulty comes, his so-called friendships evaporate like a fog, and he is left alone to face the trial (**comes to ruin**). But the man who cultivates deep, enduring friendships based on mutual love will not need many friends since the ones—or *the one*—he has will stick by him during any adversity. If you can find even one or two people who will stick by you regardless of the circumstances, you have something of great value. Many people have no such friend.

The greatest friend anyone can have is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who said,

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ "You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. (John 15:13-15 NASB)

20: 6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?

This is an invitation to seek true friendship and to be a true friend.¹⁰⁴ Many have had the disappointing experience of expecting loyalty from a friend only to find that he was looking out mostly for himself. When friendship becomes inconvenient for one’s safety or self-promotion, it is no longer considered valuable. Peter boasted that although everyone else may forsake Christ, he would never do so (Mk. 14: 29). Let us not be too quick to condemn Peter. We may think too highly of ourselves before we face the test. Let us instead pray that we would be Christ’s loyal friend even to death and that we would lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters who represent Him on earth (1 Jn. 3: 16; cf. Matt. 25: 40).

F. Generosity and Greed

¹⁰³ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 57

¹⁰⁴ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 132

11: 5 The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way, But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.

11: 6 The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, But the treacherous will be caught by *their own* greed.

Job's friends distorted the biblical doctrine of retributive justice by allowing no exceptions in the present life. Their limited experience led them to believe that the wicked man was *always* punished and the righteous man *always* rewarded in the present age. Their rigidity caused them to condemn their friend whom God exonerated (vindicated) at the end of the book (Job 42: 7-10). Nevertheless, we should not throw the baby (retributive justice) out with the dirty bath water (rigid retributive theology). The bible teaches retributive justice in many places: the curses and blessings of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 27-28), Paul's epistles (Gal. 6: 6-9; Rom. 2: 5-11), Jesus' promise of reward or punishment according to one's deeds (Matt. 16: 27), and again in Proverbs (24: 12).

The present verse cannot mean that a righteous man can **deliver** himself from judgment through self-effort or that he can earn his salvation through works, a contradiction of the well-defined doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone (Rom. 5). The OT also teaches justification by faith through the endless animal sacrifices repeatedly offered as substitutes for human sinners. Animal sacrifices sufficed for their time, but were replaced by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ which they typified (Hebrews).

No tension exists between the Lord, who makes the way of his saints straight (see 3: 5-6), and their own righteous character that produces a way free of deadly pitfalls and precipices (see 11: 3, 6; cf. 2: 8, 11).¹⁰⁵

The sovereign God is a God of means. He ordains the end but also the means to that end. He alone ultimately delivers the righteous man from death; yet, the righteous man avoids eternal death through understanding (2: 11). As Luther says, "Man is not saved by faith and works, but by a faith that works." True faith is practical; it works.

The contrast in this verse is between the righteous acts of the good man versus the treachery of the greedy man. The greedy, wicked man will lie, cheat, steal, and manipulate to extort others of possessions and money, thinking that he will save himself through his shrewdness. But his treachery will not save him in the end from the ultimate judgment of eternal death. The righteous man will be honest in his relationships, and whatever he may materially sacrifice by being honest will be more than compensated by a **smooth way** unencumbered by litigation (law suits) and a poor reputation with the community (Prov. 22: 1). The smooth way of this life will also climax in the ultimate reward of being **delivered** from eternal death.¹⁰⁶

11: 24 There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results* only in want.

The best commentary on this proverb is 2 Cor. 9: 6-11.

¹⁰⁵ Waltke, I. pp. 486-487

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Waltke, I. p.486

Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." ¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:6-11 NASB)

The bottom line is that we cannot out-give the Lord. He will be no man's debtor and will repay every act of kindness in one way or another. The ultimate motivation is not "Give more. Get more." Our motivation should not be material gain, but *eternal rewards* and the Lord's imprimatur, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25: 23). Our giving is out of love for God and our fellow man, especially believers (Gal. 6: 10). Yet, it should not be surprising to us that God sends special blessings—even material blessings—our way after we have sacrificed for the sake of others, always remembering that His kindness to us is not obligated by our sacrifice, but due to his kindness and grace—grace as the foundation of our sacrifice for others. OT wisdom commonly offers material incentives for obedience, as if the Lord is testing us to see if these promises are true (Mal. 3: 10-11). We are mistaken if we discount these incentives as unworthy; they are offered by none other than God. In the NT passage cited, Paul assures the Corinthians that their generosity will not reduce them to poverty, but that the abounding grace of God will provide them with everything necessary for their continuing life and ministry.

But this proverb applies to more situations than simple charity. Another application would be generosity to one's employees who work diligently and loyally for their employer. The rich landholder who withholds pay from those who mow his fields (James 5: 4-5) is not simply the one who withholds the *whole* amount of their pay, but the one who does not pay them sufficiently to purchase the basic necessities of life. Throughout the history of the world in every culture—even in wealthy countries like the US—the working poor must often work two to three full-time jobs because the income of one job is insufficient to cover routine expenses. Moreover, most (I know of no exceptions) corporate retail or fast food chain stores in the US will not allow their employees to work a full 40 hours per week making them eligible for health insurance and other benefits.

While many free-market capitalists would argue that the entrepreneur is not obligated to pay more than the market rate for labor, OT wisdom appears to require an equitable wage proportionate to the employer's ability (cf. Prov. 22: 16 and explanation below). I myself am a free-market capitalist, but capitalism is not my religion. Christian capitalists must allow the Bible to inform them of Biblical principles of generosity and mercy. If the wealthy employer **scatters** his wealth by sharing his profits with his employees through higher wages, profit-sharing, or benefits, he **increases all the more** because God will bless his generosity by encouraging employee loyalty and productivity. He is able to retain the best workforce while simultaneously attracting other productive workers from companies who are not so generous. He is also allowed biblically to fire workers who are lazy and unproductive (2 Thess. 3: 10) and replace them with productive workers, maximizing his profits further. The lazy worker, in the meantime, will either learn wisdom through being disciplined or continue the downward spiral into poverty (Prov. 21: 25). Whatever the result of his generosity to employees, it is the right thing to do; and God will either bless him in this life or the life to come, or both.

11: 25 The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.

This is a continuation of v. 24, indicating that prosperity and generosity go together. Paradoxically (a paradox is an apparent, but not real, contradiction), giving things away wisely causes one to be more prosperous, not less. This can only be true because God governs the universe and ordains secondary causes which work together to bless those who obey His law. The man who **waters** those beneath him economically (remembering that all are equal before God) will likely find himself prospering from the benefits bestowed by those who are economically equal or above him or by a significant increase of his business or market share. Moreover, generosity is not limited to the wealthy but is the obligation of everyone who is capable of helping someone needier than himself, like the poor widow who shared the last of her oil and flour with Elijah. The result of her generosity was not starvation and death, but abundant food (1 Kings 17: 10-16).

The measure of one's generosity is not determined by the amount of money or goods given away, but by the measure of one's sacrifice. This is proven by the story of the poor widow who gave, in Jesus' estimation, more than all the rich Pharisees (Mk. 12: 43-44).

God looks not only at what we give, but also at what we keep. The less we have left, the more we have given....

One person can give \$25 in an act of great sacrifice, whereas another can give a million dollars and not sacrifice at all. If someone makes \$10,000,000 a year, gives away \$9,000,000 and spends "only" the other million on himself we may be impressed, and it may be a relatively wise eternal investment, but is it really sacrificial in God's eyes? This is one reason why it's unhealthy and misleading to publicly laud large donors in the Christian community. Often their sacrifice is far less than those whose names will never be known.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps one good rule of thumb on giving is this question: What have I ***given up in order to give?*** If our giving does not cause us to feel some pinch upon our consumption, perhaps we have not given enough. The paradigm for the kingdom of God is personal and corporate sacrifice. Christ set the agenda through His life of voluntary sacrifice and death on the cross. Likewise, as believers we must take up His cross and follow Him in voluntarily sacrifice for others, assuming their suffering and pain.

For affluent westerners, this may mean driving the old car a few more years before buying a new one or a newer used one. It may mean giving up the vacation this year and the next in order to give more to the church or to missions. For the western congregation, sacrifice may mean postponing the building project indefinitely until the congregation is giving one-third or one-half of its budget to domestic and foreign missions or mercy ministries. But this seldom happens. The corporate church consists of individual Christians who are accustomed to spending money on themselves. We like to be comfortable at home *and* in our church auditoriums.

But Africans living on \$2 to \$5 dollars a day are not excused from the life of voluntary sacrifice. African Christians can sacrifice their "air time" and make fewer phone calls. Women can forgo the nice braided hair-do which costs a day's wage. The money saved may be given to help feed their pastors—assuming they work hard at teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 5: 18). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not excuse the poor masses from the sin of anxiety, commanding them not

¹⁰⁷ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, pp. 208-209
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to worry about food or clothing, but commanding them to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6: 31-32).

11: 26 He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells *it*.

Large storage bins were built by traders for storing wheat during times of shortage. As the shortage got worse the price of wheat would continue to rise. Traders who held back the wheat could then sell it at a huge profit. This is the way the commodities market works today. Business is business, right? But to the Lord, business is not just business. Gouging people of lesser means with high prices for essential items like food during a shortage or famine is an abomination to the Lord. Poor people have to eat, and when they must pay twice the price for food items because such items were stored on commodities markets until prices go up, God is displeased. But when they sell at normal market prices making reasonable profits, they will win God's favor and that of the people.

Notice that **a blessing will be on the head of him who sells *it***. There is no biblical mandate for the farmer or commodities trader to *give* his grain away for nothing, or to sell at a loss or at a government-mandated price called price controls. As a free market capitalist, I believe that the market is the most efficient and fair means of establishing prices for goods and services (including wages) in a world of sinful people. To shift the pricing mechanism to the government simply places the economy in the hands of a group of elite sinners who must be omniscient—and none are—to know where prices should be “set”. The principle of “self-interest” will determine what the seller is willing to sell his goods for and what the buyer is willing to pay; but self-interest is not the same thing as selfishness. Whenever the government gets involved and mandates price controls for goods, services, and wages, the market cannot operate efficiently or equitably. The black market takes over with exorbitant pricing.

Nevertheless, as I said before, my economic preference is not my religion. The Christian faith should operate freely within the free market to curtail greed and exploitation. The free market is not “free” from exploitation; it exists in a fallen world. If a Christian entrepreneur starts a business with minimum wage employees, and his business prospers to the point that he can still make good profits while raising wages to the point where men and women can better provide for their families, I believe he is *morally* obligated to do so. I would not advocate a government mandate forcing him to do so or a so-called minimum wage which historically keeps many entry-level workers unemployed. I would advocate a sensitive Christian conscience on the part of the employer who cares about his employees and wishes to see them prosper alongside of him. The Bible requires us to be generous with people; therefore, the laws concerning our relations with the poor would apply to anyone who is below us economically. For example, consider the following proverb:

22: 16 He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself Or who gives to the rich, *will only come to poverty*.

This proverb goes along with 11: 26 and helps answer the question: What are reasonable profits? The producer who holds his grain to maximize his profits may be oppressing the poor who cannot feed his family properly at the higher prices. Another interesting application of this proverb is made by Van Leewen: “It happens when executives are paid exorbitant sums...and overwork their remaining employees.”¹⁰⁸ CEO's of large corporations are paid tens of millions of dollars a year

¹⁰⁸ Van Leewen, *Proverbs*, p. 200, quoted from Waltke, II. p. 216
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to run these companies while the average worker does not earn enough to make a decent living nor pay for health insurance.¹⁰⁹ Controlling stock owners and trustees “give to the rich” (i.e. the existing CEO and other high-level executives) so long as they keep the share-holders happy with escalating share prices.

Generally speaking, worker satisfaction has little or nothing to do with share prices in the estimation of CEO’s. The CEO, particularly, is rewarded handsomely with outrageously enormous salaries and stock bonuses while the common employee lives from paycheck to paycheck. If it is argued that these workers have the freedom to take another job, this is conceded (admitted). However, they will simply face the same lack of concern virtually everywhere they turn in the corporate world. Oppressive business practices spread like cancer throughout the business community, maximizing profits—they believe—without considering their workers, many of whom are among the working poor.¹¹⁰ Many American companies are limiting the number of full-time workers to keep from having to pay health benefits. Legally they have the right to do this, and I blame government regulations (including Obamacare) for contributing to their oppression. At the same time, the business that grosses hundreds of millions or more each year should be able to provide full employment and benefits.

It is the vertical dimension of our relationship and answerability to God that balances our horizontal economic relationships with others—not merely what is legal, but what is moral. Private ownership and profitability must be held tenuously (slightly) within the context of God’s ownership of all things.

The creation narratives cannot be used to justify privatized, individually exclusive claims of ownership, since it is to humanity as a whole that the earth is entrusted. This is *not* to say that there can be no legitimate private ownership of material goods; we have already seen how in Israel legitimate property rights were grounded in the belief in God’s gift of the land, and in its distribution to the household units. It *is* to say that such individual property rights, even when legitimate, always remain subordinate to the prior right of all people to have access to, and use of, the resources of the earth. In other words, the claim ‘I (or we) own it’ is never a final answer in the economic moral argument. For, ultimately, God owns all things and I (or we) hold them only in trust. And God holds us answerable to himself for others who might have greater need of that which is in our possession. Ownership of land and resources does not entail an absolute right of disposal, but rather responsibility for administration and distribution. The right of all to *use* the resources of the earth seems to be morally prior to the right of any to *own* them for exclusive enjoyment. Note also Robert Gnuse’s comment at the end of his survey of the Israelite laws and institutions relating to property: “Laws and moral imperatives about loans, interest, debts, slaves, land, wages, and justice in general indicate that the first concern of Israel was for human need, not ownership...the maintenance of property and possessions must come second to human need. Israelite law favored persons over property and possessions.”¹¹¹

14: 20 The poor is hated even by his neighbor, But those who love the rich are many.

14: 21 He who despises his neighbor sins, But happy is he who is gracious to the poor.

¹⁰⁹ Health insurance is virtually a necessity in the US. One day in a hospital can cost over \$1000 in Mississippi and \$2000 in New York. A simple knee surgery cost my health provider \$20,000 almost twenty years ago.

¹¹⁰ Some very interesting reading on this subject is David K. Shipler’s *The Working Poor—Invisible in America*

¹¹¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, pp. 147-148. Wright makes plain in a footnote that he is not advocating communal ownership. Israelite laws and inheritance practices upheld family and clan ownership as opposed to a generalized communal ownership.

This is a proverb pair about the social liability of being poor and the social benefits of being rich. It presents us with the “unvarnished truth about human nature”.¹¹² Everyone “loves” a rich man, and everyone desires to be his “friend”. Rich people, in fact, have lots of “friends” who at least pretend to love him, but compare this with the proverbs above on true friendship. What will happen to these friendships if the money dries up or if he becomes a liability to them? The poor man, on the other hand, is often shunned as a liability that none can afford. He is “high maintenance” and very inconvenient to have around for those who have a mercenary view of friendship—for profit only. However inconvenient his need may be, he is made in the image of God; and the one who despises his poor neighbor sins against him and against God. On the other hand, the one who is gracious to him receives the joy of giving and makes a “loan” to the Lord (19: 17; Solomon with a touch of humor (?) but see explanation below).

The best commentary comes from Paul’s quotation of Jesus in Acts 20: 35, “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (NASB). Paul picks up on this statement in 1 Tim. 6: 17-19:

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (NASB)

Storing up for themselves mirrors Christ’s comment about storing up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6). One way to do this is through generosity. This is not a promise of eternal life based on works of generosity or philanthropy. Rather, it is a promise of *realizing in the present the eschatological life of the future*. “Life indeed” is exclusively life in the Son, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself even to the point of death that others may live. We do not experience life by clinging to it or by clinging to our material goods, but by giving as freely and generously as we can. To quote a modern song-writer, Michael Card, “It’s hard to imagine the freedom we find in the things we leave behind.” If we are generous with people, we will never be *owned by our money* (another line from Card).

14: 31 He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

They honor God because they honor the poor man made in His image.

The creation of human kind functions as the philosophical basis for social ethics...The antithetical predicate *is one who honors God*...classifies the benefactor as one who gives God social weight. The poor and needy have an exalted status together with all humanity by reason of their Creator...whose honor is inseparably connected with his workmanship...The one who humiliates God will not go unpunished, and the person who gives him honor will not go unrewarded....¹¹³

The prophetic literature is filled with God’s condemnation of those who oppressed the poor, Amos’ prophecy being the most memorable example.

19: 6 Many will seek the favor of a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.

¹¹² Walke, I, p. 598

¹¹³ Waltke, I, p. 607; words in bold italics his

Seeking the favor of powerful people is not sinful in itself, but offering gifts to powerful men to win their favor can degenerate into a bribe, thus perverting justice. Waltke identifies this as a courtroom scene along with 19: 5, “A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape.” Therefore, the **gift** is a bribe to incline the judge to rule in your favor.

19: 17 One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.

God assumes the indebtedness of the poor.¹¹⁴ A “loan” to the Lord is the most risk-free investment we will ever make. Solomon is using hyperbole (exaggeration): How we can lend anything to the God who owns everything? Yet, the wording grabs our attention and alerts us to the rich rewards accruing to those who are gracious to the poor.

Two reasons: first, He is their Maker in whose image they are made, and second, the poor in question here are not poor because of laziness. God is working out His providential purpose for their poverty with relationship to others who are responsible for their care. God’s attributes of grace, mercy, and generosity are exhibited through others who are gracious to the poor. Without poverty, these attributes would remain partially hidden. The poor who know the Lord should be content knowing that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the will and intimate knowledge of the heavenly father (Matt. 10: 29) and that God will provide in due time. Those who are well-endowed should be content with modest lifestyles for the purpose of sharing what they have, thus fulfilling the purpose of imitating the generosity of God—the sole purpose of their wealth.

21: 13 He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered.

The heart is spiritually connected with the ear, for “when the heart is hard, the ear is deaf”.¹¹⁵ This is the reciprocal curse opposite the blessing mentioned in 19: 17. Everything we do must shine the light on the glory of our Father in heaven (Matt. 5: 16). God will reward those who are gracious for exhibiting His generosity and mercy and for honoring His fellow image-bearers, the poor (19: 17), but He will shut His ears to those who are stingy and hard-hearted. If we shut our ears to the poor, God will shut His ears. Those who demonstrate mercy will receive mercy, but those who are not merciful will not receive mercy (cf. Matt. 18: 23-35 and commentary in *Synoptic Gospels*). This is not works salvation, but the recognition that a man who is hard-hearted and spiritually deaf has not actually received the mercy of forgiveness which, in turn, renders him merciful. Once again, we have the law of sowing and reaping. When we sow abundantly, we will also reap abundantly; but when we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly (2 Cor. 9: 6).

21: 25 The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, For his hands refuse to work;

21: 26 All day long he is craving, While the righteous gives and does not hold back.

This proverb pair shows the connection between laziness and lack of generosity. Those who are generous not only satisfy their own needs, but work hard enough to have something left over to supply the needs of others.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.” Eph. 4:28, NASB)

¹¹⁴ Waltke, II, p. 111

¹¹⁵ Waltke, II, p. 178. Cf. also the curses and blessings of Deut. 27-28.

Those who are lazy always have their hand out to receive, but the hand is too idle to produce anything to give (cf. Prov. 30: 15). The appetite for food keeps *normal* people alive, causing them to work to satisfy it; but the appetite (**desire**) of the sluggard actually kills him since he refuses to work.¹¹⁶ Here we have a clear proverb demonstrating that poverty can be the result of sin. Being lazy is a sin, for it not only robs one of the opportunity of providing for his own needs, but also the opportunity of providing for the needs of others.

22: 7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower *becomes* the lender's slave.

22: 8 He who sows iniquity will reap vanity, And the rod of his fury will perish.

22: 9 He who is generous will be blessed, For he gives some of his food to the poor.

This is a triple proverb in which the three parts have evident context with one another. The rich ruling over the poor has reference not to the political life of the poor—though this is also true—but to their economic life. This becomes clear when Verset A (the first half of the verse) is compared to Verset B (the last half of the verse). They rule over the poor because the poor borrower becomes slave to the greed of the oppressive lender. In the ancient historical context, the poor may literally become a slave to the lender if he fails to pay back his loan—a legal form of debt repayment in the OT. A Hebrew slave should have been given his freedom after six years even if the loan was not fully repaid, but there is little evidence that this practice was actually enforced for most of Israel's corrupt history (Ex. 21: 2; Deut. 15: 12).

The oppression of the rich toward his poor neighbor consisted in lending to him at interest, particularly excessive interest, which prevented him from successfully paying off his loan, thereafter becoming the lender's slave for default on the loan (Amos 2: 6). If most of the interest is amortized early in the loan history, the usual practice today, then almost nothing of the principle (the original loan amount) is paid until the end of the loan period. The early payments are almost exclusively interest payments. For example, in the US years ago (when interest rates were "high") when a person takes out a loan at 9% for a loan period of 30 years for a house costing \$100,000, the real cost of the house after 30 years will be \$289,667. But if the interest rate is 18%, the same house will cost \$542,552, almost twice as much. In Uganda, a small loan of \$5000 or 10 million Ush (the exchange rate has now changed dramatically), at 9% will cost \$7600 or 15.2 million Ush over a loan period of 10 years, and the same loan at 18% will cost \$10,812 or 21.6 million Ush over a 10-year period. Almost all of the initial monthly payments are pure interest, reducing the actual loan only a very small amount. For example, on a ten year loan for \$5000 at 18% interest, the remaining balance on the loan after 5 years is still \$3500. This means that after half the period of the loan, you still owe 70% of the loan. The reason for this is that you are paying most of the interest early in the loan. The proverb is a timeless lesson to would-be borrowers who wish to purchase *depreciating*¹¹⁷ consumer items (cars, furniture, clothing, etc.) with borrowed money. Every day the borrower works, he is working a portion of his day for his lender. He has voluntarily made himself the lender's slave.

I don't know what the banking practices were in ancient Palestine, but the interest rates were probably worse than today's considering the fact that loans to the poor were high-risk loans. The result was that it was *very difficult for them to get out of debt*. For this reason, the Mosaic law forbade charging interest to the poor (Ex. 22: 25). The command not to act as a creditor indicated

¹¹⁶ Waltke, II, p. 188

¹¹⁷ A depreciating item is one that loses value over time (autos, clothing, furniture, cheap jewelry, etc.) rather than gaining value (houses, land).

that the loan was not for the purpose of buying real estate or financing a business, but to buy food, clothing or to rent shelter. For these necessities, no interest could be legally charged—but was usually charged anyway by Jews insensitive to the Law. In the parable of the talents, Jesus implicitly condoned (approved) the charging of interest for commercial purposes (Matt. 25: 27). If the servant should have put the talent in the bank to earn interest, the bank must charge greater interest to be able to pay interest to its depositors. Otherwise, the bank makes no profit and cannot stay in business. But Jesus was not talking about charging interest to poor people; He was mentioning the legitimate practice of charging interest for investment and commercial purposes.

The general trend of commercial banking in sub-Saharan Africa is to charge 25% interest or more.¹¹⁸ (The interest tables in my amortization book did not go this high!) For this reason, there are very few manufacturing industries in sub-Saharan Africa which require large amounts of capital (money) for raw materials and labor. The industries that do exist are often self-financed or financed from abroad (from India, for example). As far as the poor are concerned, most of them cannot borrow money at all because of excessive interest rates. Consequently, the poor cannot go to the bank and borrow one million shillings to start a small business, and they continue working for two US dollars a day for someone else, or continue subsistence farming. Meanwhile, the commercial banks are earning large profits on excessive interest rates—or, they may be making up for the money lost on defaulted loans which are not repaid. At any rate, it is a vicious system. (The Grameen Bank in India was started by a man who wished to make loans of reasonable interest rates to low income people. It has become immensely successful and has become world-wide.)

Verse 8 shows that God frowns upon the heartlessness of lenders who have no mercy on poor borrowers. They will receive no long-term benefits from their greed. With the Lord, “business” is not “just business”, and if the entrepreneur demands a return on *his* investment, the Lord also demands a return on the prosperity He has lavished upon the entrepreneur. Responsibility always comes with prosperity. The “crop” being sown by the greedy lender is the oppression of the poor, and is nothing short of **iniquity**.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, the law of retribution is always in place forcing the oppressor to reap the trouble (vanity or meaninglessness) he has sown. The **rod of his fury** toward the poor borrower will **perish**. One day, the *righteous* poor who loves the Lord will be sitting at the side of Abraham in heaven while the rich lender will be begging for him to touch the tip of his tongue with a cool drop of water (Lk. 16). If the man who is generous to the poor **lends** to the Lord (19: 17), then the one who oppresses the poor insults the Lord and robs Him.

The proverb is close kin to Prov. 11: 24, “There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results* only in want.” If bankers only believed the Bible, they would realize that their profits would increase if they were more generous in their lending habits.¹²⁰

The generous man of v. 9 is not the wealthy individual who gives silver and gold out of his excess, but the working man who shares his food.¹²¹ He serves as a stark contrast to the greedy lender and the rich fool (Lk. 12: 16-21), a parable spoken against covetousness (v. 15). Having received a

¹¹⁸ Even in the US some loan companies charge as much as 36% to high-risk borrowers who have no other alternatives. They take advantage of low-income borrowers.

¹¹⁹ Waltke, II, p. 206

¹²⁰ “Generous” but not “reckless.” American banks were reckless in their lending habits to risky borrowers in the years preceding the stock market crash in 2008. Large home loans were being made to people who had little ability to repay.

¹²¹ Waltke, II, p. 210

bountiful harvest and used up the space in his existing barns, he decides to build bigger barns for storing the excess grain, thus supplying him for years to come. In other words, he wants to retire from work, and the surplus he received would enable him to do so in style—to kick back with plenty of vintage wine and marry another wife, a young one looking for a rich husband. It never seemed to occur to him that the excess grain could be used as gifts to poor people—the majority population in ancient Palestine—who had little to eat on a daily basis. It is also possible that the parable alludes to the practice of storing up the grain to save it for hard times when the productivity was low so that it could then be sold at an exorbitant (excessive) price to the starving masses (cf. Prov. 11: 26 and commentary above). Rather than being blessed for his avaricious (greedy) plan, God takes the man’s life that very night. Rather than *retire*, he simply *expired*. The conclusion: “So is the man who stores up treasure *for himself*, and is not rich *toward God*” (Lk. 12:21, emphasis mine).

G. *God’s Sovereignty and Man’s Responsibility*

15: 3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.

The fear of the Lord is generated only in those who have a biblical view of God. As the wicked in Ps. 73 despise God by proudly denying his omniscience (“all-knowing-ness”) and sovereignty, the righteous believe that God sees everything man does, both **evil** and **good**. In other words, God is sovereign, and nothing is hidden from his sight. Why then do professing believers presume to build a reputation for godliness among men while sinning in private? Do we not know that God is looking at everything we do? Would we presume to take Jesus into the bedroom with us while we commit adultery with our neighbor’s wife, or invite him to view pornography with us over the internet? If he were standing in front of you today or tomorrow, would you change your plans?

15: 11 Sheol and Abaddon *lie open* before the LORD, How much more the hearts of men!

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If even the place of the dead is visible to God, how much more the hearts of those who are still alive. This is a companion proverb to 15: 3.

16: 1 The **plans** of the **heart** belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from **the LORD**.

16: 2 All the **ways** of a man are clean in his own sight, But **the LORD** weighs the motives.

16: 3 Commit **your works** to **the LORD** And your **plans** will be established.

16: 4 **The LORD** has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

16: 5 Everyone who is proud in **heart** is an abomination to **the LORD**; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.

16: 6 By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of **the LORD** one keeps away from evil.

16: 7 When a man’s **ways** are pleasing to **the LORD**, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

16: 8 Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.

16: 9 The mind of man **plans** his way, But **the LORD** directs his steps.

These verses belong together as a unit, as the repetition indicates: **plans, ways, works, heart**, as well as the repeated references to **the Lord**. Man is a responsible creature whose plans and ways are chosen freely in the relative sense of being chosen according to his desires: **the plans of the heart**. **The mind of man plans his way**. Yet, the Lord, who **made everything for its own purpose, directs his steps** or “works all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1: 11b). This appears self-contradictory to the human mind, but man’s responsibility and God’s

predetermined will and sovereignty is perfectly compatible (harmonious) in the mind of God. As Charles Spurgeon responded when asked how he can reconcile God's sovereignty and human responsibility, "I never try to reconcile friends." Joseph, Jacob's son, also believed in the compatibility of God's sovereign purpose and man's responsibility. Speaking to his brothers who sold him into slavery, he says,

"As for you, you **meant evil** against me, *but* God **meant** it for **good** in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." (Genesis 50:20 NASB)

Notice that the same word (**meant**, *chashab* in Hebrew) is used of his brothers' intentions and God's intentions. "You meant evil", but "God meant it for good". The activity of God is implicit in the verse. God is not *re*-acting to Joseph's brothers' evil deed by somehow making the best of a bad situation, cleaning up after the brothers' mess. God never reacts to anything. He only *acts* according to His sovereign and perfect knowledge of all past, present, and future events—because He has ordained *all* those events. Earlier in the Joseph story he assures his brothers that their actions in the whole affair were secondary to God's actions.

"Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for **God sent me before you** to preserve life. ⁶ "For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ "**God sent me before you** to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. ⁸ "Now, therefore, **it was not you who sent me here, but God**; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Gen. 45:5-8 NASB)

God is always the primary actor. Man may arrogantly plan his way according to his own independent desires and purpose, but the final outcome will be determined by the sovereign will of God, regardless of human effort and planning. In v. 1, the parallel between Verset A and B is not immediately apparent, but the meaning seems to be that while a man answers in a certain way according to a well-thought plan and prepared speech, the words which actually come out of his mouth reflect more upon the pre-determined will of God who governs man's plan, even his words. Man may have the "first word", but God will have the "last word".¹²² Even man's evil tongue and ineffective arguments are under the sovereign control of God. He is never the author of evil, but He uses evil, including evil words, for His sovereign and good purposes (16: 4). Otherwise, man's abusive tongue and evil plans lie outside of God's providence and are solely under man's control.

The arguments of Japanese generals and commanders in favor of bombing Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands (1941) were doubtlessly compelling. They persuaded themselves that one fatal blow to the US Naval fleet would render the US incapable of coming to the aid of Europe against the axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan. What this attack actually accomplished, however, was to arouse the anger of the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the American people. As one Japanese commander remarked to an enthusiastic aide after the success of the attack, "I am afraid all we have done is awakened a sleeping giant." Had the US not entered World War II, Europe would have likely been lost forever to German and Japanese tyranny, and the world would be a different place today for the worse.

To use another biblical example, wicked men planned the execution of Christ, yet His crucifixion was predestined by God (Acts 4: 27-28).

¹²² Waltke, Vol. 2, p. 9).

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.** (Acts 4:27-28 NASB)

If God's will is determinative in the planning of murder, it must be so also in the planning and execution of speech.¹²³

Men think they are in control of their lives, but they fail to factor God's sovereignty into the equation. They defiantly, though less eloquently, mimic the words of the poet, William Ernest Henley,

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

Henley seems to have missed his self-contradiction. If he is bludgeoned by "chance", then he is not the master of his fate but the victim of chance. What Henley attributed to chance, Solomon attributes to God. God controls even their speech, **the answer of the tongue**. James may be alluding to this proverb when he says,

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16 NASB)

When men speak their intentions, they may not be able to carry them out to fruition; but when the Lord speaks, His speaking is synonymous with His doing.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 NASB)

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,¹⁰ **Declaring** the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:9-10 NASB)

¹²³ See *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, WCF 5.1-3, cited from BibleWorks).

Many rehearsed speeches have been altered by the activity of God.

It is a matter of experience which the preacher, the public speaker, the author, and every man to whom his calling or circumstances present a weighty, difficult theme, can attest. As the thoughts pursue one another in the mind, attempts are made, and again abandoned; the state of the heart is somewhat like that of chaos before the creation. But when, finally, the right thought and the right utterance for it are found, that which is found appears to us, not as if self-discovered, but as a gift; we regard it with the feeling that a higher power has influenced our thoughts and imaginings; the confession by us ... (2 Cor. 3: 5), in so far as we believe in a living God, is inevitable (F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, pp. 334-335).

Jesus tells his disciples who are standing before kings not to plan any defense ahead of time since the Lord will direct them what to say (Matt. 10: 18-20).

16: 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.

With the same independent spirit, men credit themselves for their good deeds while failing to look at their own hearts (v. 2). The deed may be done according to the proper standard (the law of God), but the **motive** behind the deed may be purely self-centered. But the Lord puts one's motives on the scales to be evaluated. Without the proper motive (love for God) and the proper goal (the glory of God) an apparently good deed is, in essence, an evil deed. Paul says,

“And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned [*as a martyr*], but do not have love, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3 NASB; explanation in brackets mine).

Even most externally good deeds done by men are essentially immoral because they are not borne out of one's love for God and others, nor are they done for the primary purpose of bringing glory to God (Matt. 5: 16). It is because of this three-fold criteria (condition) that Paul asserts that the natural man “cannot please God” in the highest sense of the word (Rom. 8: 7-8).

16: 3 Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.

The word, **plans**, ties this verse to verse 1. If a man will commit his works to God for His approval rather than charting his course independently and irreverently, God will establish his plans. The NIV renders the verse, “your plans will succeed”. This is a general promise of success for those with pure—or at least, mostly pure—motives.¹²⁴ It does not guarantee that every business venture of the righteous will make a handsome profit—mine surely didn't—but that his ultimate goal of living for the Lord will be fulfilled.

As a freshman and sophomore in college, I believed the Lord was calling me into medicine; but unlike my best friend, I never became a medical doctor. My long-range **plan** was to help people with proper medical care. Providentially, this plan was fulfilled another way—helping others understand the Bible. Many detours occurred along the way, providentially arranged for my informal “education”—18 years of manual labor. To this day, I don't know exactly how 18 years of manual labor fit into my plans to teach the Bible, but who am I to say they were wasted? God never wastes anything. At the very least, they curbed my pride—at least some of it.

¹²⁴ Absolute purity in our motives is impossible in the sinful state.

There is a sense in which the believer who has **committed his works**—his life—to the Lord cannot fail to succeed in his plan. Even if he may sometimes wonder why he is in a certain place and why he is doing what he is doing—like Moses in the wilderness tending sheep rather than delivering Israel—God will use him and glorify Himself through him. His **plans will be established** because they are God’s plans to glorify Himself through his life. “Secular man, who feels so self-confident, paradoxically is plagued with fear. Pious people, who know God’s sovereignty and their limitations, live in prayer and peace.”¹²⁵

16: 4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

Its own purpose refers to God’s purpose for every person, thing, or event (cf. NIV, “his own ends”). One commentary on this verse is Romans 9.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Romans 9:17 NIV).

God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he would not let the Israelites go, giving Him the opportunity to display His saving power before His people, power which would become known to the Canaanites (Josh. 2: 9-11). As a warning to kings and people in power (see below), God also makes *them* for his own purpose (cf. Ps. 2).

The proverb connects with the previous three proverbs. *Even man’s planned response* is from the Lord. Pharaoh hardened his own heart while the Lord hardened it even further. His unwillingness to let the people go was ordained according to God’s purpose to display His wonders to a people who would need constant reminders of His power and faithfulness. In context with v. 3, the wicked do not commit their works to the Lord; consequently, their selfish purposes are not permanently established.¹²⁶ Instead, they must yield involuntarily to the purposes God has ordained for them culminating (climaxing) eschatologically in **the day of evil**, the day of judgment. The righteous have the privilege of participating voluntarily in the purposes of God—committing their way to Him—while the wicked must endure these purposes contrary to their own planning and volition (will).¹²⁷

16: 5 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.

In context with the previous verses, the **proud** man is the man who does not commit his way to the Lord (v. 3), whose ways are clean in his own eyes and whose motives are impure (v. 2). He is proud because he believes everything is the result of self-initiative and self-effort divorced from God’s mercy, grace, and enabling providence. **He will not be unpunished**, but is reserved **for the day of evil** (v. 4) at which time he will realize that his earthly success and prosperity were gifts from God squandered upon the altar of the so-called “self-made man”. It is God’s sovereignty, not man’s efforts, which makes the ultimate difference; for even man’s efforts are divinely given. Divine sovereignty (the primary means) does not eliminate the secondary means of human responsibility. God uses man’s efforts to accomplish his ultimate will of prospering him, and he uses man’s lethargy (laziness) as the means to his poverty (Isa. 45: 7; 2 Chron. 32: 27-29).

¹²⁵ Waltke, vol. 2, p.11

¹²⁶ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 12

¹²⁷ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 9

"But you shall remember the LORD your God, **for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth**, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day. (Deuteronomy 8:18 NASB)

It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it. (Proverbs 10:22 NASB)

"A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest"—¹¹ Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man. (Proverbs 6:10-11 NASB)

Pride is the antithesis (the opposite) of faith because it denies God's sovereignty. For this reason, pride is repugnant (abominable) to God and heads the list of the seven things He hates.

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood... (Proverbs 6:16-17 NASB)

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:7 NASB)

Fundamentally, pride is the quest and desire for independence, claiming something we have (wealth, possessions, intelligence, education, good looks) as if we owned it apart from God's grace. This is why God is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble who look to him for everything they need and depend on Him for everything they have. In a word, pride is self-worship and narcissism. Those who are prideful **will not be unpunished**. Believers who are prideful will be punished temporally in this life in order to hold their pride in check. Without holiness no one will see the Lord, therefore the Lord will properly discipline his sons to ensure their salvation; the discipline of pride becomes a means of grace transporting them to heaven. Such discipline may be excruciatingly painful. David was most likely filled with pride at his military exploits as he walked out upon his roof and saw Bathsheba bathing. Perhaps he reasoned that he had been faithful in battle and deserved an additional reward for his labors. It was, as the writer tells us, "the time of year when kings go out to battle", but David was idle, resting from military conquests. A sense of entitlement leads us into error and possible ruin. It is how all adulterous affairs begin, with one or both parties believing that they deserve something they don't have from the other spouse rather than asking what they should be giving the other but aren't. Pride leads to greed, covetousness, theft and murder. While "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" (1 Tim. 6; 10a), the love of money has its roots in pride.

16: 6 By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.

The idea presented here is not self-atonement through works, but the necessary connection between sacrificial offerings and heart obedience to the Law (1 Sam. 15: 22). Without **the fear of the Lord** which keeps a person **away from evil**, no amount of animal sacrifice will cover his sin. The fear of the Lord includes not only refraining from evil but doing good to others—**lovingkindness and truth** applied to one's fellow man.¹²⁸

The verse is illustrated in the parable of the unforgiving servant and Jesus' warning that an unforgiving person will not himself be forgiven (Matt. 18), as well as the beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." God's atoning grace in the Christian life is demonstrated in sanctification; but without the evidence of sanctification, we should not presume

¹²⁸ Waltke, vol. 2, pp. 13-14

the imputation of the blood of Christ in atonement. Faith without works is dead and will not save us (James 2).

We err, however, if we force the same theological precision on the OT writers that we receive from the NT epistles (Rom. 5—justification by grace alone through Christ alone). Even Jesus sometimes speaks as if one was saved by his works (cf. Matt. 19: 16-17), but this only shows that the law promises life to the doer of the law and death to the law-breaker. The proper use of the law is to drive us to despair of our own efforts to keep it and then to lead us to the grace of the gospel. In the OT, the law demanded perfect obedience; and when this perfect obedience inevitably failed to come, the sacrificial system reminded the penitent sinner that there was, after all, a remedy in substitutionary atonement. But if the sinner brought his sacrifices perfunctorily (without conscious thought of their real meaning and importance, and without true repentance), the sacrifice was of no avail to him. His continuous life of sin indicated that there was no **fear of the Lord** by which he **keeps away from evil**. Atonement had not taken place.

Verse 6 is connected with the other verses in this unit with the phrase, **the fear of the Lord**. **Keep[ing] away from evil** is the product of fearing the Lord and acknowledging his sovereign prerogatives (privileges) over a person's life. Man is responsible to keep away from evil because God is sovereign. Without sovereignty there is no human responsibility. Man could do as he pleased.

16: 7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

This proverb continues with the theme of the two ways: the way of commitment vs. independence and pride, the way of pure motives vs. self-justification and rationalization; and now, the way which is pleasing to the Lord. As it stands, the proverb seems to contradict Jesus' promise of certain tribulation and persecution even from one's own household (Matt. 10: 36; Jn. 16: 33). But the verse seems to teach that **when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord**, the Lord *restrains* his enemies even if He does not remove them (cf. Ps. 23: 5). Furthermore, the man whose ways are pleasing to the Lord does not invite unnecessary ill-treatment which would not qualify as persecution for the sake of righteousness (1 Pet. 2: 20). Sometimes we deserve ill-treatment, but when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he is not generally provoking his enemies to personal attack.

The proverb must be balanced with other teaching. The man who seeks peace at any price because he refuses to take a stand against evil is not the man described in this proverb. Because he stands firm in his commitment to God's way, God, not the man himself, will make his enemies be at peace. Thus, the proverb also continues with the subject of God's sovereignty. Not only is God in ultimate control of believers, but also unbelievers who may hate us.

16: 8 Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.

Although it seems out of context with vv. 1-7, the proverb fits in well with v. 6 in which lovingkindness toward one's neighbor is contrasted with injustice, also with v. 5 in which the pride of man in his presumed self-achievement is condemned, with v. 4 in which the day of evil would be applicable to one who makes his income with injustice, with v. 3 in which the man who commits his way to the Lord will be content with limited income as long as his work is pleasing

to the Lord, with v. 2 because the man making his income unjustly will always find some way to justify his actions.

The proverb acknowledges that there are righteous men who have **little** material wealth; moreover, it acknowledges the possibility that **great income** may have been achieved through unscrupulous means. If so, it is better to have a good reputation and a clean conscience than great wealth. Moreover, this statement acknowledges God's sovereignty over outcomes. The rich man may have attained great wealth through injustice, and the righteous man may have little because he refused to compromise biblical principles in his economic dealings with others. Yet, because God is sovereign over the final outcome, it will be **better** for the righteous. The better outcome may or may not be realized in this life, but most assuredly in life beyond the grave.

A *good* name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold. (Proverbs 22:1 NASB)

Quality of life is not the product of accumulation but enjoyment *coram deo*, "before God". Without God's presence in one's life, no amount of material goods will satisfy.

Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." (Luke 12:15 NASB)

16: 9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

This is closely parallel with v. 1. In v. 1, although men plan what to say, the answer is ultimately the result of God's sovereign ordination.

Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. (Psalm 139:4 NASB)

In the same way, men make plans, but the execution of those plans is entirely subject to the will of God who either permits, prevents, or modifies their execution to coincide (correspond) with His decrees. In the case of the wicked, the proverb is a warning that they are not in ultimate control of their destinies. There is an invisible hand directing, overruling, or sustaining their decisions and actions at every turn. In the case of believers, the proverb is a statement of comfort, that although we will make painful, time-consuming detours away from God's moral pathway, the guiding arm of providence is not too short to "cause all things [*even our sin, DM*] to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). Even our sinful mistakes do not fall outside the domain of God's decreed will for His people, and He has ordained these mistakes to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8: 29).

If men *devise their way*, so as to make God's glory their end and his will their rule, they may expect that he will *direct their steps* by his Spirit and grace, so that they shall not miss their way nor come short of their end. But let men devise their worldly affairs ever so politely, and with ever so great a probability of success, yet God has the ordering of the event, and sometimes *directs their steps* to that which they least intended.¹²⁹

In his commentary on Proverbs, Bruce Waltke quotes W. McKane, "A man may plan his road to the last detail, but he cannot implement his planning, unless it coincides with Yahweh's plan for

¹²⁹ Matthew Henry, *Proverbs*

him. He is deluded if he supposes that he has unfettered control and can impose his will on every situation without limitation in order to make his plan a reality.”

16: 33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

The land of Israel was distributed to the tribes by lot (Num. 26: 55-56; 33: 54; Josh. 14: 2). The sin of Achan was determined by casting the lot (Josh. 7), and the selection of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement was done by casting lots (Lev. 16: 8). Therefore, even the throwing of the lot is determined by the Lord. The pagan practice was also under His control (Jonah 1: 7) and the current practice of gambling with dice would be no exception. Solomon uses this example to highlight the sovereign decision of God in every conceivable event. The proverb argues from the lesser to the greater. If something as random as dice-throwing is determined by God’s sovereignty, then everything else is included under His sovereignty as well.

If the reader accepts Waltke’s conviction that the Proverbs are structured more tightly than has been originally believed, then v. 33 seems to be a conclusion to the major theme of the entire chapter, the sovereignty of God in everything. Yet there are many other subjects popping up in the chapter which inclines me to believe that v. 33 stands alone.

19: 1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.

19: 2 Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, And he who hurries his footsteps errs.

19: 3 The foolishness of man ruins his way, And his heart rages against the LORD.

The first of these proverbs contrast the poor man of integrity with a man who lies (the ESV translates the phrase, “crooked in speech”). Since the man who is crooked in speech is paired with the poor man, his crooked speech is employed to defraud people of their money in some way or another. The **also** in v. 2 indicates a connection with v. 1, a connection which is not immediately apparent. The idea seems to be that the man who is crooked in speech to gain money hastens quickly to do so. In v. 3, after he has ruined his life with greed and foolish living, and having failed to accomplish his goal of getting rich, he lashes out against the providence of God who did not establish him in his greedy lifestyle.

Instead of repenting of the sins that prompted the Lord to ruin him, the earthbound creature is so convinced that his sinful way of life is right that he storms against the Lord, holding him accountable for not granting what he thought, planned and willed.¹³⁰

19: 21 Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

These proverbs are closely parallel with 16: 9. No matter how careful men are in planning their lives, the Lord’s eternal plan will carry the day and be established. This does not eliminate the occurrence of secondary causes (e.g. hard work, planning, laziness, lack of planning, etc.) but rather confirms them. Just as the end is foreordained by God, so are the secondary means of reaching that end. The Westminster Confession says,

WCF 5.2 Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly;(1) yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

¹³⁰ Waltke, II. pp. 99-100

(1) Acts 2:23.

(2) Gen. 8:22; Jer. 31:35; Exod. 21:13; Deut. 19:5; 1 Kings 22:28,34; Isa. 10:6,7. (WCF 5:2 WCS)

WCF 5.3 God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means,(1) yet is free to work without,(2) above,(3) and against them,(4) at His pleasure.

(1) Acts 27:31,44; Isa. 55:10,11; Hos. 2:21,22.

(2) Hos. 1:7; Matt. 4:4; Job 34:10.

(3) Rom. 4:19,20,21.

(4) 2 Kings 6:6; Dan. 3:27. (WCF 5:3 WCS)

This last quote from the Confession indicates that while God uses secondary causes, He is not limited to them. He may have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by direct means. He is capable of sending fire from heaven apart from any natural causes, but He could have destroyed it with a volcanic eruption. All geophysical phenomena are under His control.

20: 12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The LORD has made both of them.

There is no hearing and no seeing apart from God's gift of hearing and seeing.¹³¹ Moreover, even our empiricism (hearing and seeing) can be distorted by the mind. Two people can hear and see the same things differently and come to entirely different conclusions. The man who fears the Lord will see and hear with the aid of verbal revelation which allows him to properly interpret what he sees. The proverb does not imply that the eye and ear can be trusted apart from the divine aid of interpretation, but that they should be used wisely to observe life and creation and listen to wisdom.¹³²

20: 24 Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?

Since God providentially controls all of man's actions, it is not surprising that man cannot fully comprehend or understand what happens to him in this life—**his way**. Life is full of mystery; and things happen to man beyond his control influencing him, sometimes forcing him, to act and react in certain ways—**man's steps**—without fully understanding the significance of what he is doing and how his actions will lead to further actions affecting him the rest of his life.

I taught in a “Christian” high school (in name only) for one miserable year. The experience contributed to our decision to home school our children rather than pay dearly for an education which was only nominally Christian. The experience also contributed to my decision 20 years later to leave the US—which is over-supplied with educated Christian teachers—and come to Africa where educational opportunities have been scarce for millions of able, gifted pastors. I had absolutely no idea what God was accomplishing with that one miserable year of teaching. My steps were ordained by the Lord. How was I supposed to understand the full significance of what happened at that high school?

Waltke says of this verse, “People do not understand their ways because God makes the actual direction and destiny of their free actions subservient to his plan. The earthling has the

¹³¹ Longman, p. 380

¹³² Waltke, II, p. 141

responsibility for the choice of his way (i.e. the direction and orientation of his life) and for his steps (decisions and actions he takes), but the Lord determines the realization and the attaining of his goal. Therefore, the wise look to the Lord, not to their own hands, to work out the course of justice in their narratives...”

21: 1 The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

As indicated earlier, God's sovereignty over man's steps is not limited to ordinary earthlings, but extends to kings and all men and women in power. Although presuming to exercise sovereign authority over other men's lives, the king (president, MP, congressman, etc.) may not realize—and usually doesn't—that God is *overruling his rule* through providential intervention. As channels in the earth turn the river waters wherever they go, the Lord turns the king's heart and his decisions anywhere He wishes them to go. The king's absolute sovereignty is, therefore, only imaginary.

Given the autocratic tyranny of many kings and presidents, we may be tempted to grant kings immunity from God's sovereign rule lest we implicate (involve in guilt) God in their crimes against humanity. Yet, God's sovereignty ensures that He remains guiltless even in the sovereign control of man's wicked rule. This was true in Pharaoh's life. Pharaoh believed that it was his decision alone keeping the Israelites hostage to Egyptian slavery, but all the while the Lord was hardening his heart so that he would not let His people go in order to show His power (Ex. 4: 21; 7: 3; Rom. 9: 17). The Lord then judged Pharaoh for not letting the people go, simply because he was morally responsible for his act in spite of God's sovereign rule over his life. Likewise, Jehu, king of Israel, is commanded to exterminate the house of Ahab (2 Kings 9), but that same act is later condemned by God since Jehu's motive was not pure devotion to God (Hosea 1: 4; 2 Kings 10: 29-31). He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. Men do not sin because they wish to cooperate with God's sovereign decrees. They sin because they are sinners, and God is fully justified in judging the very activity which He decrees.

Pilate handed over Jesus to be crucified, yet this very act was predetermined by the Lord to accomplish salvation for His people (Acts 2: 23).

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. (Acts 4:27-28 NASB)

Jesus acknowledged the predetermination of his crucifixion, yet declared condemnation upon Judas Iscariot for his betrayal.

"For the Son of Man *is to* go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* good for that man if he had not been born." (Mk. 14:21 NASB)

21: 30 There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the LORD.

There can be no wisdom or counsel **against** the Lord simply because there is no higher standard by which to judge what He does. Furthermore, since we can only see the partial outcomes of any event, our decisions are always based on partial knowledge, while God's decrees are based on infinite knowledge of all events—past, present, and future—events which He himself ordained.

It is foolish, therefore, for us to complain about the providential working of God with His creatures. We cannot possibly understand the inter-connectedness of all events.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38: 2)

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?
(Romans 11:34 NASB)

In the same way, there can be **wisdom, understanding, or counsel** against the inspired word of God, which is God-breathed. There is no verbal or written standard outside the Bible by which the Bible can be validated as true or false. Shall we subject the trustworthiness of the Bible to the opinions of trained OT scholars, ethicists, or philosophers? Will they then become the new arbitrators (judges) of the truth or falsity of the Bible? We then have established a new authority above the Bible, but not subject to the Bible.

21: 31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But victory belongs to the LORD.

Human armies can plan their strategy for battle and ready their armies, but the Lord decides the victory regardless of preparations.

I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. (Ecclesiastes 9:11 NASB)

What the preacher here calls chance, the Scriptures assert as sovereignty. From Qohelet’s limited observation—the perspective of most of the book of Ecclesiastes—it didn’t seem to matter who had the advantage since some unforeseen event could turn the advantage into a handicap.

In context with v. 30, it implies that no amount of human strategy (**counsel**) or ability will overcome the sovereign decree of God. The Mosaic Law specifically forbade the multiplication of horses for the simple reason that Israel’s kings would be tempted to trust in their military might instead of Yahweh (Deut. 17: 15-16; Ps. 20: 7). War horses could cover as much as 100 kilometers per day and were employed by Solomon as one of the primary weapons of war.¹³³ But in the end, Israel’s and Judah’s horses and chariots failed to deliver them from God’s wrath in 722 and 587 BC when He used Assyria and Babylonia to destroy their cities and take them into exile. They had broken the covenant and brought down on their own heads the curse of the covenant. They could not run from God’s wrath even on fast chariots. Solomon’s efforts to establish his kingdom with marriages to the daughters of foreign kings (1 Kings 11) proved disastrous. He needed only one thing, fidelity to the covenant and the covenant Lord.

In 1588, Spain sent its presumably invincible (undefeatable) Spanish Armada to invade England, a victory which would have rendered England a Catholic nation. The Armada would have easily won except for one unpredictable inconvenience—a massive storm which rendered the larger Spanish ships less maneuverable than the English ships. The Armada was destroyed, and England remained protestant, making way for the Reformation to continue its work in the British Isles and across the ocean to America.

¹³³ Waltke, II. p. 192; cf. 1 Ki. 10: 26-29, cited in Waltke.

Therefore, in this proverb war horses are a synecdoche (a part for the whole) for any implements of war. The sophisticated war machinery of the US—or any other country—will not save it from the judgment of God. I shudder at the pride and arrogance of American presidents and other US leaders who believe that our military superiority is assurance against defeat.

H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

16: 10 A divine decision is in the lips of the king; His mouth should not err in judgment.

This is first proverb specifically about the activity and responsibility of kings. The structure indicates that the **divine decision** is parallel to the king's **judgment**. The proverb should not be taken as an argument for the “divine right of kings”—that kings always speak with the authority of God and should never be questioned.¹³⁴ Rather, the proverb speaks **pre-scriptively**, not **de-scriptively**. Kings should, but do not always, declare God's law in legal matters. It acknowledges the fact that when the king speaks, his words have far-reaching impact and influence because of the position he holds. If he is mistaken in judgment, he brings much harm to his subjects. Therefore, he **should not err**.¹³⁵

The king is not indeed wiser by birth than his subjects; but he is under stronger obligations to seek wisdom. And when God's law is his law, *a divine sentence is in his lips*.¹³⁶

The verse is connected to the previous verses in the sense that the king must render decisions with humility and with the proper motives, being overwhelmed with the gravity of his responsibility. Moreover, his high position in life does not isolate him from the overruling hand of providence (Daniel 4: 34-35).

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan. (Proverbs 29:2 NASB)

16: 11 A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern.

The subject of justice is continued from v. 8. A king must be concerned about justice in the market place and must punish those who are found buying with one set of weights and selling with another set. All scales and weights for buying and selling must be the same. Rich merchants were often guilty of the practice of cheating the poor with dishonest scales and were appropriately condemned by the prophets.

Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land,⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat *market*, To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, And to cheat with **dishonest scales**, (Amos 8:4-5 NASB)

"Can I justify wicked scales And a bag of **deceptive weights**?¹² "For the rich men of *the* city are full of violence, Her residents speak lies, And their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. (Micah 6:11-12 NASB)

¹³⁴ Beyond any doubt, it has been applied this way throughout history.

¹³⁵ See the different translations. The ESV renders the verb as an indicative statement (“does not”), while the NASB, NIV and NKJV renders the verb as subjunctive (“should not” or “must not”).

¹³⁶ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*

Therefore, the wisdom of Proverbs searches the hearts of every person who is conducting business. It is unacceptable to parade your spirituality in the temple (or at church) while throughout the week you are stealing from your fellow man. The Christian world-view covers every activity, including buying and selling. Verse 11 is connected with the overall theme of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility throughout the unit. Kings are not a law unto themselves, but must rule in the fear of God under *His* law; therefore, he must not **err in judgment** (v. 10) by letting evil men get away with extortion and fraud, thus implicating his reign with organized theft.

16: 12 It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, For a throne is established on righteousness.

Greater privilege brings greater social and moral responsibility (v. 12).

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls **as those who will give an account**. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17 NASB)

A king must rule in the fear of God, understanding that he is subservient to the standards of God's law. Belshazzar's reign was weighed on the scales against the standard weight of God's rule and found deficient. That very night his kingdom fell to Darius the Mede (Dan. 5: 27-31). His grandfather (called "father" as a matter of ancient practice) Nebuchadnezzar discovered earlier that God raises up kings and destroys them according to His will and that even kings are like grasshoppers before His majestic sovereignty (Dan. 4). But he was forced to live as an insane madman for seven years as a prerequisite for learning this lesson. Belshazzar could have learned it the easy way through the lessons of history, but he was a poor student.

The word for **establish** (*kun*) has the meaning of being made firm.

And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was **firmly established**. (1 Kings 2:12 NASB)

The LORD **has established** His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all. (Psalm 103:19 NASB)

In the history of Israel, some wicked kings had long reigns, so the proverb does not pretend to cover all the exceptions. Yet, there were many wicked kings of Israel and Judah whose reigns did not last because of unrighteousness (1 Kings 14: 5-11; 15: 2-3; 15: 25-26; 16: 8-9, 23-25; 2 Kings 3: 1-2; 8: 16-18; 15: 23-24). Even Solomon's kingdom was ripped from his son, Rehoboam, because of Solomon's idolatry (1 Kings 11).

Despots who sustain their rule by means of intimidation and oppression should beware. In many African countries, the common citizen is generally afraid to voice his disapproval of heads of state or state policies, and well-known dissenters who have attempted to fight corruption have mysteriously disappeared.¹³⁷ Yet, those who live by the sword generally die by the sword (Matt. 26: 52). While attempting to establish their power through violence and intimidation, they are really planting the seeds of their own destruction. They may retain power for many years—as did Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Kaddafi in Libya, Idi Amin in Uganda, Adolf Hitler in Germany,

¹³⁷ George Ayittey, *Africa Unchained*, pp. xi-xv
christcommunitystudycenter.org

et al—but eventually their violence falls upon their own heads either in this life or the life to come. For God to be just, He must punish the wicked; but He will do so on his own time table, not ours, giving many despots the false impression that God either doesn't care or doesn't see what is going on (Ps. 73: 11; cf. Prov. 15: 3).

Subservience to God's moral authority, moreover, does not apply merely to policy decisions but personal character. The king—in the modern context, high-ranking public servants including presidents, legislators, MP's, et al—are held up to the public spot light. They have the opportunity to demonstrate their allegiance to a moral standard that is beyond them and higher than them, encouraging the common citizen to believe that if even the president bows before God's sovereignty, maybe the common citizen should do so as well. Submission to a transcendent God who establishes the difference between right and wrong will be a witness to the watching, world which is now more informed than ever before. What presidents do in private is no longer private—as it was, relatively speaking, during the administration of John F. Kennedy who was guilty of multiple adulterous affairs, the most notable being with Marilyn Monroe. Their lives are an open book, as Bill Clinton soon found out after his affair with Monica Lewinski, and as Donald Trump discovered after the filth of his past was uncovered during and after his presidential campaign. Sadly, however, moral character seems to have little value for most voters throughout the world, including Africa, who look for candidates who promise prosperity rather than integrity.

16: 13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings, And he who speaks right is loved.

Like v. 12, the proverb in 16: 13 is **pre**-scriptive rather than **de**-scriptive. Kings *should delight* in **righteous** speech, but they don't always do so. King Ahab did not delight in the righteous speech of Micaiah the prophet, but hated him for it. His reward for not heeding the prophet was death by a random arrow (1 Kings 22: 34-38). But *righteous* leaders—however few—delight in truth, and they love those who tell them the truth, even when the truth is distasteful. Doubtless David later delighted in Nathan's rebuke for adultery after the Lord's oppression for his sin subsided and he was restored to fellowship with God (Ps. 119: 71; cf. Ps. 32: 3). We should love those who correct us, for they seek our long-term welfare.

The verse may be a reference to the king's advisors who help the king set wise policies helping his administration succeed.¹³⁸ A king will succeed—from God's perspective—only if he surrounds himself with truth-tellers, not “yes men” (sycophants) who are always telling him what he wants to hear. Otherwise, he will not have the necessary information to make wise policy decisions. Again, a righteous king, not an unrighteous one, is assumed in the verse.

16: 14 The fury of a king is *like* messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it.

The fury of the king is here contrasted with the delight of kings in the previous paragraph. A wise man knows how to temper the wrath of the king. He knows what to say and the right time to say it. One notable example is the wise woman, Abigail, who appeased the wrath of King David who came to take not only Nabal's life but the lives of all his male servants (1 Sam. 25).

Ancient kings had life and death power over their subjects, like gods walking on earth. Only in Israel did the prophets continually remind the kings that they were mere men of clay who had been

¹³⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, p. 332
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appointed by God to rule in the fear of God and His law. Nebuchadnezzar did not recognize this sovereignty until God had struck him with insanity (Dan. 4). In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar's **fury** went forth as **messengers of death** upon all the wise men of Babylon, including Daniel and his friends. Yet, with the help of God, Daniel was able to **appease** the king's fury by discerning both his dream and its interpretation.

The modern art of diplomacy is used to temper the wrath of presidents and other leaders of nations who are inclined to think too much of themselves and their personal agendas. They need a **wise man** to help them understand a better way.

The verse acknowledges that no one but God is capable of doing the right thing *all* the time. Wise leaders will surround themselves with men of sound judgment who can second-guess their decisions. Since God's common grace is given to all, even leaders and counselors of pagan nations are capable of making judgments consistent with Scripture. Christian presidents are also capable of making foolish judgments—like hot-headed David when he decided to kill Nabal and all his servants in a fit of rage and with a cool head ordered the cold-blooded assassination of Uriah and his men. David was an OT believer when he did these things. He had written psalms before his sin with Bathsheba, and he wrote psalms after his repentance.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. (1 Cor. 10:12 NASB)

16: 15 In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain.

Before the people of God came into their maturity in the New Covenant (cf. Gal. 4: 3-4), they needed concrete, tangible means of understanding their relationship with God. Israel's king represented Yahweh, the theocratic King. Therefore, his behavior should have been upright and exemplary before the covenantal community of Israel (Ps. 72: 1-2), like the God under whom he served. The rule of the king represented the rule of God, and his favor represented God's favor.

For You light my lamp; The LORD my God illumines my darkness. (Psalm 18:28 NASB)

Make Your face to shine upon Your servant; Save me in Your lovingkindness. (Psalm 31:16 NASB)

For by their own sword they did not possess the land, And their own arm did not save them, But Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, For You favored them. (Psalm 44:3 NASB)

The harvest depended on the spring rain to moisten the ground for plowing and sowing. Therefore, life depended upon the favor of God to grant rain in due season. As God gave life through the forces of nature which He alone controlled, in the same way He gave political life and freedom to His people through His chosen king. Righteous kings mediated God's peace and freedom, while wicked kings mediated God's indignation and wrath.¹³⁹

16: 16 How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver.

The proverb recalls Solomon's prayer and God's response to it in 2 Chronicles 1: 8-12. Solomon did not ask for riches, but for wisdom. Gold may be acquired at the expense of "better" things—

¹³⁹ Waltke, p. 22

like one's reputation, the love and respect of friends and family, contentment, and most importantly, intimate fellowship with God.

Within the possible context of directions to kings in Proverbs 16, this proverb stands as a warning to kings to seek the things of first importance. Wisdom should be preferred above all else, for a king's empire is not made firm (established) with an abundance of gold and silver to purchase armies and weapons. It is made firm by covenantal obedience to God's law. The law forbade a king from multiplying horses, wives, or silver and gold.

"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,'¹⁵ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, *one* from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.¹⁶ "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'¹⁷ "He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.¹⁸ "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.¹⁹ "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes,²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel. (Deut. 17:14-20 NASB)

Accumulation of these things—apart from the moral question of polygamy¹⁴⁰—could foster the temptation to trust in something other than God. They are interrelated. Horses and iron chariots represented military might, and wives were multiplied to establish political alliances with foreign countries. Silver and gold bought armies, weapons of war, and political favors. The Israelite king must not put confidence in any of these things. Through wisdom, and nothing else, he would prolong his reign and be successful. Ironically, Solomon failed in two out of three. He was not a man of war, but he sought to establish alliances with pagan nations through marriage to many foreign wives. This enhanced his economic power, but proved to be his downfall. The proverbs encourage the believer to look long-range rather than for quick fixes and short-term solutions.

19: 10 Luxury is not fitting for a fool; Much less for a slave to rule over princes.

This statement is similar to other Proverbs which speak of a world turned upside down (see commentary below).

²¹ Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: ²² Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, ²³ Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress. (Prov. 30: 21-23)

Often, people of humble origins who rise to power quickly will not be able to handle their newfound success. Given extensive powers they had never before possessed, they become tyrants. Likewise, fools have insufficient wisdom to handle large sums of money. In the US the lottery system (whereby for a few dollars people have bought tickets winning them millions of dollars) has made millionaires of low-income people overnight. Later follow-up studies have revealed that

¹⁴⁰ I have dealt with the issue of polygamy in "Doctrine of Man".
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these same lottery winners were broke within a few years. They spent their money recklessly on parties, expendable items like cars and clothing, and on gambling rather than wise investing.

19: 12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass.

20: 2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

Angry kings are as ferocious and dangerous as lions; and like lions, their anger seeks out someone to devour. The proverb is merely descriptive of the situation, not necessarily favorable. Being slow to anger is a virtue enjoined upon all people, kings included—perhaps especially kings whose anger is more potentially destructive. David was livid with anger when Nathan the prophet told him the story of the rich man who stole his poor neighbor's lamb. Yet, his anger should have been directed toward himself, and if people in power would examine themselves, perhaps their anger toward others would be mitigated (lessened). Spurned by Nabal, David was ready to kill him and every innocent male in his camp (1 Sam. 25). Wise Abigail was able to retrain him. Short of God's intervention, Nebuchadnezzar would have roasted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for refusing to bow down to his statue. But not every angry king has a courageous Nathan or an Abigail; they commonly surround themselves with sycophants, people who simply tell them what they want to hear (1 Kings 22). In God's inscrutable wisdom, He does not often miraculously intervene to save many men from the king's wrath, guilty or innocent. Kings with almost limitless power are often unhinged and act irresponsibly and recklessly. Contrary to Lord Acton, it is not a logical necessity that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". God is absolutely powerful and yet incorruptible. Nevertheless, power often *does* corrupt; but people in power must all give an account to God one day for the authority God has endowed upon them (Dan. 4—5).

In the second part of the proverb, as the **dew** waters the plants and helps them thrive, so the favor of the king helps the individual prosper. The antithetical structure of the proverb is the key to the interpretation. A king's favor can be as life-giving as his **wrath** can be deadly. Typologically, the favor of Christ upon His elect is life-giving, granting eternal prosperity. On the other hand, His eternal wrath brings unspeakable ruin and misery.

20: 8 A king who sits on the throne of justice Disperses all evil with his eyes.

20: 26 A wise king winnows the wicked, And drives the *threshing* wheel over them.

Both proverbs are prescriptive of what a righteous king *should do*, not necessarily descriptive of what he *does*. As the presence of God **disperses evil** and **winnows the wicked** so a righteous king will be feared by those intent on doing evil. As Paul says, in Romans 13,

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Rom. 13:3-4 NASB)

Prescriptively, a king should rule over his people with justice and wisdom, not letting too much wine cloud his judgment (Ps. 72: 2; Prov. 31: 4-5, 8-9; cited in Waltke). God raises up people in power for the purpose of reflecting His justice and mercy; but it is a terrible perversion of this picture of God for powerful people to use their authority to exploit those whom they are sent to serve. Implicit in the proverbs is the king's ability to discern good from evil. **Winnows the wicked** is an agricultural metaphor by which wheat is separated from the tares. This was commonly done by a **threshing wheel** pulled over the wheat by a strong ox (Isa. 28: 28; 1 Cor. 9: 10). The idea is not that the king *tortures* the wicked, but that he *separates* the wicked from the law-abiding so that

the latter are protected. Kings, and everyone in power, should be schooled in the Pentateuchal Law and wisdom of God to know the difference between good and evil. The prophet Isaiah railed against the leaders of Israel and Judah who perverted justice by reversing the definitions of good and evil.

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight!²² Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine And valiant men in mixing strong drink,²³ Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right! (Isa. 5:20-23 NASB)

One egregious example of calling evil good is the transfer of a dead man's property away from his widow to his brothers, a legal judgment which has been common in Africa. Another example in the US is the legal promotion of homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and abortion rights. While presumably protecting the rights of women over their own bodies, abortion rights promotes murder. This is happening in what many believe to be a sophisticated society, but it mimics the barbarity of ancient Rome in which unwanted defective male infants or healthy female infants were exposed to roaming packs of dogs for disposal simply because they were not wanted. God will judge.

20: 28 Loyalty and truth preserve the king, And he upholds his throne by righteousness.

Kings are protected from assassination by strong soldiers, but his greatest safety net is his own integrity. Firmly established in his kingdom (1 Kings 2: 12, 46), Solomon enjoyed peace on every side for almost forty years until his foreign wives turned his heart away from Yahweh to serve false gods (1 Kings 11). From that point on, his kingdom was troubled with both external enemies (Hadad, the Edomite, and Rezon) and internal enemies (Jeroboam, who became king of the northern kingdom of Israel). The Lord protects rulers who are righteous, but wicked rulers dig deep pits into which they themselves eventually fall (Idi Amin, Robert Mugabe, Mobutu of Zaire, to name a few).

In the US, many presidents attempt to preserve their presidency through spin-masters skilled in twisting the truth to divert attention away from their boss' immoral or illegal behavior. This may succeed in the short term, but eventually the real truth will catch up with them, as it did Richard Nixon who attempted to cover up a break-in at the Democratic National Committee but was forced to resign months later. A favorable press may succeed in covering for a leader; but history often is not so favorable, as we have seen in the life of John F. Kennedy, darling of the liberal media, but better-known today for his philandering behavior with multiple mistresses, including sex idol Marilyn Monroe, than for averting nuclear war with the Soviet Union. His brother, Ted Kennedy, will be remembered more for his neglect in saving a drowning woman at Chappaquiddick than being "the lion of the Senate".

21: 1 The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

[See under G. God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility]

I. Heart and Motives

14: 10 The heart knows its own bitterness, And a stranger does not share its joy.

Bridges comments,

The history of the soul is only fully known and felt by the conscious subject. Each *knoweth his own bitterness*, deep, interior. The most poignant sufferings often arise from causes which cannot be told to our dearest friend. No two of us are framed alike; and this diversity of mind and character precludes a *perfect* reciprocity [sharing of information] even in the warmest glow of human sympathy. Each only knows where the heart is wrung [troubled]. Each therefore must in a measure tread a solitary path, and in that path often submit to be misunderstood. Hannah, *knowing her own bitterness*, was rashly rebuked by him, who ought to have been her comfort. (1 Sam. 1: 10-13). Gehazi harshly repelled the Shunamite through ignorance of her bitter sorrow. (2 Kings, 4: 27) Job's friends, from misconception, proved to be "miserable comforters, physicians of no value (Job, 13: 4; 16: 2).¹⁴¹

In the same way we do not know one another's sorrows, we also do not know one another's joys (10b). The proverb is a very astute observation concerning the innate privacy of human psychology. It takes time to know a person, and even when we think we know him, we may learn something surprising about his past or present. The verse is a warning to us about jumping to conclusions before we have all the relevant facts about a particular person, even a close friend who may actually be **a stranger**. When he is in sorrow, it is better to sit and listen than to give superficial advice.

The proverb also exposes the superficial way believers often respond to one another in the church. We like to think of the church as the community of the faithful who are praying for one another and able to counsel one another when necessary (Rom. 15: 14) when, in fact, we are rarely more than an auditorium full of strangers living private lives. Do we *really* know one another?

15: 7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge, But the hearts of fools are not so.

15: 8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Jesus said that a man's speech was the outpouring of his heart (Matt. 15: 18-19). While the **lips of the wise spread knowledge**, no such knowledge can be expected from **fools** whose speech reflects the ignorance and folly of their **hearts**.

Like Isaiah who prophesied 200 years later, Solomon recognized that mere ritual **sacrifice** without heart devotion was a mere **abomination** (cf. Isa. 1: 11-18). God hates even the worship services of his own people when they are superficial, hypocritical, and when the daily behavior of the professing believer belies (contradicts) his profession. James refers to religious hypocrisy when he says,

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world. (Jas. 1:27 NASB)

The antithesis (contrast) to hypocritical sacrifice is the **prayer** of truly righteous people who mean what they say. Note well, the Lord **delights** in the prayers of the righteous who pray according to His will and for His glory—"Your kingdom come, your will be done..."

15: 11 Sheol and Abaddon *lie open* before the LORD, How much more the hearts of men!

¹⁴¹ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, p. 176
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An argument from the lesser to the greater (a fortiori). If the place of the dead, where no man can go, is not hidden from the eyes of the Lord, how much less the hearts of men. We can hide our true intentions from others, but not from the Lord. Why then, do we insist on trying to please men when by doing so we displease the Lord?

15: 13 A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.

Waltke entitles Prov. 15: 13-17, “The Heart’s Superiority to Circumstances”¹⁴² Verse 13 states a simple, observable fact of human nature: that one’s countenance generally reflects the state of his **heart** or his **spirit**. Verses 14-17 indicate that we have far more responsibility for choosing to be joyful than we might think.

15: 14 The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, But the mouth of fools feeds on folly.

The source of joy (v. 13) is the knowledge of God.¹⁴³ While the wise seek this knowledge and are able to maintain their joy amidst the difficult circumstances of life (v. 15), fools feed on their own worthless opinions or the worthless opinions of other fools who are overcome by their circumstances.

15: 15 All the days of the afflicted are bad, But a cheerful heart *has* a continual feast.

15: 16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

15: 17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred.

In v. 15, although the righteous experience many bad days of affliction, they are able to overcome them through the **knowledge** of God (v. 14) which gives them joy in the midst of suffering. Thus, the **afflicted** and a **cheerful heart** are the same person. His joy in life is not determined by outward circumstances (**great treasure**), and he enjoys the **little** that he has more than wealthy unbelievers enjoy their abundance (v. 16). However, the verse does not forbid sadness, as if there is no time for the believer to grieve (Eccl. 3: 4). There certainly is, and the bible even says that Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53: 3). Paul warns against grieving the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5: 19), and Gen. 6: 6 says the Lord was grieved in the sinful state in which men had descended. Yet, though there are legitimate times for grieving and sadness, the predominant state of the Christian’s heart should be joy and the anticipation of the consummation of God’s kingdom. If he is seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then the contemplation of this kingdom will overcome any grief. (In case the reader is wondering, I’m preaching to myself. I am prone to depression and must remind myself daily that God’s thoughts toward his people are thoughts of peace.

The same idea is presented in Prov. 15: 17. Money cannot buy peace of heart. While the unbelieving wealthy are eating a sumptuous feast, the hatred attending their meals renders them unable to enjoy their food. On the other hand, a man who has peace with God, thus cultivating an environment of harmony with others, will enjoy his meager **dish of vegetables** far more.

15: 28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

16: 23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth And adds persuasiveness to his lips.

¹⁴² *Proverbs*, I, p. 624.

¹⁴³ Waltke, I. p. 625

The righteous man examines his own heart and seeks the Lord's wisdom before he rashly answers a difficult question or provides counsel. Otherwise, he may condemn himself in what he says. Remember David's rash words to Nathan the prophet, "...the man who did this [*took a poor man's only lamb*] deserves to die!" (2 Sam. 12: 5) and Herod's reckless promise to Herodias' daughter [*ask anything up to half my kingdom*] to impress his guests (John 14).

The wise man thinks before he speaks, and his speaking is tempered with grace.

Let your speech always be with grace, as *though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col. 4: 6).

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such as *word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4: 29).

How many times have we violated this commandment? If anyone thinks he is super-spiritual, let him ponder his sins of commission (speaking the wrong words, or the right words at the wrong time or with impure motives or without love, Eph. 4: 15) and the sins of omission (failing to speak the right words at the right time).

In order to edify others with our speech, our minds and hearts must be instructed with wisdom. This is why bible reading and meditation are so important for the Christian life.

17: 3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts.

Silver and gold were refined at high temperatures to remove impurities—silver at 961 degrees Celsius and gold at 1063 degrees Celsius. That's hot! But although humans can test the purity of precious metals, only God can test the purity of the heart.¹⁴⁴ Even the person himself cannot know the depth of depravity in his own heart, much less examine that of another (Jer. 17:9).

17: 22 A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.

The following statement is found in *Harvard Health Publishing*:

Want to feel better and improve your health? Start by focusing on the things that bring you happiness. Scientific evidence suggests that positive emotions can help make life longer and healthier.

But fleeting positive emotions aren't enough. Lowering your stress levels over a period of years with a positive outlook and relaxation techniques could reduce your risk of health problems.

Now, I would not expect Harvard Medical School—a very liberal and generally godless university—to tell the whole truth. But it has told part of the truth. Happy people generally live longer, as Proverbs says. But as we have noted already, happiness from man's viewpoint is based upon a series of very fortunate events or circumstances—"good luck", in other words. And if you are depending on mostly good circumstances to make you happy, then, as John Calvin would say, "Good luck." No, Calvin would not say that, would he? He didn't believe in good or bad luck, only providence, God's ordering all things, people, and events according to His own inscrutable will—also taught in the Proverbs. Joy, on the other hand, is happiness based upon a firm belief

¹⁴⁴ Waltke, II. p. 40

that God is good to His people in good or bad circumstances and that all things occur by His permission and foreordination to conform us to the image of Christ, namely, His holiness, goodness, faithfulness, also called His communicable attributes (Rom. 8: 28-31). We can be joyful, therefore, because life's circumstances do not happen by random chance, but by the activity of God who uses everything—poverty, sickness, death, even our sin—to make us holy and to transfer us to the new heavens and earth. Now, that's something to be happy about!

21: 2 Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.

We come to easy conclusions about the righteousness of our decisions, but we often miss our evil motives (selfishness, greed, vengeance, sinful ambition, the lust for recognition, etc.) driving us to those decisions. The Lord, who sees all and knows all, sees through our evil motives. Even if our action is righteous, the decision may be unrighteous since it is mixed with unrighteous thoughts and ambitions. For something to be a good act, it must be done by the proper *standard* (the law of God), with the proper *motive* (love for God and others), and for the proper *goal* (the kingdom of God).

21: 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!

The scene envisioned here is *not* that of Prov. 15: 8, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.” Rather, it is that of false piety designed to mislead others (cf. Prov. 7: 14-15; 2 Sam. 15: 7-13; 1 Ki. 21: 9-12).¹⁴⁵

J. Hope and Desire

Waltke entitles Prov. 13: 12-19, “Fulfillment through Wisdom versus Frustration through Folly”.¹⁴⁶ The verses have a connection with one another which is immediately apparent (except for v. 17).

13: 12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

13: 13 The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.

13: 14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, To turn aside from the snares of death.

The three verses are tied together by one's response to the word, resulting in life or death: **tree of life, despises the word, in debt, fears the commandment, rewarded, teaching of the wise, fountain of life, and snares of death.**

Prov. 13: 12 states a simple psychological fact. We are discouraged when the things for which we **hope** never seem to materialize. Christians should expect this when we hope for the wrong things, but when we hope for the right things for many years—e.g. the conversion of a lost family member—without realizing them, our hearts become discouraged and our prayers become less frequent. When **desire** (another word for hope) is **fulfilled**, our lives are invigorated.

The believer must believe by faith that all of his godly desires will materialize in one way or another. Even if God does not give us exactly what we ask for, He will use those prayers to

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Waltke, II. p. 189; see also Luke 4, in which the Pharisees were presenting their gifts to be seen by men.

¹⁴⁶ Waltke, I. p. 562

accomplish His will summarized in the Lord's prayer, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Godly prayers are stimulated by the Holy Spirit working in our lives; therefore, they will not be wasted, but **fulfilled** in ways that promote God's glory. Prayer is never fruitless, empty activity keeping us busily occupied but never producing results.

The righteous will have every godly desire met (**rewarded**). The *ultimate* desire of the righteous is the presence and fellowship of God and the consummation of His kingdom on earth.

Whom have I in heaven *but You*? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26).

'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. (Matt. 6:10 NASB)

Everything else that we desire on earth or in heaven should spring from this ultimate desire for fellowship with God and His people and to see His kingdom realized on earth as it is in heaven. David said, "Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). The reason this promise is fulfilled for the righteous is that our desire for God moderates and influences every other desire, and as God sanctifies us and conforms us into the image of His Son, our desires even in this life will be more and more conformed to God's desires for us. In heaven, we will find that every desire we *should have had* in this life is abundantly fulfilled in the inheritance we have in Christ. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied" (Matt. 5: 6). If we think back to the time before our conversion, or during our immature years as Christians, we can think of many things we wanted badly which are no longer important to us and could have been harmful to us. This is because God is slowly changing our desires to bring them into conformity to His desires.

The desires of the wicked—**the one who despises the word** (v. 13)—will not be ultimately fulfilled, leading to eternal despair and sickness of heart. In contrast to the one who **fears the commandment** of God and receives the ultimate reward—**the tree of life**—the one who **despises the word** of God will pay the **debt**—namely, his life. Every person owes his life to God. This is his debt. This interpretation is supported by the context with v. 14. **The teaching of the wise** corresponds to **the word** which is **despised** by the wicked (v. 13).¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, **the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded with the fountain of life** (v. 14) and **the tree of life** (v. 12) and will avoid **the snares of death** which capture the wicked. Avoiding the snares of death directs our attention forward to eternal life which is the primary emphasis of *Proverbs*. Most believers will die before Jesus returns, but no believer will experience the snares of death, eternal condemnation.

As **the way of the treacherous is hard** (v. 15), **poverty and shame** will attend the life of **him who neglects discipline**. Ironically, those who reject discipline will be disciplined by poverty and shame ¹⁴⁸(See also under *C. Discipline and reproof*)

13: 19 Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.

¹⁴⁷ Waltke, I. pp. 564-565

¹⁴⁸ Waltke, I. p. 568

Verse 19 forms an *inclusio* with v. 12 and has generally the same meaning. The righteous have their desires fulfilled because they pay attention to the teaching which is the fountain of life. Fools, on the other hand, refuse to depart from their evil—the **snare of death** (v. 14).

Only fools prefer death to life (v. 14), destruction to favor (v. 15)...perdition to healing (v. 17), and disgraceful poverty to social dignity (v. 18). Their nature to despise the wise person's inspired word alienates them from a relationship with the Lord of life, the only relationship that is truly gratifying and life-sustaining (Ps. 17: 15; 42: 1). If they changed their attitude toward God, they would turn from their morally repulsive behavior toward humanity (3: 7; 16: 6). Without regeneration "the very idea that he should behave in any other way is unthinkable to him, in fact, an **abomination**; for he thinks it would spoil his fun (10: 23)" (cf. 15: 21).¹⁴⁹

K. Humility and Pride

11: 2 When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.

Paradoxically (ironically) the man who is prideful (who honors himself) comes to **dishonor** because he takes credit which is due to another—to God. Whatever we have—money, intelligence, talent, education, high social position, a good name—we have as a gift from God. But if we become prideful of what we have, we attribute our success to ourselves rather than God.

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7 NASB)

Humility, on the other hand, is wise because the humble man understands the source of all his blessings and abilities. He does not think more highly of himself than he ought to think (Rom. 12: 3). I am reminded of a story of a very wealthy corporate executive who enjoyed attending the men's prayer breakfasts at his church. At the end of the prayers, one could always find him in the kitchen with his sleeves rolled up washing the dishes. He understood where his success came from.

The proverb could be paired with 11: 1, "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight" (NASB). If so, the idea could be that pride causes someone to falsify measurements and steal from others. By doing so, he is able to afford the life-style of the wealthy and be honored by men who defer to the wealthy. But his pride drives him into a life of greedy **dishonor** through theft and fraud.

13: 7 There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; *Another* pretends to be poor, but has great wealth.

This is not the same as Prov. 12: 9, "Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant Than he who honors himself and lacks bread." In that proverb, the one who is lightly esteemed and living within his means is not pretending. In Prov. 13: 7, we are confronted with two liars. The first man attempts to attract the social prestige of the wealthy, the second one attempts to deprive the poor of any help they may have received from him. He doesn't want people coming to his doorstep for charity, so he hides his wealth. "Second, they defame and defraud the Lord; one pretends to have received the Lord's blessings, while the other denies his gracious gifts."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Waltke, I. p. 569; also citing Aitken, *Proverbs*, p. 100

¹⁵⁰ Waltke, p. 558

13: 10 Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.

Insolence is disrespect, and the second part of the verse indicates that the insolence in view is disrespect for the viewpoint of others. The insolent person respects only his own opinion and has little regard for that of others. He has an inflated opinion of himself which always leads to strife within the community. **Wisdom** is antithetically parallel with **strife**, implying that with wisdom comes *peace within the community*. The wise person does not think too highly of his own opinion but seeks the counsel of others within the community, thus building teamwork and cooperation rather than competition leading to strife.¹⁵¹

15: 25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

The proud is a *metonymy* for all those who oppress the poor. (A *metonymy* is a word used for another word which is associated with it; e.g. the White House is a metonymy for the US executive branch of the president of the US). The **house** is a *synecdoche* (a part representing the whole) representing the proud man's entire means of sustaining his life. The **widow** is also a synecdoche representing anyone who is incapable of defending themselves against the oppression of more powerful people. The **boundary** is also a synecdoche for all the property and assets of the widow, her only means of sustaining herself.¹⁵²

The proverb illustrates that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5: 5). Although the widow had no male to protect her, God assumes the role of her husband to avenge any wrongdoing by her oppressor.¹⁵³

The problem we have with such verses is the same as Qohelet's, the preacher in Ecclesiastes, who was looking at life empirically (I believe what I see) rather than relying on the old wisdom of God's law which clearly teaches eventual retribution toward the wicked—as does Proverbs (Prov. 1—2). It seemed to Qohelet, and to believers at times, that life goes on with the wicked oppressing the righteous without any punishment from the Lord. Once again, we must remember that Proverbs speaks beyond clinical death and reaches into the afterlife. While the widow may remain poor in this life, her **boundary** (if she is a righteous widow) is extended into the afterlife with her inheritance of the new heavens and new earth—as was Naboth's (1 Kings 21) whose inheritance was stolen by **proud** King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. The widow's proud oppressor, like Ahab, will eventually die and will leave his riches behind forever. Like Ahab's, his **house** (a metonymy for posterity or family) will be **torn down** (2 Ki. 9: 1-10). Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is a current illustration of this proverb, whose house was torn down while still alive.

For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.¹⁰ Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be *there*.¹¹ But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps. 37:9-11 NASB)

¹⁵¹ Waltke, I. p. 560

¹⁵² Waltke, I. p. 635

¹⁵³ Waltke, I. p. 636

Though dispossessed from his land by tyranny, righteous Naboth will inherit the earth like all other believers.

15: 33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor *comes* humility.

Solomon returns to the preamble.

To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding.... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1: 2, 7 NASB).

As the knowledge of God begins with godly fear, so the fear of God is the necessary precondition for learning wisdom. The Hebrew word *musar* (**instruction**) can also be translated “discipline”. As a runner disciplines his body to win the race and receive the prize, the wise man disciplines his mind and heart to receive wisdom. Wisdom is not the result of independent observation and logical deduction; otherwise, all intelligent, well-educated people would be wise. Rather, it is a gift from God to be received with humility. One cannot begin to learn wisdom with a proud spirit which is implicitly independent and contemptuous of absolute truth which must be obeyed. **Honor** is used here as the product of wisdom, and **humility** is synonymous for **fear**. The worldly person believes that honor comes from personal achievement independent of God, while the Bible indicates that honor will be given to someone who empties himself of self-glory. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:6 NASB). The proper time may or may not come in this life. David was hounded by King Saul, but he was exalted later as king over Israel. Jonathan, rather than seizing the kingdom himself, humbled himself by accepting God’s choice of David; yet he died along with his disobedient father and was never honored as king. The proper time for his exaltation was at his death when he found himself ushered into heaven and heard Christ’s words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

We are reminded of Jeremiah’s sobering words to his scribe, “Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not” (Jer. 45: 5)—a great reminder to all of God’s servants who are feeling sorry for themselves for being unrecognized.

16: 18 Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

Those who are prideful are on the path to destruction. Sometimes the proud self-destruct. They might fall into the pit that they dug for someone else, or they might self-destruct by working too hard pursuing wealth and fame. They may lose their families and their health all the while proclaiming that they were working to provide wealth and security to their families. But their motive was not fundamentally love for their families, but the desire to build a reputation for themselves among men.

Destruction may take the form of imprisonment for illegal activity. For thirty years or so, Bernie Madoff defrauded investors of billions of dollars in an investment scheme which was exposed in 2008 during the Wall Street stock market crash. He is now serving prison time, but his life was not the only one destroyed. His youngest son committed suicide; his oldest son, after suffering shame and ostracism for years, contracted cancer and died. Madoff’s wife, the only surviving member of his immediate family, left him. According to the movie made about him, there was no substantial evidence that any of them was aware of the scheme. While claiming to do this for his family, he destroyed them.

Does God *always* pay back the proud in this life? No, as the psalmist concedes (Ps. 73). However, tragic stories like Bernie Madoff's is common enough for Solomon to generalize the consequences of pride.

16: 19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Humility is superior to wealth. Obedience to this one proverb would change the world. The proverb acknowledges that many of the proud are wealthy. They have **spoil**. What is this spoil? We should not limit it to the loot gained from armed robbery. It could include the confiscation of real estate and other property by fraud or legal maneuvering—the theft of Naboth's property by King Ahab or the confiscation of land by African banks lending money at 25% or more, collateralized by farm land. Unable to pay back the loan, the borrower loses his land to the banks owned by wealthy Africans. Everything is legal, but is it moral? Will men's actions be judged in the end by being illegal or by being immoral?

The proverb also acknowledges that there are believers who are **lowly**, and there is not the slightest condemnation or accusation of the lowly to the effect that their poverty is due to lack of faith or personal initiative, as many health and wealth gospel peddlers assert (cf. Hank Hanegraaf, *Christianity in Crisis in the Twenty-first Century*). This book is an exposé of popular western heretics (cf. 1 Thess. 2: 5-6) like Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyers, Kenneth Copeland, and many others who believe that the "word of faith" from a Christian obligates God to perform according to the believer's desires. The believer can create his own reality. According to word of faith teaching, Jesus was mistaken in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus lacked faith, and for this reason he was poor and sick. Likewise, the crippled man by the pool of Soloam lacked faith that he could get to the pool in time while the waters were stirring.

18: 11 A rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own imagination.

18: 12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, But humility *goes* before honor.

The rich man (Luke 12: 13-21) believed that his **wealth** was his **strong city** with a **high wall** over which no intruder could climb. He was **haughty** to the very end **before destruction**. But security in wealth is a figment of one's **imagination**. The Proverbs teaches, "If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them." Wealth can sprout wings and fly away. Jesus follows the parable of Lk. 12 (the rich fool) with a warning to all, rich and poor alike. Don't worry about your life or the necessary things which sustain life—food and clothing. It is our responsibility to work (2 Thess. 3); it is God's responsibility to take care of those who trust Him and worship Him. If God feeds birds and clothes lilies, how much more will He care for His people? Besides, worry cannot add a single minute to one's life; our days are already written (cf. Ps. 139). Rather, rich and poor are commanded to seek God's kingdom, not their own, like the rich fool. Then He says, "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make for yourselves money belts which do not wear out..." But if we are overly worried about our own future, we will be unconcerned for others and ungenerous.

In v. 12, **Before destruction** and **before honor** are paired, as well as **haughty** and **humility**. As with all proverbs, this one is counter-intuitive—foreign to the way the natural man thinks. Paired with v. 11, we understand that pride is the natural result of wealth accumulation. But why is this? Because the natural man—and too often the redeemed man—honors those who are wealthy (James 2). But God is no respecter of the rich or the poor. Solomon does not say that poverty goes before honor, as if God is always on the side of the poor. God is on God's side, the side of righteousness.

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To those who humble themselves before God, honor will come—if not in this life, in the life to come. The thief on the cross died in dishonor, but was raised the same day in honor. Many powerful people die in honor, but will be raised to everlasting death and dishonor. Jesus will repay everyone according to their deeds (Matt. 16: 27).

21: 4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, The lamp of the wicked, is sin.

Eyes and **lamp** are paired together. Jesus said, “The eye is the lamp of the body...” When one’s perspective on life (his world-view) is clear and good, then his whole body (i.e. his whole life) will benefit. But if his perspective is evil, then his whole life will be full of darkness and sin (Matt. 6: 22-23). Jesus is the light that has come into the world, but men loved darkness better than light.

21: 24 "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.

In the ancient world, to give a man a name was to define who he was. God defines the proud by giving them names.

21: 29 A wicked man displays a bold face, But as for the upright, he makes his way sure.

The **bold face** of the **wicked** is paired with the **sure way** of the **upright**. The wicked man will not let his appearance of self-confidence and security betray his anxiety about the future. He puts on a bold face to hide his fears. Inside, though, he is wondering if he is able to sustain his **way**, for surely, he reasons, everything is up to him. The righteous, on the other hand, is **sure** about the future, not that he will avoid suffering or failure, but that a sovereign God who permits suffering will sustain him through it.

22: 4 The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life.

“Oh, really?” Qohelet would say. “I have seen otherwise” (cf. Eccles. 1—2). But Qohelet’s worldview at the beginning of his philosophical journey in Ecclesiastes is short-sighted. The old wisdom of Proverbs is always up to date and Spirit-inspired. Its promises extend beyond physical death; otherwise, they are unsure promises often refuted by empirical data. Perhaps the multitudes were scoffing (we are not told) when Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” But then, perhaps some of them had been hearing lessons from the Proverbs in the synagogues. We can’t verify all of God’s promises empirically (by sight, hearing, and smell) because without faith it is impossible to please Him. “The one who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11: 6).

L. Life, Death, and the Afterlife

10: 27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Deferring to Waltke, **life** in Proverbs is generally a reference to life beyond the grave, eternal life. Otherwise, we must explain why Abel—and millions of other Abel’s—died early while their wicked brothers/peers (Cain) lived to old age and built cities. Nevertheless, there is ample empirical evidence that righteous living usually **prolongs** temporal **life** on earth while reckless living and disobedience to God’s law shortens life. Drug and alcohol addicts, drug dealers and kingpins (e.g. Pablo Escobar, gunned down at 40), promiscuous homosexuals and heterosexuals,

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adrenaline junkies who get their kicks by jumping off cliffs with parachutes, often die early in life, while the righteous man, who is a good steward of his body and avoids unnecessary risks, will generally live longer.

Nevertheless, it is absolutely true that the fear of the Lord **prolongs life** beyond biological death.

11: 7 When a wicked man dies, *his* expectation will perish, And the hope of strong men perishes.

This is a synonymous parallel in which **a wicked man** is paired with **strong men**. The hope of strong, wicked men is wealth, power, and notoriety (reputation). Their hope for these things does not die with them since their **expectation** is that their wealth will continue with their families, and their accomplishments will be remembered by others for years to come. Doubtless, Bill Gates will go down in the history books not only as one of the most successful entrepreneurs of all times but also as one of the greatest philanthropists. Yet, in an interview in which he was asked if he believed in the existence of God, Gates commented that he believed that God (or *a* god) exists but that his belief had little relevance for his daily life. In other words, God exists; but He doesn't matter.

Eventually, even the names of the most famous men and women will be fading memories (Eccles.) Who, but historians, can name any of the accomplishments of the most well-known Pharaoh's of Egypt or presidents of the United States? The ultimate question is not **how well** one will be known by others after death, but **who** knows you (Matt. 7: 23).

The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Ps. 34:16 NASB)

11: 19 He who is steadfast in righteousness *will attain* to life, And he who pursues evil *will bring about* his own death.

This is not an OT version of works righteousness. Eternal life has never been earned but only received as a gift of grace. However, as we saw in our examination of Prov. 16: 6, both Old and New Testaments confirm that a man's heart is registered in his works. We learn in Romans 2: 6-10 that God

...will render to each person **according to his deeds**: to those who by perseverance in **doing good** seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and **do not obey the truth**, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man **who does evil**, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone **who does good**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (NASB).

11: 30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls.

A good tree bears good fruit—in this case, the **fruit of souls** won to God. In Proverbs, as in the entire bible, wisdom is the ability to apply truth, not simply intellectual comprehension. A **wise** person **wins souls** not because he is intellectually stimulating, but because his behavior is a living sermon testifying to the truth of God's salvation. He practices what he preaches.

12: 28 In the way of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no death.

It would be difficult to explain this verse if **life** and **death** were limited to temporal life and temporal death. All men must die temporally, the righteous and the unrighteous; but all men do not eternally die. There is **no** permanent **death** for the righteous; death is but a transitional moment into everlasting life. Death for the unrighteous, on the other hand, is final because existence in hell is not, by definition, life. There can be no life apart from Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life”.

13: 9 The light of the righteous rejoices, But the lamp of the wicked goes out.

Light and **lamp** are metaphors for a person’s life. The **righteous** man rejoices during his lifetime, not because his life knows no sorrow or hardship, but because he knows a Savior who is bigger than life and bigger than his sorrows. “In everything rejoice, for this is God’s will concerning you” (1 Thess. 5: 18). It is not clear whether “God’s will” in this NT verse refers to the command to rejoice or whether it refers to all the providence of God in a person’s life, or both. Either is true. We are commanded to rejoice in everything that happens to us by God’s providence, i.e. by His **decreed** will; and it is God’s **preceptive** (revealed) will that we rejoice in Him no matter what happens to us. In comparison to an eternal life of bliss and fellowship with God and His people, suffering in this life is only momentary.

But for the wicked, his **lamp** (life, which is actually a walking death) will be extinguished at biological death. His memory will fade from the earth.

14: 12 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

14: 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.

Proverbs 14: 12 continues the theme of the two ways found in Proverbs and the wisdom Psalms (cf. Ps. 1). It seemed **right** to Adam and Eve that they should be able to think and act independently of God. Satan’s argument seemed logical that God was holding them back, depriving them of something good. Nothing has changed in man’s constitution and disposition since that time other than wonder-working regeneration, repentance, and faith. It still seems right to man that he should govern his own life without any obligation to a God he has never seen. But, of course, he has seen God’s works, even as the Israelites beheld the works of God, yet did not trust Him to give them what was good for them. Man suppresses the true knowledge of God in unrighteousness because the works and attributes of God are “evident” to him, making his unbelief inexcusable (Rom. 1: 18-21).

Jesus possibly had 14: 27 in mind as He spoke with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4: 14). He told her, “...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” She believed Him, and this message became in her a **fountain of life** causing her **to turn aside from the snares of death**. Her genuine conversion is evident by her deeds. Leaving the water which perishes (v. 28), she began to evangelize the **men** of the city saying, “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?” (a rhetorical question begging a yes answer). Who were these men? Possibly, some of the men she had slept with over the years, and they were well aware of “all the things” she had done. Someone who has gone through five husbands and was now sleeping with someone else most likely had many other men in between the husbands. But there is hope for people like the Samaritan woman. The fountain of life is not hidden from view like the “sweet”, “stolen water” of the adulterous woman (Prov. 9: 17). One only needs to reach for the hand who offers it. Afterwards, his faith will cause him to **turn aside from the snares of death** (in other

words, a sinful way of life). If one is traveling down the broad road that leads to hell, he will inevitably get there. To avoid this end, he must take a detour along the narrow way.

14: 32 The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing, But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.

Regardless of Qohelet's insistence that there is no difference between the death of the righteous and the death of the unrighteous (Eccles. 9: 2-3), Solomon upholds retributive justice. **Thrust down** is paired with **refuge**, meaning that the wicked is thrust down to eternal death when he dies as opposed to the righteous who also die temporally but have a **refuge** in God (Ps. 2: 12b; 5: 11). The text also refutes the notion from some OT scholars that the OT does not give a definitive hope beyond the grave. The refuge of the righteous **when he dies** is not unconscious rest, but a conscious enjoyment of heaven.

15: 10 Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.

Forsakes the way and **hates reproof** are synonymous. The sinner cannot claim to be open-minded and neutral to God's **way** while he **forsakes** it in practice. Ignoring God's way is another form of hatred. "He who is not with me is against me," Jesus said. There is no neutrality when it comes to God's wisdom; we either love it or hate it.

Again, the consequences are eternal, not merely temporal. Those who listen to reproof will also die temporally, but they will live eternally. The promises of Proverbs are extended into life beyond clinical death.

15: 24 The path of life *leads* upward for the wise That he may keep away from Sheol below.

Sheol was the place of the dead. Some of the OT references do not clearly distinguish between the righteous and the unrighteous in their destination. All will go to Sheol.

Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him. (Gen. 37:35 NASB)

"When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up. (Job 7:9 NASB)

Yet, there is also awareness that God will rescue some men from Sheol. In Elihu's response to Job, he says,

He keeps back his soul from the pit, And his life from passing over into Sheol. (Job 33:18 NASB)

The psalmist complains of near-death occurrences, but also God's deliverance.

The cords of death encompassed me, And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me.⁵ The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me.⁶ In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears. (Ps. 18:4-6 NASB)

He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out of many waters.¹⁷ He delivered me from my strong enemy, And from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me. (Ps. 18:16-17 NASB)

We also have a reference that can be interpreted as the rescue of the righteous from Sheol.

"The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. (1 Sam. 2:6 NASB)

There is a clear distinction between the wise and the unwise (implied) in Prov. 15: 24. The **path of the wise** will not lead to Sheol, but **upward**. Where could upward be but eternal life with God?

Salvation from the grave is more than being spared an untimely death, for otherwise the path of life is swallowed up by death, an unthinkable thought in Proverbs.¹⁵⁴

Tremper Longman is more reserved than Waltke about such passages, claiming that "the textual and philological difficulties of these verses make certainty impossible."

But does Proverbs itself demonstrate an awareness of an afterlife where people meet their final reward? *Most scholars say no*. They suggest that the reason earthly rewards—wealth, long life, happiness—are put forward is that there was *no sense of anything beyond this life*. And certainly there is no definitive argument to prove otherwise....When they said "life," did they simply mean to suggest that God would reward good people with a few more years, or did they have a sense of something beyond? This may be the case particularly regarding passages like the following in Proverbs: [included in the list is Prov. 15: 24]¹⁵⁵

We are uncertain about the level of knowledge of the afterlife among the faithful during this time period. The only passage that indisputably teaches about the afterlife in the OT is Dan. 12: 1-3.¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Longman is obligated to admit that

Even though the word "life" does not clearly point to knowledge of the afterlife, in some contexts [e.g. 12: 28] such a minimalist [conservative] reading makes the sages [wise men] seem incredibly naïve. What does it mean to promise life to those who are wise and death to those who are foolish when everyone knows that all die? Of course, this is the question that Qoheleth raises, concluding that in the final analysis the wisdom enterprise is not worth it (Eccles. 2: 12-17).¹⁵⁷

In other words, it is "incredibly naïve" to promise life to the wise when he will also die like the fool—that is, unless "life" in Proverbs means something *more* than what "most scholars" admit—temporal life. It would seem to me that Longman must, in the end, concede Waltke's conclusion that "life" in Proverbs points *invariably* to eternal life beyond the grave. Once more quoting Waltke,

Instructively, the opening situation depicted in the father's first lecture resembles the first situation of humanity outside of the Garden of Eden. Even as Cain murdered righteous Abel, sending him to a premature death, after which Cain lived out a normal life span, so the father represents a traveler's "innocent blood" (Prov. 1: 11-19) as being dispatched to a premature death by venal sinners who walk on top of his grave and plunder his house. These initial situations [in the book of Proverbs] discredit the popular interpretation that life and death in Proverbs refer respectively to *living to an old age and to a premature death*. For justice to be done, as Proverbs assures it will be (e.g., 3: 31-35; 16: 4-5), Abel and the innocent traveler must be vindicated and delivered from death in a future that lies *beyond*

¹⁵⁴ Waltke, Vol. I, p. 634

¹⁵⁵ Tremper Longman, *Proverbs*, pp. 86-87, words in brackets mine.

¹⁵⁶ Longman, pp. 250-251

¹⁵⁷ p. 87

their clinical deaths. If clinical death is the last word for the waylaid innocent, then the father’s first lecture, along with other biblical stories about the deaths of martyrs, deconstruct [contradict] the Bible’s claim that God upholds justice.¹⁵⁸

The difference between Waltke and Longman goes beyond the subject of “life” in Proverbs, but encompasses their fundamental orientations to the book. For instance, in the introduction, Longman cautions the reader about taking the promises of Proverbs as “guarantees”.

It is not the intention of a proverb to yield guarantees or promises but rather to point toward behaviors that, all things being equal, will *normally* lead to desired ends. Thus, laziness normally leads to poverty. However, all things aren’t always equal, and a lazy person might be the recipient of a significant inheritance or stumble across a lost treasure. Such exceptions do not disprove the rule, however. But it does remind us that, to use a modern proverb, one “can’t tell a book by its cover.” One cannot immediately judge that a certain rich person is hardworking, or that a certain poor person is lazy... In other words, the consequence does not always follow. The biblical story of Joseph is an excellent example of this, since he does just as the proverbs urge—rejecting the advances of a promiscuous woman—but rather than being rewarded, ends up in jail (Gen. 39). To judge by immediate consequences, the way of wisdom led to trouble rather than blessing.¹⁵⁹

These exceptions are noted, and the better-than proverbs recognize these exceptions (see above). Moreover, Ecclesiastes and Job provide a corrective for us to avoid the rigid retributive theology of Job’s three friends who attempted to force God into the inalterable pattern of giving unmixed temporal blessings to the righteous and unmixed sorrow to the wicked. On the other hand, the conscientious bible reader may wonder how he should go about applying the promises of proverbs if they are only “probably” true. To repeat Waltke,

The popular evangelical solution that these are probabilities, not promises, though containing an element of truth, raises theological, practical, and psychological problems by stating the matter badly. According to this wording the human partner is expected to keep his obligation perfectly (Prov. 3: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9), but God may keep his imperfectly (3: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10). In truth, however, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful” (2 Tim. 2: 13). Moreover, a sober person would like to know the probabilities, and a psychologically well person could scarcely trust the I AM with all his heart (Prov. 3: 5), knowing God usually, but not always, keeps his obligations.¹⁶⁰

However, it seems to me that Jesus resolves the issue once and for all in his dispute with the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection. They relate the story of the woman who had married seven brothers. Which brother, they asked disingenuously (dishonestly), would be her husband in the resurrection? Jesus retorted that they *did not understand the Scriptures* or God’s power. Proving the reality of the resurrection from their favorite Scriptures, Jesus pointed them to Genesis. God *is, not was*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom died, but now live. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22: 23-33; Mk. 12: 18-27). The Sadducees did not understand the Scriptures concerning the afterlife nor the ability of God to raise the dead, but they should have understood.

If Jesus chided the Sadducees for not understanding the Scriptures, we may assume that the scriptural implications of Ex. 3: 6 *should* have been understood, not only by the Sadducees, but

¹⁵⁸ *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 912, words in brackets and emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁹ Tremper Longman, III. *Proverbs*, p. 61, emphasis mine

¹⁶⁰ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 911.

by Solomon and other writers of the Proverbs, all of whom wrote after Genesis was part of the OT canon. Jesus allows them no excuses for their ignorance of the resurrection. Why then, do “most scholars” today believe the wisdom writers had “no awareness of an afterlife where people meet their final reward”?

16: 17 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life.

21: 16 A man who wanders from the way of understanding Will rest in the assembly of the dead.

In ancient Israel, the main roads by-passed the cities, much like the interstate system of roads in the US and Europe often pass **by** cities but not **through** them. In order to enter the city, one would have to take the access road. The **upright** in this verse is depicted as a traveler who refuses to leave the “main prepared thoroughfare” to enter the evil city by taking the access road. He remains steadfast on the way that leads to life.¹⁶¹ By way of contrast, the man who leaves the main road and **wanders from the way of understanding** will enter the **assembly of the dead**.

19: 23 The fear of the LORD *leads* to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.

One who fears the Lord also trusts Him, so that he may **sleep** at night knowing that nothing will befall him which is not ordained by a loving Father. Although he may be put to death by evil men, not a hair of his head will eternally perish (Lk. 21: 18). He is **satisfied** with life because his satisfaction lies in his relationship to God, not in his outward circumstances. He, therefore, remains **untouched** by the evil events and people which may surround him.

21: 21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty Finds life, righteousness and honor.

The proverb teaches us that a man will **find** that which he **pursues**—the same principle as sowing and reaping. **Righteousness** is repeated as the reward of our pursuit of righteousness. The writer of Hebrews admonishes us, “Pursue holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12). He is speaking of progressive sanctification. Jesus said, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied,” perhaps closer in thought to the text before us. He who pursues righteousness with his whole heart will be satisfied with complete righteousness upon his entrance into heaven. He will no longer entertain one single unholy thought or commit one unholy deed forever. Peace and prosperity are promised God’s people in the consummated age—“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”—but perfect sanctification is the high point of all God’s promises and benefits without which no other promise can be enjoyed. Sin prevents us from enjoying not only God, but his benefits and other people. The sinful heart is dissatisfied and ungrateful.

Loyalty may refer to loyalty to God, to man, or to both. Our loyalty to others means that we are friends who stick closer than a brother, through adversity and sorrow. Jonathan was loyal to David, even to his own hurt. The righteous man is loyal to God in his behavior and worship, pursuing no other gods of money, sex, or power. He is willing even to lay down his life in self-sacrifice rather than deny this loyalty; for without God, nothing else matters.

He will also receive **honor**, for God honors those who honor Him and loves those who love Him—not disregarding the truth that He first loved us. On the contrary, those seeking honor from men will often compromise their faith, love for God, and the standard of God’s law to receive honor in

¹⁶¹ Waltke, *Proverbs*, II, pp. 25-26

this life. The righteous man has an audience of One. If God is pleased with us, it matters not if men are displeased or indifferent to us. If God is not pleased with us, it matters not if the whole world is pleased. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?”

22: 4 The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life.

The proverb is counter-intuitive. That is, it goes against man’s assumption that riches are made exclusively by aggressive personalities who will bend the rules and do whatever it takes to get what they want. The prophetic witness is filled with condemnations upon the rich who oppress the humble of the earth, but it is never assumed in Scripture that all the wealthy are unrighteous (e.g. Abraham and Job). In fact, in the normal “moral order” of the universe, humility would always lead to riches and honor, but sin has subverted the moral order and turned it on its head. In the new heavens and earth, this moral order will be restored and there will be no scarcity of resources for the humble who inherit it.

M. The Two Ways—the Righteous and the Wicked

10: 29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, But ruin to the workers of iniquity.

12: 2 A good man will obtain favor from the LORD, But He will condemn a man who devises evil.

The way of the Lord is obedience to His law. It is a **stronghold** to God’s people because it keeps them relatively safe (compared with unbelievers) from temporal sorrows as well as the temporal and eternal consequences of sin and judgment. Obedience to covenant law receives God’s promises of blessing and his **favor**. The same **way** is **ruin** and condemnation to **workers of iniquity** and **a man who devises evil** because of the promised threats of violating God’s law (Deut. 27-28).

15: 8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

15: 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.

There is no better commentary on 15: 8 than Isa. 1: 10-17. Isaiah condemned the worship, sacrifices, and prayers of wayward Israel who did not “learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan” and “plead for the widow”. Isaiah’s condemnation of Israel is all-inclusive. If their very worship is an abomination, how much more everything else they do. **Sacrifice** is parallel to **prayer** indicating that even in the act of prayer, the wicked are an abomination.

Abomination is contrasted with **delight** in 15: 8 as **abomination** and **loves** are contrasted in 15: 9. It is not said specifically in these two verses that the wicked themselves are an abomination to God, but only their deeds and their **way**; but there is ample evidence in the psalms and proverbs that they themselves are an abomination (cf. Prov. 3: 32; 17: 15; Ps. 11: 5). One may claim to love God only if he **pursues righteousness**. If we love Christ, we will keep His commandments; otherwise, we are idolaters who love the world and the things of the world—the pride of life and the lusts (desires) of the flesh and the eyes (1 Jn. 2: 3-5; 15-17).

15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

The Lord is both transcendent (far above man and incomprehensible) and imminent (near) with His people. His ear is attentive to the prayer of the righteous, but He will not hear the petitions of the wicked. The only prayer He will hear from the wicked is one of genuine confession and repentance wrought by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the prayers of the unrighteous are an abomination to God (Prov. 28: 9).

16: 20 He who **gives attention to the word** will find good, And blessed is he who **trusts** in the **LORD**.

Gives attention is parallel to **trusts**; and **the word** is parallel to **the Lord**. Failure to give attention to the word of the Lord indicates lack of trust in its author. Good, parallel to blessed, is defined by what the word calls “good”, will come to all who pay attention to the Lord’s commandments and keep them.

17: 15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

In every age and culture, justice has been overturned when righteous people have been condemned by the courts while their guilty oppressors have been set free. The proverb acknowledges that righteous people often suffer while the wicked prosper. For God’s people to receive continual blessings in this life, God would have to isolate them completely from the wicked. The health and wealth “gospel” peddlers offer people the false hope of heaven on earth, but there can be no heaven on earth while the wicked continue living on the earth.

Wicked Ahab was **justified** by his “kangaroo”¹⁶² court in the confiscation of Naboth’s property, and righteous Naboth and his sons were **condemned** to execution. Nevertheless, the Lord is the avenger of injustice, and He never forgets the wrongs committed. In 1 Kings 21, the lies of Naboth’s accusers are balanced by the lying spirit placed in the mouths of Ahab’s prophets to the effect that his military campaign would be successful. Yet, the Lord spoke the truth to Ahab through the mouth of His prophet, Macaiiah, who warned Ahab that his prophets were lying to him. Always more willing to believe a lie rather than the truth, Ahab continues with his plans and loses his life (1 Kings 22). What goes around comes around. Ahab is condemned in the same manner as Naboth, a lying tongue.

But the proverb does not simply apply to the courts. It is true for all people who are often prone to call evil good and good evil.

18: 10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.

God’s covenant name, Lord (Yahweh), reveals His character and identity. “I am who I am” means that His steadfast and unchanging love for His people provides them with a safety net at all times, especially in times of trouble. Like a strong impregnable tower, the Lord stands between His people and their enemies, not permitting their ultimate destruction. Although we may tend to focus on the exceptions when the righteous fall, like Naboth before Jezebel, the Scriptures focus on the righteous when they rise (cf. excerpts above from Waltke, “Do the Proverbs Promise Too Much?”).

All the righteous will rise in a future that outlasts death. Jesus acknowledges that His disciples will stand before kings and other powerful people; and some of them will be put to death. “Yet,” he

¹⁶² A kangaroo court is one in which the verdict has already been decided before the case is heard.

promises, “not a hair of your head will perish” (Lk. 21: 18). We must also remember that not even a hair on the heads of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was scorched by Nebuchadnezzar’s cruel fire. In a preincarnate appearance, Christ walked with them through the fires; and He continues to do so for all who run to Him for deliverance and help. Nothing—not even “death” (Rom. 8: 38)—shall separate us from the love of Christ in whose **name** we are **safe**.

N. The Fear of the Lord

14: 26 In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge.

14: 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.

Those who fear God have **strong confidence** that the Lord is their **refuge** and the refuge of their children throughout life’s dangers, troubles and sorrows (Rom. 8). As sinful, imperfect parents care for their **children** how much more will a loving heavenly Father who is perfect and omnipotent (Matt. 7: 7-11). Therefore, the fear of the Lord that leads to salvation is **a fountain of life** which enables us to **avoid the snares of death** both temporally (avoiding life’s unnecessary dangers) and eternally.

O. Love and Hatred

10: 12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.

...love...cherishes the wrongdoer as a friend to be won, not as an enemy with whom to get even (1: 22).¹⁶³

Like a subterranean fire, [hatred] continually *stirs up* mischief, creates or keeps alive rankling [resentful] coldness, disgusts, dislikes...carps [brags] at the infirmities of others; aggravates the least slip [mistake]; or resents the most trifling, or even imaginary, provocation [mistreatment]. These *strifes* are kindled...to the great dishonor of God, and the marring of the beauty and consistency of the gospel. Is not here abundant matter for prayer, watchfulness, and resistance?... *Love covers*, overlooks, speedily forgives and forgets...Full of candour and inventiveness, it puts the best construction on doubtful matters [citing 1 Cor. 13], searches out any palliation [lessening of guilt], does not rigidly eye, or wantonly expose...a brother’s faults; nor will it uncover them at all, except so far as may be needful for his ultimate good.¹⁶⁴

Love does not attempt to **cover** sin at a time when it should be addressed for the good of the sinner or those associated with him (see Bridges’ comment above; also Matt. 18: 15-20; 2 Tim. 4: 10, 14; Prov. 13: 24). However, love is patient and kind and attempts to believe the best about people by giving them the benefit of the doubt (1 Cor. 13: 4-7). Hatred bears the opposite fruit, rejoicing in unrighteousness (1 Cor. 13: 6) even if the unrighteousness is only a rumor. There does not seem to be a middle ground offered to us between **hatred** and **love**. At any point in time, we are either loving our brother or hating him. We cannot remain neutral toward him or uncommitted. Neutrality is just another form of hatred (1 Jn. 3: 16-17).

Peter repeats this proverb in his epistle.

¹⁶³ Waltke, I, p. 461

¹⁶⁴ Bridges, pp. 97-98

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8 NASB)

16: 6 By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.

Without heart obedience to the law, particularly the law pertaining to one's neighbor, ritual sacrifices did not atone for sin—nor does attending Sunday services. The proverb does not intend to teach that one's good works atone for sin, but to show the necessary connection between true regeneration and the cultic practice of bringing sacrifices to the altar (cf. Isa. 1). If good works were sufficient, then the sacrificial system would never have been inaugurated in the first place.

The guilty sinner cannot trust himself to the divine grace mediated through the cultus [the sacrificial system] “if he is not zealous in his relations to his fellowmen, to practice love and truth” (cf. Matt. 6: 12, 14-15; Luke 7: 47; Jas. 1: 26-27; 2: 8, 12-18).¹⁶⁵

Lovingkindness and truth is paired with **the fear of the Lord**. Love and godly fear are not opposites; they are complementary of one another. The awe of a holy God is a biblical incentive to love our neighbor as ourselves who are also made in the image of God.

My flesh trembles for fear of You, And I am afraid of Your judgments. Ayin. (Ps. 119:120 NASB)

P. Man's Way

12: 15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Arrogance and pride will prompt the **fool** to believe that he has everything figured out and needs no one else to advise him or teach him. The **wise** will **listen to counsel** simply because he admits his limitations. Moreover, the fool will keep falling into trouble because even his failures are not enough to teach him his limitations.

14: 12 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

16: 25 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

This is the only proverb that I am aware of which is exactly repeated.

The Pharisee is dazzled with his own goodness. All his religion is in external; sufficient ground for his own acceptance with God. He has compounded for the internal work, to add to the pomp of the heartless ceremonial. He brings to God the formal duty, which he [God] abhors, and he refuses the spiritual service, which he demands. Yet his *way seems to be right*. But his countenance is hated, his prayer is cast out; his goodness is an abomination. *The orthodox professor* takes up his opinion, and puts on appearances, only to keep the Spirit out of the heart, and to quiet his conscience, without coming to the true point.¹⁶⁶

Closely akin to the previous proverb, this one teaches the consequences of pursuing **the way of a fool** which he believes is **right**. While it may seem right, **its end is the way of death**. Why? Because there is only **one way** that leads to life, submission to the true God and the means to

¹⁶⁵ Waltke, II, pp. 13-14

¹⁶⁶ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, p. 245

salvation expressed in His word. Everyone wishes to choose his own way to live and his own way to God. Some believe that there are many ways to God, and none are more or less valid than the others.

The Muslim believes that the way of Muhammed is the only way, and the Jews believe that Judaism and keeping the law is the only way. In the OT, submission to God's way consisted in obedience to his law while simultaneously recognizing that perfect obedience was unattainable because of one's sinful nature. Therefore, the OT believer also submitted to the laws of sacrifices culminating once a year in the Great Day of Atonement when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for all Israel. By submitting his sacrifices, the true believer recognized that the slain animal was substitute for his life, and he believed that God had forgiven his lack of perfect obedience through the animal sacrifice representing a once and for all sacrifice in the future typified in the Great Day of Atonement. In the NT, the Christian believes that Christ has become the fulfillment of all the OT sacrifices, and that he is no longer required to sacrifice animals, but to believe in the sufficiency of Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice. Yet, there is still a connection between his belief in the sufficiency of Christ and the grace-producing obedience which inevitably follows this belief. The **way** of salvation in the OT is the same as in the NT. Jesus, God incarnate, says, "I am **the way**, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."

14: 13 Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, And the end of joy may be grief.

There is a subtle connection between v. 13 and v. 12.

14: 12 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

While the fool believes his **way** is the **right** way, the work of God's law written on his heart (Rom. 2: 15) reveals something of the nature and attributes of the true God which are inescapable, leaving him without excuse for choosing another **way**. While putting on a good show of **laughter**, inwardly he is **in pain** because the way of disobedience is hard (Prov. 13: 15). Overcoming the action/consequence series of God's law is just like trying to overcome the law of gravity. If you jump from a plane without a parachute, you will die. If you choose the wrong way, you will also die.

The proverb may also be a simple observation of the sad plight of mankind. Even in those brief, short bursts of happiness and laughter, there is the underlying background of sorrow dominating the human situation. Waltke says it well.

Sorrow forms the unchanging background of the occasional, distracting moments of merriment. Life begins with a baby's cry of discomfort and dissatisfaction; it ends in a dying gasp and grief. In the interim laughter is tintured [lightly mixed] with heartache (14: 13a), and in the end sorrow follows hard on the heels of joy (v. 13b). "Since humans die, joy inevitably ends in grief (see 27: 1). The party always ends; acts of love cease." This exceptionally pessimistic proverb must be interpreted in light of the book's dominant and optimistic affirmations that the expectation of the righteous is joy (10: 28), life (10: 16, 17; 11: 19; 13: 12, 14), and a future hope...in contrast to the wicked, who have none (24: 19, 20). By describing the human condition as out of joint, the proverb points to a salvation and true

home that lie beyond normal human experience in a relationship with God that outlasts death (3: 1-12).¹⁶⁷

14: 14 The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways, But a good man will *be satisfied* with his.

The **backslider in heart** is the man who first chooses the **right way** but does not persevere in it. He **will have the fill of his own ways** which is death because he abandoned the true way. The person who resolutely abandons the only way to life will not reach this destination, regardless of how long he travels on the right road since he eventually takes a detour on the path to death. Jesus proclaims that “he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24: 13), not the one who forsakes the way (cf. Matt. 13, the parable of the soils; Prov. 15: 10). John warns,

They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; **for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us**; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19 NASB)

The **good man** is paired with the **backslider**, indicating that the **good man** continues on the right way leading to life. While the backslider will be dissatisfied with the consequences of **his own ways**, the good man **will be satisfied with his**.

The proverb does not teach that the backslider was saved at one time but lost his salvation. Those who are truly saved will most certainly *persevere* until the end. Scripture is replete (filled) with passages proving the security of the true believer.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who **began** a good work in you **will perfect** it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6 NASB)

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12-13 NASB)

In the first passage, the work of salvation is attributed to God who will complete what he started—namely the work of salvation leading to complete sanctification and glorification. In the last passage, John Murray informs us that God’s **work** in us does not suspend or replace our **will and work for His good pleasure**; nor does our work suspend or replace God’s **work in [us]**. Nor are we to conclude that there is an *equal cooperation* between the believer and God, as if God does his part and we do our part in equal proportion. Rather, our working for His good pleasure is the assurance and confirmation that God is presently at work in us producing our *willingness* to do his will and the *performance* of that will. In the end, all the believer’s willingness to please God and his doing of God’s will is the consequence of God’s constant working His will in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, in the *true* believer, God is at work through His Spirit to prevent backsliding and to produce the obedience that leads inevitably to eternal life.

And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;³⁰

¹⁶⁷ Waltke, I, p. 592

and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? (Rom. 8:28-31 NASB)

If **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, it follows that nothing can **separate us from that love**, not even the devil himself, who is a **created thing**.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, **nor any other created thing**, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39 NASB)

But none of these verses suggest that a man who does not love God, though he may profess this love, will go to heaven. Jesus says, “If you love me, keep my commandments”, and the disciple whom Jesus loved says,

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (1 Jn. 2:4 NASB)

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (1 Jn. 1:6 NASB)

Does John imply the necessity of perfect obedience to be saved? Absolutely not. (Note the chiasmic structure of the following passage with the emphasis on v. 9.)

If we say that <u>we have no sin</u> , we are deceiving ourselves and <u>the truth is not in us</u> .	} A
⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.	} B
¹⁰ If we say that <u>we have not sinned</u> , we make Him a liar and <u>His word is not in us</u> . (1 Jn. 1:8-10 NASB)	} A

14: 15 The naïve believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.

The **naïve** (gullible) will believe anything he hears, but the **sensible man** tests what he hears with the help of wise counselors. Afterwards, he **considers his steps** (his way) to ensure he is on the right path. This verse is particularly applicable to those who follow cults like Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and the more subtle cultists like Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen who teach a salvation based on personal improvement and positive thinking. **Consider** your **steps** by reading the Bible to see if their message is true.

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. (Acts 17:10-11 NASB)

14: 16 A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless.

Like the previous proverb, the **wise man is cautious**, testing what he hears and turning away from it if it proves to be **evil**. The **fool is arrogant**—arrogant enough to believe that he will avoid ruin

even if he plunges into a **careless** activity or religious belief. Others may die from reckless behavior, he thinks, but not him. So are those who pursue crime as a means of gain, or drugs and alcohol as a means of escaping meaninglessness, or false religion as a means of finding purpose in their lives. They come to ruin and then blame God for their pain (19: 3).

14: 17 A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.

The **quick-tempered man** is another careless **fool** (v. 16) who brings harm to the community with careless words and actions. A **man of evil devices** is a schemer who keeps a cool head, thinks rationally, and is able to cheat people out of their money.¹⁶⁸ His level head brings him riches in the short-term, but distrust and **hatred** from the community in the long-term.

16: 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.

See “Heart and Motives”

16: 7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

16: 9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

See “God’s Sovereignty and Man’s Responsibility”

21: 8 The way of a guilty man is crooked, But as for the pure, his conduct is upright.

20: 27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, Searching all the innermost parts of his being.

Crooked and straight are moral opposites; therefore, **upright** is used as a synonym of straight.

But Saul, who was also *known as* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,¹⁰ and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make **crooked** the **straight** ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:9-10 NASB)

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,¹³ and make **straight** paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (Heb. 12:12-13 NASB)

Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, But a man of understanding walks **straight**. (Prov. 15:21 NASB)

The **spirit** in v. 27 is man’s breath (*neshamah*). Through a man’s words he reveals the state of his soul, **the innermost parts of his being**, the same thought that Jesus enunciates when he says, “

"Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?¹⁸ "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (Matt. 15:17-18 NASB)

Q. Marriage and Family—the Home

10: 1 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

10: 2 Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death.

10: 3 The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked.

10: 4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Waltke, I, p. 596

10: 5 He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, *But* he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.

These five verses form a unit. In a fallen world, the extended family of children which begins with joy and glad expectation may degenerate into sorrow. There is scarcely one father out of a hundred, even among unbelievers, who wishes his son or daughter to fail so that he will be seen as superior to his progeny. Fathers and mothers wish their children to progress past their levels of success, to be productive and happy. But often this is not the case. Some children do not have the abilities of their parents, but innate ability is not in view here, only willful rebellion. The **foolish son** (v. 1) squanders his inheritance or his opportunities to learn wisdom and to earn the success which comes from wisdom (e.g. the prodigal son of Lk. 15).¹⁶⁹ The foolish son may be a sluggard who refuses to get up early during harvest season to bring in the crops (10: 5). Although his father's farm may be productive, he figures that the slaves will work hard and allow him more sleep. It is common worldwide for children of wealthy parents to develop into sluggards and "party animals" that know how to spend their parents' money but don't know how to make it or keep it. For those parents who are not wealthy, the foolish son shows contempt for their present and future welfare, since he will be responsible for caring for them physically and financially when they get too old to work. "Honor your father and your mother" implies financial upkeep when necessary (cf. Mk. 7: 1-13; 1 Tim. 5: 3, 17, where "honor" means financial help). The untrained sluggard will be ill-equipped to help.

On the flip side, the father who sees his son rising early to work and fulfilling his tasks with nobility and cheerfulness will possess something "better than" silver and gold. He possesses a son or daughter who loves the Lord and loves his or her parents. The foolish son will bring only grief **to his mother** (and his father, since the mother stands as a part for the whole).

The foolish son may also be the kind of man who, shunning honest labor, will later turn to theft and murder (10: 2). The sage (wise man) brings us all the way back to the father's lectures against taking up a life of crime with the gang (Prov. 1: 10-16). He reminds his son that the Lord will provide for all his needs through righteous labor (10: 3), but that if he takes up a life of **ill-gotten gains**, he can expect God to ignore his hunger when the stolen money is gone—and it will be. Once more, we are warned about being greedy and desiring quick, easy money. Rather, the **negligent hand** will produce poverty, while the **hand of the diligent** will produce wealth (10: 4). In the production of wealth, we need not run like rabbits. The slow, patient plodding of turtles is preferable. Steady, honest work will provide all the relative wealth we need, and we should be content with it (Heb. 13: 3-5). My African friends may wish to argue with me, saying, "Yes, hard honest labor works in the US but not here. Hard-working people are still poor." I understand the frustration, having observed African life for some time now. But remember that the Proverbs were not written *only* for Solomon's son, but for all of Israel, many of whom were poor—otherwise, why so many references to the poor? This is the bible which is applicable for all times and cultures.

11: 29 He who troubles his own house will inherit wind, And the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted.

Simeon and Levi brought trouble on Jacob's house by murdering the men of Shechem (Gen. 34). While Shechem's son deserved execution for rape, Simeon and Levi were not content with

¹⁶⁹ In this story, the shamefulness of the son's request for his share of the inheritance is borne out by mid-eastern customs. By asking for his share before his father died, the son was basically saying that he wished his father already dead.

punishing Shechem's son, but the whole tribe, killing the innocent for the sin of one guilty person. It could be argued that they performed a righteous act of making war with the Canaanites; and, doubtless, God used their anger as a preventative measure against intermarriage (Gen. 34: 21). However, at the end of his life, Jacob, now named Israel, uttered a curse upon Simeon and Levi for being men of gratuitous (unnecessary) violence. There is not a single word of blessing for them (Gen. 49: 5-7). This prophetic curse must be an indication of God's displeasure with their act.

The one who troubles his house will **inherit wind** (troubled wind at that) not wealth. Instead of being the well-respected head of his family, he will instead be a **servant** to those who have wisely protected the reputation of the family with cooler heads and restrained actions and speech.

12: 4 An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who shames *him* is like rotteness in his bones.

King Lemuel's mother taught him that the husband of a wise woman would be known in the gates, the important place of judicial decisions (31: 23). A good wife is a treasured find (18: 22) because her good reputation also becomes the **crown of her husband**. She makes a positive contribution to his reputation in the community. (I don't have a well-known reputation anywhere, but wherever I go, I always look better if Fran is there with me.)

A foolish wife, on the other hand, **shames** her husband and besides giving him a bad reputation, her foolishness may destroy him spiritually and physically (**rotteness in his bones**). No matter what kind of man he may be, perhaps even wealthy and righteous, his blessings are mitigated (lessened) by the foolish behavior of his wife.

Doubtless, this proverb will stick in the throat of all western feminists who stiffen at the idea of subordination of the wife to the husband; but it implies just that. The wife has a **subordinate** role in the home of helping her husband and protecting his reputation in the community—assuming that it is a good one. This role **does not diminish her equality as a fellow image-bearer of God** (Gen. 2), but recognizes a distinction in function. The feminists may attempt to reverse the roles of men and women, making men subordinate to the woman, but they will not succeed in the end since this order has been ordained from creation. Ironically, the same feminists who wish to rule their husbands do not wish to be ruled by their children; but children's subordination to parents is also foundational for social order.

13: 1 A wise son *accepts his* father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

The **scoffer** has gone a step beyond the gullible fool (see commentary on 1; 22). If lady wisdom assumed that the **naïve** would never listen, she would have kept her speech to herself. The **scoffer** is the one who actively rejects the truth and **does not listen to rebuke**. We cannot pretend to distinguish infallibly between him and the naïve, lest we fail to evangelize those who would turn to the truth if confronted. Nevertheless, Jesus himself warns us about throwing our pearls before swine (Matt. 7), so Christians must possess some ability to distinguish between swine, dogs, and people who will listen.

This proverb indicates that scoffers are not made in a day. A **wise son** will abide by his father's instructions, thus growing up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He will, therefore, escape the hard way of the scoffer who continually refuses to listen.

13: 22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.

The sage upholds the practice of saving for one's family, even for the grandchildren, **his children's children**. This does not imply that we bequeath (give at death) enough riches to our children and grandchildren so that they do not have to work the rest of their lives. Many of the wealthiest people in the world possess enough common grace¹⁷⁰ to know that they can cripple their children and grandchildren with too much **inheritance**. Nevertheless, it should not be necessary for our children to start at the same place that we started. If we are able to get them farther ahead financially from where we began our journey, then so much the better—assuming that we have taught them a good work ethic and the value of frugality and saving. If they become wealthy, they will be able to help many others.

On the other hand, if our children become fools—and Proverbs holds this out as a possibility—then we are not obligated to bequeath our hard-earned inheritance to those who will squander it. Fundamentally, our inheritance does not belong to us, but to God who gave it; and He will not be honored by throwing it to pigs and dogs who don't appreciate it and have no positive goals for its use (Matt. 7: 6).

14: 26 In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge.

The fear of the Lord is a legacy which may be passed on to our children. If we as parents demonstrate that our **confidence** is in the Lord, and not in men or money, our children may also choose Him as *their* confidence. If we fear God, then nothing else need be feared.

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe. (Proverbs 18:10 NASB)

15: 5 A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is sensible.

This proverb is a reminder to parents that they are not the only responsible parties in the family structure. They are responsible for teaching and disciplining their children, but the children are responsible for receiving (note the word **rejects**) this teaching. The proverb does not call the parent a **fool** whose child is a fool. Children are not computers who may be programmed for spiritual success. They are human beings who must be born again of the Holy Spirit before they are able to receive and act upon wise instruction.

15: 20 A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother.

17: 21 He who sires a fool *does so* to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy.

17: 25 A foolish son is a grief to his father And bitterness to her who bore him.

Proverbs 15: 20 is very similar to 10: 1 but advances beyond 10: 1 to expose the inherent hatred of the **foolish** son. He not only brings **grief** to his mother but demonstrates through his speech and actions that he **despises** her. Proverbs 17: 21 and 25 balances the **grief** of the father with the mother. A fool does not care whom he hurts or destroys since he is only thinking of himself and what makes his life enjoyable or comfortable. He brings no **joy** to this **father** or **mother**. The **wise son**, on the other hand, is careful not to shame the family through foolish speech or behavior but wishes to bring honor and joy to his parents. Interestingly, the sage does not use the word **son** in

¹⁷⁰ Common grace is the non-saving grace God gives to all men to mitigate (lessen) their sinfulness and to maximize their obedience to his law. Without this common grace, the world would be uninhabitable because of men's unrestrained sinfulness (Gen. 6).

the second verset of 15: 20, but uses **man** instead. The implication is that the foolish son loses his right to be called a son (cf. Lk. 15: 19).

Do not the brightest joys, and the bitterest sorrows in this world of tears, flow from parents' hearts? Whatever be the delight to see a son prospering in life; the Christian father finds no rest, until *a wise son maketh him glad*. And here we need not any development of talent, or superior attainment, but the true *wisdom*; humble and docile, marked...by filial reverence, specially by the cordial choice of that, which "is the beginning of wisdom—the fear of the Lord."¹⁷¹

15: 27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.

Many illegal and immoral deeds have been committed under the pretense of "providing for one's family"—stock market schemes (Bernie Madoff), drug trafficking (Pablo Escobar), sex trafficking, dishonesty in the marketplace, embezzlement, and common theft. According to the parallel, the **illicit profits** in view are primarily **bribes** made to powerful people for personal favors or unjust judicial decisions, but the principle would apply to every kind of immoral gain. The best contribution one can make to **his own house** is to walk with integrity in the fear of the Lord, thus passing down the legacy of faith, confidence in the Lord, and righteous living to one's spouse and children. **Will live** denotes not only eternal life, but an earthly life lived with joy and a clean conscience. The money made dishonestly will not provide the happiness and security that was expected but only **trouble**. The illicit gain will cause the schemer to be constantly looking over his shoulder in anticipation of retribution from those he harmed; but even if he escapes their vengeance, he will miss eternal life.

17: 1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.

The sage (wise man) recognizes that the family of the righteous man who enjoys **quietness** may be so poor that they can only afford to eat a **dry morsel** of bread. The **house** of the wicked (unstated but implied) may be wealthy enough to eat an abundance (**feasting**) but their meals are accompanied by **strife**, not quietness. Poverty with joy is superior to riches and strife.

17: 2 A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, And will share in the inheritance among brothers.

As the fool loses his right to be called a son (cf. 15: 20; Lk. 15: 21), the **servant who acts wisely** is elevated to the position of a son who **will share in the inheritance among brothers** (i.e. the other sons in the family). Moreover, he will **rule** over the foolish son. There was no provision in OT law for the servant to supplant a natural-born son; yet, faithless Israel who was Yahweh's first-born was eventually supplanted by the Gentiles. The proverb seems inconsistent with Prov. 19: 10 and 30: 22; however, the qualifying phrase **who acts wisely** sets this servant apart from foolish servants who are elevated beyond their ability or character.¹⁷²

17: 6 Grandchildren are the crown of old men, And the glory of sons is their fathers.

20: 7 A righteous man who walks in his integrity—How blessed are his sons after him.

Until recently in the west, the multiplication of children in one's household was considered an honor (Ps. 127: 3-5). It was a blessing to perpetuate the survival of the family name. Other proverbs

¹⁷¹ Bridges, p. 211

¹⁷² Waltke, II, p. 40 and footnote

(15: 20; 17: 21, 25) warn that biological birth alone will not bring the joy that fathers and mothers seek. The son must be born *again* and learn wisdom. However, for children to be born the *second* time, they must be born the **first** time.

Rather than perpetuating the value and blessing of children, western culture has perpetuated the myth of overpopulation, centering their attention on overpopulated cities with poverty-ridden slums. Contrary to human wisdom, God has given mankind the creation mandate to multiply children for subduing (not exploiting) and cultivating the earth for his glory (Gen. 1: 26-28). Since the image-bearers of God are needed for this endeavor in every area of the world, God has never rescinded (done away with) this mandate and will not do so until the consummation of His kingdom.

One does not need to travel the globe to see that only a few parts of this world are concentrated with people while vast portions are virtually uninhabited. Married couples who do not want to have children are being disobedient to the creation mandate either because they fear their offspring will turn out poorly or because they don't want the responsibility and expense of rearing them. Others fear that children would cause them too much inconvenience in their careers or would curtail their entertainment and spending. Multiplying is not a suggestion; it is a command, and any culture which violates this command for any reason is committing cultural and demographic suicide, as England, France, and Germany are now demonstrating through rapid depopulation.

As the Israelites were removed from their homeland because of disobedience to the covenant, the once predominantly Christian nations of Europe are progressively losing their homelands to Islamic immigrants who are conquering Europe through unconscious obedience to the Christian mandate, not jihad. Charles Marcel, a.k.a. Charles the Hammer, stopped the European conquest of Islam at the Battle of Tours in 732 AD. Lacking this victory, France and possibly all Europe would have fallen to Islam like Spain did from 711 to 1492. Moreover, Muslims are propagating their faith increasingly by building mosques and schools while the vast majority of Europeans have no use for the Christian faith. Their churches are becoming museums. Undoubtedly, my statements here would be considered "racist" by liberal westerners who would vehemently denounce such "hate" speech, thus exercising the very freedom of speech denied everyone—including Muslims—in predominantly Muslim countries. If there is a free Muslim country on the face of the globe, I would challenge the liberal to point it out to me.

Let me be clear that I do not hate Muslims—or Buddhists, or Hindus. I love them as fellow-image-bearers of God who need Christ. Yet, I believe that only the Christian faith, as the predominant faith of any country, can ensure the freedoms which are enjoyed in the predominantly Christian West. No other religion is concerned about individual human freedom, especially Islam.¹⁷³

The glory of sons is their fathers indicates the importance of revering and respecting fathers as well as the incentive for fathers to be the kind of men that sons and daughters can proudly call "father" (20: 7). From first-hand testimonies, I have learned that many African children have had very minimal relationship with their fathers. This has been true for various reasons: fathers working away from the family, the cultural habit of children being the sole responsibility of mothers to train and nurture. Whatever the reason, many Christian African fathers are challenging

¹⁷³ See Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* and *The Great Divide: Failure of Islam and Triumph of the West*

the cultural norm and becoming a dynamic and benevolent force in the lives of their children, giving them a future advantage over children of disconnected fathers.

17: 13 He who returns evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house.

After Nabal...paid back the good of David's men with evil (1 Sam. 25: 21), the Lord smote him and gave his wife to David (25: 36-42); after David paid back faithful Uriah with adultery and murder, the Lord took David's child and handed his children over to incest and murder (2 Samuel 11—13...).¹⁷⁴

Evil will not depart from his house is a warning of retribution inclusive of a man's family. Evil did not depart from Ahab's house after his murder of Naboth. Naboth, refusing to sell his vineyard to Ahab, had reminded him of the sacred importance of a man's property bequeathed to him when the tribes of Israel had been apportioned the land of Canaan (1 Kings 21: 3). Ahab repaid him (**returns evil for good**) for this valuable reminder by having him stoned to death and stealing his land. Not only was Ahab killed in battle, but the **house** of Ahab was eventually eradicated by Jehu (2 Kings 10).

Then he wrote a letter to them a second time saying, "If you are on my side, and you will listen to my voice, take the heads of the men, your master's sons, and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow about this time." Now the king's sons, seventy persons, *were* with the great men of the city, *who* were rearing them.⁷ When the letter came to them, they took the king's sons and slaughtered *them*, seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent *them* to him at Jezreel.⁸ When the messenger came and told him, saying, "They have brought the heads of the king's sons," he said, "Put them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning." (2 Ki. 10:6-8 NASB)

Then Jehu says,

"Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, for the LORD has done what He spoke through His servant Elijah."¹¹ So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests, until he left him without a survivor. (2 Ki. 10:10-11 NASB)

The punishment of Ahab's house naturally begs the question of why the whole family should be punished for the sins of the father, something strictly forbidden in the Mosaic law.

"Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deut. 24:16 NASB)

Why were the 70 sons of Ahab put to death because of Ahab's sin? For that matter, why were the sons and daughters of Achan stoned to death (Josh. 7). One explanation is that the sins of Ahab and Achan were "visited" upon their children.

"You shall not worship them or serve them [*idols*]; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (Exod. 20:5 NASB)

Since God never contradicts Himself, the iniquity **visited** upon subsequent generations must be the iniquity **practiced** by subsequent generations. Achan's children must have been complicit with

¹⁷⁴ Waltke, II, p. 55

his theft of items under the ban, and they were judged along with him. I do not believe infant children are included, though they are not explicitly mentioned in the text. As for Ahab's sons, it is most probable that they all followed false religion—particularly Baal worship—in imitation of Ahab and Jezebel. There is no biblical record to the contrary. Apart from any just punishment that Ahab's sons deserved, it is common in the history of man that people suffer for the sins of their fathers or political leaders regardless of their innocence or guilt. Thirty million Russians died at the hands of Joseph Stalin; millions more died of starvation and execution during the brutal reign of Mao Zedong of Communist China during the cultural revolution. Millions of Africans are poor because of the selfish pursuits of their own presidents. Children suffer neglect for the sins of their lazy or alcoholic fathers. Whatever the reasons, we know that God is just and pays back evil in accordance with perfect justice.

Paying back **evil for good** occurs when people pose as hitchhikers on the roadway with a gang of two or three nearby waiting to beat the driver senseless when he pulls over. They then steal his money and his car for being willing to give someone a ride. A young woman in Mississippi was recently stabbed to death by a man coming from behind whose female companion in crime flagged the woman down and asked for money. While she was getting money out of her pocket, she was stabbed to death. Sometimes people are befriended by others only to turn on their benefactors later. I remember the story of a missionary who befriended someone in his church and disciplined him in the faith. Later, the former friend was complicit (agreeable) to the session's decision to withdraw his missionary support for unsubstantial reasons.

There are many other examples. You may trust a friend with a loan which he never intends to pay back.¹⁷⁵ A near neighbor may commit adultery with your wife. All of us have been betrayed by people we attempted to help. Rather than seeking retribution for ourselves, we must put the matter in God's hands who will repay equitably according to perfect justice (Rom. 12: 19). The lesson we must learn is that repaying good with evil is a grievous sin deserving of the sure retribution which it will receive.

19: 18 Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death.

While there is hope implies that there will come a day when there is no hope. The father cannot know for sure when that day arrives, so he is encouraged to make the most of his opportunity to discipline his son. **Discipline** implies more than corporal punishment of a small child. It involves admonishment, teaching him the scriptures, rebuke for bad behavior, and encouragement for good behavior throughout his son's (or daughter's) life. Negligence in these means of forming character is calculated as a **desire** for his eternal **death**, a sobering thought to all conscientious fathers. Although fathers and mothers cannot guarantee the son's positive response to discipline (cf. commentary on Prov. 1-3), it is possibly the most important means to his salvation.

18: 22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD.

19: 13 A foolish son is destruction to his father, And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.

19: 14 House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD.

Finding a **good** (implied; cf. Prov. 31: 10) **wife** (or husband, also implied) does not result from our clever strategy or spirituality. A good spouse is the product of God's favor that is undeserved. This does not mean that we should assume the Lord will give us something we have not desired. If men

¹⁷⁵ This comment does not refer to those who have received microloans from East Africa Microenterprise for Pastors. christcommunitystudycenter.org

desire only a pretty face and a shapely body, let them not complain if God gives them what they want, a beautiful woman who may be like the **constant dripping** of the rain, ceaselessly complaining about what she does not have and her unmet expectations from her husband (Prov. 27: 15). Her beauty will become like a ring in a pig's snout (11: 22). "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31: 30). Or if the prospective wife desires riches and social status more than spiritual leadership, love, affection, and understanding (1 Pet. 3:7), then let her not complain when her rich husband proves abusive and unfaithful.

In African culture, a husband or wife may be selected by the parents (frowned upon by romantic Western culture but not inherently a bad idea), but Solomon warns us that we also must not trust ultimately in the security of parental selection. **Fathers** may bestow **house and wealth** upon both bride and groom, but this will not ensure the success of the marriage. **But a prudent wife is from the Lord.** The proverb gives both potential husbands, wives, and parents the needed incentive to beseech the Lord's **favor** upon the future union.

Nevertheless, there is a moral principle here. A man who prays for a godly woman who will help him along in the task of having dominion over the earth—God's original command to both male and female—should not be surprised when he **finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.** The verb, **finds**, implies that he is looking for someone special, not just anyone. I prayed for such a woman and the Lord showed favor upon me for the last 42 years. (Fran is also beautiful, and this didn't hinder my selection.) Yet, I do not for a single moment believe that I deserve Fran or that God was *obligated* to give her to me because of my prayers and priorities in women; otherwise, she would not be a **favor**, but earned wages. Moreover, even good men and women marry someone who does not treat them well and will not labor together with them in seeking the kingdom of God on earth. How, indeed, can we really know a person well apart from marriage when all the masks he or she is wearing are pulled off and the real self is exposed?

We play the part of Job's three friends if we say that a poor, nagging wife or an abusive husband is God's justifiable curse upon one's obvious misplaced priorities in choosing a wife or husband. Certainly, they *could* be part of God's discipline, but *not always*. Let's remember that God causes all things—even unhappy marriages—to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8: 28). A failed marriage is not the end of a Christian's life, even as adultery and murder were not the end of David's life. God heals the brokenness. A difficult husband or wife can be God's method of making us better, wiser people, conforming us into an image who seeks the Lord's mercy and grace ever more fervently, like John Wesley who confessed to a group of pastors that his wife (a very difficult, unsupportive woman) forced him to his knees many times a day—more than their wives accomplished for them.

Prov. 19: 13 and 14 are paired together with the theme of the family **inheritance**. A **foolish son** destroys the family inheritance through sloth, while the **contentions of a wife** are like the **constant dripping** of a leaky roof—a metaphor for an inheritance falling apart through a failed marriage. Alternatively, it could mean that the contentious wife is never satisfied with the husband's provisions, a warning that no amount of inheritance from fathers can satisfy the contentious wife. A **prudent wife**, on the other hand, is better than a large inheritance because she works hard and looks to the needs of her husband and children (Prov. 31).

19: 26 He who assaults *his* father *and* drives *his* mother away Is a shameful and disgraceful son.

20: 20 He who curses his father or his mother, His lamp will go out in time of darkness.

The law was merciless to sons who assaulted or cursed their parents, and the Proverbs reflect this severity.

"He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 21:15 NASB)

"He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 21:17 NASB)

The 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. (Proverbs 30:17 NASB)

Cursing or striking a parent was essentially an assault upon God Himself since He is the ultimate authority from whom all other authority is derived. All other forms of authority, including the civil magistrate, represent His prerogative in ruling over his creation.¹⁷⁶ To assault the source of one's origin was especially grievous.¹⁷⁷

The society characterized by disrespect and disdain for parents is also a society that despises God. It is a lawless society living under the delusion that the essential equality of all men implies functional equality. Wives do not have to submit their husbands (Eph. 5: 22); therefore, why should children submit to parents? Why, then, must men submit to the laws of society or to their employers? Taken to the extreme, the lawlessness within the family will lead to the dissolution of the entire society as everyone becomes a law unto himself. Economically, God has blessed even pagan societies like Japan for their respect for authority, law, and order. It is a shame for anyone to disrespect his parents in Japan.

21: 9 It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

See the "Better—Than" proverbs.

22: 6 Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Most English translations give parents hope that even their wayward adolescent or adult-age children will eventually return to the Christian rearing that they received at youth. There is some evidence for this both experientially and exegetically. According to Waltke, the proverb could be taken sarcastically, as if to say, if you dedicate your child according to his foolish way, he will not depart from his foolishness.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the message usually interpreted as hopeful becomes a warning to parents who allow their child the freedom to go his sinful way. When he gets old, he will continue in his rebellion against God.

Yet, there is reason for an optimistic interpretation. The words **train up** in the NASB are one word in the Hebrew, *hanak*, which implies the possibility of "religious commitment to a certain course of action", "dedication", and "religious and moral direction".

¹⁷⁶ R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 122

¹⁷⁷ Rushdoony, p. 168

¹⁷⁸ Waltke, II, p. 204

[*The child*] can be molded by verbal instruction (1: 4; 23: 13; cf. 19: 18) and, according to its parallel in 22: 15, by corporal punishment. Since he is still teachable, the dedication must take place while there is still hope (23: 13; cf. 19: 18).¹⁷⁹

The **way** of the child, left to himself, is given to folly and stands in need of being driven from him through wise administration of discipline, including corporal punishment (13: 24; 22: 15). So-called Christian psychology has convinced many Christian parents to interpret **rod** metaphorically, but such attempts are futile. Other well-meaning methods of discipline are psychologically harmful, e.g. long periods of social isolation.

We should also not force the application which lays all the responsibility of children's moral behavior upon the parents. Life is more complex than parental upbringing; otherwise, we could virtually eliminate morally decadent behavior in all children with Christian upbringing. Proverbs is written primarily with children of all ages as the audience, and their freedom to choose between good and evil is highlighted throughout the book.

In sum, the proverb promises the educator that his original, and early, moral initiative has a permanent effect on a person for good. But that is not the whole truth about religious education.¹⁸⁰

20: 11 It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself If his conduct is pure and right.

A **lad** is a small boy, indicating that small children should, and must be, the objects of discipleship (cf. 22; 6). Moreover, the proverb teaches that it is not too much for the parent to expect some reasonable level of spiritual maturity from small children. The lad in question has gained a reputation in the community for **pure deeds** and **conduct**. In other words, he demonstrates integrity, reliability, and trustworthiness. Age alone does not produce maturity, as we all know. There is nothing more foolish than an old fool who has learned nothing his whole life. Wisdom belongs to God alone who may give it to whomever He pleases, but His gift is always accompanied by personal discipline in listening to wise counsel from others and from the word of God. Jesus is the quintessential (ideal) example of a wise lad who at 12 years of age could ask questions and give answers which stunned the rabbis (Lk. 2: 46-47). He was not making use of his omniscience on this occasion, but rather upon his disciplined study of the OT Scriptures.

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:52 NASB)

This verse has no comprehensive explanation. How can Jesus the Son of God, who was "very God of very God", **increase** in any of His divine attributes? We may only plead a mystery and recognize that Jesus was a real human being, 100 percent, while also being 100 per cent God, as well. He learned the Scriptures as a youth the same way we do, except that His efforts were far more exemplary than ours.¹⁸¹ His distinct humanity can only explain how Christ needed food, suffered fatigue and poverty, and died on a cross while maintaining that God is spirit and incapable of any of the limitations mentioned of Christ.

R. Observations of Human Nature

¹⁷⁹ Waltke, II, p. 205

¹⁸⁰ Waltke, II. P. 206

¹⁸¹ For further study, see my notes on *The Doctrine of Christ*
christcommunitystudycenter.org

18: 14 The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But *as for* a broken spirit who can bear it?

Physical **sickness** is compared with a **broken spirit**. Physical sickness may be **endure**[d] through the strength which God supplies the human spirit either through special grace or common grace. Even many unbelievers can endure immense physical suffering. Christians have the Holy Spirit as their special resource in times of physical and emotional pain.

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10 NASB; cited in Waltke, p. 81)

However, there seems to be no relief from a broken spirit which no one **can bear**. The sage is making a general observation about human nature; he is not speaking absolutely. Spiritual depression can be the most disabling malady in a person's life since it saps both his physical and psychological energy. Elijah, who outran Ahab's chariot to Jezreel, was ready to die when he realized that even God's victory over Baal's prophets at Mt. Carmel had done nothing to change the hearts of Ahab and Jezebel, or even Israel (1 Kings 18: 45—19: 4).

Genuine, committed believers are not immune from disabling spiritual depression. It may have a chemical cause, and the individual should consult a doctor who may prescribe medicine to correct a hormonal or other chemical imbalance. However, be cautious of drug remedies which may have side serious side effects. We have a biblical remedy for spiritual depression in the Psalms. Whenever the psalmist is depressed, he preaches the gospel to himself.

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And *why* have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him *For* the help of His presence. ⁶ O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. (Psalm 42:5-6 NASB)

Spurgeon, who himself was prone to frequent depression, comments on this psalm.

As though he were two men, the Psalmist talks to himself. His faith reasons with his fears, his hope argues with his sorrows. These present troubles, are they to last forever? The rejoicings of my foes, are they more than empty talk? May absence from the solemn feasts, is that a perpetual exile? Why this deep depression, this faithless fainting, this chicken-hearted melancholy? As Trapp says, "David chideth David out of the dumps;" and herein he is an example for all desponding ones. To search out the cause of our sorrow is often the best surgery for grief. Self-ignorance is not bliss; in this case it is misery. The mist of ignorance magnifies the causes of our alarm; a clearer view will make monsters dwindle into trifles....This is the grace that swims, though the waves roar and be troubled. God is unchangeable, and therefore his grace is the ground for unshaken hope. If everything be dark, yet the day will come, and meanwhile hope carries stars in her eyes; her lamps are not dependent upon oil from without, her light is fed by secret visitations of God, which sustain the spirit....A loss of the present sense of God's love is not a loss of that love itself; the jewel is there, though it gleams not on our breast; hope knows her title good when she cannot read it clear; she expects the promised boon though present providence stands before her with empty hands.¹⁸²

18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

18: 17 The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him.

¹⁸² Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1, pp. 272-273

18: 18 The *cast* lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.

18: 19 A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.

I believe Waltke is correct in treating these four proverbs as a unit. The context is a courtroom in which disputes are being settled.¹⁸³

The **gift** in 18: 16 is a bribe (*mattan*; 15: 27) which influences the decision of the judge who **makes room for him** who pays the judge a bribe or **gift**.

He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates **bribes** (*mattanah*) will live. (Prov. 15:27 NASB)

Apart from the word used, the context of vv. 16-19 is decidedly in favor of interpreting the word as a bribe.

When his case is brought before the judge, the judge will be tempted by bribery to decide in his favor without the benefit of cross-examining the defendant or another witness (18: 17). **The first to plead his case** is the man who offers the bribe, and his case seems believable (**right**) *until another*, his opponent or the opposing lawyer, **examines** his statements more closely. Even standing alone without this context, the proverb makes good sense. Everyone's story seems believable and true until someone else gives an account which is totally contrary to the first account. Then the trouble of sorting out who is lying or exaggerating begins in earnest. Of course, if a **gift** (bribe) has been accepted, no amount of evidence will sway the judge's decision. Outside the courtroom, 18: 17 is a warning to anyone who listens to gossip or slander without giving the object of gossip the benefit of a hearing. Determining the truth can be one of the most difficult things we can do, especially if both stories seem plausible.

Proverbs 18: 18 demonstrates the difficulty of determining the truth in such cases and reveals the limitations of judicial procedure.¹⁸⁴ If all else fails, a **lot** was *cast* to decide innocence and guilt. The sages did not believe in accident or luck, as if blind fate was the deciding factor, but in the **sovereignty of God** even over the casting of lots.

The **lot is cast into the lap**, But its every decision is from the LORD. (Proverbs 16:33 NASB)

The above verse is not about dice games (even though the principle could be applied to dice games) but about **the official casting of lots to decide important issues** (cf. Josh. 7: 14-18; 1 Sam. 14: 40-42; Jonah 1: 7; all verses cited by Waltke).

Could this method still be used? After careful investigation into disputes between litigants without convincing proof for any argument, could the judge simply throw the die (or dice) to decide who's telling the truth? Yes, if we truly believe God is sovereign over the throw of dice (16: 33). This would not relieve us of the responsibility of making every attempt to sort out the truth through careful investigation, but sometimes the truth eludes us. Of course, the practice would be considered ludicrous by a legal system which does not acknowledge belief in the sovereignty of

¹⁸³ Waltke, II, p. 81

¹⁸⁴ Waltke, II, p. 83

God; but it is beyond dispute that throwing lots to determine guilt was used with utmost seriousness in OT Israel.

The lot is used to settle any hidden matter that human beings cannot uncover on their own. Here it is a matter in which both sides have such strong arguments that it is impossible to reach a verdict. It is better to let God, who sees hidden matters, settle a dispute that the judicial system cannot resolve through one throw of a tiny die than to allow any violence, not just extreme violence, be the final argument. Physical force inflicts damage, the one who prevails in its use is not necessarily right, and it does not reconcile the defeated to the victor (see 18: 19). For those who abide by its impartial verdict, it adds the spiritual virtues of self-denial, humility, patience, and faith....¹⁸⁵

Continuing with the context of disputes, 18: 19 points out that **contentions** between **brother[s]** are more difficult to conquer than **a strong city**, and that they are more impenetrable than the **bars of a citadel** (a fortress on elevated ground). **Brother** does not simply denote a biological relationship but a close friendship. The deeper the friendship, the more difficult reconciliation will be since deep *trust* has been turned into deeper *distrust*. However, as Waltke observes, the throwing of the lot in 18: 18 holds out hope that even this dispute can be settled, provided the litigants accept God's sovereign ruling.¹⁸⁶

19: 22 What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.

...the imprecise antithetical parallels “unfailing kindness” and a “liar” suggest that the one in need had counted on the liar to help him. In that sense it is better to be a destitute person from whom no one expected help (see 13: 8) than a liar, who is like a bad tooth and a lame foot (25: 19).¹⁸⁷

Stated another way, it is better to be a poor man who maintains his integrity with truthfulness than a wealthy benefactor who reneges (goes back on) his promise of help but turns out to be as useless as a bad tooth or a lame foot.

To add an American and African cultural perspective, however, I would like to say that very often African friends confront me with “promises” that I never made. Doubtless, I have forgotten to do some things that I said I would do. This is sinful, and I would beg their forgiveness. At the same time, there have been times when I felt that I was being manipulated with “Do you remember the computer you promised me?” This reminder is based on my spoken *desire* to procure a used computer for an individual without an explicit *promise* to do so. “I will attempt to get you a computer” does not translate, in my language at least, into “I will certainly get you a computer.” Perhaps it translates this way into Swahili, Kinyarwanda, or some Ugandan, Kenyan, or Sudanese dialect. Sometimes I wish to do things for my African friends which I later find is not presently possible. Despite any African myths to the contrary, money does not grow on trees in America. We must earn it by working.

20: 5 A plan in the heart of a man is *like* deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out.

Longman allows a synthetic interpretation of this proverb with the second half being continuous with the first. Interpreted this way, the **deep water** can be seen in a positive light.¹⁸⁸ Waltke and

¹⁸⁵ Waltke, II, p. 84

¹⁸⁶ Waltke, II, p. 85

¹⁸⁷ Waltke, II, p. 115

¹⁸⁸ Longman, pp. 354-355

Bridges prefer a negative connotation of **deep water** with Bridges offering the examples of Saul's and Absalom's deception of David (1 Sam. 18:17-26; 2 Sam. 15: 7-9) and the evilly motivated advice of Darius' counselors which landed Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 6: 4-9).¹⁸⁹

Waltke notes the connection between this proverb and that of 18: 4, in which the hiddenness of **deep waters** appears contrasted with the openness of the **bubbling brook** of the sage's words.

The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook. (Proverbs 18:4 NASB)

The evil connotation is found in the idea that **deep waters** cloak a hidden agenda which is dangerous while the **bubbling brook** of the wise has nothing to hide. The wise man, however, has the ability to uncover this hidden agenda and is not fooled by cleverly disguised speech.¹⁹⁰ The proverb encourages the youth to become wise so that they may avoid deceptive words.

20: 6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?

Human nature is fickle and often unreliable. Those who vow their friendship and loyalty may succumb to external pressure to deny their friends (Ps. 41: 9). In the US such fickle friends are called "fair-weather" friends. When the "weather" (life) is fair and easy, the friends remain—especially if their "friend" has money. But when the weather gets rough and stormy, the fair-weather friends disappear. The youth is encouraged in this proverb to search out those who are genuinely **trustworthy**, whose friendship can be counted on during times of trouble, even if he has sworn friendship to his own hurt, like Jonathan (1 Sam. 20; cf. Ps. 15: 4). By swearing his loyalty to David, Jonathan relinquished the possibility of being king over Israel. However, by doing so, he aligned himself with God's chosen king and secured David's (and God's) favor to his remaining posterity (cf. 2 Sam. 9 and 21: 7). Jonathan is a classic example of what Paul says in Philippians and what our Lord says.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, (Philippians 3:8 NASB)

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."²⁴ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."²⁵ "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:23-25 NASB)

20: 9 Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"?

The proverb is synthetic with the first verset being synonymous with the second verset (as a reminder, a verset is one-half of a proverb). This is a clear statement of the doctrine of remaining sin in the life of the believer.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:8 NASB)

¹⁸⁹ Bridges, p. 338

¹⁹⁰ Waltke, II, p. 131

Moreover, the verse also implies that man is incapable of cleansing his own heart. Both OT and NT deny our ability to do this.

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil. (Jeremiah 13:23 NASB)

When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has **granted** to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life." (Acts 11:18 NASB)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**;⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9 NASB)

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:3-8 NASB)

Romans 3: 10-18 is a collection of OT quotations describing the utter depravity of the human condition.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." (Rom. 3:9-12 NASB)

In Ephesians 2, Paul makes it clear that we are spiritually dead until God gives us life.

And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:1-5 NASB)

One cannot cleanse his own heart and make it pure any more than he can enter again into his mother's womb, change his skin color, or raise himself from the dead. Jesus' analogy of physical birth appropriately demonstrates the passivity of the sinner in his rebirth. The baby is passive in his natural birth, having no part in giving himself birth. Likewise, the sinner is passive in his supernatural rebirth, awaiting regeneration by the Spirit. The baby's initial cry is not the cause of his birth, but the natural response of being born. Likewise, the sinner's cry of repentance and faith is not the cause of his rebirth, but the spirit-produced response of being born again.

Repentance, like faith and regeneration, is God's gift to whomever He chooses to give it. However, there are both OT and NT texts which *appear* to teach otherwise.

"Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds." (Jeremiah 4:4 NASB)

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, (Isaiah 1:16 NASB)

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8 NASB)

We know that God does not contradict Himself in the Scriptures. His very nature requires consistency. How could a God who knows everything past, present, and future contradict himself? So how are we to reconcile these verses? Without going into a lengthy argument, let me say that **God requires what we cannot give Him** apart from divine aid. Although men are responsible to repent and believe, and even though God demands repentance and faith, unregenerate men are incapable of producing either one. But their *inability* does not remove their *culpability* (guilt). Therefore, the OT prophets were constantly demanding that Israel repent of their sins and obey God's law, but their hearts were so hard that they were not able to do either. Nonetheless, God required them to do so, and he judged both Israel and Judah by sending them into exile. Men will go to hell for failure to comply with God's demands; but left to themselves, they cannot meet those demands (Jn. 6: 44). For this reason, Augustine, the ancient church father, said, "Lord give me what you command, and then command what you will." Augustine knew that he would never be able to please God unless God gave him the spiritual ability to comply.

David was correct when he said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10 NASB) He knew that he could not produce a clean heart or a steadfast Spirit. Only God could do this through the Holy Spirit.

S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich

15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

Wisdom acknowledges the contentment of those who fear the Lord but have little material wealth, as well as those with great wealth whose lives are unhappy. Money cannot purchase peace of mind. In this particular parallel, **the fear of the Lord** is contrasted with **turmoil**, implying that those who fear the Lord are *not* in turmoil. There is no inherent sin or curse in poverty which may afflict many of God's people who are worthy and righteous. **Treasure** may be accompanied by **turmoil**, for often material things begin to own the people who have them, occupying their time and mental energies and leaving little time for meditation, reflection, and relationships with family and friends. Money can complicate one's life, giving the person a multiplicity of options from which to choose, many of them harmful.

'Riches and poverty are more in the heart than in the hand. He is wealthy, that is contented. He is poor, that wanteth more.' The universe will not fill a worldly [heart], while a *little* will suffice for an heavenly, heart. "The children of light" content themselves willingly with the small pittance, which their Father allows them during the time of their minority; knowing that their main portion is reserved for them in

safe keeping unto the “full age.” (1 Pet. 1: 4) They are well satisfied on their way home to live rather more scantily [frugally] by the way....¹⁹¹

In this present age, most of the Proverbs promising wealth to the righteous and poverty to the wicked appears upside down. Often material gain is not the consequence of divine blessing nor is poverty necessarily the result of God’s curse. The better-than proverbs acknowledge that there is irregularity in this world and seeming contradiction to God’s moral order. In the consummation of the kingdom of God, however, all contradictions to this order will be eradicated: the righteous will be “rewarded with material gain and the wicked with material loss in a future that outlasts death”.¹⁹² The godly must continue to live by faith and not by sight.

15: 25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

Widows (representative of all who were oppressed) often had a difficult and hard life in the ancient world, having no one to represent her in society or court¹⁹³; thus, God took upon Himself the cause of the widow and the oppressed. **The house of the proud** is contrasted with **the boundary of the widow**. Boundary is a reference to property which could be confiscated by greedy land owners who were never satisfied.

Throughout Proverbs, the reader must read between the lines to avoid ascribing eternal spiritual blessings to the poor and the widow unconditionally. It is the *righteous* widow who is in view here contrasted to those who build their **houses** and estates with pride. Isaiah complains of those who “add house to house *and* join field to field until there is no more room for the poor” (Isa. 5: 8). Amos complains of the rich “who pant after the *very* dust of the earth on the head of the helpless” (Amos 2: 7).

In African countries with rapidly growing populations, the available land once owned by families for generations is being gobbled up by government officials and banks owned by wealthy Africans, leaving the poor very few places to farm and expand their families. The price of land, in the meantime, is being inflated far beyond the capabilities of the poor or even the middle class. In ancient Israel, the tendency of land accumulation among the rich was potentially limited through the Jubilee principle (Lev. 25), although we have no narrative evidence of Jubilee practice. Every 50 years, land which had been sold due to poverty automatically reverted to the original family owners whose ancestors were allotted the land during Joshua’s conquest of Canaan. Thus, the Jubilee indicated that the land could not be permanently sold; it belonged to the Lord and those whom the Lord had allotted it.

Today, the earth still belongs to the Lord and to whomever the Lord allows to use it. The unrighteous of the earth, like the Amorites, are permitted upon the earth until their iniquities are completed (Gen. 15: 16) after which Christ will return in glory to defeat all His and our enemies, distributing the earth to the “meek” (or “gentle”, “humble”) according to His perfect justice and equity.¹⁹⁴ Those who are God’s people will no longer be dispossessed from the land; they will inherit it (Ps. 37: 9-11, 22, 29; Matt. 5: 5).

¹⁹¹ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 208-209, citing Bishop Hall

¹⁹² Waltke, I, p. 627

¹⁹³ Longman, p. 321

¹⁹⁴ See my commentary on Revelation 18.

10: 2 Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death.

10: 3 The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked.

10: 4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Ill-gotten gains do not profit in the long run because they will not **deliver from death** (10: 2). Jesus warned us about this: “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?” (Lk. 9: 25) Righteousness, on the other hand, **delivers from death**. This is not a statement of works-righteousness but a simple observation that obedience to God’s word demonstrates the kind of faith which saves.

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (Jas. 2:14 NASB)

In comparison with 10: 3, King David said,

I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread. (Psalm 37:25 NASB)

One might accuse David and Solomon of wishful thinking. Did not even Jesus present Lazarus as a poor man begging outside the gates of the rich man? Did not Asaph’s faith almost slip when he beheld the disparities between the godless rich and the righteous poor (Ps. 73)? Taken as an absolute promise of earthly provision, we might conclude that there are no righteous people among the hungry masses, an unkind and erroneous assumption (see Longman’s comment above). In the middle of the 19th century, Spurgeon comments on Ps. 37: 25,

It is not my observation just as it stands, for I have relieved the children of undoubtedly good men, who have appealed to me as common mendicants [beggars]. But this does not cast a doubt upon the observation of David. He lived under a dispensation more outward and more of this world than the present rule of personal faith. Never are the righteous forsaken; that is a rule without exception. Seldom indeed do their seed beg bread; and although it does occasionally occur, through dissipation, idleness, or some such causes on the part of their sons, yet doubtless it is so rare a thing that there are many alive who never saw it. Go into the union house [house for needy children] and see how few are the children of godly parents; enter the gaol [jail] and see how much rarer still is the case. Poor minister’s sons often become rich. I am not old, but I have seen the families of the poor godly become rich, and have seen the Lord reward the faithfulness of the father in the success of the son, so that I have often thought that the best way to endow one’s seed with wealth is to become poor for Christ’s sake.¹⁹⁵

As a general rule, therefore, both Proverbs 10: 3 and Ps. 37: 25 will stand the test of experience. If most of God’s people were begging for bread, the whole world might conclude that He was impotent to save them from poverty, something God will not permit for the sake of His own name. Yet, we must also extend the promise into the future beyond the grave. A rigid retributive theology held that poverty was always the just payment for sin, and Jesus’ disciples were surprised to hear Him say that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. How then could anyone be saved, they reasoned, since it was commonly believed that God favored the rich (Matt. 19: 23-26)? In the Sermon on the Mount, Luke records the beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger, for they shall be satisfied,” leaving out the Matthean qualification “...for righteousness”. Luke was not implying that physical hunger was the ticket to everlasting life. Nevertheless, he (along with His Savior) was the champion of the poor and

¹⁹⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1, p. 176
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women, the marginalized members of ancient society. He wanted them to know that poverty did not *disqualify* them from receiving God's mercy. Being poor did not imply that they were under God's curse.

All of God's people who may now be hungry—and who could estimate their number—will one day be full. God will not **allow** them to hunger unduly before He gives them what they need. Even if we limit the interpretation to this temporal life, who among us with limited resources cannot remember the many times that God has rescued us from hunger or want? When hope seemed almost gone, God showed up with bread, like the poor prophet's widow whose oil multiplied in her obedience to Elisha's command (2 Kings 4)

.Proverbs 10: 4 provides the balance to 10: 22 below. Prov. 10: 22 speaks of God's sovereignty in blessing our labor; 10: 4 speaks of the responsibility of man to labor. God uses means to provide for us and will not drop manna from heaven as was necessary in the wilderness. Manna was no longer necessary when they entered the promised land, and it is not necessary today. Sinful laziness is one cause of poverty—not the only one—and believers can be guilty of presumption by thinking that God will care for their needs no matter how irresponsible they are. Commenting on 10: 4 and 10: 22, Bridges notes,

Both are consistent. The one marks the primary, the other the instrumental and subordinate, cause. Neither will be effective without the other. The sluggard looks for prosperity without diligence; the practical atheist from diligence alone; *the sound-hearted Christian from the blessing of God in the exercise of diligence*. This wise combination keeps him in an active habit; humble, and dependent on God (John 6: 27). For "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." (Ps. 127: 1; Eccles. 9: 11). The rich [that is, believers who are rich] then may receive their portion (Eccles. 2: 24-26; 3: 13; 18-20) *as the blessing of the Lord* (Gen. 24: 35; 26: 12...) carefully using it as a talent for his service (Luke 19: 13), and for the good of their fellow-creatures. (1 Tim. 6: 17-18) The poor may enjoy the same *enriching blessing* in the "gain of godly contentment." ...Their cottage is a palace, as the habitation of the King of kings; and neither life nor death, neither time nor eternity, can separate them from their God. (Rom. 8: 38-39).¹⁹⁶

10: 22 It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it.

The blessing of the Lord moreover hath this prerogative. *He addeth no sorrow with it*; at least no sorrow, but what turns to a blessing. Accumulation of riches may be the accumulation of sorrows....Lot's covetous choice was fraught with bitterness....Ahab wore a crown, and "lay sick on his bed" in discontent....Gehazi was laden with his bags; but the plague of leprosy was on him....Haman's mortification was the canker in his boasted glory (Esther 5: 13). The rich youth's rejection of Christ was the source of present, ...everlasting *sorrow* (Luke 18: 23). The worldling's recompense for his daily toil is "eating the bread of sorrows" So mark the striking contrast, "he giveth his beloved sleep." (Ps. 127: 2...). Happy portion of the children of God! They "know how to be abased, and they know how to abound." (Phil. 4: 12) "All things are theirs." (1 Cor. 3: 21).¹⁹⁷

Proverbs 10: 22 could be misinterpreted to mean that all rich men are blessed of God; but there is ample testimony from the rest of Scripture that riches alone are not proof of God's approval, even among those of the professing community. Proverbs was not written for Assyrians, but for Israelites who were warned that false weights and measures fell under God's condemnation. The proverb acknowledges that if riches do come, the wealthy man must not assume that they are due

¹⁹⁶ Bridges, p. 104, emphasis mine

¹⁹⁷ Bridges, pp. 104-105 (emphasis his, brackets mine)

exclusively to his intellect and hard work, but ultimately to the Lord's providence. (See Bridge's quote above concerning the "practical atheist".) Many people who work hard are still poor in a relative sense, and there are many brilliant men who have pursued their science for the betterment of mankind, not for financial gain. **And he adds no sorrow to it** indicates that the gain in wealth has been legitimate and receives God's approval, not like Ahab's increase in property at the expense of Naboth's life and reputation. Ahab later lost his kingdom, his life, and his dynastic line.

10: 15 The rich man's wealth is his **fortress**, The ruin of the poor is their poverty.

11: 28 He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the *green* leaf.

18: 11 A rich man's wealth is his **strong city**, And like a high wall in **his own imagination**.

We can see from these three proverbs that they must be interpreted from different perspectives. Prov. 10: 15 is not being spoken sarcastically in the same context as 18: 11. We cannot negatively interpret every proverb pertaining to wealth, for wealth is often mentioned in a positive light as a blessing and the reward of the righteous (Prov. 3: 16; 8: 18; 22: 4). Wealth can surely be a **fortress** against starvation, sickness, and the everyday expenses of living in this world. When the roof leaks, the rich man simply calls the carpenter to get it repaired, but the poor man must endure exposure to rain or climb upon the roof to repair it himself with limited skills and tools. I know this from experience since most of my carpentry skills have been cultivated in the "school" of necessity. I could not afford carpenters—or plumbers, or electricians, or painters. There was a time when I also did my own car repair until cars became so complicated that I couldn't do it anymore—but I still change the oil. All of these essential skills are as close as the phone for the rich man who can afford to pay for labor. The rich can also afford the best doctors or lawyers;¹⁹⁸ but I've met poor men in a US jail who had not seen their court-appointed lawyers for six months, and I know that poor people must go to the state hospitals rather than ones providing better treatment.

It is a blessing to be rich, the Bible tells us, as long as it does not become the foundation of our hope (**a high wall in his own imagination and will fall**), or cause us to become proud, arrogant, and selfish (like the rich fool in Lk. 12). Riches should not insulate and isolate us from the needs of the poor or from the poor themselves (It is easy to forget people we don't ever see), but should stimulate us to help those in need. The rich should be generous and ready to share (1 Tim. 6). Why? Because it is the blessing of the Lord which enables some people to become rich. Therefore, riches come with extra responsibilities ("to whom much is given, much is required").

11: 4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.

The day of wrath is the day of judgment, the wrath of God. Riches will not ransom one's soul. **Righteousness**, on the other hand, **delivers from eternal death** since it reflects genuine salvation. Once again, death is not interpreted as physical death; otherwise, the righteous would not be delivered from death.

11: 16 A gracious woman attains honor, And ruthless men attain riches.

This proverb explicitly acknowledges that God's justice against wickedness is often delayed. Violent, **ruthless** men do, indeed, **attain riches**, but these riches do not deliver them from eternal death, the ultimate justice (Prov. 10: 2; 11: 4). The gracious woman, on the other hand, who is both

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Longman, pp. 235-236

physically and socially weaker (in the historical context of ancient Israel) than men, obtains everlasting honor possessed beyond death.

11: 24 There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and *yet it results* only in want.

The paradox of generosity is revealed in this proverb. One might reason that the more we give, the poorer we would become. The opposite is true. The one who scatters his possessions by giving generously (not recklessly) to the poor will find in the end that he has not only not diminished his wealth, but increased it. This is not due to the laws of mathematics, but the laws of God commanding us to be compassionate to those in need and to believe that obedience will be rewarded. The reward may not come noticeably in dollars, but the proverb gives us reason to expect even material reward. The Scriptures do not condemn financial gain, only financial gain by fraud or lack of generosity.

“The giving of charity has been compared to the suckling of a child. The more the child suckles, the greater becomes the mother’s supply of milk.”¹⁹⁹

By way of contrast is the man who might withhold wages even from those who have earned them only to find that poverty and ruin have finally caught up with him. To continue the suckling analogy, the mother whose child quits suckling soon finds her milk drying up.

There is a grievous evil *which* I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. (Ecclesiastes 5:13 NASB)

11: 31 If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the sinner!

The NIV reads, “If the righteous **receive their due** on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!”

The NKJV, “If the righteous will be **recompensed** on the earth, How much more the ungodly and the sinner.”

The ESV, “If the righteous is **repaid** on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!”

Rewarded (NASB) generally has the connotation of positive repayment, but this is not consistent with the argument from the lesser to the greater. It would seem that the **righteous** would be rewarded *more* than the **wicked**. But if the connotation is negative, the verse makes more sense (And the Scriptures always make good sense.) Even the righteous receive just **recompense** (payback, both good and bad) for the deeds done in the body while they live on the earth. Their discipline often seems too great to bear—think of Eli’s grief over his two sons, David’s grief over Tamar’s rape, Amnon’s murder, Absalom’s rebellion and later assassination. David was a man after God’s own heart. If God does not turn a blind eye to the sins of His people, but disciplines them in proportion to their sins, how much more does he **repay** the wicked for their sins. Note, however, that the righteous are recompensed **on the earth**. They will not be punished eternally. On the other hand, the wicked and the sinner may not receive their just punishment on earth, but they will be punished eternally.²⁰⁰

13: 8 The ransom of a man's life is his wealth, But the poor hears no rebuke.

The interpretation of this verse hinges around the second verset, **hears no rebuke**. The ESV renders the verse, “The ransom of a man's life is his wealth, but a poor man hears no **threat**.” Understood this way, the proverb is speaking of either kidnapping, blackmailing, or paying a ransom for a crime (Ex. 21: 30; Num. 35: 31). The last citation indicates that there was no ransom

¹⁹⁹ Waltke, I, p. 507, citing Greenstone, *Proverbs*, p. 122

²⁰⁰ Waltke, I, p. 514

for premeditated murder, implying the possibility of ransom for accidental murder and other crimes (Prov. 6: 35). While the rich man can save his life by paying a ransom, the poor man is immune to threats against his life since he has no means of bribing his accusers or paying a ransom to the victim's family. He also has no fear of kidnapping for the same reason—what would it profit anyone to kidnap someone whose family is incapable of paying a ransom?

Therefore, while the advantages of wealth are acknowledged in the first verset (half of the verse), its advantages are negated in the second verset.²⁰¹ Poor men do not have to fear—or listen to—blackmail or threats.

13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.

See under *Truth and Deception*.

13: 18 Poverty and shame *will come* to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored.

13: 19 Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.

13: 20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

13: 21 Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.

13: 22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.

13: 23 Abundant food *is in* the fallow ground of the poor, But it is swept away by injustice.

13: 24 He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

13: 25 The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, But the stomach of the wicked is in need.

This list of verses has a common theme of wealth and poverty. **Poverty and shame** will be the net result of an undisciplined life who will not listen to anyone, most likely the father, who rebukes his laziness. The one **who regards reproof** will make the necessary corrections by developing the ethic of hard work and discipline which lead to wealth and **honor**.

Proverb 13: 19 is an antithetical proverb (notice the word **but**), meaning that the first verset is set in contrast with the second verset (i.e. the second half of the verse). Since the second half is speaking of **fools**, then the first half must be speaking about the wise, although this is not explicitly said. The wise or the righteous have their **desire realized** simply because they desire first and foremost the glory of God.

Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4 NASB)

The righteous man patterns his desires after God's heart—e.g. one's children walking in the faith, the care of the poor and needy, the conversion of the sinner—therefore, when these desires are realized, they are **sweet to the soul** rather than something to be consumed upon his lusts. The righteous is satisfied with the feast of God's word and any outcome in conformity to the word (Matt. 6: 6).

Fools, on the other hand, will never **turn away** from any activity which brings short-term pleasure; thus, their long-term desire of wealth and comfort are never fully realized. Since the wicked often prosper (Ps. 73), this may appear to be contradictory, but casual observance of their lives will expose their sorrow and unrest even in the midst of riches.

²⁰¹ Longman, p. 286

It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it. (Proverbs 10:22 NASB)

Proverbs 13: 20 indirectly incentivizes the youth to surround himself with wise men so that he will avoid the pitfalls of being a fool, including poverty. Of course, there are far more advantages to wisdom than wealth, but the apparent context seems to demand the interpretation of legitimate wealth as one of the benefits of being wise (cf. v. 21 and the chiasmic arrangement below).

He who walks with wise men will be wise,
 But the companion of fools will **suffer harm**.
Adversity pursues sinners,
 But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.

The **companion of fools**, on the other hand, **will suffer harm**, including the harm of long-term poverty through reckless get-rich-quick schemes, theft, and fraud. Fools will also spend their wealth on excess alcohol, prostitutes, and unnecessary luxuries, having nothing left of their spoils after a few months or years. I have heard stories about lottery winners in the US who have won millions of dollars by playing power-ball only to be dead broke after a few years. They had the money but not the wisdom to use it.

Proverbs 13: 22 extolls the wisdom of saving for the future (cf. Prov. 6: 6-11). While the fool and the sluggard will consume everything they earn—or everything someone else earns—the wise man will delay his gratification for things he needs and will deny himself the things he merely wants. By doing this, he has something to pass down to his posterity, even grandchildren, giving them a head start in marriage, business, and education. The proverb gives incentive to the wise not only to save but to hand down a legacy of wisdom to their children and grandchildren. Otherwise, they will simply be leaving their wealth to fools (Eccles. 2: 18-19).

The **wealth of the sinner** is put in storage for use by the righteous. The idea may be that the wicked will generally live shortened lives and that their wealth will be redistributed eventually to God's people in this present age. Most likely, Solomon refers to the wealth produced by the wicked that will not follow them into eternal life. All of it will remain on earth while the rewards for serving God will go before the righteous into eternal life. "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5) even as the Israelites, saved by grace, inherited the land of Canaan complete with houses they did not build, vineyards they did not plant, and cisterns they did not dig (Deut. 6: 10-11). The wealth of Haman was laid up for Mordecai (Esther); the wealth of Laban for Jacob.²⁰² As Adam and Eve were given the whole earth to improve, believers will inherit this earth and whatever has been developed by unbelievers through God's common grace extended to all mankind (cf. Gen. 4, the accomplishments of the line of Cain which benefitted all mankind, including Seth's line of faith).

The **fallow ground** in 13: 23 is uncultivated ground during the sabbatical year (Ex. 23: 10-11).

"You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield,¹¹ but *on* the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie **fallow**, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove. (Exodus 23:10-11 NASB)

²⁰² Bridges, p. 167

If the Sabbath year for the land was observed, God would so bless the planting of the sixth year that there would be enough food growing on that year for the sixth, seventh, and eighth years (Lev. 25: 20-22).

The **injustice** which sweeps the food away must be the unwillingness of wealthy land owners to give the land its Sabbath rest, thus allowing it to replenish itself but also allowing the poor to benefit from uncultivated fields. The prophet Jeremiah, writing approximately 350 years after Solomon's reign, informs Judah that they will be taken into Babylonian exile for 70 years, a period which the Chronicler ties to the years the land had not enjoyed its sabbaths.

Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. (2 Chronicles 36:20-21 NASB)

Sabbath-keeping was a very important aspect of moral obedience to Yahweh because it acknowledged the utter dependence upon Yahweh for salvation by grace. It was not by works, but by grace that God brought them *into* and sustained them *in* the land of Canaan; therefore, by failing to keep the sabbaths for the land, Israel denied God's grace and implicitly claimed that their prosperity had come through their own ingenuity and effort.

"In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.¹⁷ "Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.'¹⁸ "But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.¹⁹ "It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish.²⁰ "Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 8:16-20 NASB)

Along with ignoring the sabbath rest of the land was the neglect of the poor, even in the time of Solomon who for some reason or other neglected to protect the poor. Why else would he say that the poor man's crops were carried away with injustice?

Proverbs 13: 24 is also related to the theme of poverty and wealth. The father who fails to discipline his son in the name of love actually **hates** him because lack of discipline leads to laziness, contempt for authority, and eventually poverty and/or death. And most importantly, eternal death. Discipline, on the other hand, instills respect for authority and appreciation for hard work and thrift (another word for delayed gratification), leading to material and spiritual prosperity.²⁰³ **Loves his son** indicates that the father who uses **his rod** does so for correction, not for venting his anger and frustration.

The proverb is based on several assumptions. First, that the home is the basic social unit for transmitting values (cf. Ex. 20: 12). Second, that parents have absolute values, not merely valuations. Third, that folly is bound up in the heart of the child (22: 15; cf. Gen. 8: 21). Fourth, "that it will take more than just words to dislodge it." The English proverb, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," is biblical and has stood the test of history. The biblical method of rearing is loving the child, which entails strict discipline

²⁰³ Keeping in mind that prosperity in the Proverbs is the opposite to poverty, not extravagant wealth and consumerism (the tendency to purchase everything we see—as in Ecclesiastes 1-2). See commentary on 13: 25.

and valuing him or her as a gift from God (4: 3; 31: 2). The New Testament teaching does not abrogate or supersede it and should not be abandoned in the church as unfashionable (cf. Eph. 6: 4; Heb. 12: 5-11) or explained away as culturally conditioned. “A hard way to wisdom is better than a soft way to death.” The failure of the apostate Western world to continue the biblical practice has left its civilization in moral chaos, and parents now hate what they see: “his end will be that he will hate his son, for he will see him, in the end, going forth to evil deeds.”²⁰⁴

Proverbs 13: 25 proves that the prosperity of the righteous does not need to be extravagant wealth (see the “better—than” proverbs). Rather, the provisions of a loving Father are **sweet to the soul** of the godly man who is satisfied and content with whatever God supplies. “But a cheerful heart has a continual feast” (Prov. 15: 15). Our example is the imprisoned Apostle Paul who said,

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13 NASB)

We might wonder what kind of “prosperity” Paul had in mind, for we cannot picture him at any time of his life cruising around on Roman roads in his private chariot with an entourage of servants in tow.²⁰⁵ Prosperity meant something to him that it does not mean to most people. That aside, Paul learned the secret of contentment, and we are repeatedly encouraged to learn this lesson.

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"⁶ so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?" (Hebrews 13:5-6 NASB)

The **appetite** of the righteous is always satisfied simply because he is content with the provisions of a God whom he believes is **good**. As a friend of mine recently said in a bible class, “Once you begin doubting the goodness of God, you are on the road to heresy.” He’s right, because heresy looks to other gods fabricated by the “idol factory” (Calvin) of the heart to provide him the satisfaction he lacks in God—money, sex, power, and leisure—all of which King David possessed when he turned from Yahweh to the idol of sex.

14: 4 Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, But much revenue *comes* by the strength of the ox.

Wealth in Proverbs is always presented either as the product of corruption, theft, or murder (Prov. 1: 10-13; 13: 23) or just plain hard work (Prov. 14: 23). The writers extolled hard work and industry simply because God had ordained labor upon the earth from the beginning before sin and corruption. **Where no oxen are**, there is also no work to be done in cleaning the **manger**. So, the fool says to himself, it is better not to have oxen. With a touch of irony, Solomon exposes the utter stupidity of this conclusion. In the middle east, oxen were a prime source of **revenue** (income) since a man with an ox could cultivate far more land than the poor who must use his back. Moreover, more oxen were better than one ox; therefore, the productive farmer had a great deal of filth to clean from the stalls. No matter; the smell of manure was the sweet smell of money—

²⁰⁴ Waltke, I, p. 574, citing also Kidner and Rashi.

²⁰⁵ Interpretations like this are the property of Kenneth Copeland (net worth at \$300,000,000), Joel Osteen, who lives in a 17,000 square foot house valued at \$11 million, and Joyce Meyer who cruises around in her \$11 million private jet—all paid for by admiring “Christian” supporters. All three people are connected with Oral Roberts.

legitimately earned money, the blessing of the Lord to those who believed His word about the importance of labor.

The proverb also extols the wisdom of working smart, not just hard. Hard work is a virtue, but it is wise to use all the means of production that one can afford. Using oxen to plow the ground is to be preferred to using one's back, or one's wife.²⁰⁶

14: 11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, But the tent of the upright will flourish.

The proverb implicitly demonstrates the superiority of the temporary dwelling of the **upright** to the more permanent dwelling of the **wicked**. The security of the upright does not consist in a fortified house with wall and gate, but in the Lord. While looking for a city whose builder is God, Abraham dwelled securely in tents. His posterity **flourished** into a great nation.

14: 20 The poor is **hated** even by his **neighbor**,
But those who **love the rich** are many.

14: 21 He who **despises** his **neighbor** sins,
But happy is he who is **gracious to the poor**.

19: 4 Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend.

19: 7 All the brothers of a poor man hate him; How much more do his friends abandon him! He pursues *them with words, but they are gone.*

By observing human society in any culture, we cannot help but notice that everyone wishes to be friends with the rich while only a few wish to befriend the poor. Even family and former friends abandon him in his poverty (**brothers, friends**; 19: 4, 7). Being a friend of the rich costs us nothing, and it may provide us with rich benefits; but social contact with the poor gets expensive when they began asking us for things they need. But regardless of any inconvenience, it is a **sin to despise** our poor neighbor. (Do we not ask God for our needs, who is infinitely rich?) Moreover, although the poor will not be able to repay you in kind (Lk. 14: 12-24, the parable of the feast), you will experience the joy (**happy is he**) of helping someone in need. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 35). Jesus, who was rich, "inconvenienced" himself by becoming poor for our sakes that we might become rich in faith. Who are we, then, to avoid social contact with the poor to avoid their problems? By segregating themselves from the poor, the rich are spiritually impoverished.

15: 6 Great wealth is *in* the house of the righteous, But trouble is in the income of the wicked.

15: 27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.

Wealth in Proverbs must be interpreted more broadly than westerners normally do. In the US, we now have billionaires—a million dollars multiplied 1000 times—in almost every state. Millionaires in the US total 4.4 million people out of a population of 324 million, one out of every 74 people—a staggering figure considering the tragedy of world poverty. Although Solomon was quite wealthy (he was, after all, a king); yet even most ancient kings did not enjoy the wealth which is now afforded by the poor in the US—indoor plumbing, air-conditioning, modern medicine (through the Medicaid system), the comfort and speed of automobiles. Solomon was not omniscient, and he could never have foreseen the level of wealth owned by ordinary citizens who were not part of the nobility, even those in Africa.

²⁰⁶ See my "Doctrine of Man" and the section, "Working Smarter".

If we believe that the promises of Proverbs are absolutely true, then we must conclude, as Waltke has maintained throughout his commentary, that their ultimate fulfillment is pushed into the future “beyond clinical death”. Otherwise, Jesus is mistaken when he says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (I personally don’t know many meek millionaires, although I do know a few whose money is primarily a means of helping others and exercising dominion for God’s glory. Jesus was talking primarily to poor people whom he had to feed after the sermon.) We are obligated to take Jesus’ words seriously when He says, “How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Not impossible, but difficult.

So, when we come to this proverb which says that **great wealth is in the house of the righteous**, we must keep in context the age in which Solomon wrote and the relative poverty of most of the population. However, we also must not push the material promise completely into the future, as we have seen in other proverbs pertaining to the combination of wisdom and riches. In the history of redemptive history, God has delighted to prosper many of his saints: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, David, Solomon, to name only a few. Job’s friends thought he had sinned grievously since God had taken away all his wealth. (Incidentally, none of them said that the devil had done it.) Since material wealth is far inferior to spiritual wealth (22: 1), perhaps we should see these men as types for all of God’s people in the new heavens and new earth where all of us, to a person, will have literally everything our material bodies will need. I cannot visualize any of us in the new earth living in a crowded slum, even if all of us, with renewed minds, would be perfectly happy to do so.

Therefore, all of God’s people have **great wealth** in the spiritual sense, while some have great wealth also in a material sense. If all of God’s people were materially wealthy in this life, then people would wish to serve God just for the material benefit—Satan’s accusation against Job, which proved false. But if every Christian in this world were materially poor, it might send the signal that there is inherit righteousness in poverty, encouraging people to become poor to earn their way to heaven. We can be confident that God in His perfect wisdom has distributed His goods appropriate to His purposes.

But trouble is in the income of the wicked (cf. 10: 22). Being rich is not a sin; earned righteously, it is a sign of God’s blessing and obedience to the biblical laws concerning economics (e.g. 13: 11, 23; 14: 4, 21; 21: 5; 28: 22; Ex. 23: 10-11). **But trouble** is often the hidden ingredient of the **income of the wicked**. I am thinking of all the mob bosses in the early 1900’s in Chicago whose children were murdered, the drug cartels of Columbia and Mexico which have left a trail of bodies and fatherless homes. I have already mentioned the devastated family of Bernie Madoff who stole billions from his investors, only to lose his youngest son to suicide, his oldest son to cancer, the love of his wife, and his freedom. But even the wisest man on earth at the time became a fool by using his immense wealth building heathen altars to satisfy the idolatrous lusts of his foreign wives—Solomon, the one who wrote this proverb.

17: 5 He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

Implicitly, the proverb proves that poverty is not always the result of sin. Some people become poor through no fault of their own. When someone **mocks the poor**, he fails to recognize that the poor bear the image of God and should be respected for this fact alone. He also fails to recognize that since God could eliminate poverty if He wished, the poor have been appointed to this station

in life by a sovereign God who has a purpose for allowing poverty.²⁰⁷ When we mock the poor, we also call into question the wisdom of God and His sovereign purpose (**taunts his Maker**), not the least of which is to test others for humility and compassion. **Rejoices at calamity** may take the form of boasting in our presumed superiority to those who are either poor or who have much less than we do. The worse they look, the better we think that we look.

Rather, we must “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12: 15; cf. Job 30: 25). Further, Paul says,

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but **associate with the lowly**. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:16 NASB)

Associating with the lowly is the opposite of mocking the poor, treating them as people worthy of your company and respect. As we do this, we may find out that given the same set of circumstances, we would also be poor. Working with poor people will often reveal not only individual failures but also a complicated, systemic network of societal and governmental failures which could be remedied with repentance and obedience to the law of God. No one *should* have been poor in Israel. There was enough abundance for everyone, but because they dismissed the laws of God, the safeguards against poverty were not in place to protect the marginal members of society.

"However, there will be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess,⁵ **if only you listen obediently** to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. (Deuteronomy 15:4-5 NASB)

Since the Lord commanded us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, we must conclude that there is no economic necessity for poverty to exist in any culture or country. There will be no poverty in the new heavens and new earth. Poverty is rooted in the sinful human condition, whether individual (the sluggard who refuses to work) or systemic corporate and governmental evil—by far the greatest cause of poverty in the world.

17: 18 A man lacking in sense pledges And becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor.

This warning is given to anyone who co-signs a loan, making himself liable for repayment should the borrower default on the loan. While encouraging us to be generous (19: 17), Proverbs warns us against being liable for a sum of money which we do not have.²⁰⁸

18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

This is an example of an illicit use of wealth. A **gift** is a bribe (*mattan*, the masculine form of the feminine word used in 15: 27, *mattanah*). The person who has a bribe can influence the civil magistrate who will be more inclined to give him a favorable verdict. This puts the poor at a disadvantage to the rich since they have nothing to bribe the magistrate.

²⁰⁷ Waltke, II, p. 42

²⁰⁸ Longman, p. 348; cf. 6: 1-5; 11: 15; 20; 16; cited by Longman

While bribery within the judicial process is more egregious (outstanding for negative characteristics), the subtle bribery of legislators by lobbyists is accepted in the US as business as usual. Lobbyists are paid well by corporations to influence law-makers to pass laws which would be in the interests of the companies they represent. This is defended under the constitution which allows free speech and petitioning the government for a redress (remedy) of grievances. Quite frankly, the whole lobbying process has grown cancerously out of whack and has become the largest legal means of bribery and distortion in US history—my non-expert opinion. In short, money buys elections and favors from US politicians. In order to turn over the election process to the people of the US, it should be banned—also my non-expert opinion. What is not my opinion—but fact—is that while the lobbyists and the politicians think they are controlling the world, God is only using them as puppets to accomplish His own purposes and desires (Isa. 46: 9-10; Prov. 21: 1).

20: 20 He who curses his father or his mother, His lamp will go out in time of darkness.

20: 21 An inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning Will not be blessed in the end.

The context of 20: 21 seems to be the rebellious son who **curses his father or his mother** (v. 20). By cursing his parents, the son wishes them harm in order to gain his **inheritance** (v. 21) prematurely (cf. Lk. 15, the prodigal son; one could also include the elder son in this category).²⁰⁹ Far from securing his inheritance, the cursing son loses his life instead (**His lamp will go out in time of darkness** which is paired with **Will not be blessed in the end.**).

The punishment in the law for cursing father or mother was death by stoning (Ex. 21: 17; Lev. 20: 9; Dt. 27: 16; 21: 18-23). As the last reference in Deuteronomy indicates, the law was not applied to small children, but adults (“glutton and a drunkard”). It is likely that Jesus was alluding to this proverb in Lk. 7: 34, quoting the accusations of the Pharisees who saw Jesus not as the Messiah sent from God but as a rebellious son who should be stoned to death. The purpose of the law was two-fold. First, the law upheld the honor and respect owed to God who was the Father of Israel (although this name for God was not common until Jesus’ teaching). Second, it protected the foundations of civil society in Israel which would crumble under the demise of parental authority undergirding (supporting) the premise of God’s ultimate authority. What has now happened throughout Europe and the US is the depreciation of parental authority and respect by which society has drifted into lawlessness. No young sons are being stoned for cursing their parents, but the consequence is the death of a whole society. The African context has resisted this trend for many decades, but there are clear signs in African culture that the nuclear family is eroding, leaving a vacuum quickly filled by the poorest examples of western culture.

21: 5 The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty *comes* surely to poverty.

The Proverbs warn us about easy money and get-rich-quick schemes. Instead, we are encouraged to plan ahead (**plans of the diligent**) for the long term with a steady accumulation of capital. Those who are **hasty** are impatient of slow growth with its normal set-backs and challenges. They demand instant results which are sometimes achieved in the short-term by risky investments or business but which fizzle out in the **end**. They are not **blessed**, either because they were illegal or immoral (not everything which is legal is moral) or because the risks were reckless—like gambling in a casino. Of course, even legitimate business is risky, and God does not guarantee the believer’s financial success in this life; otherwise, all Christian businessmen would be wealthy. As I have said before, the promises of riches and wealth to the believer must be projected beyond physical life in order to account for the many exceptions to these promises in the present life. However,

²⁰⁹ Waltke, II, pp. 150-151

Proverbs offer us general rules which will minimize the probability of falling into poverty due to haste or ill-conceived plans made without the benefit of able counselors.

Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory. (Proverbs 11:14 NASB)

Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22 NASB)

And even the above promises of **victory** and success must be qualified.

22: 2 The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.

Before the Lord, who owns everything, the rich man's wealth means nothing. Both rich and poor will stand naked before the Judge of all the earth to give account of what they have done, good and bad (2 Cor. 5: 10). If we would meditate on this verse, it would help mortify all of our sinful tendencies to demean the poor and idolize the rich. They, and everyone in between, are but men who are made in the image of God, the one no less than the other. James warns us of showing favoritism to the rich even in our worship services.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism.² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:1-4 NASB)

Having, therefore, a **common bond** with the poor, those who are rich in faith *and* money should use their wealth wisely by helping the poor (1 Tim. 6: 17-19).

The proverb is also helpful to rulers and judges who are tempted to show partiality to other powerful people.

21: 17 He who loves pleasure *will become* a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

The Lord created Adam to work in His garden, not to lull himself to sleep drinking wine by the gently flowing waters of Eden. Throughout the proverbs the wisdom of hard work is extolled while the lust for pleasure—whether illicit sex or money—is condemned. It is not primarily the material things we receive from wealth that should give us pleasure, but the privilege of work itself—the production of something which has value for the good of society. Mostly, our labor should draw attention to the Creator who Himself is a laborer not given to leisure. He rested the seventh day only after He labored six days, and the Sabbath command is just as much a command to work with consistency as it is the command to rest one day in seven.

We can be quite certain that a great many of our physical and economic ills proceed from failure to observe the weekly day of rest. But we can also be quite sure that a great many of our economic ills arise from our failure to recognize the sanctity of six days of labour. Labour is not only a duty; it is a blessing. And, in like manner, six days of labour are both a duty and a blessing. If this principle were firmly established in our thinking, then the complications and hypocrises often associated with the

demand for a five-day week would not have so readily afflicted our economy, and moral degeneration would not have proceeded at the pace we have witnessed.²¹⁰

Using an American expression, “Idleness is the devil’s workshop.” King David was wasting time on his roof when he saw Bathsheba bathing. He should have been at war with his troops. Too much leisure time exposes us to needless temptations. Rather, we should make it our goal to enjoy our work as much as we can, praying that God would show us how to do it so that He might be glorified.

22: 7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower *becomes* the lender's slave.

As with so many of the proverbs, the sage (wise man) is not speaking prescriptively, but descriptively. He is simply observing life as it is, not necessarily as it should be. Prescriptively, there should have been no poor in Israel so long as the Jubilee principle was practiced—if it ever had been. Because of bad crop years, bad health, or any number of other scenarios, the poor may have to sell their land and labor to the rich for a period of years—49 for the land and 6 for the labor—but their land would be returned every 50th year and they would be given their freedom every 7th year. But because Israel was disobedient to covenant law, the poor multiplied in the land.

Therefore, the sage warns the working man to stay away from debt, a legal instrument by which **the rich rules over the poor** even in most of the world today where slavery, per se, has long since been eradicated. God allowed slavery and regulated it, but not because He approved of the institution. His hatred of divorce would likewise apply to slavery, but He regulated both because of the sinfulness of men’s hearts (Matt. 19: 8; Mal. 2: 16). God’s desire is for men to be free to serve him (Ex. 9: 13), and the principle of human freedom is encouraged by the Apostle Paul.

Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.²² For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. (1 Cor. 7:21-23 NASB)

So long as we owe our hard-earned income to the **lender**, we also owe our labor which is an extension of our lives and our very being, a very large extension. We can never be truly free from his rule while this indebtedness lasts. This proverb is very interesting in that we now see in western culture millions of high income and middle-income workers becoming slaves to corporate banks through thirty-year mortgages (I have one myself) for houses bigger than they need or loans for cars which now cost as much as ordinary homes half a century ago. Our self-indulgence, in opposition to sane frugality, has enslaved us to banks proliferating (growing) all over the nation seemingly with offices on every corner (a “slight” exaggeration but somewhat observable). And who owns the banks? You guessed it, the rich. Yes, some middle-classers like myself own shares of stock in these enterprises, but we don’t have voting power; and banks are more concerned for the interests of their majority stockholders—no surprise there. Likewise, corporations are much less concerned about their minimum wage earners stocking the shelves and wrapping the goods for shipment than those who have controlling interests in the company. If they can make a few more million for their stockholders, the working man is dispensable to this “higher” goal—fodder to shoot out of the corporate cannon.

²¹⁰ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 83
christcommunitystudycenter.org

Many Africans have lost family lands owned for many generations to corporate banks in Africa which are far more ruthless than western banks, charging interest rates of 25% or more. One reason for this is undoubtedly the default rate on African loans; thus, banks make up for their “loss”, if there is one, by collecting excessive interest on other borrowers. But what came first, the default on loans or the exorbitant interest rates? How does the average entrepreneur and home-owner in Africa pay off a loan at 25% interest? The unsurprising result of usury (excessive interest) is default followed by a swelling upper class, shrinking middle class, and swelling lower class at the bottom of the pyramid.

But let’s look at this problem from another angle. What is true for individuals is also true for nations. Since their political independence from colonial powers in the 60’s (primarily), African nation states have become increasingly *dependent* upon western powers like the US, the UK, France and Germany. Moreover, they cannot repay their debts; so, what happens. The western powers insert themselves increasingly into African politics, much to the distaste of all Africans—particularly African presidents, who then criticize western powers for meddling. But you can’t have it both ways. The debtor nations are slaves to the lender nations, and so long as they have their hands out for favors, they must accept some degree of meddling—or at the very least, pay back their loans. African presidents and MP’s, to use only one example, make more income than US presidents and congressmen (at least initially until the former congressmen become lobbyists with a seven-figure income and the former president goes on the lecture circuit making a half million dollars per speech—and as long as fools think that former presidents have something to say which is *that* important!²¹¹

The US now is over 20 trillion dollars in debt. Let me put that in zeros: \$20,000,000,000,000! Much of our debt is owed to China, so if China decides to attack the US—a very distasteful scenario to Chinese billionaires and millionaires who own US properties and businesses—then the US will have to borrow money from China to kill Chinese soldiers. This is how absurd borrowing can become on a national level. One thing is not so absurd; the US has become a slave to China.

22: 16 He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself Or who gives to the rich, *will only come to poverty.*

Lately I have been watching a documentary on Amazon Prime about the history of New York City. In the early 1900’s, there were thousands of tenements (crowded slums) where most immigrants lived. The conditions were squalid, encouraging rodents and festering disease. Drinking water was contaminated. What’s more, the tenement owners were wealthy land owners living in plush houses who resisted any kind of improvements upon the living conditions of the poor. Before the days of rent controls, they consistently raised the rents on these poor immigrants far beyond the worth of their living conditions. The tenement dwellers had little choice; they were people without power and without a voice in the public square. The rich tenement owners could also bribe public safety officials who were responsible for building safety, but many of these government safeguards were not even in place at the time. The landowners were plenty able to improve the lot of their slum tenets, but they chose their own short-term wealth and came to eternal **poverty**.

The “preacher” in Ecclesiastes tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. The story of New York reminds me of the slum in Nairobi that I recently visited and in which I taught a small group

²¹¹ I’m not exaggerating. Bill Clinton has made up to \$500,000 for a single speech. Will God will be so approving? I doubt it.

of Kenyan pastors along with an African friend and pastor, Ben Odhiambo. As I walked through the streets of that slum, I noticed that raw sewage was coursing its way down the middle of the narrow dirt streets accompanied by blue and orange plastic water pipes which were sometimes submerged in the same sewage ditch and then often emerging out into the open. Significant cuts in these water pipes could allow sewage to enter during the frequent scheduled water cutoffs and pollute the drinking water of thousands of occupants. Cholera is a nasty disease still killing significant numbers of Africans, particularly children. The most amazing thing about this slum, however, was not the water and sewage systems, but the fact that these slum dwellers actually paid rent for their metal huts. This was not a government-owned slum, but a private slum owned by rich land owners getting rich from their “investments”. In the short-term, these men are looking pretty good, probably drinking expensive scotch and whisky imported from Scotland and the US. **But He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself...will only come to poverty** in the end.

This is also the inevitable outcome for the one **who gives to the rich**. The subtle connotation may be any number of scenarios, but one possibility is that judges were giving favors to the rich who are supplying them with bribes, further ensuring their freedom to oppress the poor. So, rather than using their wealth to improve the lives of the poor, the rich are using their wealth to bribe men who are also wealthy. Another application in business is the deplorable practice of corporations which pay ridiculous salaries and stock options to top executives while keeping the wages of the average worker to a minimum so that he can scarcely provide a living for his family.²¹² Let me repeat once more that I am a capitalist—but with a small “c”. I do not believe in the wisdom of minimum wage laws which keep entry level workers out of a job. But capitalism is not my religion. God’s law and wisdom require that we are kind and compassionate to those who work for us, not simply to those who invest large sums of money in our businesses.

T. The Power of the Tongue

11: 9 With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

11: 12 He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.

11: 13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

Waltke interprets 11: 9 as follows:

The imprecise antithetical parallels imply that the neighbor is not righteous. Unfortified by righteousness, the unwary neighbor is led astray by manifestations of friendship and is destroyed, but the righteous, who have stored up knowledge (10: 14), see through the mask (28: 11).²¹³

The proverb reinforces the wisdom of 13: 20:

He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Proverbs 13:20 NASB)

Proverbs 11: 12 could be speaking of gossip or slander. The one who **despises his neighbor** goes about as a tale-bearer (11: 13) while the **man of understanding** holds his tongue and gathers more

²¹² Cf. Waltke, II, pp. 216-217, citing Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*

²¹³ Waltke, I, p. 489

information. He will not divulge this information unless it is necessary to protect others (cf. 2 Tim. 4: 14). He is **trustworthy** in being able to keep secrets.

12: 18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

There is an American expression that says, “Sticks and stone will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Of course, the saying is nonsense. Words may not kill you, but verbal abuse often hurts even worse than physical abuse. Two male friends may get into a fist fight over some trivial offense, but they will soon get over it. But if one’s dignity and self-respect is threatened, the wounds are much deeper, like the **thrusts of a sword** driven into the heart.

The speech of the **wise**, far from inflicting damage, **brings healing**. Even rebuke and admonition, if given in love, will be more beneficial than the flattery of a fool (Prov. 17: 10; 26: 28). This is a difficult verse for many of us who are prone to correct error harshly. Zeal for moral truth is commendable, but often the manner in which we defend the truth actually contradicts the truth and inflicts damage. (Once more, I speak from my own experiential errors.)

12: 25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, But a good word makes it glad.

15: 4 A soothing tongue is a tree of life, But perversion in it crushes the spirit.

15: 23 A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!

16: 24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

We miss many opportunities to help people with simple words of encouragement. How many times have we ourselves been discouraged when someone, perhaps a friend or a spouse, has said something to lift our spirits? However independent and self-sufficient we imagine ourselves, the truth is that we need others to get through life’s struggles and disappointments. The **man who has joy** (15: 23) is someone who receives the **apt** (or appropriate) **answer** from the wise man. **Timely** indicates that the **apt answer** or **good word** was spoken at precisely when it was needed, the teachable moment when the heart was weighed down.

Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Col. 4:6 NASB)

Paul may have been referring to Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on the Mount, “You are the salt of the earth...” (Matt. 5: 13) and applying it to the Christian duty to defend his faith among unbelievers. By using persuasive speech, the Christian serves as a preservative in culture against the inevitable corruption of truth and virtue. The statement applies equally well to all speech. Our speech should be appropriate in content and in timing in order to have the greatest influence.

A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a **timely** word! (Prov. 15:23 NASB)

Analogously in Prov. 15: 4, the **soothing tongue** restores the brokenness of others while perverse speech does harm (**crushes the spirit**).

13: 2 From the fruit of a man's mouth he enjoys good, But the desire of the treacherous is violence.

13: 3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Thinking first before we speak is a wise habit that **preserves life** (v. 3; cf. 15: 4)) and brings **good** to the wise man (v. 2)—e.g. beneficial relationships with others. The one who reverses the order—

opening wide his lips before examining the truthfulness or helpfulness of what he is about to say—**comes to ruin** possibly through broken relationships with friends and the **violence** of those who hate him because of his **treacherous**, lying speech against them.

- 13: 13 The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, A
 But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded. B
- 13: 14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, A
 To turn aside from the snares of death. B
- 13: 15 Good understanding produces favor, A
 But the way of the treacherous is hard. B

According to the parallel, the **one who despises the word** (v. 13) will be captured in **the snares of death** (v. 14), i.e. eternal death. Therefore, the **word** is the word of God, also called **the commandment** (v. 13b) and **the teaching of the wise** (v. 14). The **word** is a **fountain of life** (eternal life) contrasted with **the snares of death**.

In v.15, the **favor** produced includes favor with men. Almost everyone recognizes and appreciates (**favours**) a man of honor. “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God **and men**” (Luke 2:52 NASB). This is to be expected since sin has alienated man both from God and from other men. A man who is **treacherous** cannot be trusted by those who are likewise treacherous. As the common proverb says, “There is no honor among thieves”. **Good understanding** (v. 15), in context with vv. 13-14, comes from **the word** (v. 13) and **the teaching of the wise**. **The way of the treacherous is hard** because it leads to lack of favor and dishonor among men, but it is ultimately hard because it leads to eternal **death** (v. 14).

- 13: 15 Good understanding produces favor, But the way of the treacherous is hard.
 13: 16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly.

Although favor with God is also included, the **favor** produced is primarily favor with men. Even unbelievers—who are endowed with a certain degree of common grace—recognize and appreciate (**favor**) a man of honor. “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God **and men**” (Luke 2:52 NASB). This is to be expected since sin has alienated man both from God and from other men. A man who is treacherous cannot be trusted even by those who are likewise treacherous. As the common proverb says, “There is no honor among thieves”, meaning, thieves cannot even trust each other. **Good understanding**, in context with vv. 13-14, comes from **the word** (v. 13) and **the teaching of the wise**. **The way of the treacherous is hard** because it leads to lack of favor and dishonor among men, but it is ultimately hard because it leads to eternal death (v. 14).

In v. 16, the sensible man **acts with knowledge** which leads to caution. Waltke translates the phrase, “takes cover” with the idea of protecting himself. The fool, on the other hand, is like a peddler displaying his merchandise before the eyes of men, throwing caution to the wind.²¹⁴

- 13: 17 A wicked messenger falls into adversity, But a faithful envoy *brings* healing.

²¹⁴ Waltke, I. p. 566

Messengers (envoys) had a very important function in the ancient world and were given a very high social status. They spoke in the name of the person represented, giving them tremendous responsibility and potential for good or evil. They could either bring **healing** by honestly and diplomatically delivering their message, or they could bring dishonor—or even war—through lying or improper conduct, eventually being overcome by the **adversity** or difficulty that he himself caused. The context with vv. 12-16 lies in the spoken word or message—either truth or falsehood. Rabshakeh, envoy of the king of Assyria, spoke harsh words to Hezekiah of Judah, blaspheming the name of Yahweh. His **wicked** speech cost the lives of 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 18).

15: 1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

15: 2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly.

16: 21 The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

17: 14 The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to continue a heated argument with someone who never raises his voice and speaks words which edify the hearer. **Gentle** speech has the effect of defusing time bombs of anger. **A harsh word**, on the other hand, begets more harsh words and **stirs up anger**. Moreover, wise speech is not unnecessarily offensive nor does it build walls of defense. It may result in winning over the angry opponent (**makes knowledge acceptable**) (cf. 16: 21, **increases persuasiveness**). In the heat of the argument, generally no one is listening to the other; each one is thinking of what he can say to refute what is being said. The end goal of a heated argument is winning, while the goal of wise men who may differ with one another is truth and clarity. Thus, a heated argument produces more heat than light (knowledge and understanding).

If we have nothing constructive to say, it is better simply to walk away from the argument. Once the harsh words begin to flow, they are like water coming out of a dam. They cannot be taken back, and they can do irreparable damage (17: 14).

15: 30 Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones.

Bright eyes are synonymous with **good news**. One who brings good news generally brings it with joy in the heart which is communicated through the facial expressions: smiling lips and twinkling eyes. **Heart** and **bones** are also synonymously parallel. If the heart is glad, one has a healthy appetite. Joyful people are generally healthier people, although we must not accuse someone of being joyless if they are sick. Remember Job's three friends who completely misread his situation.

16: 27 A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire.

16: 28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

17: 9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Digs up evil (16: 27) and **spreads strife** are synonymously parallel. The result is **words** that act **like scorching fire**, destroying everything and everyone in their path. If we look long and hard enough into a person's life, we will eventually find dirt. This should not be news since all of us have pasts which are flawed. None of us have a perfect record. The **evil** discovered is used to **slander** the reputation of the person we seek to hurt, thus separating him from his **intimate friends**. **Love**, on the other hand, **conceals a transgression** rather than digging it up from the past and exposing it, consequently causing strife between **intimate friends**. Another proverb supports this one, and Peter alludes to it.

Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions. (Prov. 10:12 NASB)

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8 NASB)

We might wonder about the apostle Paul's reasoning behind exposing the infraction of Alexander the Coppersmith.

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (2 Tim. 4:14 NASB)

Paul does not disclose the actual deed, but he does warn Timothy to “watch his back” with regard to Alexander. Some people are dangerous to the ministry of the gospel, and other Christians should not be left in the dark to experience their harm without being forewarned. I was hurt by someone in Africa, but no one warned me about him beforehand. If possible, transgressions should be concealed and the past should be left in the past, but there are other times when transgressions must be exposed for the benefit and safety of others and the church. Church discipline would be another example when a person's sins have reached a point when they must be held accountable by others, even the entire church (Matt. 18: 17). There is nothing private about church discipline in Matthew 18 or 1 Corinthians 5; yet, Presbyterian elders insist on leaving the congregation in the dark about the serious offenses of their members. By examining the text in 1 Corinthians 5, the reader will notice that Paul does not even mention the elders. They are included in the words, “assembled together (*sunago*).

18: 1 He who separates himself seeks *his own* desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.

18: 2 A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.

18: 3 When a wicked man comes, contempt also comes, And with dishonor *comes* scorn.

18: 4 The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.

18: 5 To show partiality to the wicked is not good, *Nor* to thrust aside the righteous in judgment.

18: 6 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.

18: 7 A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.

21: 23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

Proverbs 18: 1-7 have the common theme of the tongue with the exception of v. 5; and even here the tongue is involved in showing partiality to the wicked in a court of law. The loner who **separates himself** from society is self-absorbed, seeking his own self-gratification rather than opportunities to benefit the community. Rather than gaining an **understanding** by listening to the wisdom of others, his **desire** is simply to let off steam by **revealing his own mind** (18: 2). He is contemptuous, dishonorable, and scornful (18: 3).

Deep waters (18: 4) may have a negative connotation, as may also be the case with Prov. 20: 5.

A plan in the heart of a man is *like* deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out. (Prov. 20:5 NASB)

I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. (Ps. 69:2 NASB)

Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink; May I be delivered from my foes and from the deep waters. (Ps. 69:14 NASB)

The **foes** of Ps. 69: 14 may signify people who are laying traps for the psalmist by scheming against him with lies and slander. Such was the case with the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests in Jesus' day who wished to put Him to death; and the psalm receives its ultimate fulfillment in the ministry of Christ, especially in His crucifixion (cf. vv. 8-9, 20-21, 26).

The **deep waters** may, therefore, signify evil motives which a **man of understanding** (20: 5) is able to uncover, as Christ was able to uncover the evil motives of the religious establishment. This veiled speech motivated by evil motives (18: 4) contrasts with the speech of the fool who desires only to speak his mind (18: 2). Of the two people, (1) the fool who blurts out whatever is on his mind, and (2) the man whose motives are evil and whose deceptive, persuasive speech masks this evil, the second is much more dangerous to the future of the community. While the fool will seldom rise in the community to anything other than a social nuisance, the man of **deep waters** will be politically savvy and will be able to influence unthinking people with his deception. Politicians have been doing it for years and have risen to immense power to the severe detriment of the people who cheer them on.

In contrast to the **deep waters**, wisdom is a **bubbling brook**, out in the open, transparent, and offering refreshment to any passerby who wishes to drink. The ultimate fulfillment (the antitype) of this bubbling brook of wisdom is the person of Christ. Speaking to the Samaritan woman, He says,

“but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” (Jn. 4:14 NASB)

In verses 6 and 7, Solomon picks up where he left off—with the **fool**. The fool's speech stirs up **strife** and violence (**calls for blows**). Bar room brawls are generally the product of fools' speech who first exchange heated accusations which escalate into fist fights. I do not know this from personal experience, but I have been around enough fools in high (secondary) school and the military to know what I'm talking about (I served six years in the Mississippi National Guard which had no shortage of brawling fools). “A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1). Fools are known for harsh words, not gentle answers. In the end, the **fool's mouth is his ruin** (18: 7). Either his enemies will kill him for his mischief, or the community will disassociate with him, leaving him to suffer life alone without any help. His mouth will become a trap or **snare for his soul**.

The willful *contention* of the men of Succoth and Penuel with Gideon called *for strokes* [Judges 8: 4-17]. The scoffing mouth of the little children was their merited *destruction* [2 Kings 2: 23-24]. The slanderous *lips* of Daniel's persecutors were *the snare of their soul* [Dan. 6: 13].²¹⁵

On the other hand, the one who **guards his mouth and tongue** also protects his soul (21: 23). The implicit idea is that our tongues can either be our own worst enemies or our own best friends. While destroying others with our tongues, we will also be destroying ourselves at the same time.

²¹⁵ Bridges, p. 284

While blessing others with our speech, we are sowing blessings which will return to us in the future.

18: 20 With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied; He will be satisfied *with* the product of his lips.

18: 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

Both of these proverbs indicate the biblical principle of sowing and reaping—what goes around comes around. If a man sows discord and strife with his speech, he will also reap discord and strife from the damaged relationships resulting from his speech. On the other hand, if his speech has been a **bubbling brook** and **fountain of wisdom** (18: 4), then the relationships which have been positively impacted by his speech will return to him in blessings from others and peace.

...whatever a person dishes out, whether beneficial or harmful, he himself will feed on to full measure through what his audience in return dishes out to him...The deadly tongue disrupts community and by its lethal power isolates its owner from community and kills him. The life-giving tongue creates community and by its vitality gives its possessor the full enjoyment of the abundant life within the community.²¹⁶

20: 15 There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; But the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing.

Solomon in this verse returns to the comparison of wisdom with material success in chapter 3.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. ¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. (Prov. 3:13-15 NASB)

We recall Solomon's exhortation in the ten lectures of the father to his son and his plea to the son to listen to the instruction of his mother and father.

My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; ²¹ Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. ²² When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. ²³ For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life (Prov. 6:20-23 NASB)

22: 10 Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.

22: 11 He who loves purity of heart *And* whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.

22: 12 The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, But He overthrows the words of the treacherous man.

22: 14 The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; He who is cursed of the LORD will fall into it.

Strife, dishonor, and contention accompany certain kinds of people. Wherever they go, discord soon follows. When they are driven out of the community, peace is restored (**contention will go out**). Waltke quotes Van Leeuwen and Kidner.

“The matter of boundary definition, of inclusion and exclusion...is crucial, for without it no group, even the family of God, can have identity with integrity.”

²¹⁶ Waltke, pp. 85-86

“What an institution sometimes needs is not reform but the expulsion of a member.”²¹⁷

The church is the community of the faithful. While entry into this community is voluntary, one’s habitual behavior is not. To continue as a member, one must live within certain boundaries of behavior without which the church ceases to have any identity as the church. To use a modern example, when the church includes practicing homosexuals as communing members in good standing, the difference between the church and the world is extinguished. But aberrant sexuality is not the only illicit behavior that merits the censure of the community. The one who spreads **strife** with his speech, if left uncorrected, will also invite excommunication in order to restore peace and order within the church. At the beginning of the NT church, God excommunicated Ananias and Sapphira by death lest the progress of the great commission be hindered through their lies. The Corinthians who despised the Lord’s supper through drunkenness and selfishness toward poor members were likewise excommunicated (1 Cor. 11). Paul commands the Corinthians to excommunicate an incestuous member so that his soul might eventually be saved (1 Cor. 5).

The next verse encourages the opposite behavior. The person with pure motives and a **gracious** tongue will have the **king** as his **friend**. This, of course, assumes that the king is a righteous king who appreciates moral purity. It also assumes that the gracious speech is not mere obsequiousness²¹⁸ to gain material favors. Ultimately, the King of the universe will count as his friends those who have loved him and obeyed him with their speech.

Verse 12 indicates that **knowledge** (true speech) will be **preserved** by the Lord while the **words** (i.e. lies) of **the treacherous** will be **overthrown**. Eventually, God will clear away the fog which obscures the difference between truth and lies. Heaven will be a place where truth reigns because Jesus IS “the way, the truth, and the life.” **The eyes of the Lord** is a figure of speech representing the omniscience of God who is likewise omnipresent (everywhere) seeing both the good and the evil, distinguishing the truth from lies. Nothing can be hidden from Him. Since we are limited as human beings, we often cannot distinguish between truth and lies except for those things explicitly revealed in Scripture. We are often fooled by liars as well as our own limited knowledge of concepts and events.

The **adulteress** (v. 14) speaks lies both to her husband and to her adulterous partner (cf. 2: 16; 5: 3-6; 6: 24-26; 7: 5-23), resulting in ruin. One who is **cursed of the Lord** for other reasons will be allowed to **fall into** her **deep pit** of flattery and ruin.

U. Pursuit of Wisdom

15: 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.
21: 21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty Finds life, righteousness and honor.

The way sums up the moral direction of a man’s life (Ps. 18: 30-32; 25: 8-9; 25: 12; 32: 8; 37: 5-7, 23, 34; 49: 12-13; 50: 23; 101: 2, 6; 119). Psalm 1 summarizes the **two** ways.

For the LORD knows **the way of the righteous**, But **the way of the wicked** will perish. (Ps. 1:6 NASB)

²¹⁷ Waltke, p. 212

²¹⁸ Obsequiousness is false flattery for the purpose of obtaining favors
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The meaning is not that the Lord has no awareness of what the wicked are doing, but that the Lord is not intimate with the wicked like He is with the righteous and is actually opposed to the wicked in his way. In Ps. 139,

For the choir director. A Psalm of David. O LORD, You have searched me and **known me**.² You **know** when I sit down and when I rise up; You **understand my thought** from afar.³ You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are **intimately acquainted with all my ways**. (Ps. 139:1-3 NASB)

In the NT, **the way** of God is revealed in the person and life of Christ who said,

"I am **the way**, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (Jn. 14:6 NASB)

Therefore, anyone following **the way** of Christ is walking in the **truth** which leads to **life**, not death.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they **follow Me**;²⁸ and I give **eternal life** to them, and they **will never perish**; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (Jn. 10:27-28 NASB)

Those claiming to be walking in the truth who are still living in sin and darkness are self-deceived.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet walk in the darkness*, we lie and do not practice the truth;⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 Jn. 1:6-7 NASB)

Thus, the proverb establishes the inseparable connection between faith and righteousness. God **loves** His elect people, to be sure; but his elect people are the same who live in pursuit of the righteous ways of God. Moreover, those who **pursue righteousness** are the same who **find righteousness** as well as **life and honor**.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matt. 5:6 NASB)

19: 8 He who gets wisdom	A	
loves his own soul;		B
He who keeps understanding	A	
will find good.		B

The proverb is a further endorsement of wisdom found at the beginning of the proverbs.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding.¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold.¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her.¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor.¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace.¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast. (Prov. 3:13-18 NASB)

The word for **keep** is *shamar* found also in Prov. 2: 20; 3: 26; 4: 4, 21; 6: 23; 7: 1-2, 5; 8: 32; 22: 18; passim (in other places). The word is also used of Adam when he was placed in the garden to cultivate it and **keep** it (Gen. 2: 15), in association with the Israelites who were instructed to **keep** God's commandments (Ex. 19: 5; 20: 6), and the priests who served in the tabernacle (Num. 3: 8-10). The word has the connotation of guarding something. The wise man **keeps** or **guards understanding** so that he knows how to navigate successfully through life to preserve his **soul**

from eternal death. The synthetic structure of the proverb indicates that **loves his own soul** and **will find good** are synonymous (the same).

19: 27 Cease listening, my son, to discipline, *And you will* stray from the words of knowledge. In Proverbs 1—7, the father ceaselessly admonishes his son to listen to his instruction for the purpose of avoiding the reckless and lawless activity of the gang as well as the enticements of the adulterous woman. After 7: 1, the direct address, **my son**, occurs eight more times. Usually the address comes in the form of a positive command followed by the resulting blessing; here in the form of a negative warning followed by the resulting curse. **Cease listening** or “If you do not listen”, you will **stray from the words of knowledge**.

22: 1 A *good* name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.

[See B. The Better—Than Proverbs]

V. *The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

10: 3 The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked.

Qohelet in *Ecclesiastes* found it difficult to reconcile such a proverb with empirical observation.

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs *his life* in his wickedness. (Eccl. 7:15 NASB)

There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. (Eccl. 8:14 NASB)

Although it can be clearly observed that God takes care of the righteous and gives them their daily bread (Matt. 6: 31-32), experience does seem often too contradict the general rule of God's temporal benevolence to the righteous. Moreover, He appears to bless the wicked, even as the Psalmist acknowledges with much consternation and confusion.

A Psalm of Asaph. Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!² But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped.³ **For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.**⁴ For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat.⁵ They are not in trouble *as other* men, Nor are they plagued like mankind.⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them.⁷ Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of *their* heart run riot.⁸ They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high.⁹ They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth.¹⁰ Therefore his people return to this place, And waters of abundance are drunk by them.¹¹ **They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?"**¹² **Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth.**¹³ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence;¹⁴ For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning. (Ps. 73:1-14 NASB)

Since the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself, we must extend the promises of the Psalms and Proverbs beyond clinical death; otherwise, the proverbs promise too much.²¹⁹ In life beyond death, the righteous have no unsatisfied wants: no hunger and no sorrow. The wicked on the other hand,

²¹⁹ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, pp. 909-912
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will have endless **craving** for all the good gifts they enjoyed on earth by God's grace. While wishing to have nothing to do with God, they will crave for the goodness they took for granted. Jesus may be alluding to Proverbs in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount.

"Blessed *are* you **who hunger now**, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed *are* you who weep now, for you shall laugh..."Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe *to you* who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. (Lk. 6:21, 25 NASB)

In Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus acknowledges that some of the righteous poor were presently (**now**) hungry; but that their hunger would one day be satisfied, presumably in heaven. We should not accuse the Lord of making empty promises. He knew well that many of the believing poor would remain poor in this life and the many of the rich who were well-fed would remain so until death. Like the inspired writers of Proverbs, He was forward-looking to the consummation of the kingdom of God when He returns.

10:6 **Blessings**

	A	
are on the <u>head</u> of the <i>righteous</i> ,		B
But the <u>mouth</u> of the <i>wicked</i>		B
conceals violence.	A	

In the NASB, the verse has a chiasmic structure in which the first line is parallel to the last line while the middle lines are parallel.

The verse group (vv. 6-17), as a whole, concerns retributive justice. Note how body parts dominate the entire group: **head, mouth, heart, eye, lips, back.**

The righteous will receive blessings while the wicked will receive curses. Blessings on the head of the righteous conveyed their just reward for obedience to the covenant. Both Ephraim and Manasseh were blessed for the covenant obedience of Joseph. While blessing them, Israel placed his hands on their **heads**. Therefore, we are surprised to see the second half of verset B speak of the activity of the wicked rather than just retribution. The verse is parallel with v. 11 in which the second part (verset B) of v.11 is identical in the Hebrew to verset B of v. 6, yet translators and commentators differ in their translations. Below are some of the differences.

^{NIV} Proverbs 10:6 Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

^{KJV} Proverbs 10:6 Blessings *are* upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

^{ESV} Proverbs 10:6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

^{Waltke} Proverbs 10:6 Blessings come to the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

The translations of v. 11 are as follows:

^{NIV} Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

^{KJV} Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of a righteous *man* is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

^{ESV} Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

^{Waltke} Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a wellspring of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Since the Hebrew is identical in verset B in both verses, the question is raised why the translators have not been consistent. Waltke notes that "Since 'blessing' is the subject in v. 6a, its antonym, 'violence,'

is presumably the subject in v. 6b...Likewise, since the ‘mouth of the righteous’ is the subject of v. 11a, the ‘mouth of wicked people’ is presumably the subject in v. 11b...”²²⁰

If Waltke and the NIV translators are correct, then the seeming imbalance of the proverb is solved. In accord with retributive justice, blessings come to the head of the righteous while the wicked are overcome with violence provoked by their own wicked speech. The covenant community favors the righteous but punishes wicked men whose speech stirs up strife (Prov. 15: 18; 10: 12). In this case, the verse is no longer a chiasm but a simple forward parallel.

Blessings come	A	
to the <u>head</u> of the righteous ,		B
but violence overwhelms	A	
the <u>mouth</u> of the wicked .		B

Verse 7 is also a forward parallel.

10: 7 The <u>memory</u> of the righteous	A	
is blessed ,		B
But the <u>name</u> of the wicked	A	
will rot .		B

Here, we see similarity with retributive justice taught in the psalms.

You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their **name** forever and ever. (Ps. 9:5 NASB)

The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the **memory** of them from the earth. (Ps. 34:16 NASB)

There are two aspects to the memory of the righteous. First, they are remembered by their God who never forgets their good deeds done in this life.

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (Heb. 6:10 NASB)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58 NASB)

Second, they are remembered by the friends and loved ones who knew them well. Although no life is flawless, the righteous will be remembered as those who loved and followed the Lord in obedience. They will be remembered as lovers of men rather than money.

A *good name* is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold. (Prov. 22:1 NASB)

10: 8 The wise of **heart** will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined.

²²⁰ Waltke, p. 448, 449 footnote
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The **wise of heart** is not arrogant, but values the collective wisdom of other wise men, and most importantly, the Scriptures which are God's wise words given to men. Respect for authority is built into the fabric of society; otherwise, we are reduced to anarchy and the law of the jungle and evolutionism—only the fit will survive. Respect, or disrespect, is cultivated at an early age in the home with the wife's respect for her husband (Eph. 5: 22-25, 33). When children see their mothers yield to God-ordained authority, they learn that authority does not rest in the person but in the position of the one in authority. They, in turn, must obey fathers and mothers not because their parents are bigger and more powerful, not because they are necessarily of greater intelligence, but because God has placed them in authority. "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6: 1). It's the right thing to do, excepting any command that would cause one to violate the word of God. The same respect for authority transfers to adult life in respect for the law, employer, military officer, etc. (Rom. 13: 1). To **receive commands** is a training ground for **giving** commands. One who has never done the former will not be prepared or qualified for the latter responsibility. One must first be willing to yield to the authority of others before he is placed in a position of authority. And the more he listens to the wise counsel of others, the better off he will be as one in authority.

On the other hand, the **babbling fool will be ruined** (a warning repeated in v. 10) because he is too busy talking to be able to listen. He is a law unto himself, imagining himself to be an authority on every subject but being an authority on nothing. Why? Because he never listens to anyone else and never escapes the foolishness rattling around in his own head. He is trapped in a box, and he cannot think outside that box. Even highly educated men can be babbling fools since their unproven presuppositions govern what they think is possible or impossible. To the typical modern scientist, the miracles of the Bible are myths. Why? Because miracles are impossible. They know this because they have never seen a miracle, nor have they known anyone who has seen a miracle. By the same presupposition, God also is a myth because He has never been seen. But babbling fools (Carl Sagan: "The cosmos is all there is and all there ever will be" and Bertrand Russel being two of them) failed to recognize the self-contradictions of their positions. "The miracles of the bible did not happen because miracles cannot happen" is not an argument; it's an opinion of fools.

For the choir director. *A Psalm* of David. The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. (Ps. 14:1 NASB)

The reader should note from this psalm that there were skeptics 3000 years ago in the time of David who said that there was no God. But one would have to be eternal, omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (present everywhere at all times) to know that God cannot exist and that miracles cannot happen and have never happened. One would have to be God. Moreover, God, by definition, is also omnipotent (all-powerful) and is quite capable of doing anything within the boundaries of his own perfections. Nothing is too hard for him. God is also able to accomplish his purposes by secondary means apart from miracles. He uses people, things, the forces of nature (Ex. 14: 210, etc. to bring his providential works to pass. But when he wishes to work apart from secondary means, he is able to do so (Gen. 1).

The babbling fool will come to ruin both temporally and eternally. He will suffer ruin in this life through the mistake of refusing to listen to authority, including the authority of Scripture; and he will be ruined eternally in hell.

10: 9 He who walks in integrity walks **securely**, But he who perverts his ways will be **found out**.

The old saying in the US, “honesty is the best policy”, is true. One who conducts his life—his marriage, business, etc.—with honesty and integrity will have nothing ultimately to fear because God will be his protection. He **walks** [lives] **securely**. “In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Ps. 56:11 NASB) Well, one may say, man can kill you or slander you. True enough, but we are taught not to fear man who can only kill the body, but God who can kill the body and cast the soul into hell (Matt. 10: 28).

But the proverb also has a temporal promise. As a general rule, the man of **integrity** does not fear being discovered (**found out**) because he has nothing to hide. He is therefore able to live a transparent life before his family and before men. His phone records, computer, and banking records do not hide dirty secrets. On the other hand, **he who perverts his ways** is constantly looking over his shoulder to see if anyone is following to do him harm. He avoids people, including those whom he should love. He is always fearful that his fraud will be uncovered and that the result will be shame, divorce, or prison time.

A young pastor in my denomination was discovered to be frequenting a website for those who were looking for extramarital affairs. One of the leaders of the denomination visited his church on a Sunday night while in the middle of a sermon, and the young man figured he had finally been caught after many years of pornography and adultery. It was the shortest sermon he had ever preached. He was defrocked and disciplined, but all to no avail. Months later he was arrested for sex trafficking and jailed. Days later he hanged himself. It was one of those shocking stories eliciting the well-known response, “How could this happen?” How could a pastor in an evangelical church come to this?

Of course, perverted people often are not discovered. They live normal lives pursuing their perversions. But the God who knows all will render recompense to every man according to his deeds (Matt. 16: 27). In the end, every wicked **will be found out**. It is the unavoidable law of sowing or reaping. If men do not eventually pay for their deeds, then God would be opening himself up to mockery.

Do not be deceived, **God is not mocked**; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Gal. 6:7-8 NASB)

This applies to believers as well. Galatians was written to believers, not perverts. The only reason we will not be repaid in hell for our sinful deeds is because those deeds have already been repaid in Christ’s atonement. But it is foolish for the believer to think that God will not often repay his evil deeds in this life. King David was forgiven, but he received a four-fold curse for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. His first child by Bathsheba died. His daughter Tamar was raped by her half-brother Amnon. Amnon was murdered by Absalom. Absalom rebelled against David and was murdered by Joab. David paid dearly the rest of his life for his sin against God. Starting from 2 Samuel 12 to the end, his life was never the same. **We will all** stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14: 10).

For **we** must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

What this will be like for Christians cleansed with Christ's blood, I could not say; but our judgment may consist in shame or lost rewards, rewards that would have continued for eternity, and a knowledge of missed opportunities had we been more obedient. We often are willing to substitute fleeting pleasures for eternal rewards.

10: 10 He who winks the **eye** causes trouble, And a babbling fool will be ruined.

Winking the eye is a sign of deception resulting in **trouble**. This is one of the synonymous parallels in Proverbs in which the first part of the proverb (verset A) is essentially the same (synonymous) with the second part of the proverb (verset B). The **babbling fool** occurs here as in v. 8, and its context with v. 9 indicates that **will be ruined** is parallel with **will be found out** in v. 9. Again, the verse group is about retributive justice, sowing and reaping. A man reaps what he sows, and the troublesome eye-winker will reap the trouble he has caused others through his babbling and deception.

10: 11 The **mouth** of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the **mouth** of the wicked conceals violence.

Continuing with reference to body parts, Solomon (see the ascription of 10: 1) contrasts the life-giving speech of the righteous to the life-destroying speech of the wicked. **Conceals violence** is parallel to **winks the eye** in v. 10 since the deception of the wicked conceals the motives of his heart to do harm to his neighbor.

Who **winks with his eyes**, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers;¹⁴ Who *with* perversity in his heart **continually devises evil**, Who spreads strife. (Prov. 6:13-14 NASB)

On the other hand, the righteous acts to protect the life of his neighbor; consequently, his speech is a **fountain of life** springing from his relationship to his God who *is* the fountain of life (Ps. 36: 9; 13: 14).

10: 12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.

Hatred stirs up discord among men and vengeance, the desire to get even. It keeps a long list of offenses by others which must be rectified. Consequently, hatred can never make peace but only produces **strife**. But Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5: 9). **Love**, on the other hand, is willing to overlook the grievance and move beyond the offense. This does not mean that we must always sweep sinful acts under the rug and forget about them. Sometimes the offender must be confronted for his own good and the good of the whole church (Matt. 18: 15-20; 1 Cor. 5). Scripture never contradicts Scripture. This OT verse demonstrates that Christian graces were not invented in the NT; they also governed the people of God in the OT. Peter quotes this proverb in his epistle,

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8 NASB)

10: 13 On the **lips** of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the **back** of him who lacks understanding.

Earlier in the book, Lady Wisdom assures the integrity and truth of her speech. By listening to her voice, the wise of heart will show discernment in word and deed.

"Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things. (Prov. 8:6 NASB)

But one who will not listen to wisdom is doomed to be punished either by others or by the self-destructive consequences of his foolishness (lack of understanding). Considering the context of retributive justice (reaping and sowing), the verse demonstrates that the blessings of the **discerning** consist in wisdom itself, apart from any material advantages.

10: 14 Wise men **store up** knowledge, But with the **mouth** of the foolish, ruin is at hand.

Attaining wisdom is an ongoing process and obligation (**store up**). One never arrives at the final destination of complete wisdom even in heaven since the wisdom of God is infinite while man, even glorified man, will always be finite. The **wise** is willing to keep his mouth shut and listen to others who are wiser than he, storing up what he hears. The **ruin** of the **foolish...is at hand** (i.e. continually present) since the **foolish** will not listen to anyone but himself or other foolish people who are just like him (1 Cor. 15: 33, "Bad company corrupts good morals.") The bad consequences of his actions may be immediate or in the future, but they are always certain.

10: 15 The rich man's wealth is his fortress, The ruin of the poor is their poverty.

This verse seems out of context with the rest of the verse group, and I have no explanation for the connection. Often, **wealth** is not presented in a positive light as *real* security. The wealthy man only **imagines** himself to be secure.

A rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall **in his own imagination**. (Prov. 18:11 NASB)

Wealth is also seen by the sage (wise man) as short-lived, fleeting.

Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.⁵ **When you set your eyes on it, it is gone**. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens. (Prov. 23:4-5 NASB)

Nevertheless, wealth is also presented as a positive good, a blessing from the Lord to the righteous man.

"Riches and honor are with **me** [*that is, with Wisdom*], Enduring wealth and righteousness.¹⁹ "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield *better* than choicest silver.²⁰ "I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice,²¹ **To endow those who love me with wealth**, That I may fill their treasuries. (Prov. 8:18-21 NASB)

A **good man** leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the **sinner** is stored up for the righteous. (Prov. 13:22 NASB)

Great wealth is *in* the house of the righteous, But trouble is in the income of the wicked. (Prov. 15:6 NASB)

It is not possible in the context of Proverbs or the OT to spiritualize **wealth** in these verses as only the spiritual wealth the righteous possess in God (cf. the blessings and curses of Deut. 27-29). The

present verse (v. 15), appears to be a simple observation. While poor people are often severely affected by ordinary adversities, the wealthy man is unmoved. For example, a drought or locust swarm may cause a poor man to go hungry while the rich man's money can always buy enough food to eat. A minor robbery of insignificant items like pots and pans may be a major setback for a poor man who cannot replace them, but the rich can easily replace the stolen items with better ones. In the American context, poor people (yes, there are, indeed, poor people in America) are one automobile breakdown away from losing their jobs. If they can't get to work, they are fired; and taxis or rental cars are prohibitively expensive for poor people. On the other hand, the rich simply call the wrecker and have a rental car delivered to his door. Life appears easy for those who have enough money to supply all their needs and meet any financial emergency (Ps. 73), but the poor are **ruined** by simple emergencies. Their **poverty** disables them from rising to the occasion.

Nevertheless, Proverbs does not present the poor as necessarily cursed for their poverty. Hindered, yes. Cursed, no. Often, the poor enjoy life more than the rich as seen in the "better...than" proverbs.

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it. (Prov. 15:16 NASB)

Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife. (Prov. 17:1 NASB)

A *good* name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold. (Prov. 22:1 NASB)

But neither is poverty presented favorably for its own sake. There is no inherent piety or superiority in poverty. Apart from the special grace God may give the poor, poverty is often ruinous and always difficult. It is often the root of family breakdown. In the US poverty is often the cause of divorce when spiritual strength is not present to overcome it. It can lead to suicide among those who feel guilty for failing to provide proper food and medical care for their families. God may grant special grace to the poor, but it is never presented as inherently good. (There is no poverty in heaven.) It may turn out to be a blessing if the poor are driven by it to God and his provision.

10: 16 The wages of the righteous is life, The income of the wicked, punishment.

The verse should be interpreted in the context of retributive justice, reaping and sowing; otherwise, we have a contradiction to Paul's teaching in Romans.

"For the **wages** of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23 NASB).

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.⁵ But to the one **who does not work**, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, (Rom. 4:4-5 NASB)

We earn death, but eternal life is an unmerited gift. Nevertheless, throughout the OT, life is offered to the one who walks in obedience to the covenant. God sets life and death before his covenant people and encourages them to choose life.

"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;¹⁶ **in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and**

His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. (Deut. 30:15-16 NASB)

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, (Deut. 30:19 NAU)

"I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, **According to the results of his deeds.** (Jer. 17:10 NASB)

The LORD also has a dispute with Judah, And will punish Jacob according to his ways; **He will repay him according to his deeds.** (Hos. 12:2 NASB)

OT writers never imply that eternal life could be earned, and the Apostle Paul explicitly denies that the law could save anyone.

If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? (Ps. 130:3 NASB)

Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. (Gal. 3:21 NASB)

For this reason, the sacrificial system was ordained as a preliminary means of atonement until Christ would come and fully atone for sins. Nevertheless, a man's deeds reveal the state of his heart, and Paul declares that judgment will be according to one's deeds.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

⁷ <u>to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality,</u>	A
eternal life;	B
⁸ <u>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,</u>	A
wrath and indignation.	B
⁹ There will be tribulation and distress	B
<u>for every soul of man who does evil,</u> of the Jew first and also of the Greek,	A
¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace	B
<u>to everyone who does good,</u> to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 2:5-10 NASB)	A

There is no contradiction between grace and the evangelical deeds produced by grace. We are full circle back to 10: 2.

Ill-gotten gains do not profit, **But righteousness delivers from death.** (Prov. 10:2 NASB)

It is the evangelical righteousness produced by grace, and demonstrated in deeds, that delivers one from death.

10: 17 He is *on* the path of life who heeds instruction, But he who ignores reproof goes astray.

One who **heeds instruction** will eventually find his way to God, but one who **ignores *the* reproof** of wise men and the Scriptures will not.

10: 24 What the **wicked** fears will come upon him, But the desire of the **righteous** will be granted.

We are continuing with “V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice”.

Often, the biblical writers acknowledge that the wicked man escapes judgment in this world. This was a thorny problem in the side of Asaph (Ps. 73: 1-14) and Qohelet.²²¹

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs *his life* in his wickedness. (Eccl. 7:15 NASB)

There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. (Eccl. 8:14 NASB)

For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether *it will be* love or hatred; anything awaits him. (Eccl. 9:1 NASB)

Yet, we know that God never contradicts himself. Qohelet, the preacher, was describing the world strictly from an empirical point of view—the point of view which says that we only know the world through our senses: sight, hearing, taste, feel, etc. The proverb, “seeing is believing” sums up this philosophy of epistemology (theory of knowing). We only know what we see or experience. Jesus himself recognized that the disciples, who were weak in faith, would need tangible signs in order to believe that he had risen from the dead. He gave them this proof, and even Thomas believed when confronted with Jesus’ person in the flesh. However, Jesus also gently rebuked him saying, “...Because you have **seen** Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who **did not see**, and *yet* **believed**.” (Jn. 20:29 NASB)

We believe in many things that we have never seen. In the physical realm, we believe that electrons are running through the wires of our electric appliances, but we cannot see those electrons. We take the scientist at his word that this is happening. We believe in morality, but you can’t see morality or immorality, righteousness or evil. Suppose you see someone murder another human being, and you say to yourself, “That is evil.” But you have not seen evil. What you have seen is the act of murder. Evil is a mental construct or category formed in the brain. It is not material and you cannot physically see it. We cannot see love for the same reason. It’s a mental construct. You may see a man kissing his lover, and you say to yourself, “That is love.” But you haven’t seen love. How would you know whether this man was seducing the woman to his bed only to gratify himself at her expense? Then his kiss would be an act of hatred which is also invisible and immaterial.

So, we can see that empiricism alone (knowledge and truth from our sensations) will not work for us. Nor can we determine the meaning and purpose of life from our sensations. This must come from some other source of knowledge, and Christians believe that the only infallible source is the Bible which sometimes defines (1 Jn. 4: 10; 5: 3) but and at other times illustrates (from the narratives of Scripture) evil, good, love, hate, and the meaning of life, among many other non-material things that we believe in. The bible even helps us interpret the material world of sensation. We understand the meaning of material things by their relationship to God and other things: birds, mountains, trees, etc. (Ps. 19: 1).

²²¹ For an explanation of these difficult passages, see my *Ecclesiastes*.
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Getting back to our text in 10: 24, Solomon is taking the long look. Yes, sometimes, even quite frequently, the wicked prosper and get away with murder, theft, rape, and all sorts of evil deeds. As Asaph says, they even go to their graves peacefully—at least it *appears* this way. But the Proverbs never promise “too much” (in Waltke’s words) because their promises and curses extend beyond “clinical”, physical life. In the end, all men will repaid for the deeds done in the body, both good and bad (2 Cor. 5: 10).

What exactly does the wicked **fear**, and what does the righteous **desire**? In the short-term, the wicked fear the judgment of men who will punish them for their evil. They fear going to jail, being executed, or losing face. (And since prisons did not exist in Israel except as detention centers for those pending trial, the wicked feared the prospect of having to repay what they had stolen two-fold up to five-fold.) In the long-term, the wicked fear the eternal judgment of God in hell. But one may object that many wicked do not believe in hell. The answer to their skepticism is two-fold. First, it really doesn’t matter whether they believe in hell or not; hell still exists. Second, the bible affirms that the wicked **know** God’s righteous ordinances (laws) and that those who break them are liable to His wrath.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;³² and **although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.** (Rom. 1:28-32 NASB)

Men actually know that there is a day of reckoning for sin, and they **fear** being face to face with the Creator whom they have chosen to ignore and disobey.

But what do the righteous **desire**? First and foremost, the righteous desire the knowledge of God, and compared to this knowledge everything else is secondary.

Whom have I in heaven *but You*? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. (Ps. 73:25 NASB)

This did not mean that Asaph, the psalmist, didn’t desire his wife and children, love, food, a beautiful sunset, and any number of things, but apart from his relationship with God, none of these things—**nothing on earth**—was significant.

Secondly, the desires of believers imitate the desires of their Creator. Through the process of sanctification, our desires change gradually from self-centered desires to the desire to receive what God most wishes to give us.

Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.⁵ Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday. (Ps. 37:4-6 NASB)

If we **delight** ourselves in the Lord, we will **desire** those things which delight the heart of God. Notice from the context of v. 6 that one of those things is **righteousness**. God desires that we are righteous not only in our position or status as adopted children but in experience, and the believer

will also desire this righteousness more than lesser things, material things. He will be praying that God transforms him into a better person even if frequent discipline is needed—and it will be.

10: 25 When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, But the righteous *has* an **everlasting foundation**.

Jesus may have been alluding to this proverb at the end of the sermon on the mount.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the **rock**.²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been **founded** on the rock.²⁶ "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the **sand**.²⁷ "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Matt. 7:24-27 NASB)

The **foundation** of the righteous is the **rock**, Christ, who is the word of God (1 Cor. 10: 4), but the foundation of the wicked is the shifting **sand** of moral consensus (whatever society tolerates as moral, and whatever it condemns and punishes is immoral) or moral relativity (there are no universal moral standards). But social morality changes, and it does not establish the rightness or wrongness of one's actions. Moral standards which are only personally chosen by each individual are self-contradictory. They are not "standard", only preferences. Only a moral system outside of man, transcending social norms (laws) and personal preferences can be authoritative.

10: 27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

There are exceptions to this promise if the promise is bound only to this life; but as we have argued, the Proverbs look to the future beyond clinical death. The primary reference in this proverb is earthly, physical life. Notice it says, **prolongs life**. If it were possible to do a statistical study of the longevity of believers versus unbelievers, we would find that this proverb is still true. Believers live longer physically than unbelievers simply because God promises long life to those who obey his covenant (Ex. 20: 12; repeated in Eph. 6: 2). Obedient children who do not participate in sexual immorality, drugs, and reckless driving will most likely live to adulthood. Adults who are not equally reckless with their health and who have happy marriages will also be more likely to live beyond their reckless peers whose sinfulness has damaged their psychological and physical well-being.

10: 28 The hope of the righteous is gladness, But the expectation of the wicked perishes.

The NIV reads,

^{NIV} **Proverbs 10:28** The **prospect** of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.

The righteous may endure much suffering in this life, but their future (**prospect**) is bright and joyful. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Matt. 5:5-6 NASB). This life is the closest thing to hell the believer will experience. The wicked also hope for a better life, but their **hopes** will be dashed to pieces upon the reality of God's wrath. This present life, with all of its disappointments and sorrows, is the closest thing to heaven they will ever experience. We must pity the wicked and seek to win them to the Savior.

10: 29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, But ruin to the workers of iniquity.

The **way** of the Lord is his moral perfection and justice which governs the world. While the righteous are protected by the **stronghold** of God's law and eternal justice, this same law and justice condemns **the workers of iniquity** who break his law repeatedly and thereby suffer His just recompense.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NAU)

10: 30 The righteous will never be **shaken**, But the wicked will not **dwell in the land**.

Shaken is set in antithetical contrast with **dwell in the land**. In the OT, dwelling in the land of promise is a figure for enjoying God's favor and blessing; it is typological for dwelling in heaven. The land of Canaan was the land promised to Abraham as his inheritance and the inheritance of his descendants. In the NT, the true descendants of Abraham are defined as those who believe in Christ (Gal. 3: 29). Unbelievers, on the other hand, will not continue dwelling in the land of promise. Even as unfaithful Israelites were exiled from the land during the exiles of the northern and southern kingdoms, the wicked will be banished from heaven. They will not dwell within the boundaries of the New Jerusalem.

Trust in the LORD and do good; **Dwell in the land** and cultivate faithfulness. (Ps. 37:3 NASB)

The righteous **will inherit the land** And dwell in it forever. (Ps. 37:29 NASB)

"Blessed are the gentle, for they **shall inherit the earth**. (Matt. 5:5 NASB)

For the upright **will live in the land** And the blameless **will remain in it**;²² But the wicked will be **cut off from** the land And the treacherous **will be uprooted from it**. (Prov. 2:21-22 NASB)

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and **may enter by the gates into the city**.¹⁵ **Outside** are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Rev. 22:14-15 NASB)

11: 3 The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.
11: 5 The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way, But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.

11: 6 The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, But the treacherous will be caught by *their own* greed.

God's people avoid many of the dangers confronting the rest of humanity by listening to the counsel of His word.

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. (Ps. 119:105 NASB)

Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble. (Ps. 119:165 NASB)

Wisdom will allow the wise son to walk securely without stumbling.

Then you will walk in your way securely And your foot will not stumble. (Prov. 3:23 NASB)

Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble. (Ps. 119:165 NASB)

On the flip side, the **crookedness** (11: 3) of those who use cunning and deceit to get ahead in life will eventually lead to their destruction. This proverb is demonstrated by many stories of supposedly successful people whose lives ended in misery and ruin. Wicked men, however clever in their evil, cannot reverse the God-ordained universal order which demands that evil be punished. It is like the law of gravity; it always works. Often, the wicked are overcome by the very evil they themselves have produced. For an example, thousands of young drug dealers who have used deception and murder to overcome their competitors have become victims of the same thing. Professional prostitutes (as opposed to those who are trafficked against their will) have died premature deaths from venereal diseases. Homosexuals have died from AIDS. Romans 1 indicates that God gives the wicked over to the consequences of their own actions. Sin produces its own penalty (**But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.**)

and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and **receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.** (Rom. 1:27 NASB)

Although some evil men seem to dodge retributive justice in this present life, the final judgment at the end of the age will set things right; otherwise, God is found to be a liar.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of *God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Rom. 12:19 NASB)

11: 7 When a wicked man dies, *his expectation* will perish, And the **hope** of strong men perishes.

11: 8 The righteous is delivered from trouble, But the wicked takes his place.

In this proverb **a wicked man** is compared to **strong men** because, very often, wicked men are also powerful. This seems contrary to many of the proverbs which teach that the expected consequences of righteousness are life, peace, and prosperity while the expected consequences of unrighteousness are poverty and strife. Concerning wisdom,

Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. (Prov. 3:16 NASB)

"Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness. (Prov. 8:18 NASB)

However, that strong men are often wicked appears to be the norm in any society throughout human history, as the stories of tyrants will attest; and Proverbs does not flinch at its admission that wicked men may become rich.

A gracious woman attains honor, And ruthless men attain riches. (Prov. 11:16 NASB)

Therefore, this proverb also seems unrealistic and contrary to human experience. Once more we are circling back to our discussion about the Proverbs promising too much. If limited to his age, they do promise too much; but the rewards of righteousness are futuristic.

Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity. (Prov. 13:21 NASB)

The proverbs are not unrealistic. They acknowledge that the God-ordained action-consequence sequence seems at times to be turned on its head (cf. Ecclesiastes, Ps. 73). The proverbs take the long look ahead to the new age rather than the short-sighted look of earthbound unbelievers.

11: 17 The merciful man does himself good, But the cruel man does himself harm.

The **merciful man** benefits from those to whom he shows mercy while the **cruel man's** self-interest at the expense of others will eventually turn back against him. Merciful people are respected in the community while the cruel are scorned and ostracized (isolated).²²² Other proverbs verify the same principle of retributive justice.

He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. (Prov. 26:27 NASB)

The two activities in this proverb involve an attempt to harm a traveler and steal his goods. Very often, those who act as predators of others become the victims of their own evil, like a man who digs a pit for someone to fall in and accidentally falls into it himself. When this happens, the community rejoices in the self-inflicted wounds of the predator. Pharaoh had the infant sons of Israelites cast in to the Nile and drowned (Ex. 1: 22) only to have his whole army drowned in the Red Sea. Small wonder that the Israelites sang for joy afterwards (Ex. 15). Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (Matt. 5:7 NASB) The primary emphasis is upon mercy from God, but it is also true that merciful people are more likely to receive mercy from others (Matt. 18: 33-34).

11: 19 He who is **steadfast** in righteousness *will attain* to life, And he who **pursues** evil *will bring about* his own death.

The words **steadfast** and **pursues** indicate persistent practice. The righteous are not perfectly righteous, but they are persistent in their pursuit of righteousness. On the flip side, the evil man is persistent in his pursuit of evil.

There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of **death**. (Prov. 16:25 NASB)

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who **practices** righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;⁸ the one who **practices** sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn. 3:7-8 NASB)

11: 20 The perv erse <u>in heart</u>	A	
are an abomin ation to the LORD,		B
But the blameless <u>in their walk</u>	A	
are His delight .		B

Notice the AB parallel in which **perv**erse is contrasted with **blameless** and in heart is compared to in their walk.²²³ The structure indicates that a person's walk (practice) will reflect his heart. A person's life is an extension in practice of what he really believes in his heart. If his heart is perverse (evil) then this evil will inevitably come to the surface in practice, like a drowned body that eventually floats to the surface.

11: 21 Assuredly, the **evil man** will not go unpunished, But the descendants of the **righteous** will be delivered.

²²² Waltke, vol. 1, p. 500

²²³For more on parallelism, see my notes on *Interpreting Old Testament Poetry*
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Still on the subject of retributive justice—sowing and reaping—this proverb shows the connection between length of life and character as well as the connection between the behavior of parents and children.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. (Exod. 20:12 NASB)

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise),³ SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. (Eph. 6:2-3 NASB)

The proverb appears to imply that not only will the **righteous** be **delivered** from punishment, but also their **descendants** who generally follow in the footsteps of their faithfulness. On the other hand, the **evil man** and his **descendants** (implied) who follow him in his evil will be **punished** and will shorten their lives.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth."⁵ "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me**, (Exod. 20:4-5 NASB)

The above verse does not imply that the children are punished for the sins of their fathers, a direct contradiction of Deut. 24: 16.

"Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deut. 24:16 NASB)

The principle taught in Ex. 20: 4-5 is that children generally, not always, imitate the sins of their parents, and that God will **visit** the very same **iniquity** in the lives of the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren that He observed and punished in the lives of their parents, grandparents, or great grandparents. As the saying goes, "The apple does not fall far from the tree." Even when children hate their parents, they tend to imitate them. Notice that God visits the iniquity **of those who hate Me**, meaning that not only do the parents hate God but also their descendants. Thankfully, this is not an absolute rule since many children of evil parents become righteous believers and many descendants of believers become evil unbelievers. But we go amiss if we think God is now somehow working solely with disconnected individuals because we are "living in the NT". This idea is based on western individualism, not Scripture. God still works through the medium of the family, the very reason Paul quotes directly from Exodus 20 without apology. The NT contains the New Covenant, the relationship between God and the new Israel, the church. The New Covenant is not altogether new but the fulfillment and completion of what God began in the Old Covenant.

Assuredly indicates that although the wicked often escape judgment in this life, God's ultimate justice will prevail in the new age beyond this life. The righteous can count on it.

The proverb "affirms the ultimate justice of God, not on the basis of empirical observation, but on the basis of God's nature."²²⁴

²²⁴ Waltke, quoting Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, p. 119.
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You might remember that the skepticism of Qohelet in Ecclesiastes is rooted in his empirical observation of the way things appear to be. But at the end of the book,

11: 23 The **desire** of the righteous is only good, *But* the **expectation** of the wicked is wrath.

The **desire of the righteous** reflects the desires of their heavenly father who is **good**. Consequently, their desires will be good. **Desire** and **expectation** are parallel

Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the **desires** of your heart. (Ps. 37:4 NASB)

11: 27 He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, But he who seeks evil, evil will come to him.

A person will eventually get what he **seeks**, whether **good** or **evil**.

12: 2 A good man	A	
will obtain favor from the LORD,		B
But He will condemn a man		B
who devises evil.	A	

The chiasmic parallels (ABBA) indicate the connection between character and conduct. **A good man** does not **devise evil** deeds because his heart is right with God. He is rewarded with **favor** for good deeds arising from good character.

12: 3 A man will not be established	A	
by <u>wickedness</u> ,		B
But <u>the root of the righteous</u>		B
will not be moved .	A	

Will not be established is contrasted with **will not be moved** and **wickedness** is contrasted with **the root of the righteous**. The same word for **established** is used of David and Solomon's kingdom under God's blessing.

"Now therefore, O LORD God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, confirm *it* forever, and do as You have spoken,²⁶ that Your name may be magnified forever, by saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel'; and may the house of Your servant David be **established** before You. (2 Sam. 7:25-26 NASB)

And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was **firmly established**. (1 Ki. 2:12 NASB)

As long as David followed the Lord, the Lord was pleased to defeat his enemies on all sides, laying the groundwork for the prosperity and peace of Solomon's kingdom afterward. After he sinned against the Lord by committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah and his men, David's kingdom began to experience many setbacks and was almost lost to Absalom. Yet, David had already repented of his adultery and murder, and his kingdom was passed on to Solomon under whose administration peace and prosperity prevailed and the temple was built (1 Kings 1-10). Solomon's kingdom was **firmly established** until he began marrying foreign wives from pagan nations and building pagan altars to their gods, even worshipping at these altars (1 Kings 11). God, therefore, raised up adversaries to Solomon, Haddad and Rezon who plagued his kingdom. Before the multiplication of wives in chapter 11, the author of Kings gives us hints of Solomon's demise in chapter 10 with the multiplication of gold, horses, and chariots. The multiplication of all these things were strictly forbidden to the king in the Mosaic Law concerning the king.

"Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'¹⁷ "He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. (Deut. 17:16-17 NASB)

Horses and chariots were the most dreaded instruments of warfare, and the Israelite king who multiplied them indicated that his security was established on a strong military rather than God. The multiplication of foreign wives secured foreign alliances, but Israel was forbidden to trust in military alliances with other nations. Gold was used for purchasing both foreign alliances and strong militaries—in a word, security. But God wished his people, and His king, to rely fully upon His protection and favor. As long as Solomon was **rooted** in God's word and law, the nation would not be **moved**; but by seeking other means of security, the kingdom became unraveled in the days of Rehoboam is son.

Analogously, the wicked will not be **established** through the violation of God's law, including scheming, lying, and violence, however much they believe that their wicked behavior benefits them. Eventually, it will end in their demise. The **root of the righteous**, on the other hand, is firmly planted in the unerring and eternal word of God and his eternal promises. The storms of life may seem at times to overwhelm them, but like a strong tree firmly rooted in the ground, the righteous **will not be moved** away from the anchor of eternal truth.

12: 5 The **thoughts** of the righteous

are just.

But the **counsels** of the wicked

are deceitful.

12: 6 The **words** of the wicked lie in wait for blood, But the **mouth** of the upright will deliver them.

12: 7 The wicked are **overthrown** and are **no more**, But the house of the righteous **will stand**.

The **righteous** devise plans on how to please God and benefit others, and their **thoughts** toward others are rooted in God's justice and righteousness, not in their self-serving interests. The **counsels** (plans) of the wicked, on the other hand, are rooted in their self-interests which lead them into deceptive scheming. Absalom was not really concerned for justice when he heard the complaints of Israelites at the gates of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15: 1-6). His only concern was his hatred of David and his plans to snatch the kingdom away from him. Good looks (2 Sam. 14: 25) and **deceit** were useful tools to this end.

The **words** of Jezebel to King Ahab **waited** for the **blood** of Naboth so that Ahab could take possession of his vineyard.

Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now reign over Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." (1 Ki. 21:7 NASB)

As with Absalom, **deceit** was her primary tool. She sent letters with the king's seal to the equally wicked elders of Jezreel instructing them to frame Naboth with false accusations of cursing God and the king. Her plan was successful, and Naboth and his sons were executed, clearing the way for Ahab to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. Her **counsels** were **deceitful**, but Naboth's **thoughts** were concerned with honoring God's inheritance from his ancestors. All Israelite land was a sacred trust from God beginning with the division of the land by tribe during the days of christcommunitystudycenter.org

Joshua. While Jezebel's words were deceitful and waited for blood, the words of Naboth's **mouth** were righteous and **delivered** him from eternal death. His words were proof of his faith.

But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."
(1 Ki. 21:3 NASB)

Though successful in their plan to eliminate Naboth, the house of Naboth, though physically ruined, **will stand** eternally. Ahab would soon die in battle from a random arrow piercing a small crack in his armor (1 Kings 22) and Jezebel would be thrown from a window and eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9). As payback for the murder of Naboth and his sons (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9: 26), seventy sons of Ahab were murdered by Jehu so that the house of Ahab was **no more** (2 Kings 10).
12: 8 A man will be praised according to his insight, But one of perverse mind will be despised.

Social esteem will be given to a person of wise (implied) **insight** who is able to solve complex situations. Joseph and Daniel were given insight into the dreams of kings and were noted for their wisdom. Abigail had insight into David's anger, and her words prevented David's slaughter of Nabal and all his servants. After God avenges David by putting Nabal to death, Abigail is rewarded by becoming the wife of a king. Insight is not always rewarded in this present life, since the sage remembers a wise person who did not receive the gratitude of a whole city even after rescuing it from danger (Eccles. 9: 15). Rewards may be postponed until the new age God (Matt. 5: 11-12).
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12: 10 A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, But *even* the compassion of the wicked is cruel.

Sometimes we can discern the character of an individual from the treatment he gives his animals. Arguing from the lesser to the greater, if a person is compassionate to his animals, he will also be compassionate to people. The case law of Deut. 25: 4 illustrates the wisdom of this proverb.

"You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing. (Deut. 25:4 NASB)

Properly understanding the application of this law to human beings, Paul uses it to argue for the just remuneration (pay) of pastors or anyone who labors for another.²²⁶

Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?⁶ Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?⁸ I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?¹⁰ Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*.¹¹ If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (1 Cor. 9:5-11 NASB)

Paul argues from the lesser to the greater. If God is even concerned oxen enjoying the fruit of their labor, He is certainly more concerned about people being given just recompense while working for others. If even animals have rights, then certainly do human beings. In the Corinthians passage,

²²⁵ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 525

²²⁶ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 526-527

those who labor in the word are entitled to compensation from their flock. Anything less is unloving and **cruel**. In the context of ancient Israel, the law argued for the proper and compassionate treatment of laborers and slaves whose employers are obligated to give them proper food, clothing, shelter, or wages.

Another illustration of this proverb is found in the law of the Sabbath.

"Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* **so that your ox and your donkey may rest**, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves. (Exod. 23:12 NASB)

Even the beasts of burden were to benefit from a compassionate God who did not require man to labor seven days, but only six.

On the contrary, the "compassion" of the wicked is **cruel**. That is, even in their best behavior, their treatment of others—and animals—is flawed and selfishly motivated.²²⁷

The delight of children in putting animals to pain for amusement, if not early restrained, will mature them in cruelty, demoralize their whole character, and harden them against all the sympathies of social life... "they who delight in the sufferings and destruction of inferior creatures, will not be apt to be very compassionate and benign to those of their own kin." Thus *the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel*, having no right feeling (Gen. 37: 26-28); only a milder exercise of barbarity (1 Sam. 11: 1,2; Luke 23: 13-16); and usually meted out for some selfish end.²²⁸

Statistical studies have revealed that men who are cruel to animals are much more likely to be cruel to their wives. Women, beware! Carefully observe how your potential candidate for marriage behaves around pesky dogs!

12: 11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless *things* lacks sense.
12: 12 The wicked man desires the booty of evil men, But the root of the righteous yields *fruit*.

Illegal drug use in the US is producing a whole culture of young men who are caught up in the distribution and sale of imported drugs from other countries, especially from Mexico to the south. Young men see the fancy cars, clothes, jewelry, and houses of the drug kingpins who are making more money in a day that they will make in ten years of common labor. They "want in on the action" and become "mules" who pack drugs through the border patrols into the US. If they were believers, they would quickly see through the glitz of ill-gotten gain and turn their eyes toward honorable work. But the **wicked man desires the booty of evil men**. "Easy money" becomes a temptation too great for evil men to resist. However, most of them do not survive to spend their easy money. They are caught up in the violence of protecting their territories from other drug cartels and end up hanged or with a bullet to their heads. Wars are being fought in northern Mexico leaving widows and bereaved mothers in their wake.

But the root of the righteous yields *fruit* because of the promise of God in v. 11: **He who tills his land will have plenty of bread**. Honest labor, even hard labor, will put food on the table; and this, after all, is the only thing the Lord promised us.

'Give us this day our **daily bread**. (Matt. 6:11 NASB)

²²⁷ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 527.

²²⁸ Bridges, *Proverbs*, p.137

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'³² "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.³³ "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6:31-34 NASB)

If we have **food and covering**, with these we shall be content.⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. (1 Tim. 6:8-9 NASB)

Idleness is a sin. "The proud person is Satan's *throne* and the *idle* man his *pillow*."²²⁹

12: 13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.

12: 14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, And the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.

13: 3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

The law of sowing and reaping applies not only to what a man does but also to what he says. The evil man will be paid back in kind—or worse—for **the transgression of his lips**. This proverb may also apply to believers whose speech is not always generous and kind, but often hurtful and rash. **The righteous will escape from trouble** by watching his mouth and thinking before speaking. A good rule is to let your words be few. God gave us one mouth but two ears; thus, we should be listening at least twice as much time as speaking.

12: 21 No harm befalls the righteous, But the wicked are filled with trouble.

Obviously, the proverb has apparent exceptions but not real exceptions. Many sorrows befell the righteous man, Job; and believers today in many countries are persecuted. However, this proverb, as with many others, must be interpreted in light of the final blessings bestowed upon the righteous beyond death. **No harm [ultimately] befalls the righteous** because "...God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose" (Rom. 8:28 NASB). The wicked, on the other hand, **are filled with trouble** even if their circumstances are good. The rich worry about losing their riches; the beautiful worry about losing their good looks, etc. The better-than proverbs indicate that with the Lord, less is better than more without the Lord.

12: 26 The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked leads them astray.

A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, (Prov. 1:5 NASB)

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Cor. 15:33 NASB)

13: 5 A righteous man hates falsehood, But a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully.

The risen and glorified Lord, speaking to John by revelation, said that liars will not inherit His kingdom.

²²⁹ Bridges, quoting Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling*, Part 1, p. 346.
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"He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.⁸ "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and **all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**" (Rev. 21:7-8 NASB)

Paul acknowledged to Timothy that Cretan culture had earned the reputation for being untruthful.

One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "**Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.**"¹³ **This testimony is true.** For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, (Tit. 1:12-13 NASB)

One would think that African pastors who read these verses would take them seriously, but I have found out the hard way that lying is the national sport of many African pastors. For many, their god is their belly, and they use the ministry for material gain—by lying and cheating bazungus (1 Tim. 6: 5-6).

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ,¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (Phil. 3:18-19 NASB)

13: 9 The light of the righteous rejoices, But the lamp of the wicked goes out.

Light and **lamp** are biblical metaphors for life. In antiquity, oil needed to light lamps was expensive; therefore, the light of a lamp symbolized the success and well-being of those who possess them. The **righteous rejoices** in the light of God's word, and this joy will endure forever. However, **the lamp of the wicked goes out**; i.e. it is extinguished at death and remains unlit eternally.

13: 13 The one who despises the word	A
will be in debt to it,	B
But the one who fears the commandment	A
will be rewarded.	B

13: 21 Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.

14: 2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.

Despises the word is antithetically parallel to **fears the commandment**. There is no middle ground. Either one fears the commandments of God or he despises these commandments. Prov. 14: 2 reinforces the idea that wickedness demonstrates hatred toward God. Neutrality is impossible.

Hate evil, you who **love** the LORD, Who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. (Ps. 97:10 NASB)

"The **fear** of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate. (Prov. 8:13 NASB)

Jesus also acknowledged no middle ground.

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (Matt. 12:30 NASB)

Will be in debt to it [*i.e. the word of God*] implies that every human being has a **debt** of obedience to be paid to God. If this debt is not paid, he will be punished (the opposite of **rewarded**) to pay a debt which cannot be repaid. Although God is not externally obligated to reward us for obedience, He nevertheless obligates Himself by promising to reward us. God always presents incentives for obeying Him.

The incomplete metaphor probably represents the incorrigible, who thumb their noses at God's word, as guilty and pledged to pay their debt at the time of judgment because the Lord will fulfill his inviolable [unbreakable] moral plan that evil deeds yield evil consequences (Exod. 5: 2; 14: 28; Jer. 36: 23-32; 1 Pet. 3: 20; 2 Pet. 2: 5; Heb. 12: 25). Other proverbs make clear that the debt is his life...

The honesty and integrity of the Lord demand that he upholds the moral order and fulfills his promises.²³⁰

Verse 21 presents the same action/consequence sequence as v. 20. Actions always have consequences, and the Lord of the universe has full control of what the consequences of certain actions will be. Whether these consequences—**adversity** or **prosperity**—come during this life or afterwards is beside the point. We are not given an inside look at how God will punish the wicked and reward the righteous after death. We see only consequences which occur in this life, some of them contrary to the action/consequence sequence in these two proverbs (cf. Ps. 73); but we may be assured that for God's justice to be served, the wicked must be punished and the righteous must be rewarded. At the same time, the believer must understand that apart from grace he is also among the wicked. His reward from God is not the reward of merit, but grace.

13: 25 The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, But the stomach of the wicked is in need.

Contentment cannot be bought with quantity; otherwise, the rich without exception would be the most satisfied and contented people on earth. King Ahab was not content with his kingly riches and vast lands, but Naboth was satisfied with his small vineyard. Many African Christians are content with enough food to sustain them for only a day, but many Americans crave one non-essential after another, hoping that one day they will have enough of these non-essentials to be happy. But contentment never comes because God never intended men to be content without knowing Him.

14: 11 The **house** of the wicked
will be **destroyed**,
But the **tent** of the upright
will **flourish**.

House and **tent** are antithetically compared. The proverb is counter-intuitive (not what one would expect) since houses are more permanent dwellings than tents. However, the promises of God are the only thing which has genuine permanence. Abraham dwelled in tents (Heb. 11: 9), but he inherited the eternal promise of the entire land of Canaan as a type of all who share his faith and inherit the new heavens and new earth.

²³⁰ Waltke, p. 564-565

The righteous man **will flourish** like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³ Planted in the house of the LORD, They **will flourish** in the courts of our God. (Ps. 92:12-13 NASB)

The **upright will flourish** not only in heaven but generally in this life, as well. They are either materially blessed or they will be satisfied and fulfilled with the limited material means given them by a heavenly father who loves them and whom they love.

Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. (Prov. 3:16 NASB)

Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice. (Prov. 16:8 NASB)

The permanence and security of the **wicked** dwelling in houses is an illusion because they **will be destroyed**.

Behold, these are the **wicked**; And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth. ¹³ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; ¹⁴ For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. ¹⁶ When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight ¹⁷ Until I came into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I perceived their end. ¹⁸ Surely You set **them** in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. ¹⁹ **How they are destroyed in a moment!** They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. (Ps. 73:12-20 NASB)

The houses of the wicked are like the house built on sand (Matt. 7: 26-27) which will not endure when the storms of God's wrath come upon them. As the psalmist says, they may flourish in the short term, but not forever. Those who fail to take the long view will envy the wicked and will imitate them, but those who know their God and believe His word will wait be patient.

14: 14 The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways, But a good man will *be satisfied* with his.

Continuing with the theme of retributive justice, the **backslider** will receive the just recompense (repayment) for abandoning the way of God; but the **good man** will be confirmed in his steadfast course of following the Lord. God's reward is not offered to those who temporarily profess the truth, but to the one who continues in the way. "...the one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (Mk. 13: 13). The good seed of the gospel falls in many places—beside the road, rocky places, among the thorns, and on good soil (Matt. 13: 1-9)—but only the good soil prepared by the Holy Spirit will yield an enduring harvest of steadfast righteousness.

14: 18 The **naïve** inherit foolishness, But the **sensible** are crowned with knowledge.

An inheritance is usually considered as a positive good, but **foolishness** will be passed on to the **naïve** who have unthinkingly accepted the falsehoods of those who came before them. A society which has rejected the biblical foundations of truth will enter the downward spiral of individual, familial, and social disintegration by applying foolish, man-made solutions to individual and social ills. God will visit the foolishness of parents upon their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,"⁶

but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exod. 20:5-6 NASB)

On the other hand, **the sensible** who love God and keep His commandments will inherit the **crown of knowledge** belonging to those who have believed the truth. A culture which has assimilated the Christian faith will pass on this faith to their children and grandchildren who will continue to benefit both materially and spiritually from the application of biblical truth to individual and social problems.

14: 19 The evil will bow down before the good, And the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Joseph's evil brothers were eventually forced to bow before him. All their plans to be rid of him were thwarted by the retributive justice of God who had foreordained to elevate him. Haman, who attempted to exterminate the whole Jewish race, was forced to bow before Esther as a type of the wicked bowing before the righteous at the end of the age (Esther 7: 7). The wicked Moabites bowed before David as a type of the unrighteous bowing before Christ on the day of judgment (2 Sam. 8: 2; Phil. 2: 9-11). Therefore, we should not lose heart in doing **good**, knowing that we serve a God of justice who will reward the righteous and not allow the wicked to succeed in the end.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. (Gal. 6:9 NASB)

14: 22 Will they not <u>go astray</u>	A	
who devise evil?		B
But <u>kindness and truth</u> will be to those	A	
who devise good.		B

In this imprecise proverb, the expectation to **go astray** is paired with the expectation of **kindness and truth**. The first expectation does not appear, in itself, to be **retributive justice**, but only a description of behavior. Yet, upon further reflection, going **astray** itself is the just consequence of **devise evil**. Such perpetrators of evil are continually off course in every area of life. No positive result can ultimately come from harming others, although the short-term gains of evil may abound. The old proverb, "There is no honor among thieves", holds true because thieves are inherent liars who will betray other thieves if given a reasonable opportunity of getting away with it. Drug dealers murder other drug dealers for a competitive advantage, etc. While "providing" lavishly for their families, wealthy criminals destroy their families with lies and deceit. In other words, **they...go astray** in the most basic and important area of human relationships. Their evil is its own consequence.

On the contrary, those **who devise good** will receive from the Lord **kindness and truth** by means of those whom they have blessed. In other words, those to whom they have shown these attributes will reciprocate in like kind, showing them kindness and dealing with them truthfully. (Though there are always exceptions, e.g. Saul's treachery toward David, this is the general rule.) The Lord repays evil with evil and good with good.

"Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments;
¹⁰ but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will **repay** him to his face. (Deut. 7:9-10 NASB)

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, **eternal life**; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **wrath and indignation**. ⁹ *There will be tribulation and distress* for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but **glory and honor and peace** to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 2:5-10 NASB)

14: 32 The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing, But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.

This proverb supports the interpretation above that the consequence of evil can be the very evil itself. **Thrust down** is paired with **refuge**, indicating that there will be no safe place and no future for the wicked, in this life or the next. On the other hand, the **refuge** of the **righteous** is extended into the future beyond physical life. Those who hold the view that the OT saint had no concept of eternal life beyond the grave are confuted by such explicit promises of future blessing.

15: 3 The eyes of the LORD are in **every place**, Watching the evil and the good.

The folly of those who say, “There is no God” (Ps. 14: 1) and “How does God know” (Ps. 73: 11) is revealed in this proverb. Implicitly, the theology of God’s **omnipresence** (He is everywhere at all times) and **omniscience** (He knows everything) is established here (cf. Ps. 139), but also His **justice** and **righteousness**. What is unsaid in the proverb is still assumed. God not only **watches the evil and the good**, but He watches for the purpose of repaying the evil and the good. Why else would He watch? Moreover, the observation of man’s evil deeds provides the justification for the world’s destruction in the future, as in the days of Noah, as well as justification for the salvation of His people who honor Him by doing good. God is just, who will not judge the wicked without a perfect knowledge of their evil, nor will He reward the righteous without a perfect knowledge of their good.

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

15: 9 The way of the wicked	A	
is an abomination to the LORD,		B
But He loves		B
one who pursues righteousness.	A	

In this chiasmic arrangement, **pursues righteousness** is implied as the habitual lifestyle (“the way”) of those whom **the Lord...loves** as opposed to the **way of the wicked** which **is an abomination to the Lord**. Lest we misunderstand the Lord’s love as an earned commodity based on works, we must understand that the OT teaches salvation by grace, not works, as well as the NT, though the latter more explicitly and propositionally. “Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” but not the rest of humanity did not. Moreover, the Lord spoke to Abraham, but not his father Terah. The election of grace comes before the practice of grace which is righteousness.

We might also ask the question: “Is only the **way** of the wicked an abomination to the Lord, or are the wicked **themselves** also an abomination?” The bible also says,

"You shall have a full and just weight; you shall have a full and just measure, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. ¹⁶ "For **everyone** who does these things, **everyone** who acts unjustly is an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deut. 25:15-16 NASB)

He who justifies the wicked **and he** who condemns the righteous, **Both of them** alike are an abomination to the LORD. (Prov. 17:15 NASB)

The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And **the one who loves violence** His soul hates. (Ps. 11:5 NASB)

In Deut. 25:16, the fraudulent use of weights and measures to cheat someone in business cannot be disconnected from the person who is a fraud. **Everyone** who cheats his neighbor is himself an **abomination** to God. In Prov. 17: 15, people (court judges, primarily are in view) who condemn innocent people but acquit the guilty are themselves an **abomination to the Lord**. Moreover, God hates people who love violence. We recall that He once destroyed the whole world one time because it was "filled with violence" (Gen. 6: 11). Many other verses could be cited. Sin is a meaningless concept apart from the person who sins. Sins cannot find expression except through the sinners who commit them. But we get the impression from some preachers that God is smiling on the sinner in spite of his rebellion and lawlessness, thus giving thieves, liars, adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, et al, the false impression that they may continue these evil practices without consequences. After all, people say, "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." While it is true that God loves sinners and desires their salvation (Ezek. 18: 23), He will nevertheless send them to hell if they do not repent.

"I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (Lk. 12:4-5 NASB)

15: 14 The mind of the intelligent	A	
seeks knowledge,		B
But the mouth of fools	A	
feeds on folly.		B

In this ABAB forward parallel, **mind** and **mouth** are antithetically paired. While the **intelligent** man (the wise man) is intent on seeking more information about a situation and the biblical wisdom in dealing with it, **fools** are bent on mindlessly venting their own ignorance and listening to other fools (**feeds on folly**).

15: 21 Folly is joy	A	
to <u>him who lacks sense</u> ,		B
But <u>a man of understanding</u>		B
walks straight.	A	

Folly "is moral corruption from the standpoint of its impact on judgment and reason."²³¹ The man who **lacks sense** celebrates corruption and immorality; he rejoices in unrighteousness and lies (1 Cor. 13: 6). Thus, when the unrighteous man is able to successfully con (cheat) someone of their money through deception, the fool listens to his story with glee and laughter. In his mind, the victim is the fool, not the con-man who is wise in the ways of the world. The man of folly rejoices

²³¹ Waltke, p. 113, Vol. 1, quoting M.V. Fox, *Proverbs*
christcommunitystudycenter.org

with the fornicator who has been successful in robbing a girl of her virginity and with the adulterer who has been concealing a sexual affair from his or her spouse for an entire year undetected. Sin is funny to the fool; but come judgment day, in this life or the next or both, sin will be no laughing matter. God and Lady wisdom (wisdom personified) will have the last laugh.

And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof; ²⁶ **I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes,** ²⁷ When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, (Prov. 1:25-28 NASB)

The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. ¹³ **The Lord laughs at him,** For He sees his day is coming. (Ps. 37:12-13 NASB)

Walks [halak] straight is a metaphor for living according to God's law-word.

How blessed is the man who does not **walk [halak]** in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. (Ps. 1:1-2 NASB)

Aleph. How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who **walk [halak] in the law of the LORD.** (Ps. 119:1 NASB)

O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; Make Your way **straight [yashar]** before me. (Ps. 5:8 NASB)

Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed **straight [yashar]** in front of you. ²⁶ Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established. (Prov. 4:25-26 NASB)

John the Baptist, Paul, and the author of Hebrews all allude to the **straight** path of righteousness.

For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS **STRAIGHT!**'" (Matt. 3:3 NASB)

But Saul, who was also *known as* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, ¹⁰ and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, **will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?** (Acts 13:9-10 NASB)

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³ and **make straight paths for your feet**, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (Heb. 12:12-14 NASB)

The straight-walking person does not detour to the left or the right, but steadfastly fixes his gaze on God and His righteousness. He is focused, and he will reach the destination of holiness with the least amount of pain and suffering endured by others who are easily distracted from **the way**.

15: 29 The LORD is <u>far</u>	A	
from the wicked ,		B
But He <u>hears</u>	A	
the prayer of the righteous .		B

Far is antithetically paired with **hears**, thus implying that the Lord does not hear the prayers of the wicked, something explicitly stated in Prov. 1: 28 quoted above. Likewise, it may be confidently asserted that the Lord is near to the righteous, so near that He hears all their prayers and answers them according to their needs and His infinite wisdom.

17: 10 A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.

One who has understanding is sensitive to correction, and he will listen to it because he is humble enough to realize that wisdom is not a destination but a journey that will never end. He will always be in need of correction, and he **understands** this.

The **fool**, on the other hand, has reached the point at which he is not only insensitive to verbal **rebuke**, but cannot be corrected even with a severe beating that threatens his life. The **hundred blows** could be literal or a metaphor for imprisonment. As one who teaches biblical studies in a state prison, I am surrounded by fools who have continually refused correction; and yet, while I would like to believe that they are now ready to receive the word of God, the vast majority of them still have no use for it. (My bible studies are small, with maybe 20 participants out of the hundreds who would be permitted to attend.)

The proverb also brings to my mind the fools who continually get pulverized in bar brawls, but instead of staying away from the bar and **walking straight**, they simply return for more of the same punishment. They never seem to learn. Solemnly, the temporal punishment of **a hundred blows** foreshadows the eternal punishment awaiting those who would not listen to correction.

17: 11 A rebellious man seeks only evil, So a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

As the **rebellious man seeks...evil**, the **cruel messenger** will seek him out to deliver bad news. The bad news could be imprisonment or death from a king who is ordained by God to deliver justice.²³²

The fury of a king is *like* messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it. (Prov. 16:14 NASB)

The lawless man is always looking over his shoulder and expecting the police to show up; thus, he lives in slavery to fear. But this does not deter him from continuing his life of crime and debauchery as the **hundred blows** in 17: 10 indicate. He **seeks only evil** because his nature does not allow otherwise.

Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly. (Prov. 26:11 NASB)

After quoting this proverb, Peter adds another note, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:22 NASB). This is what dogs and pigs do, and it is what fools do.

18: 3 When a wicked man comes,	A	
contempt also comes,		B
And with dishonor	A	
<i>comes</i> scorn.		B

²³² Waltke, vol. 2, p. 52

There are two possible interpretations. When a wicked man shows up in the community, he brings his **contempt** and **scorn** for everyone else with him. (**Contempt** and **scorn** are synonymous B parallels.) The A parallels also indicate that the **wicked man** is also a man of **scorn**.

Another interpretation, the one I favor, is that the **contempt** and **scorn** is that of the community in its response to the wicked man. The community responds to the **wicked man** and his **dishonor** with the appropriate response of contempt and scorn.²³³ Ideally, the community is safe-guarded by a biblical world-view of God's law which defines what is good, true, beautiful, and honorable; and those who refuse to conform to this standard are held in contempt by the majority. But the social fabric of any community will only be as good as its source. Are its social ethics (norms) derived merely from traditions which are constantly changing in any modern society, or are they derived from divine revelation?

As belief in the authority of the Scriptures diminishes steadily in American culture, public evil no longer carries the burden of shame that it once did. To use two examples, pregnancy out of wedlock is no longer considered shameful, nor are unwed fathers shamed into owning up to their responsibilities toward their unborn children. Homosexuality, once hidden from view, is now open and flagrant, even politically favored and flaunted by the Democrat Party, the American media, and Hollywood—in other words, those with the most exposure to the American public. When the boundaries of morality are incrementally moved further and further from the center of biblical law, then the definitions of honor and morality no longer have any objective meaning. Morality and honor become what society currently says they are, awaiting further modifications with time and public opinion.

Contrary to popular opinion, *shame* is not always a bad thing. Paul uses the social constraints of shame in his instructions to the Corinthian church concerning the man committing incest with “his father's wife” (1 Cor. 5: 1).

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Cor. 5:9-11 NASB)

And what was the purpose of this ostracism (isolation) and shame?

I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.** (1 Cor. 5:5 NASB)

To fill in the context, keep in mind that the world Paul lived in was not the same as that of Solomon, the author of Proverbs 18: 3. Solomon lived within the covenant community of Israel where the law of God was the law of the land. While social behavior was far from perfect (witnessed by the degeneration of the kingdom and the idolatry which began in Solomon's reign and followed it), there was never any doubt about the standard for individual and social behavior—the law of Moses. Not so in the Greco-Roman world of Paul. Sexual immorality of all kinds was the norm, including fornication, homosexuality, adultery, pederasty (sexual immorality between adult men and young boys), and infanticide. Apparently, incest was not common (cf. 1 Cor. 5: 1). Since the Greek gods

²³³ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 70.

had been somewhat discredited by this time, belief in any kind of transcendent morality above man was suspect, leaving Greco-Roman society in moral uncertainty.

The church, of course, was a different community altogether under the rule of Christ who himself upheld the law of God in the OT (Matt. 5: 17, stated at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount which was an explication of the Law of Moses). So then, Paul calls upon the Corinthian church congregation—not merely its leadership, which is not mentioned in the passage—to take the man to task by revoking any familiar association with him until he came to repentance. In other words, shame was a powerful tool in the hands of the church to provoke repentance and the subsequent desire to be reunited with the faithful. This didn't mean they were supposed to despise him as a person, but that he was to be held in contempt for his behavior. The very discipline called for was an expression of love. It was not love to allow the man to continue in the sin of incest, thus committing him to the downward spiral of unbelief and damnation. If this was the same man mentioned in 2 Cor. 2, then Paul's purpose of bringing him to repentance and restoration was achieved with the censure of the majority of the congregation.

Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority,⁷ so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort *him*, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love for him. (2 Cor. 2:6-8 NASB)

19: 5 A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape.

Restricted to physical, temporal existence, this proverb obviously does not always hold true. In other words, it promises too much, namely, that God's justice will always be served in present time during the biological life of the **false witness** and the one **who tells lies**. Often these sinners will be punished during their life-times, but certainly not always. Some go to their graves without being discovered, and the frequency of their quiet demise casts doubt upon the retributive justice of God (cf. Ps. 73) However, the promises and warnings of Proverbs are never restricted to this life; otherwise, the complaints of Qohelet would be valid.

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. (Eccl. 7:15 NASB)

There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. (Eccl. 8:14 NASB)

Qohelet complains that the retributive justice taught in wisdom literature (e.g. Psalms and Proverbs) seems to be reversed in real life. God *should* punish the wicked and reward the righteous in this life, but often this seems to be reversed: He rewards the wicked and punishes the righteous. Likewise, Job, a righteous man by God's own testimony, had raised serious doubts about God's justice.

"It is *all* one; therefore I say, 'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'²³ "If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent."²⁴ "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; He covers the faces of its judges. If *it is* not *He*, then who is it? (Job 9:22-24 NASB)

In other words, God does not preserve the innocent during a plague (like Ebola) any more than he preserves the wicked. Righteous people are not immune from plagues. Moreover, wicked rulers

reign over the righteous to their harm. All of this is the hand of God, and if God is not in control, who is? Job himself was smitten with painful sores which his friends insisted were judgment for some sin he had committed. Job knew he was essentially innocent, something God's testimony in chapters 1-2 confirm.

20: 7 A righteous man who walks in his integrity—How blessed are his sons after him.

Every good parent wishes to leave a legacy to their children. Most people think of legacy in terms of money and property, and even the sage agrees that saving for one's children, rather than personal consumption, is a wise act.

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous. (Prov. 13:22 NASB)

But here, the wise man thinks in terms of **integrity**. What kind of name or reputation are we leaving our children? Will they be able to look back at the lives of their fathers and mothers and say, "They walked self-consciously in the presence of God. They sought His kingdom first"?

A *good* name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold. (Prov. 22:1 NASB)

The spiritual qualifications for elders are a good benchmark for every believer (1 Tim. 3: 2-7). As it stands, I don't believe I will be able to leave my children and grandchildren much material wealth. But what I hope to do is leave my children with pleasant memories of someone who—very imperfectly—followed the Lord and believed his promises. This is something within the capability of every Christian, including those who are poor in material wealth. Your children will be **blessed** far more than if you had left them great wealth with a poor reputation.

21: 7 The violence of the wicked will drag them away, Because they refuse to act with justice.

In this proverb, the **violence of the wicked** acts like a net catching fish. Those who threw the net for others are caught in their own net which **will drag them away**. The retributive justice toward the wicked will often consist of the "boomerang" effect of suffering *from* their own deeds. The violence they meant for others will come back upon them, like a boomerang comes back to the one who threw it. Waltke has cited the following "boomerang" verses in Proverbs.²³⁴

Indeed, it is useless to spread the *baited* net In the sight of any bird; ¹⁸ But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives. ¹⁹ So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors. (Prov. 1:17-19 NASB)

The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them. (Prov. 11:3 NASB)

The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way, But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness. ⁶ The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, But the treacherous will be caught by their own greed. (Prov. 11:5-6 NASB)

The righteous is delivered from trouble, But the wicked takes his place. (Prov. 11:8 NASB)

²³⁴ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 73

An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.
(Prov. 12:13 NASB)

The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways, But a good man will *be satisfied* with his.
(Prov. 14:14 NASB)

21: 8 The way of a guilty man is **crooked**, But as for the pure, his conduct is **upright**.

We might expect the comparison to be between **crooked** and **straight**. Most translations translate *yashar* as **upright** or **right**, but the word can be translated **straight** (from BibleWorks). Proverbs 2: 15 compares **crooked** to **devious** and 8: 8 likens it to **perverted**.

Whose paths are **crooked**, And who are **devious** in their ways; (Prov. 2:15 NASB)

"All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; There is nothing **crooked** or **perverted** in them.
(Prov. 8:8 NASB)

Looking to the NT, John the Baptist likened the ways of Christ as **straight** as opposed to **crooked**.

as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS **STRAIGHT**.⁵ 'EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE **CROOKED** WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;⁶ AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.'" (Lk. 3:4-6 NASB)

Straight is the opposite of perverted, devious, or twisted. The ways of the righteous are, therefore, **pure** or true. He has nothing to hide, and his words are not purposely ambiguous and misleading. In America, we have the expression of truth-telling as "shooting **straight**" with someone, saying what he means and meaning what he says. The wicked, on the other hand, attempt to mislead you with ambiguous speech full of twists in meaning and subtle nuances in order to throw you off balance and gain an advantage over you.

21: 10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; His **neighbor** finds no favor in his eyes.

We normally think of **neighbors** as those who live either next door or in the near vicinity, and this connotation can also be found in the OT.

Do not devise harm against your **neighbor**, While he lives securely **beside you**. (Prov. 3:29 NASB)

Neighbor in the Hebrew sense can also be understood as a fellow Israelite countryman.

'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against **the sons of your people**, but you shall love your **neighbor** as yourself; I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:18 NASB)

"You shall not bear false witness against your **neighbor**.¹⁷ "You shall not covet your **neighbor's** house; you shall not covet your **neighbor's** wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your **neighbor**." (Exod. 20:16-17 NASB)

Yet, the Law did not excuse mistreatment of outsiders who were not Hebrews. It protected everyone. This is clear from the commandments concerning **aliens** and **strangers**.

"So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:19 NASB)

"You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, whether *he is* one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. (Deut. 24:14 NASB)

"You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exod. 23:9 NASB)

The **wicked** has no regard for his neighbor or anyone but himself. The neighbor is someone to exploit for his own ends.

21: 12 The righteous one considers **the house of the wicked**, Turning the wicked to ruin.

Since believers are never instructed to take vengeance into their own hands, **the righteous one** can be none other than the Lord himself.²³⁵

'Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.' (Deut. 32:35 NASB)

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Rom. 12:19 NASB).

The curse of the LORD is on the **house of the wicked**, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. (Prov. 3:33 NASB)

The **wicked are overthrown** and are no more, But the house of the righteous will stand. (Prov. 12:7 NASB)

The **house of the wicked** will be destroyed, But the tent of the upright will flourish. (Prov. 14:11 NASB)

Notice in the last comparison that while the wicked may dwell more comfortably and affluently in a **house**, God's blessings will nevertheless flow to the less materially endowed **upright** man who dwells in a **tent**. Abraham was the friend of God (Isa. 41: 8) who inherited the land of Canaan, but he dwelled in tents as a pilgrim. All of God's people are strangers and aliens in this world (1 Pet. 2: 11), but we will one day inherit the earth (Matt. 5: 5).

21: 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!

Three things are essential for an act to be righteous: the right standard, the right motive, and the right goal. The right standard is the Law of God found in both the Old and New Testaments. The right motive is love for God and one's fellow man (these two things go hand in hand). The right goal is the glory of God and His kingdom. First and foremost, we must seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. To seek this kingdom, one must be given an evangelical faith. Not everyone has such faith; and, therefore, such a one is not capable of doing anything ultimately approved by God. "...for whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14: 23).

²³⁵ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 176

The Apostle Paul said that even if he surrendered his body to be burned as a sacrifice or gave away all his possessions to feed the poor, but did not have love (the right motive) his actions would not profit him (1 Cor. 13: 3). We may ask how someone could make such sacrifices without love toward God, but it happens. Buddhist monks have poured gasoline over themselves and made themselves human torches in protest of the oppression of certain people groups. Bill and Melinda Gates (who do not profess faith in Christ) have given away billions of dollars in medical and educational aid to poor countries.

Motive or **intent** is crucially important for an act to be good. This is why Paul says,

For **the mind set on the flesh** is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,⁸ and those who are in the flesh **cannot please God**. (Rom. 8:6-8 NASB)

Every act begins in the **mind**; and the mind set on the flesh, by definition, must have **evil motives and goals** associated with its acts. Perhaps Bill Gates gives money away in order to gain a reputation for generosity, or perhaps he is intent on gaining world-wide influence upon governmental policies—which, as a matter of fact, he has. Money buys influence, and a lot of money buys a lot of influence. Beyond any doubt, Gates aspires to the goal of a one-world government which supposedly can eradicate poverty and war, and this world order has no room for the Christian God. He is correct about one thing: A one world government is certainly coming. But the leader of this government will not be any member of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the Federal Reserve, or Bill Gates. His name is Jesus Christ.

It is especially evil for someone to pretend a religious **sacrifice** for the purpose of gaining an advantage over someone, thus using God and taking his name in vain. The most obvious example of this is Absalom, who pretended to honor a vow to the Lord in Hebron, all the while planning a rebellion against his father, David (2 Sam. 15: 7-13). The adulterous woman pretends piety to seduce her male fool (Prov. 7: 14-15), and the elders and nobles of Jezreel proclaimed a fast (to the Lord, we presume) pretending to ascertain the guilt or innocence of Naboth, accused of cursing God and Ahab (1 Kings 21).²³⁶ Sacrifices, or any form of religious worship devoid of heart obedience, is deplorable to God.

"*But* he who kills an ox is *like* one who slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb is *like* the one who breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain offering is *like one who offers* swine's blood; He who burns incense is *like* the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their *own* ways, And their soul delights in their abominations, (Isa. 66:3 NASB)

"For what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba And the sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable And your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me." (Jer. 6:20 NASB)

"Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; And I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. (Amos 5:22 NASB)

21: 29 A wicked man displays a bold face, But as for the upright, he makes his way sure.

²³⁶ References cited in Waltke, vol. 2, p. 189
christcommunitystudycenter.org

Since there is no substance to the **wicked**, they must veil their immoral activities with **bold** confidence, giving the appearance (**face**) of integrity and success. The **upright** cares nothing for outward appearances and the reputation for material success. He is not a man-pleaser. His only concern is that his **way** is in full accord with the laws and principles of righteousness. He has an audience of one, God.

22: 3 The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.

Hides himself does not mean cowardice, but caution and the avoidance of the unnecessary woes which come from associating with evil men—or evil women. The **naïve**, on the other hand, throw caution to the wind and plunge themselves unthinkingly into compromising situations where they will be harmed by others or by their own folly, like the foolish man seduced by the adulterous woman.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Cor. 15:33 NASB)

With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him.²² Suddenly **he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter**, Or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool,²³ Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, **So he does not know that it will cost him his life. (Prov. 7:21-23 NASB)**

The sage advises his student that one's intimate friends are important for his spiritual development.

He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Prov. 13:20 NASB)

22: 8 He who sows iniquity will reap vanity, And the rod of his fury will perish.

Another explicit proverb about sowing and reaping. The God of the universe balances the books, and He will pay back evil for evil and good for good. His justice demands it. For those saved by grace, His justice is served in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. However, in this world the believer must still suffer the consequences of his evil, as King David surely did. For the unbeliever, the books must be balanced at the end of the age when Christ reappears to recompense every man according to his deeds.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

Lest we think this applies only to unbelievers, Paul reminds us,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, **whether good or bad.** (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

What this negative recompense will look like for Christians, I am not prepared to say. Perhaps it will be the loss of future rewards.

The rod of his fury could refer to the oppression of rulers or rich men. Their oppressive power over others will not last forever, and they **reap vanity**, i.e. the nothingness of their man-made kingdoms.²³⁷ Tyrants often have a bad ending. Having ruled Romania with an iron fist, Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena wept and begged for mercy before a firing squad in 1990. Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Bolshevik revolution and responsible for countless murders, had an axe put through his head

²³⁷ Waltke, vol. 2, pp. 208-209

under the execution orders of Joseph Stalin. Stalin himself, toward the end of his life, slept in a different Kremlin bedroom each night to avoid assassination, but many theorists believe he was poisoned to death anyway. Hitler committed suicide in a bunker (unless you believe the latest theories), Idi Amin died in exile in Saudi Arabia, Muammar Qaddafi pleaded with his captors before they murdered him—and the list goes on.

No matter how they end up, man-made kingdoms will never last. The kingdoms of this world will crumble into dust before the stone cut without hands that becomes a great mountain (Dan. 2).

22: 12 The eyes of the LORD	A	
preserve knowledge,		B
But He overthrows		B
the words of the treacherous man.	A	

The eyes of the Lord are contrasted with **the words of the treacherous man**. The parallel implies that the words of the treacherous are not according to **knowledge** or truth; they will eventually be **overthrown** or proven to be false.

Throughout the history of man, there has been a great deal of misinformation, especially these days with social media and the major news media. Lies abound, and when lies are repeated endlessly, they become truth in the eyes of the unsuspecting public. The theory of evolution is one such lie which has been repeated so endlessly for a hundred and fifty years that most people believe it is true. Man-generated global warming is another such lie that is now accepted as fact in the absence of substantial evidence. Politicians in the US and elsewhere are masters of deceit to accomplish their own political and economic ends.

We can be thankful that God is a God of truth and that His **eyes** see things just as they are. Moreover, He desires that we see things as He does and that we know the truth—not simply spiritual truth that leads to salvation from sin, but **all** truth that relates to anything in the universe: science, politics, abortion, sexuality, et al. He will **preserve** the truth about any fact of the universe, while the pseudo-truth generated from lies and deceit, He will **overthrow**. Lies will not be preserved. “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

V. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

11: 9 With <u>his mouth</u> the godless man	A	
<u>destroys</u> his neighbor ,		B
But through <u>knowledge</u>	A	
the righteous will be <i>delivered</i> .		B

Waltke remarks,

The imprecise antithetical parallels imply that the neighbor is not righteous. Unfortified by righteousness, the unwary neighbor is led astray by manifestations of friendship and is destroyed, but the righteous, who have stored up knowledge (10:14), see through his mask (28: 11). By knowing what to say, how to express it, and when to speak (12: 6, 13; 14: 3), they save themselves from the trap.²³⁸

²³⁸ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 489

Through the wisdom (**knowledge**) which comes from the word of God, the **righteous** man can avoid some of the pitfalls of other **neighbors** who do not possess such knowledge. Thus, the sage is expressing one of the practical benefits of wisdom: it allows one to see through the deceit and false friendship of **the godless man** who wins someone's confidence only to betray them later. **The godless man destroys his neighbor** through slander and gossip within the community, false testimony in court, and deceit in the market place.

Once more, Proverbs offers an optimistic outcome for the righteous (**will be delivered**) which is generally true in this life but not always. Righteous people are also tricked (conned) into trusting someone who is leading them into a trap. Any of us can make unwise character judgments; I have made my share. We are not omniscient like God, and we may be fooled by many people whose motives are impure. Nevertheless, the proverb is generally true in this life, and absolutely true beyond this life. The righteous, however mistreated and tricked by unbelievers, will be forever delivered from evil in the life to come by their knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ.

11: 10 When it goes well with the righteous,
 the city rejoices,
 And when the wicked perish,
 there is joyful shouting.

11: 11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

The just fates of the righteous and the wicked cause the community to rejoice (v. 10) because its well-being depends on them.²³⁹

The well-being of any community, city, state, or nation depends on retributive justice: things **going well** for righteous, law-abiding people and things going poorly for ungodly, lawless people. When thieves, murderers, and rapists are apprehended and punished, the community rejoices, and rightly so. For if the fates of the righteous and the wicked are reversed—the righteous **perish** while the wicked prosper—there will be no community or national incentive for fairness, justice, honor, truth, industry, or any number of virtues which ensure the quality of life and safety of society. On the contrary, the law of the jungle will predominate in which people are pessimistic about the prospects of bettering their own lives and the lives of their loved ones through hard work.

One example of this pessimism is a situation I encountered while living in Mbarara, Uganda. An African neighbor of mine succeeded in growing a cash crop of corn only to have his bumper crop stolen by thieves. He had little incentive to try again since he had little hope of protecting it in the future. Societies in which private property is not well-protected do not prosper; they remain poor.

The Apostle Paul gives us a prescriptive explanation of the obligations of civil government.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of

²³⁹ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 491

God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. (Rom. 13:1-5 NASB)

When Paul wrote this, Nero was the Caesar in Rome, one of the most ruthless, insane killers ever to occupy this position. But Paul was speaking *prescriptively* rather than *descriptively*. The civil authority *should* be **an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil**, although at times it actually brings wrath on those who are righteous. However, there is no perfect government, and believers should submit themselves to civil laws to the extent that their consciences excuse them from these laws under the higher law of God—**for conscience' sake**. We must obey God rather than man (Acts 4: 19). But thankfully, because law-makers are made in God's image and have the work of the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2: 15), most civil laws are protective of private property and persons. To the extent that they are consistently enforced, the whole society or nation rejoices; when they are inconsistent with God's laws or when good laws are inconsistently enforced, the nation suffers. Other proverbs bear out the same truth.²⁴⁰

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves. (Prov. 28:12 NASB)

When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; But when they perish, the righteous increase. (Prov. 28:28 NASB)

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan. (Prov. 29:2 NASB)

When the wicked increase, transgression increases; But the righteous will see their fall. (Prov. 29:16 NASB)

But, one may ask, how is **joyful shouting** consistent with the nature of God who says that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked?

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, '**I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked**, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?' (Ezek. 33:11 NASB)

We may as well ask why Moses and Israel sang a song about the drowning of the Egyptian army (Ex. 15). Rejoicing in the just retribution of God is not the same as rejoicing over the wicked person per se.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;¹⁸ Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him. (Prov. 24:17-18 NASB)

Rather, the perishing of the wicked is evidence that God's justice is avenged and still prevails in a world partially ruined by injustice. In spite of the fact that God sometimes seems to overlook evil (Ps. 73), the regular demise of the wicked reminds us that He is still in control of His universe and that just as we can be confident that night follows day and spring follows summer, we can be confident that God still rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. If He didn't, life would be impossible to endure.

²⁴⁰ All verses cited by Waltke, vol. 1, p. 491
christcommunitystudycenter.org

- 11: 12 He who *despises* his neighbor lacks sense, A
 But a man of understanding **keeps silent**. B
- 11: 13 He who *goes about as a talebearer* reveals secrets, A
 But he who is trustworthy **conceals a matter**. B

The structure indicates a dual proverb counseling us against gossip and slander. **Despises** is antithetically parallel (an antonym, different) to **keeps silent** but synonymous to (the same) **goes about as a talebearer**. Thus, if we go about as gossips and slanderers we despise our neighbor as well as demonstrate our own **lack of sense**. **Keeps silent** and **conceals a matter** are synonymously parallel—that is, they reflect the same thought—and the terms are grouped with two positive characteristics: **understanding** and **trustworthy**. Unless the information about a person reveals illegal activity, we must ask ourselves how we can help this person. Rather than revealing his **secrets** to others as a matter of casual conversation, we should remain **silent** or **conceal a matter**. The righteous man must always attempt to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

As always, we have to qualify these proverbs with other biblical data, particularly the biblical mandate to confront sin in our brother (Matt. 18: 15-20). The proverb does not counsel us to ignore sin. But notice that the first two steps in Matthew do not consist in telling *others* about the brother's sin, but confronting him privately. If all else fails, the matter must be reported to the whole church—assuming that the matter has *sufficient weight* to harm the sinner, the one sinned against, and the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5).

- 11: 14 Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory.
 15: 22 Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.

The sage acknowledges the division of gifts (abilities) in society. There are those who have the ability to lead (**counselors**) and those who make loyal and effective followers (**the people**) who carry out effective policy decisions. A fully democratic society in which everyone takes equal part in making decisions for the society as a whole is an impossible myth. No such society can exist because the average “Joe” and “Debbie” are too busy conducting their own affairs to do the painstaking research on pending legislation. (For that matter, too many US legislators are too busy funding their next campaigns to even read the pending bills, much less think about how they might affect the country.)

The sage also recognizes the importance of the relative *decentralization* of decision-making. *One* individual rarely has sufficient information and expertise to make all decisions. This is why even ancient kings had multiple counselors (some good and some bad) helping them make and execute decisions (**plans**). Presidents have cabinet members, MP's, and congressmen. Senior pastors have a plurality of elders (although the scriptures do not mention the term “senior elder”). Moreover, the leaders in one segment of social life may not be qualified to lead in another segment. Political leaders and business leaders are not necessarily the best candidates to serve as church elders—although it would be difficult to convince the average Presbyterian or Anglican of this fact. Not all elders would be qualified for political office. The military is another category requiring different leadership skills. I would not wish to have a modern day George Patton (famous US general during WWII known for crudity and lack of compassion) as my pastor.

The bottom line is that the Bible recognizes that people need leadership. Leadership is woven into the fabric of society, insinuating itself at every level: family, church, business, and government. A leaderless society is a social myth propagated by Marxist utopian hopes of a society lead by the

proletariat (working class) without the need for a hierarchical government. When the Marxist experiment has been extended to its ultimate conclusions, it has always ended badly.

There are many who believe that *social justice* requires everyone on the planet to be equal to everyone else on the planet. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of *egalitarianism* is:

1. a belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs
2. a social philosophy advocating **the removal of inequalities** among people (emphasis mine).

According to Wikipedia:

The term *egalitarianism* has two distinct definitions in modern English, either as a political doctrine that all people should be treated as equals and have the same political, economic, social and civil rights, or as a social philosophy advocating **the removal of economic inequalities among people, economic egalitarianism**, or decentralization of power. Some sources define egalitarianism as equality reflecting the natural state of humanity (bold emphasis mine.)

It is one thing to recognize that God created everyone equal in terms of their image. All men and women are created in the image of God and are, therefore, equal in dignity and worth before God. All Christians are equal in worth before God in terms of their being loved by God before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1: 1-4). It is quite another thing to say that everyone is equal in terms of *opportunity and outcome*. Equal opportunity should be provided, as much as humanly possible, by laws which protect people against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, and so forth. The civil rights movement in the US has gone to great lengths to ensure that African Americans have the same social, economic, and educational opportunities as white people. There is still much more to be done, but things have changed for the better since the 1960's, despite the rhetoric of many who would argue that black people in the US are no better off today than they were then. The facts argue otherwise. But the absolute equality of opportunity is impossible to provide. Does a native living in the jungles of Irian Jaya have the same opportunities as someone living in the US or some other western country? A person must also possess a certain level of ability to take advantage of opportunities.

Equal *outcome* is yet another problem. People with equal opportunities will use those opportunities *unequally* based upon their differences in intelligence, ambition, and circumstances. One person may not have the energy and drive of the other to accomplish his goals. He may not have any goals at all except to get from one day to the next, while the other has the initiative to take the opportunities he has and bring them to fruition in accomplished goals. People not only have the freedom to succeed but also the freedom to fail. Moreover, a person with a very high IQ who is born to poor parents will not have the same opportunity to take advantage of his intelligence by going to an elite university that cost tens of thousands of dollars each year.

Should we then, by government mandate, take away the wealth of those who used their opportunities wisely and redistribute this wealth to those who failed to use their opportunities? Are we obligated as a nation to redistribute the rich man's wealth through taxation so that his child and the poor man's child can each go to less prestigious universities? In doing so, it is believed that we will achieve equal *outcome* for all. This is the philosophy of socialism which reaches its logical conclusion in communism. Everyone will be equal economically, socially, and politically; but historically, this equality in socialist and communist countries has never occurred. Although everyone is considered equal, some are a tad "more equal than others." A bureaucratic elite always arises to impose their will upon the masses, and always for their own good, leading to

totalitarianism, violence, and bondage of the common people who have no access to power. At least 70 million people in China were murdered (either by firing squad or starvation) during the communist revolution led by Mao Zedong (Tse Tung), and at least 40 million were murdered under the administration of Josef Stalin. The trend seems to always be from more freedom to less freedom even in so-called democratic societies like the US which is becoming increasingly socialistic. Nevertheless, so far the flow of political refugees has always been **to** the US rather than **from** it. The US is possibly the worst country on earth according to the media and academic elite. This may be true unless we take all the other countries under consideration.

When considering equality, we must ever consider the providential ways of God in distributing his gifts and wealth. God does not provide everyone with either equal opportunity or with equal outcome. God distributes ability and wealth however he pleases to accomplish his sovereign will for mankind. I don't know why I was born in the wealthy US with opportunities for education and the mental intelligence to take advantage of them while my brothers in Africa—with equal ability and intelligence—were born in poor countries providing few educational and economic opportunities. But I do know that at the end of the age, God's wise distribution will be fully justified.

12: 26 The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked leads them astray.

See under *V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

13: 23 Abundant food *is in* the fallow ground of the poor, But it is swept away by injustice.

See under *S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich*

14: 20 The poor is hated even by his neighbor, But those who love the rich are many.

14: 21 He who despises his neighbor sins, But happy is he who is gracious to the poor.

See under *F. Generosity and Greed*

14: 28 In a multitude of people is a king's glory, But in the dearth of people is a prince's ruin.

An increasing population (as opposed to **dearth** or scarcity) measures the success of the king's protection of life and property through the wise administration of law and order. It also measures his resolve to defend his people from foreign intruders. Decreasing population indicates that the nation may be overcome by intruding armies, famine, or domestic violence which the king or prince may have been able to prevent.

The burgeoning population of Uganda under Museveni's thirty-four-year rule indicates a safer country during than his predecessors, Idi Amin and Obote. From 1986 to 2020, the population has risen from 15 million to 48 million, not a likely possibility if war, disease, famine and lawlessness had been the norm. Love him or hate him, Uganda as a whole has prospered under his regime. However, wages for the working man have remained stagnant for many years while the value of the Uganda shilling has been cut in half and prices have doubled. But this has also been true to a lesser extent in the US.

14: 31 He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

See under *F. Generosity and Greed*

14: 34 Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to *any* people.

We normally think of **righteousness** and **sin** in terms of individuals, not nations. Perhaps this is the result of western-style individualism becoming more ubiquitous (wide-spread) in many developing-world countries. We seem to forget that God judged Israel and Judah as **nations** for the sin of idolatry and the mistreatment of the poor, orphan, and widow (Amos and Isaiah). He judged Sodom and Gomorrah as cities, and he will judge the nations who participate in the immorality of Babylon (a metaphor for the evil world system at the end of the age. Rev. 14: 8; 18: 3). Before the coming of Christ, Satan was permitted to deceive whole nations (Rev. 20: 3), and he will be allowed to do so once more just before Christ returns (20: 8).

If law and order, fairness and justice, are common characteristics of a nation, it will be exalted in the eyes of citizens of other nations. But when corruption is rampant, and there is no justice except for those who can bribe judges, the whole nation suffers disgrace in the eyes of other nations. The US is both honored and despised by other nations. On the one hand, it is known as the greatest benefactor in the world with the biggest economy. On the other, the sins of the US are broadcast abroad to every nation on earth in newscasts, TV, and movies. The US is known as a nation preoccupied with money, sex, power, and abortion; and, to some extent, this is true. The danger is in painting every American with the same brush, as if everyone is just alike. There are many God-fearing people in the US, and it is my hope that God may give us more time to repent and to revive our nation for the sake of his elect ones in the US.

In his letter to Titus, Paul makes a surprising generalization about the Cretan culture.

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain.¹² One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."¹³ **This testimony is true.** For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, (Tit. 1:10-13 NASB)

While we cannot interpret Paul's words as allowing no exceptions, we may interpret him as saying that the Cretan culture had earned the dubious reputation of being an immoral people. Likewise, African men who spend a lot of time in the market-place visiting with friends and playing cards, while allowing their wives to do most of the work in the fields with their babies strapped to their backs, have earned the reputation from western tourists for being lazy. This doesn't mean all African men are lazy—I know many hard-working Africans—but that there is a sufficient number of lazy African men giving justification to this generalization.

The truth of the matter is that every nation on earth is a mixed bag when it comes to righteousness and sin. At the same time, there is no equivalence in the matter. Some nations are more evil and less righteous than others due to the assimilation of the gospel into cultural life or the lack of it. The flow of refugees from east to west prove this point eloquently. To deny this lack of equivalence forces us to say that justice, fairness, and freedom are observed in Afghanistan and North Korea as often as they are in Uganda or the US. But any honest observer who has lived in Afghanistan, North Korea, or any other Muslim or communist dominated nation will testify otherwise—regardless of what the liberal media or academics say.

Implicit in the proverb is that there is an objective definition of **righteousness** and **sin** which may be applied to any culture. The objective standard is not cultural consensus (agreement) of what is right or wrong, but what **God** says is right or wrong. If there is no objective standard, then righteousness and sin is what any culture or individual says it is. Years ago, Google came up with a motto for the company which said, “Do no evil”, without anyone defining what evil is. The reason it was not defined is that the founders of Google just assumed that evil was what they *believed* it was. This broad definition left the door open for Google to insinuate ideas into people’s heads by editing the ideological/political material it allowed consumers to view, thus affecting not what people bought but who they voted for. When there is no objective standard of righteousness and sin, anything goes.

14: 35 The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely, But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully.

Once more, **wisely** and **shamefully** need to be defined, and the sage assumes the reader knows that God’s law is the objective standard. The actions of a king’s **servant** reflect upon the character and actions of the king because he represents the king. If he acts foolishly, the king shares in his shame, but if he acts wisely, the king’s name is honored. David shared in the shame of Joab’s murder of Abner even though he attempted to distance himself from his action (2 Sam. 3).

Likewise, Christ’s servants bring him either honor or shame by their actions, and He will bless us for wise actions and discipline us for shameful ones.

16: 11 A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern.

16: 12 It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, For a throne is established on righteousness.

16: 13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings, And he who speaks right is loved.

16: 14 The fury of a king is *like* messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it.

16: 15 In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain.

See under *H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority*

16: 27 A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire.

16: 28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

16: 29 A man of **violence** entices his neighbor And leads him in a way that is not good.

Once more, the sage advises his student to keep good company. This is poetically described in the father’s admonition to his son in Prov. 1.

My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. ¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, **Let us lie in wait for blood**, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; ¹² Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; ¹³ We will find all *kinds* of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil; ¹⁴ Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse," ¹⁵ My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, ¹⁶ For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood. (Prov. 1:10-16 NASB)

17: 2 A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, And will share in the inheritance among brothers.

See under *Q. Marriage and Family—the Home*

17: 5 He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

See under *S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich*

17: 9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

17: 14 The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

17: 15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

See under *M. The Two Ways—the Righteous and the Wicked*

17: 17 A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.

See under *E. Friendship*

17: 18 A man lacking in sense pledges And becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor.

See under *R. Observations of Human Nature*

17: 19 He who loves transgression	A	
loves strife;		B
He who raises his door	A	
seeks destruction.		B

A person who enjoys sinning (**transgression**) also enjoys the turmoil and chaos (**strife**) that accompanies sin. It is difficult to imagine why a person would **love strife** rather than tranquility; but regardless of his stated preferences, if he pursues the path of sin, his actions testify that he also finds satisfaction in the **strife** that accompanies sin. In contrast, the ways of Lady Wisdom are peaceful.

Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace. (Prov. 3:17 NASB)

The second part of the proverb is even more difficult. **Raises his door** may be a cultural expression for building a large house to impress one's neighbors and exalt oneself above the poor.²⁴¹

Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling. (Prov. 16:18 NASB)

Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, But humility goes before honor. (Prov. 18:12 NASB)

By so exalting himself, he **seeks destruction** by inviting the attention of thieves or enemies. Alternatively, **seeks destruction** may be a reference to his own exploitation of the poor.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 58. Verses also cited by Waltke

²⁴² Waltke, p. 58

17: 23 A wicked man receives a **bribe** from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.

18: 16 A man's **gift** makes room for him And brings him before great men.

See under *Y. Truth and Deception*

17: 26 It is also not good to fine the righteous, *Nor* to strike the noble for *their* uprightness.

18: 5 To show partiality to the wicked is not good, *Nor* to thrust aside the righteous in judgment.

Just as bribery is a perversion of justice (17: 23), it is also a perversion of justice when the innocent (righteous) are punished (**to fine** or **to strike** or flog). The execution of Naboth is one example. If such perversion is systemic in a society, then the society is turned upside down; its lawful citizens go into hiding and the lawless rule the day.

A modern-day example of these proverbs is the case of David Daleiden of California (USA) who carried hidden video cameras into the offices of Planned Parenthood, documenting evidence that the organization was selling body parts of aborted babies. Rather than prosecute Planned Parenthood, Kamala Harris, attorney general of California and now vice-president elect of the US, charged Daleiden with a felony and threw him in jail for illegally recording the conversations of Planned Parenthood employees.

18:1 He who separates himself seeks *his own* desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

18: 6 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

18: 17 The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him.

18: 18 The *cast* lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.

See under *R. Observations of Human Nature*

18: 23 The poor man utters supplications, But the rich man answers roughly.

I know several rich people who are humble, generous, and eager to help others. Therefore, the proverb cannot be taken as a blanket condemnation of all rich people, and we must be careful not to do so. Job was a rich man accused by his “friend” Zophar of oppressing the poor; and now God was punishing Job for past mistreatment of the poor (Job 20: 19). But Job denies this accusation.

"For when the ear heard, it called me blessed, And when the eye saw, it gave witness of me,¹² Because **I delivered the poor who cried for help, And the orphan who had no helper.**¹³ **"The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me, And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.**¹⁴ "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban.¹⁵ **"I was eyes to the blind And feet to the lame.**¹⁶ **"I was a father to the needy, And I investigated the case which I did not know.**¹⁷ "I broke the jaws of the wicked And snatched the prey from his teeth. (Job 29:11-17 NASB)

The reader knows that Job's claim is true by the very fact that God calls Job, who was rich, “a blameless and upright man” at the very beginning of the book.

The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, **a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.**" (Job 1:8 NASB)

Many wealthy people are righteous. Nonetheless, rich people have often deserved the charge of apathy and **rough** treatment of those who are poor, disadvantaged, and unable to defend themselves against false accusations in court. The scriptures are abounding with evidence of this. James admonishes the church for showing favoritism to the rich and contempt for the poor.

Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. **Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?** (Jas. 2:5-6 NASB)

The OT prophets characteristically warned the rich for injustice against the poor.

Woe to those who enact evil statutes And to those who constantly record unjust decisions, ² **So as to deprive the needy of justice And rob the poor of My people of *their* rights, So that widows may be their spoil And that they may plunder the orphans.** ³ Now what will you do in the day of punishment, And in the devastation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth? (Isa. 10:1-3 NASB)

"But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness...if a man does not oppress anyone, but **restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing,** ⁸ **if he does not lend *money* on interest or take increase, if** he keeps his hand from iniquity *and* executes true justice between man and man, ⁹ *if* he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous *and* will surely live," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 18:5, 7-9 NASB)

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, **Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,** Who say to your husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!" (Amos 4:1 NASB)

Therefore **because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them, Though** you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. ¹² For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, *You* who distress the righteous *and* **accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.** (Amos 5:11-12 NASB)

The Apostle Paul warns masters to treat their slaves—many of whom were Christians—with dignity and gentleness.

And masters, do the same things to them, and **give up threatening,** knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Eph. 6:9 NASB)

Masters, **grant to your slaves justice and fairness,** knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. (Col. 4:1 NASB)

What was Paul's reason for such instructions unless it was common for masters to treat slaves unfairly?

19: 4 Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend.

See under *S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich*

19: 12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass.

See under *H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority*

19: 22 What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.

See under *B. The Better...Than Proverbs*

19: 28 A rascally [*beliyyaal*] witness makes a mockery of justice, And the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity.

There are many proverbs concerning false witnesses.

A false [*sheqer*] witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape. (Prov. 19:5 NASB)

A false [*sheqer*] witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will perish. (Prov. 19:9 NASB)

Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false [*sheqer*] witness against his neighbor. (Prov. 25:18 NASB)

In this particular proverb, the word *beliyyaal* is translated **rascally** in the NASB. In other places it is translated **worthless**.

A **worthless** [*beliyyaal*] person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, (Prov. 6:12 NASB)

A **worthless** [*beliyyaal*] man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire. (Prov. 16:27 NASB)

Considering these verses together, the witness who tells lies is a **worthless** witness. He is a drain on society, a corrupting influence that hinders the triumph of truth and justice and offers no positive contribution to the good of his community or nation.

A very interesting legislation concerning false witnesses is found in Deut. 19.

"If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing,¹⁷ then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days.¹⁸ "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely,¹⁹ then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.²⁰ "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.²¹ "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deut. 19:16-21 NASB)

Thus, the false witness will be served the same sentence of the falsely accused. If he gives a false witness of murder which would have resulted in the execution of the accused, then he, the false witness, will be executed. Needless to say, such legislation, if consistently applied, would minimize false accusations within society. As it is, it is too easy simply to accuse someone you hate of a crime he didn't commit knowing that you will face no consequences other than probation or fines. At the most, committing perjury (lying) for a federal crime may result up to five years in prison, but this is a far cry from being punished with the same sentence as the accused.

We have had many such **rascally witnesses** lately in the US, as high up as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (James Comey, Andrew McCabe, et al) and the major news media—CNN, ABC, CBS, National Public Radio—and the leaders of the Democrat Party—Nancy Pelosi, Adam Schiff, et al. All of these have for four years attempted to slander President Trump on false claims of collusion with Russia. The Russia collusion story fell apart with the Mueller investigation, although 40% of the American public still believe President Trump conspired with the Russians to steal the election from Hillary Clinton. Although Mueller came up with nothing, when the public hears lies from the American media enough times, the lies become truth. Will they get away with their false witness? Probably, because justice seems to be in short supply for powerful people in the US. But God is bigger than the American media or politicians, and THE truth, whatever it is, will one day be known. How? Because every man and woman will appear before the judgment seat of God to give an account of his actions.

20: 8 A king who sits on the throne of justice Disperses all evil with his eyes.

20: 26 A wise king winnows the wicked, And drives the *threshing* wheel over them.

See under *H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority*

20: 16 Take his garment when he becomes **surety for a stranger**; And for foreigners, hold him in **pledge**.

Other proverbs make the present one more understandable.

My son, if you have become **surety** for your neighbor, Have given a **pledge for a stranger**,² If you have been snared with the words of your mouth, Have been caught with the words of your mouth,³ Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor.⁴ Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids;⁵ Deliver yourself like a gazelle from *the hunter's* hand And like a bird from the hand of the fowler. (Prov. 6:1-5 NASB)

The picture is that of co-signing a loan for someone you don't even know (a **stranger**). If the borrower cannot or will not pay back the loan, then the party who co-signed will be held liable for the loan. The idea in 20: 16 is that if you are foolish enough to guarantee repayment of a loan for a stranger whose character is unproven to you, then you deserve to have your property (held as collateral by the lender) taken away from you (**take his garment**).²⁴³

20: 18 Prepare plans by consultation, And make war by wise guidance.

Another proverb advising us to seek the wisdom of others when making important decisions. No one except God knows everything there is to know. Implicitly, the proverb leaves room for the declaration of a just **war**. A just war is one in which a country is protecting itself against foreign intruders. War is not justified simply when a nation's president, congress, or parliament decide to take a nation to war. Many wars have been fought with little or no justification simply to enrich wealthy and powerful men who finance such wars. Possibly, most of the wars that have been waged in the history of mankind have fit into this category.²⁴⁴

20: 19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

²⁴³ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 145

²⁴⁴ See G. Edward Griffin, *The Creature from Jekyll Island*. This is a history of the creation of the Federal Reserve of the US.

A clear warning not to keep company with people who go about revealing other people's business. In Paul's catalog of sins in Romans 1, the sin of gossip is placed alongside the sins of homosexuality.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.²⁶ For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,²⁷ and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are gossips,*³⁰ *slanderers,* haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;³² and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:25-32 NASB)

20: 28 Loyalty and truth preserve the king, And he upholds his throne by righteousness.

See under *H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority*

21: 1 The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

See under *G. God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility*

21: 10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.

See under *V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

21: 15 The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous, But is terror to the workers of iniquity.

The righteous rejoice when innocent victims are avenged for injustices committed against them. This does not imply impious, happy celebration over a murderer's execution, but the quiet rejoicing grounded in the avenging of God's holiness and the upholding of his law. But **the workers of iniquity** run scared when their lawless friends are discovered and punished, for they may be next in line. And in a just society their lawless friends *would* be next because in a just society evil is punished. To repeat Romans 13,

For rulers are not a cause of **fear** for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Rom. 13:3-4 NASB)

In contrast to the righteous who rejoice in justice, the wicked rejoice in the evil inflicted upon the innocent and their cleverness in getting away with their evil deeds.

Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; (Prov. 2:14 NASB)

Their laughter will be short-lived.

22: 11 He who loves purity of heart *And* whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

22: 16 He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself Or who gives to the rich, *will only come to poverty.*

See under *S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich*

X. Speech as a Reflection of Character

10: 6 **Blessings** are on the head of the righteous,
But the **mouth of the wicked conceals violence.**

10: 7 The memory of the righteous is blessed,
But the name of the wicked will rot.

10: 8 The wise of heart will **receive commands**,
But a **babbling fool will be ruined.**

10: 9 He who **walks in integrity** walks securely,
But he who **perverts his ways** will be found out.

10: 10 He who winks the eye **causes trouble**,
And a **babbling fool will be ruined.**

10: 11 The **mouth of the righteous** is a fountain of life,
But the **mouth of the wicked conceals violence.**

10: 12 Hatred **stirs up** strife,
But love **covers** all transgressions.

Notice all the bodily parts mentioned in these verses: **heart, head, mouth, eye**. The words **walks** and **ways** imply the legs. A man's total being (most often represented by the heart) is revealed in the ways he uses his body, particularly his mouth. Paul tells believers in Rome not to present their bodies to unrighteousness but to righteousness (Rom. 6: 13), and Jesus says that a man's character is partly known by what comes out of his mouth (Matt. 15: 19, "slanders").

Prov. 10: 6 has an imprecise antithetical parallel in which the **violence** concealed in the **mouth of wicked** is contrasted to the **blessings** associated with the righteous. The righteousness of the righteous man is doubtless demonstrated in his speech which brings healing as opposed to the deceptive speech of the wicked which **conceals violence** and is harmful to the community. The favorable reputation of the righteous man will live after him in the **memory** of the community while the **name of the wicked** will be forgotten (**rot**) (10: 7)

A **babbling fool** (10: 8) is always talking, but never listening and **receiving commands**. Therefore, he comes to ruin because he never listens to wise counsel. The person who receives commands is the same who **walks in integrity**, while the babbling fool **perverts his ways**. He will be **found out** because the ways of a fool will become a public spectacle in the community. A man's **ways** and his **mouth** are connected. Both are either wise or foolish.

Winking the eye may have been a secret signal to someone who was a partner in deception.

16: 30 He who winks his eyes *does so* to devise perverse things; He who compresses his lips brings evil to pass.

He who winks the eye is synonymous with **the mouth of the wicked** which **conceals violence**. Both forms of communication are hypocritical, deceptive, and harmful to others. On the other hand, **the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life**.

The dependence of life on water is experienced existentially all over the earth, especially in the ancient Near East, where it is in short supply. Flowing well water is particularly precious (cf. Jer. 2: 13), and people gather around it. The open, benevolent speech of the righteous is just as necessary for a community, offering everyone abundant life—temporal, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. The right word, spoken at the right time (15: 23) and in the right way (15: 1; 17; 27), supports or corrects a community in a way that promotes its life. Whereas a community gathers around the open speech of the unselfish person in order to live, *the mouth...of the wicked...hypocritically conceals violence....*²⁴⁵

Several proverbs employ the phrase, “fountain of life”.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, To turn aside from the snares of death. (Proverbs 13:14 NASB)

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death. (Proverbs 14:27 NASB)

Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, But the discipline of fools is folly. (Proverbs 16:22 NASB)

All these things—**understanding, fear of the Lord, and teaching**—find their source in God, thus supporting the general theme of Proverbs at the beginning. **The mouth of the righteous** qualifies as a **fountain of life** to the extent that its speech conforms to the wisdom and fear of God. This is the awesome responsibility and privilege of those who teach, preach, and counsel others with the principles of God’s word. Contrary to much Christian opinion, God has never spoken frequently to His people with audible words. In the history of redemption, only a small number were blessed with any kind of direct communication—Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David, Solomon, Paul, etc. And much of the communication with the prophets was inferior to His communication with Moses, a type of Christ.

He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream."⁷ "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?" (Numbers 12:6-8 NASB)

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2 NASB)

As the author of the Pentateuch, Moses is in some sense God’s first published word to mankind. Certainly, God spoke first to Adam and Eve, but the record of this communication is given by

²⁴⁵ Waltke, I, pp. 460-461

Moses. In Christ, God **has spoken to us in His Son**. This means that Christ Himself is God's direct communication of His will and the way of salvation—the Word of God incarnate in human flesh (Jn. 1). One may then question why the rest of the NT is necessary. It is necessary because God left it to the apostles and prophets of the NT to supply the essential explanation of the work of Christ. The revelation of the NT is interwoven with and dependent upon the final revelation of Christ. God also communicated directly with the apostles (Acts 10: 13-15; Gal. 1: 15-19, Paul's story of how he received the gospel; Acts 18: 9-10).

It is therefore, unnecessary for God to communicate with us directly or audibly. We have sufficient revelation in the Old and New Testaments and the aid of the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds to understand and apply this revelation.

Returning to the proverb, the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life in that it helps the hearer understand and know God and His will, and this leads the person to the source of life in God alone. By contrast **the mouth of the wicked conceals violence** because the counsel of the wicked always leads ultimately to death.

While the **hatred** of the babbling fool **stirs up strife**, the **love** of the righteous **covers all transgressions**.

love...cherishes the wrongdoer as a friend to be won, not as an enemy with whom to get even (1: 22)...Instead of placing the transgressor on stage and withdrawing the veil to expose his faults (see 17: 9) and so exact revenge, love endures his wrongs to reconcile him and save him from death (cf. 25: 21-22; 1 Cor. 13: 4-7; Jas. 5: 20) and to preserve the peace (cf. Prov. 19: 11). Love withdraws the burning wood of gossip (17: 9; 26: 20-21), but the quarrelsome and hot-tempered fuel the conflict into disastrous proportions, producing still further transgressions (26: 21-22). The saying must be held in tension with the truth that a spiritual friend corrects the sinful offender (cf. Lev. 19: 17; Prov. 7:6; Gal. 6: 1).²⁴⁶

10: 13 On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.

10: 14 Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.

Continuing the theme of speech and its consequences, **On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found** in the same way that good fruit is found on the branches of a good tree. The remaining part of the parallel is imprecise, dealing with the consequences of lacking wisdom (Prov. 26: 3). The parallel is connected to the previous verses by body parts: **lips** and **back** as we have seen in 10: 6-12.

Verse 13 is related to v. 14 through logical inference. The reason **wise men** have wisdom on the “tip of their tongue”, so to speak, is that these wise men **store up knowledge** so that they may be able to give the proper response extemporaneously (unrehearsed).

10: 18 He who conceals hatred *has* **lying lips**, And he who spreads **slander** is a fool.

10: 19 When there are **many words**, transgression is unavoidable, But he who **restrains his lips** is wise.

10: 20 The **tongue** of the righteous is *as* choice silver, The heart of the wicked is *worth* little.

10: 21 The **lips** of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.

²⁴⁶ Waltke, I, p. 461.

This is another grouping of proverbs dealing with the tongue.

In 10: 18,

The construction leaves no doubt that hatred inspires slander informed by innuendoes, half-truths, and facts distorted and exaggerated beyond recognition (cf. 6: 17, 19). In other words, this fool spreads slander, concealing his hatred with lying lips.²⁴⁷

The proverb begins by implicitly criticizing those who keep their hatred of another from that person. Such people by definition are liars since they do not express their dislike for the other person. Colon 2, however, intensifies the offense since slanderers may continue to conceal their hate from the object of their hate, but they say negative things about that person to others. Proverbs understands that it is important to be open and honest with one's words. If there is a legitimate gripe about something, the wise person will rebuke the other, with the purpose of helping and restoring relationship. Here, however, there is no intention other than to hurt, belittle, or demean the other person. Through such actions, relationships are destroyed.²⁴⁸

Proverbs 10: 19 warns us about speaking without thinking, in which case we talk too much and listen too little in the heat of the moment when we are irritated by someone. Speaking too much without thinking things through results in saying things which hurt others unnecessarily, making **transgression unavoidable**. The wise person, on the other hand, “bites his tongue” (metaphorically speaking for **restrains his lips**) and decides to say nothing until he knows what to say that might heal the situation. Many times, we are more concerned with venting our anger and winning the argument than we are with truth and reconciliation. (I speak from experience.)

Proverbs 10: 20 places the relative worth of the righteous tongue on the scales in comparison with the worth of the whole person (**the heart**) of the wicked and concludes that even a righteous person's tongue has more value. **The tongue of the righteous** is valuable because his **lips...feed many** by bringing spiritual nourishment (10: 21), but the **heart of the wicked** is not valuable because the wicked bring ruin and destruction upon themselves and others.

If, as regards this world's wealth, the Lord's poor must say—“Silver and gold have I none;” at least they may scatter choice silver with a widely-extended blessing—“As poor, yet making many rich.” (Acts 3: 6; 2 Cor. 6: 10)....

If we be living with God, it will diffuse a salt, a heavenly leaven, a rich propagation of holiness in our various circles. *The lips of the righteous feed many* from the rich stores of “the dwelling word” (Col. 3: 16); “ministering them grace,” the soul's true and proper nourishment! (Eph. 4: 29; Job 4: 3-4; 29: 22-23).... And as our great Master broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples for their distribution (John 6: 11); so does he now dispense to his servants heavenly provision, suitable, and abundantly sufficient for the need of their charge. And every Sabbath is the wondrous miracle displayed before our eyes. The imperishable bread [Bridges is speaking of the word of God, DFM] multiplies in the breaking. The hungry, the mourners, the weary and fainting; yes, all that feel their need, are refreshed and invigorated....

So far from feeding others, *the fool dies himself for the want of wisdom* [10: 21b]; or rather *for want of heart* to seek it. He despises *the lips that would feed him*, and ‘dies of famine in the midst of the rich pastures of the Gospel’ Oh! How often we are reminded that sin is self-destruction! (Hos. 13: 9).²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Waltke, I, p. 469

²⁴⁸ Longman, p. 238

²⁴⁹ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 103-104, emphasis his, words in brackets mine
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10: 31 The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, But the perverted tongue will be cut out.

10: 32 The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.

The perverted tongue will be cut out by none other than the Lord himself who is the avenger of all evil (cf. 10: 27, 29).²⁵⁰ Jesus taught that a man is known by what comes out of his mouth.

"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹ "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. (Matt. 15:18-19 NASB)

11: 9 With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

11: 12 He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.

11: 13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

See under *V. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice*

12: 13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.

12: 14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, And the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.

See under *V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

12: 18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

12: 19 Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.

See under *Y. Truth and Deception*

12: 16 A fool's anger is known at once, But a **prudent** man conceals dishonor.

12: 23 A **prudent** man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly.

Fools do not know how to control themselves, so their emotions are exhibited to everyone in foolish speech. The prudent man has self-control not only over his tongue but the negative emotions which naturally occur in life which produce anger. Anger is inevitable because we are sinners living in a world of sinners. We sin and are sinned against. Some of our anger is justified and reflects the righteous anger of God, as when Jesus made a whip and drove out the money changers. He was not smiling when this happened. Nevertheless, Jesus never "lost it"—that is, lost his temper. He always maintained self-control in every situation. The **prudent man**, to a less perfect extent, is able to imitate the character of God by holding his tongue and restraining his emotions, thus concealing any **dishonor** that would also reflect upon his creator.

To **conceal knowledge** does not mean that the prudent man withholds information that is justly and morally due to another person, but that he withholds it in situations where his knowledge might

²⁵⁰ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 480

bring harm and not healing. Moreover, he has no prideful urge to parade his knowledge nor vent his rage.²⁵¹

13: 2 From the fruit of a man's mouth he enjoys good, But the desire of the treacherous is violence.

13: 3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

14: 3 In the **mouth** of the foolish is a rod for *his* back, But the lips of the wise will protect them.

The fool is his own worst enemy, and his **mouth** is his favorite weapon used against himself like a boomerang. A boomerang is a weapon originally used in hunting by the Aborigines in Australia. Ironically, it is even shaped like a mouth. The fool's mouth serves as a **rod for his back**. However, the **lips of the wise** are also used as weapons, but for self-defense, not self-infliction. The wise know when to keep their mouths shut and when to speak. They are able to discern the proper time to speak and the appropriate content.

14: 7 Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.

There is no knowledge to be gained by keeping the company of fools. Their stupidity is contagious. On the other hand, the son is advised to keep company with wise men who will instruct him.

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:²To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,³ To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity;⁴To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,⁵ A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, (Prov. 1:1-5 NASB)

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.⁹ Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning. (Prov. 9:8-9 NASB)

A wise son *accepts his* father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. (Prov. 13:1 NASB)

Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days. (Prov. 19:20 NASB)

At the beginning of Proverbs, the father advises his son to ignore the temptations presented by fools who will be destroyed by their own actions.

My son, if sinners entice you, **Do not consent**.¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; (Prov. 1:10-11 NASB)

Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,"¹⁵ **My son, do not walk in the way with them**. Keep your feet from their path,¹⁶ For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood.¹⁷ Indeed, it is useless to spread the *baited* net In the sight of any bird;¹⁸ But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives. (Prov. 1:14-18 NASB)

14: 9 <u>Fools</u>	A
mock at sin [<i>asham</i>],	B
But among the <u>upright</u>	A

²⁵¹ Waltke, vol. 2, pp. 539-40

there is good will. B

The NIV and ESV translations are as follows:

Fools mock at **making amends for sin**, but goodwill is found among the upright. (Prov. 14:9 NIV)

Fools mock at the **guilt offering**, but the upright enjoy acceptance. (Prov. 14:9 ESV)

The idea is that **fools mock** at any attempt to make things right between them and those whom they have wronged.

Fools are those who disdain guilt offerings. After all, fools will not admit fault and therefore would never agree that a guilt offering is necessary.²⁵²

Leviticus 6 sheds light upon the guilt offering.²⁵³

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,² "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted *to him*, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion,³ or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do;⁴ then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty [*asham*], that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found,⁵ or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day *he presents* his **guilt offering** [*ashmah*].⁶ "Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering [*ashmah*] to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering [*ashmah*],⁷ and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt [*ashmah*]." (Lev. 6:1-7 NASB)

On the contrary, **among the upright there is good will** toward others and an eagerness to repay any wrong done to one's neighbor primarily because a wrong done to a neighbor is an offense against God. Notice Lev. 6: 2: "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the Lord..." How does he act unfaithfully against the Lord? By deception, robbery, extortion, etc. against his **companion** or neighbor. The first four of the Ten Commandments summarize sins against the Lord and the last six summarize sins against others, but any sin against our fellow man is also, and foremost, a sin against God (cf. Ps. 51: 4, David's confession of adultery and murder was primarily a sin against the Lord).

But the **fools'** mocking will be returned to them on the day of their calamity.

Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square;²¹ At the head of the noisy *streets* she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:²² "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? **And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing** And fools hate knowledge?²³ "Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.²⁴ "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;²⁵ And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof;²⁶ **I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes,**²⁷ When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. (Prov. 1:20-27 NASB)

²⁵² Longman, p. 299.

²⁵³ Verses cited by Longman

The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. ¹³ **The Lord laughs at him**, For He sees his day is coming. ¹⁴ The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct. ¹⁵ Their sword will enter their own heart, And their bows will be broken. (Ps. 37:12-15 NASB)

15: 2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

15: 7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge, But the hearts of fools are not so.

See under *I. Heart and Motives*

15: 26 **Evil plans**
are an abomination to the LORD,
But **pleasant words**
are pure.

The parallel suggests that the **evil plans** involve deceptive words while **pleasant words** are truthful. God hates the former and loves the latter.

17: 7 Excellent speech
is not fitting [*naveh*] for a fool,
Much less are lying lips
to a prince.

The sage (wise man) often makes note of things which should not go together.

Luxury is **not fitting** [*naveh*] for a fool; Much less for a slave to rule over princes. (Prov. 19:10 NASB)

Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is **not fitting** [*naveh*] for a fool. (Prov. 26:1 NASB)

Excellent speech may be very persuasive to people who have no discernment, thus making the **excellent speech** of the fool all the more dangerous and harmful to the community. One example may be that of the persuasive politician whose actions and legislation is bad for the nation, but through his speech he is able to convince others of his empathy for the needs of the common man. Inwardly, he is a **fool** who knows nothing of the precepts of God's law or the wisdom to apply it to complex situations. We have such fools in abundance in our national and state governments in the US, and Africa has an abundance of fools as national presidents and MP's. They are great speakers, but terrible leaders. This leads into the second verset.

Lying lips are not fitting for a **prince** or nobleman; for the prince, who has much responsibility to help his people, should be a man of integrity.

17: 20 He who has a **crooked mind**
finds no good,
And he who is **perverted in his language**
falls [*naphal*] into evil.

As in other proverbs a **crooked mind** and **perverted...language** are intricately connected.

10: 8 The **wise of heart** will receive commands,
But a **babbling fool** will be ruined.

10: 20 The **tongue** of the righteous is *as* choice silver, The **heart** of the wicked is *worth* little.

In the present proverb, the one with a crooked mind cannot **find...good** even though he earnestly looks for it. The verb find implies effort while the verb falls [*naphal*] implies an involuntary slip into trouble, like the wicked falling into their own pit dug for someone else.

He who digs a pit will fall [*naphal*] into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. (Prov. 26:27 NASB)

The idea is that while the crooked man is incapable of discovering things beneficial to him—like truth, love, meaning, etc.—he slips effortlessly into trouble without even trying just by being himself.

17: 27 He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

See under A. *Anger and Self-Control*

17: 28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent.

The proverb argues from the lesser to the greater. If even a fool is **considered wise** when he keeps his mouth shut, how much more will a wise man reinforce his reputation for being wise when he exercises self-control while being provoked by another. In a contrasting proverb, Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the US from 1861 to 1865, said, “It is better to keep your mouth shut and let them think you a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”²⁵⁴

18: 8 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

The **whisperer** is the slanderer who spreads lies or the gossip who spreads information publicly which should have been left private. It does not matter whether the gossip is true or false. It was designed to hurt someone rather than help them; thus the whisperer is guilty either way. The lies and private information are **dainty morsels**; that is, they are like tasty, irresistible food to those who are listening to the whisperer’s conversation. Sinful people enjoy hearing anything which depreciates others and thereby enriches themselves in comparison to others. They pride themselves in being better or in not getting caught in their own trespasses. **The innermost parts of the body** represent the long-term assimilation of the forbidden information. People are prone to keep information in long-term memory which may be used to blackmail others to gain some advantage. For example, if someone knows about an adulterous affair of a political rival, he may file this information away to use at an opportune time, for example, when the rival runs against him in an election.

18: 13 He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.

²⁵⁴ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 64-65

The sage warns against volunteering our “wisdom” on a particular matter before we have listened to all the relevant information. By jumping to a conclusion before listening to the other side of the story, we will only make a fools of ourselves.

The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him. (Prov. 18:17 NASB)

18: 20 With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied; He will be satisfied *with* the product of his lips.

18: 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

19: 1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.

See under *B. The Better...Than Proverbs*

Y. Truth and Deception

11: 1 A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.

11: 2 When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.

11: 3 The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.

12: 22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.

14: 2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.

20: 10 Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the LORD.

God **delights** in truth in any sphere of human activity. There is no sacred/secular dichotomy with God in which He is only concerned about the spiritual realm of public and private worship but disinterested in economics and trade. All of life is intrinsically religious, and we practice what we believe in every transaction, for good or evil. In the ancient world, dishonest merchants would use two different sets of **weights**, one for purchasing and one for selling, thus making false gain on the purchase and sale of goods.

Jesus alludes to technical lying in Mk. 7 when he condemns the Pharisees for encouraging people to shelter their present wealth from their needy parents by obligating it to the temple treasury after death. The Pharisees were looking for legal loopholes enabling them and others to violate the Law of God. But **lying lips** (12: 22) and **devious ways are an abomination to the Lord**, demonstrating how much the person **despises** the Lord, even if they are not technically illegal. God delights in those whose words are faithful and true. Today, dishonest businessmen and the lawyers who serve them often look for legal loopholes allowing them to take away the property of others through sophisticated schemes which the common man does not understand. Today in the US, it is even difficult to sell one's home without a realtor who, in turn, hires a lawyer to make sure a simple contract is legitimate. Rushdoony traces the evolution of legal practice from a lawyer-less society to one dominated by lawyers.

The Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were fearful of the tendencies of English society towards a lawyer-order, and they began by banning a professional, paid lawyer-class. ***Every man had an obligation to know the law by means of the Bible.*** The jury system was developed in America to a far-reaching power on the premise of a Biblical law order in which every citizen knows the law. The requirement that jury members be believers was not a church requirement but a state requirement. the

law order required men knowledgeable in Biblical law. The jury system was strong *as long as the law was the common law of the Scripture*, not an esoteric doctrine open only to a professional class... When lawyers turned instead to positive law (statist law) and statute law (in place of Biblical law), they cut themselves off from the people and became steadily a by-word for deceit because they were beyond the comprehension of the people with their esoteric, humanistic law. A layer-society had replaced a law-society...

In a lawyer order, the social cement has eroded, and the commonly accepted ties which bind men and facilitate communication are gone. An artificial body of statutes, lacking in social roots and have been rationally conceived, replace the old order, and the lawyer becomes the interpreter of these esoteric laws. In a Christian law order, “ignorance of the law is no excuse,” because the law is an open book to all, since it is Biblical in nature and represents a common faith and order. In humanistic lawyer orders, ignorance of the law is unavoidable, because thousands of statute laws, having no basis in any ultimate moral order, are regularly passed. Not only is ignorance of these laws unavoidable for the laymen, but also for the lawyer, who must become a specialist in a particular area of law and then engage in continuing research in order to keep up with its esoteric intricacies.²⁵⁵

In the US we have a familiar joke: How do you know when a lawyer is lying? Answer: When he opens his mouth. This generalization is by no means fair, and I personally know honest lawyers; but the joke is indicative of the general lack of trust in lawyers or the legal system in our country. No one is familiar with the “legaleez” language that they invariably employ in drawing up contracts.

The integrity of the upright will guide them (11: 3) to do what is honorable, including transparent business transactions. They will humble themselves before God, accepting his kind providence in giving them what they need, rather than allowing a prideful heart (11: 2) to convince them that they deserve more. But **when pride comes, then comes dishonor** because there is an unbreakable link between pride and greed. Nevertheless, the **crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them**—eventually. This often happens as a temporal judgment when their greed leads them into activities which eventually bring ruin upon them and their families (Ahab, or to use a modern example, Bernie Madoff, who stole billions of dollars from investors leading to his current imprisonment and the suicide of one of his sons). But even if they remain virtually untouched in this life (Ps. 73), the retributive justice of God is as irrevocable as the law of gravity. Men who are “selfishly ambitious” will be judged according to their deeds (Rom. 2: 6, 8; Matt. 16: 27). For God to be just, both rewards for righteousness and punishments for unrighteousness must be extended into the future beyond clinical death.

Despises is the opposite of **fears** (14: 2). Let not a man claim that he fears God when he despises His law. The law is a reflection of God’s nature and character and is the surety of His judgment upon evil. A man who is **devious in his ways** shows that he has no fear of God (Rom. 3) and treats Him with contempt as all other gods who have no eyes, no ears, and no knowledge (Ps. 73: 11).

16: 11 A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern.

20: 10 Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the LORD.

See 11: 1 above.

11: 18 The wicked earns deceptive wages, But he who sows righteousness *gets* a true reward.

13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.

²⁵⁵ R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 517-518, emphasis mine
christcommunitystudycenter.org

Deceptive wages (11: 18) are those which are earned **by fraud** (13: 11). Perhaps the earner has not given his employer the full benefit of his labor and is now being paid for work he has not done. Since he cannot take his deceptive **wages** to heaven, he fails to be rewarded for his labor after death. Or, the verse could mean that the **true reward** of honest labor is honest wages. One can sleep well at night knowing that he has actually earned his living rather than stolen it.

Any **wealth obtained by fraud dwindles**. Some fraudulent wealth vanishes in the thief's lifetime. William "Boss" Tweed was an ordinary chair maker who became the leader of the democratic political "machine", Tammany Hall, in New York City in the mid-19th century. He stole \$200 million (according to liberal estimates) from New York tax payers to fund his extravagant life style until he was exposed in the late 1870's. He died penniless in prison at 55. Had he chosen to remain with his humble profession of chair making and earned an honest living, he would have been much better off. The meager wages of a chair maker would have served him better than the dwindling fortunes of corruption.

Even if the dishonest man gets away with his fraud during his lifetime—and some do—his wealth will eventually vanish in time because he has failed to inculcate virtue in his heirs (Eccles. 2: 18-19). Beyond time, at the consummation, all unjust wealth will burn (2 Pet. 3: 10). By contrast, **he who sows righteousness** will get a **true reward** because he has given his employer, customers, clients, patients, et al, a full day's work for a full day's pay. Righteous wages **gathered by honest labor** constitute a reward which outlasts even death.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord (1 Cor. 15: 58).

Paul was not speaking only to preachers and evangelists, but to every believer of the Corinthian congregation. Particularly to the slaves in Colossae, he said,

Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Col. 3: 23-24).

So long as we are working for the Lord and not merely for *wages*, our labor will result in a reward at the consummation. Why? Because God's original purpose for making man was to extend the Garden of Eden past its original boundary and throughout the world (Gen. 1: 26). Keep in mind that Adam was expelled from the garden into another space which was *not* the garden. This space is now cursed, but it will be restored at the consummation (Rom. 8: 18-25; Isa. 65) and available for man's dominion. It is also likely that God has other planets in mind for dominion as well. Work done for the Lord is inherently valuable *because the Lord says so*, not because of whatever imputed value *others* place upon it—either significant value (neurosurgery, computer science) or insignificant value (garbage collection). Can you imagine the surprise many will have when God rewards Christian garbage collectors and condemns unbelieving neurosurgeons and astronauts?

The **wealth** mentioned in 13: 11 is relative. It does not have to mean vast riches, although it can refer to such. Interpreted this way, wealth can be gradually accumulated or gathered (**the one who gathers**) by the ordinary laborer; and this is the wealth which is in view as opposed to get-rich-quick schemes.

The proverb argues for the accumulation of wealth through virtue, not through get-rich schemes and vice, by weighing the scales at the end of the day...The metaphor of getting money from a vapor suggests what English speakers call “easy money,” including tyranny, injustice, extortion, lies, and windfalls, at the expense of others. Plöger says that wealth that has been acquired out of nothing evokes the suspicion of having been achieved illegally. Instead of these “windy” methods, the book prescribes the substantial methods of patience, diligence, prudence, generosity, and faith, virtues that have stood the test of time....*By hand*...symbolizes a slow, small, steady accumulation of wealth by the handful, not by a “windfall.” This equivalent of “diligent hand” in contrast to “slack hand” in v. 4 implies industry and patience.²⁵⁶

Waltke’s comment brings to my mind the exorbitant interest charges by African banks (and many other developing world banks), almost invariably 25% or more. With the simple stroke of the keyboard, banks make millions by charging rates which often cannot be paid on time, allowing them to transfer collateralized properties (properties offered as guarantees for repayment) to their asset base, leaving the borrower without land for future income production. OT law recognized that the wealthy would eventually own everything unless there was some way to return land back to the original owners. This was called the Jubilee Year in which land was returned without repayment back to the family owners every 50th year. Since it took 49 years for land to be returned, the law did not encourage mismanagement, irresponsibility, or incompetence. What it did do was limit the permanent concentration of wealth—particularly land wealth—into the hands of a relatively few families. Essentially, all the land belonged to the Lord who had given it to the tribes (distributed to families) as a gift of His grace, not as wages earned. In the same way, God owns everything else, including money and time.

The increase of money through time and high interest rates will also concentrate money into the hands of a relatively small percentage of the population which is why usury laws (against high interest rates) were established in the first place in many countries where the Judeo-Christian faith flourished. OT law forbade charging any interest to the poor for seed or food. Interest would essentially wipe out the poor and make them slave to the lender (Prov. 22: 7). In “The Jubilee: Time Ceilings for the Growth of Money”, Muller-Fahrenholz asks the question:

...does it make sense to attribute to money qualities that no created thing can ever have, namely eternal growth? Every tree must die, every house must one day crumble, every human being must perish. Why should immaterial goods such as capital—and its counterpart, debts—not also have their time? The capital knows no natural barriers to its growth. There is no jubilee to put an end to its accumulative power. And so there is no jubilee to put an end to debts and slavery. Money that feeds on money, with no productive or social obligation, represents a vast flood that threatens even large national economies and drowns small countries...But at the heart of this deregulation is the undisputed concept of the eternal life of money.²⁵⁷

Care must be taken in how such a jubilee would be applied. In recent years various music and screen celebrities have called for the forgiveness of African governmental debts by western governments, conveniently ignoring the corruption and embezzlement that led to these debts. Bono of U-2 fame has since retracted his position and encouraged old-fashioned capitalistic expansion (with job creation) as the only viable means to poverty reduction. “Jubilee” for corrupted

²⁵⁶ Waltke, I, p. 561

²⁵⁷ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, pp. 208-209, quoting Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, in *Jubilee Challenge*, Hans Ucko

governments and the officials who enrich themselves from them is hardly consistent with biblical Jubilee. On the other hand, creative solutions need to be forthcoming from Christian economists and OT scholars concerning the proper application of Jubilee for individuals and families without rendering them slaves to charity.

12: 17 He who speaks truth tells what is right, But a false witness, deceit.

The verse seems like a tautology, a needless repetition (e.g. the black kettle is black). Actually, the proverb

...places in causal connection the internal character of men and their utterances...²⁵⁸

Truth comes from a righteous person while lies are uttered by one who is fundamentally deceitful. A similar principle is made by Christ who said that it was not what someone ate that defiled him but that which came out of his heart. The righteous man is fundamentally truthful. One can count on what he says. The unrighteous person does not have the moral foundation for truth-telling, therefore, his conscience is not disturbed by twisting the truth even if people are hurt.

12: 19 Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.

A skillful liar can weave a network of lies to cover one lie, thus extending its life-time. But more often, lies are discovered soon after they are uttered, simply because they can't hold up for long in the complicated nexus (cause and effect connections) of actual events. Lies may have a long life-span when measured by short-lived humans; but measured by eternity, their life-span is short, indeed. Heaven will be a place where truth between fellow men abounds in every aspect of life. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Since He is the life, then nothing but truth will live eternally. Satan is "the father of lies" and is very powerful; nevertheless, he and those who follow him in deceit will perish with him in the lake of fire. Only the truth will live forever.

12: 20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.

Devising **evil** is paired with counseling **peace**, and **deceit** with **joy**. The proverb shows the radical psychological/spiritual difference between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous man is a joyful man, as Jesus clearly said, "Blessed [*happy*] are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." God did not give us His law to make us miserable, but to make us happy by complying with the demands consistent with His moral order. Adam was content within the garden until he believed Satan's lies concerning God's order and providence. But bound up in the heart of the wicked is **deceit** which is antithetical (opposite) to **joy**. Men lie because they are dissatisfied (unhappy) with God's providential ordering of their lives; and they seek to overturn providence. **Peace** among men is the result of compromise and reconciliation and is the opposite of chaos. Joy comes when everyone at the negotiating table wins, not when there are clear winners and clear losers. **Evil** is chaos because it is based on deception and lies which disrupt constructive discourse between men and alienate them from one another.

12: 22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.

²⁵⁸ Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, p. 260

God **delights** in His own character and everything consistent with His character. We have nothing to gain from deceit, for whatever we sow we shall also reap. Even believers who lie occasionally (not habitually) will have nothing to gain from their lies because “we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for what we have done, both good and bad.” Although we will not be judged with the wicked because of the atoning work of Christ, we will lose rewards we would have received for speaking the truth.

13: 5 A righteous man hates falsehood, But a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully.

The righteous man hates anything in opposition to the character of God. It is **disgusting** to him and **shameful**. The wicked, on the other hand, rejoices in shameful behavior, including lies. In extreme cases, some people would rather lie even when the truth would be more convenient to them. They enjoy deceiving others. “Love”, says Paul,

does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; (1 Cor. 13:6 NASB)

13: 15 Good understanding produces favor, But the way of the treacherous is hard.

Those who promote truth are generally looked upon by others in a favorable light. Even the wicked who rejoice in deceit do not themselves wish to be deceived. **The way of the treacherous is hard** because of retributive justice—payback. While the honest man makes many friends, the dishonest man produces many enemies who are planning to get even, making his way **hard**.

14: 5 A trustworthy witness will not lie, But a false witness utters lies.

The proverb sounds tautologous (a simple repetition: e.g. The black pot is black.) However, the idea is that if a man is truly **trustworthy**, he will tell the truth **every** time, not simply some of the time. Likewise, the **false witness** is the kind of person who **utters lies** habitually.

14: 25 A truthful witness saves lives, But he who utters lies is treacherous.

In OT law, a false witness who was discovered in his lie was given the same punishment which would have been received by the accused had he been convicted, even to the extent of capital punishment (Deut. 19: 17-20). For example, if the false witness accused someone of adultery, but the accused was exonerated (acquitted), then the false witness would be put to death, the penalty for adultery. A **truthful witness saves lives** because his testimony protects the innocent from the penalty of the crime. The false witness who **utters lies is treacherous** because his testimony endangers the life of the accused.

15: 27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.

Anyone serving as a judge was in an advantageous position to accept bribes on many occasions. For this reason, Solomon warns judges of the evil and danger of accepting bribes to pervert justice.

The king gives stability to the land by justice, But a man who takes bribes overthrows it. (Proverbs 29:4 NASB)

17: 8 A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner; Wherever he turns, he prospers.

17: 23 A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.

18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

Prov. 17: 8 is speaking from the point of view of the one who *offers* bribes, not from God's perspective, who hates bribes. For the one who has money to bribe a judge (or, in the modern world, legislators, members of parliament, or other government officials), the money becomes a **charm**—or **jewel** (Delitzsch)—to turn the head of the official who will give him the favor he asks (17: 23). From Solomon's viewpoint, the bribe serves to **pervert the ways of justice**.

Corporate and private lobbying of congressmen in the US is protected by the first amendment, the right to free speech. But with billions of dollars being spent by lobbyists attempting to persuade legislators, it has become increasingly unpopular. Although regulated, lobbyists with huge budgets can unduly influence legislators to pass laws which benefit certain corporations or businesses turning capitalism into "crony capitalism" which is not capitalism at all. When some corporations are benefitted by government legislation, the law gives them an unfair advantage over other businesses or corporations which may be punished by the same law. The new law may have the effect of driving the competition out of business—the very intent of many lobbyists.

Verse 18: 16 simply states a matter of fact without commenting on its rightness or wrongness. **A man's gift** (another word for **bribe**) does **make room for him** and sits him at the table **before great men**. Although true pragmatically (it works), the fact does not justify the practice.

22: 12 The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, But He overthrows the words of the treacherous man.

Even in this present evil age, truth often wins over lies, but not always. Eventually, the truth about God and about everything else will be known throughout the universe. **Knowledge** will be **preserved**.

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." (Romans 3:3-4 NASB)

The eyes of the Lord are a synecdoche (a part for the whole) representing His personal omnipresence, looking down with favor or disfavor upon men and their actions. Compare the following verses:

For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths. (Proverbs 5:21 NASB)

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3 NASB)

"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." (2 Chronicles 16:9a NASB)

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. (Genesis 6:8 NASB)

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are *open* to their cry. (Psalm 34:15 NASB)

For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths. (Proverbs 5:21 NASB)

In 22: 12, the Lord’s eyes see everything going on in the world of men; therefore, He distinguishes perfectly the difference between **knowledge** (truth) and that which only poses as knowledge (the lies of the **treacherous man**). But since men are finite and cannot be everywhere simultaneously, their knowledge of the truth is imperfect, and it often becomes a difficult task to discern truth from lies (unless we are speaking about the Bible, and even here believers differ with one another). But when it comes to historical fact outside the Bible, there is much more difficulty. One example in modern times is the media who claim to report the “facts” of an event objectively. But pure objectivity is impossible because everyone is coming to the “facts” from a particular vantage point which is biased in one direction or another, either with Christian, non-Christian, conservative, liberal, etc. presuppositions. The TV viewer thinks he is getting the facts but fails to understand that the real truth may have been covered up with what is left out in the media coverage. So, we are left with treachery pushing a certain agenda rather than knowledge. Christians may be comforted that God is not only omnipresent but omniscient—the one implies the other—and that all true knowledge rests with Him and Him alone. He has revealed a small portion of His infinite knowledge in the Bible, but there are other things He chooses not to reveal, including the whole historical truth about what men do and have done in this world. When a definitive history of the world is finally written, it will look quite different to what fallible men have written.

Sometimes in this world, the Lord **overthrows the words of the treacherous man** by allowing him to get caught in his own trap which he laid for others. Absalom was repaid for his treachery with three spears to the heart while he hung helplessly by his hair (2 Sam. 18: 14). Ahab, whose treachery got Naboth murdered, received an arrow between the joints in his armor by a random shot from an archer (1 Kings 22: 34). Prisons are filled with such persons, and we cannot in all honesty say that wicked men *always* get away with their lies. They don’t, and their cases should be a warning to all who contemplate evil. But for those who escape punishment in this life, their short-term escape will be overshadowed by their eternal doom. God will **overthrow** all falsehood.

20: 14 "Bad, bad," says the buyer, But when he goes his way, then he boasts.

This is a simple observation of human nature. In the US, we have the expression, “Buyers are liars.” But the same can be said of the seller. In an economic exchange in which the final price is open to negotiation, the buyer and seller carry on a game of pretense. The buyer pretends that he will not pay more than a certain sum of money for the product or service, while the seller pretends that he will not take less than the stated price. In truth, the seller will take less and the buyer will pay more. They are just negotiating the deal to an acceptable level for both parties.

In this proverb, the buyer goes away from the deal pretending that he has been taken advantage of by the seller, all the while he really believes that he has gotten the best of the deal. He figures that the next time around with this particular seller, he will be able to negotiate an even better price.

16: 30 He who winks his eyes *does so* to devise perverse things; He who compresses his lips brings evil to pass.

See under X. *Speech as a Reflection of Character*

17: 4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips; A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.

The irony of the proverb is that the **evildoer/liar** who spurns wisdom (Proverbs 1) will nevertheless **listen to wicked lips** and will **pay attention to a destructive tongue**. Thus, the punishment of the

wicked will come to them in ways which replicate (repeat) their own wickedness. Liars will be misled and destroyed (**destructive tongue**) by other liars. Again, this is biblical retribution or payback for sin. Bridges comments,

Here is a black, but true picture of human nature. *The wicked doer* is not content with the stirring impulse of his native lust. But such is his craving appetite for sin, that he seeks foreign stimulants to give it increasing activity. Amnon thus stimulated his own lust, by *giving heed to the false lips* of his friend [2 Sam. 13]. Ahab, to secure his desired object, eagerly listened to the counsels of his murderous wife [1 Kings 21]. The Jews *gave* delighted ears to the false prophets, who flattered them in their wickedness [Isa. 30: 9-11; Jer. 5: 30-31]. Active and intense was the malice of the ungodly, in suborning [inciting] false witness for our Lord's condemnation [Matt. 26: 59-60]. Yet, 'there would not be so many open mouths, if there were not as many willing ears to entertain them.' But be it remembered, that the listening *ears* share the responsibility of the *naughty tongue*; as all are involved in the treason, that are directly or indirectly acquainted with the plot.²⁵⁹

On the contrary, the righteous man is "paid back" with wise counsel and life for listening to wise men.

"But he who listens to me shall live securely And will be at ease from the dread of evil." (Prov. 1:33 NASB)

He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise.³² He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. (Prov. 15:31-32 NASB)

17: 7 Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool, Much less are lying lips to a prince.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

18: 17 The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him.

See under *R. Observations of Human Nature*

18: 18 The *cast* lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.

See under *R. Observations of Human Nature*

19: 5 A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape.

19: 9 A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will perish.

See under *V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

19: 28 A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice, And the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity.

See under *V. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice*

20: 6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?

See under *R. Observations of Human Nature* and *E. Friendship*

²⁵⁹ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 256-257, citing also Hall's *Works*, viii. 7
christcommunitystudycenter.org

20: 17 Bread obtained by falsehood is **sweet** to a man, But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.
 21: 6 The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue Is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.

The adulterous woman says to her naïve lover, "Stolen water is **sweet**; And bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant." (Prov. 9:17 NASB). In other words, sex is much better if you have to sneak around to get it. The scriptures teach just the opposite.

Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth.¹⁹ As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.²⁰ For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner? (Prov. 5:18-20 NASB)

The “sweetest” love is legitimate, marital love. Any other kind is a cheap substitute.

Likewise, the sweetest **bread** (income) is that which is earned legitimately by fruitful labor. We are often advised by the sage to work hard and make our own living honestly, not by theft or mooching off of others.

10: 4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
 12: 11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless *things* lacks sense.
 12: 24 The hand of the diligent will rule, But the slack *hand* will be put to forced labor.
 13: 4 The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat.
 13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.
 18: 9 He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.

But in a sinful world, there will always be those who would rather steal the hard-earned bread of others rather than making an honest living. Even professing believers in Ephesus and Thessalonica were depending on others for daily sustenance rather than working themselves.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. (Eph. 4:28 NASB)

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. (2 Thess. 3:10 NASB)

Perhaps Paul was speaking to professing believers who were literally stealing, but I prefer to interpret him as speaking figuratively, that is to say, dependence upon others is a form of theft when we are capable of working ourselves.

The consequence of making an income by **falsehood** is tangibly depicted: **But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel**. Once more the retributive justice of God is in view—a man will reap what he has sown. Although stolen bread obtained without labor is sweet to the tongue at first, God’s justice will ensure that the bread will turn to gravel, thereby choking the consumer. Naboth’s stolen vineyard produced sweet wine first acquired through **falsehood**; but when confronted by Elijah, Ahab knew that the Lord had cursed him for the blood of an innocent man. A random arrow was selected for Ahab’s execution three years later (1 Kings 21—22). Naaman’s enormous gift to Gehazi seemed like a “sweet” bonus to Elisha’s meager employment, but in the end the curse of leprosy turned his silver into gravel (2 Kings 5). His **treasure** became a **fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death** (21: 6). Jacob’s birthright was gained from Esau

by deception but at a great cost to Jacob who never saw his mother again, who himself was deceived by Laban, and who lived in fear of Esau for many years.²⁶⁰

Whatever be the tempter's proffered advantage, his price is the soul, to be paid in the dying hour. Oh! The undoing bargain! An eternal treasure bartered for the trifle of a moment! Charmed we may be with the present sweetness; but bitter indeed will be the after-fruits, when the poor deluded sinner shall cry—"I tasted but a little honey, and I must die." (1 Sam. 14: 43) So surely is the bitterness that springs out of sin the bitterness of death.²⁶¹

20: 19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

See under *V. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice*

20: 23 Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, And a false scale is not good.

See under *Y. Truth and Deception*, (11: 1) and *H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority* (16: 11).

20: 25 It is a trap for a man to say rashly, "It is holy!" And after the vows to make inquiry.

This is a warning against making **rash** vows to the Lord. After examining the ultimate cost (**make inquiry**), one decides that the cost is too high or that the means of fulfilling the vow are inadequate. Vows are voluntary. Better not to make a vow at all than to make a vow we can't keep, thus putting ourselves in a **trap**.

21: 14 A **gift** in secret

subdues anger,

And a **bribe** in the bosom,

[subdues] strong wrath.

Solomon is not advocating the use of **bribes** (also called **gifts**); he is simply making an observation concerning their effectiveness. It is a matter of fact that bribery is effective in securing support for one's plans or a positive decision from a judge or ruler. But the OT regulations against bribery are plain.

"You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. (Exod. 23:8 NASB)

"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. (Deut. 10:17 NASB)

"You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. (Deut. 16:19 NASB)

'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' (Deut. 27:25 NASB)

²⁶⁰ Bridges, p. 350

²⁶¹ Bridges, pp. 350-51

"Here I am; bear witness against me before the LORD and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore *it* to you." (1 Sam. 12:3 NASB)

"Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe." (2 Chr. 19:7 NASB)

Bribes are offered to people with power, influence, and/or information to give someone a competitive edge over his enemy or business competitor. It would be useless to bribe someone who had no ability to influence decisions or make policy. The possession of political power is not essential as long as the person bribed has knowledge which may be helpful or harmful to the one who offers the bribe. Knowledge is power. For example, a person who has witnessed a serious crime may be bribed to keep the information hidden from civil authorities. But in most cases, bribes are offered to people with legislative, judicial, or economic power: for example, judges and government officials.

To operate a business in Africa, government officials are commonly bribed to allow a person to obtain a license for the business. According to the World Bank, Africa is the most difficult continent on earth to start new businesses. This is ironic, since Africa needs business more than any other continent to dig itself out of poverty. But to start a business, there are multiple *unnecessary* steps to take (and at each step bribes are required), reams and reams of paperwork to fill out, taxes to pay—and more palms to grease (officials to bribe)—before you can operate or remain in operation. If you have the money for bribes, you will have a competitive advantage over others who don't have the money or the connections.

But bribery is not unique to Africa. There is bribery in corporate America, and some of it is legal. It's called lobbying. Every year corporations pay lobbyists six-figure incomes (sometimes in the millions) attempting to influence US congressmen to pass legislation either helping their company or hurting another competitive company. It is illegal for a congressman to take a bribe directly, but it is not illegal to accept campaign funds from these same corporations—which amounts to the same thing, bribery. Forty percent of retiring congressmen end up becoming lobbyists, making far more than they ever did as congressmen. The corporations know that congressmen know how government works and can get the legislation they need to have a competitive edge in the market place. Lobbying is the reason that monopolies are actually indirectly created by federal and state governments giving favors to some corporations but denied to others. If you haven't understood me so far, the whole lobbying swamp should be abolished. Government should stay out of the marketplace and allow the market (consumers) to decide who succeeds and who fails.

21: 28 A false witness will perish, But the man who listens *to the truth* will speak forever.

The consequences of bearing false witness are equivalent (equal to) to the punishment administered for the accused crime.

"If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing,¹⁷ then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days.¹⁸ "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely,¹⁹ then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.²⁰ "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do

such an evil thing among you.²¹ "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deut. 19:16-21 NASB)

The phrase, "life for life, eye for eye" etc. does not mean that one who gouges out someone's eye will have his eye gouged out or that one who cuts off someone's foot will have his foot cut off. Within the context of vv. 16-20, it simply endorses *proportionality*: the punishment will fit the crime. Thus, if someone is accused of theft and the accuser found false, then the accuser will pay back two-fold, four-fold, or whatever the accused would have had to pay back if found guilty. If the false witness accuses someone of murder, then he will be executed—just as the accused would have been executed if found guilty. The slave owner who strikes his slave violently and causes him to lose a tooth or an eye will lose his slave on account of the tooth or eye.

"If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye.²⁷ "And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth. (Exod. 21:26-27 NASB)

The second part of the proverb is imprecise. We would expect it to read, "But the man who *tells* the truth will speak forever." **The man who listens to the truth** implies someone who

...knows how to listen attentively and critically so that his judgment is sound and his testimony reliable...The false witness either cannot or will not listen to the report objectively because he has a hidden agenda that distorts the truth and so is unable to give trustworthy testimony. By contrast, the true witness, who loves reality, listens attentively and critically to the evidence and so is able to give credible testimony...The Ultimate Agent, without excluding a court decree (Deut. 19: 19) vindicating the true witness and silencing the false, is the God of truth.²⁶²

Z. Vengeance

20: 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.

See under A. *Anger and Self-Control*

AA. Wisdom's Protection

11: 15 He who is guarantor for a stranger will surely suffer for it, But he who hates being a guarantor is secure.

See under [*Appendix: Three Inferior Types of Men (6: 1-19)*]

13: 6 Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless, But wickedness subverts the sinner.

14: 3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for *his* back, But the lips of the wise will protect them.

Both proverbs deal with the protection provided by wisdom to its possessors. Wisdom will keep a person safe while foolishness brings harm to the fool. The woes of the fool are primarily self-inflicted.

In 13: 6, righteousness is personified as a body **guard** of those **whose way is blameless**. This is so because those who walk in conformity to the law of God will give little means to those who

²⁶² Waltke, vol. 2, p. 190

wish to condemn them. To the accusing scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says, “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (Jn. 8: 46a) There was none who could.

There have been many accusations of misconduct toward President Donald Trump before and after his election as president of the US. Although accused falsely in many cases, his checkered past **subverts** (overthrows, NIV) him. Mike Pence, a committed Christian, has few accusers. His righteousness has **guarded** him throughout his career as a politician.

In 14: 3, **the wise** know how to restrain their lips, and they know how to respond when necessary. By contrast, **the mouth of the foolish** spouts off without knowledge and gets himself in trouble, possibly with the civil magistrate who administers to rod.

15: 25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

See under *S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich* and *K. Humility and Pride*

18: 10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.

See under *M. The Two Ways—the Righteous and the Wicked*

19: 16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, *But* he who is careless of conduct will die.

Another proverb proving belief in the afterlife. **Keeps his soul** is a reference to man’s spiritual constitution. Man is both body and soul. **Will die** is obviously a reference to *spiritual death* since it is the destiny of all men, good and bad, to die. **Keeps the commandment** does not refer to salvation by works but to the pattern of obedience which confirms a redeemed character. It is antithetically parallel to **careless of conduct** which is the pattern of the unredeemed character who experiences eternal death. The NT affirms the same conclusion, that a person’s conduct is the true indicator of his heart’s condition.

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?"¹⁷ "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit."¹⁸ "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."¹⁹ "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."²⁰ "So then, you will know them by their fruits."²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*." (Matt. 7:16-21 NASB)

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (1 Jn. 2:3-4 NASB)

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn. 3:7-8 NASB)

19: 23 The fear of the LORD *leads* to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.

See under *L. Life, Death, and the Afterlife*

20: 16 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for foreigners, hold him in pledge.

See under *V. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice*

20: 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.

See under *A. Anger and Self-Control*

21: 18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, And the treacherous is in the place of the upright.

A very difficult verse. The idea is not that the righteous are guilty of some crime for which the wicked take their place of punishment. Rather, God sometimes allows the wicked to fall into the same snare which they intended for the righteous. One example is Haman who paid the penalty he intended for Mordecai.²⁶³

21: 23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

22: 5 Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards himself will be far from them.

The **perverse** [*wicked, twisted*] have many dangers lying in their path of life—immoral seductresses, alcohol (and now, drug) abuse, brawls. These are things which are characteristic of the perverse way of life. The righteous will **guard himself** from these things by steering a wide path around them (**far from them**). He will flee temptation but also the places and times in which temptations are most present—bars, brothels, the night life in general.

BB. Wise Men Contrasted with Fools, the Naive, and Scoffers

10: 13 On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.

See under *V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice* and under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

10: 14 Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.

See under *V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice* and *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

10: 21 The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

10: 23 Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, And so is wisdom to a man of understanding.

A **sport** is something done for entertainment and pleasure. (There were no paid athletes in the ancient world.) Therefore, as the **man of understanding** enjoys thinking and acting biblically and wisely, the **fool** gets satisfaction from engaging in evil deeds. Evil is fun to him. The proverb reveals the systematic

²⁶³ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 182

distortion of the mind produced by a life of habitual sin. The fool hates what he should love and loves what he should hate. The wise man's mind has been trained to love doing the things which bring God pleasure.

12: 15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

See under *P. Man's Way*

12: 16 A fool's anger is known at once, But a prudent man conceals dishonor.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

13: 16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

13: 19 Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.

13: 20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

See under *J. Hope and Desire* and under *S. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich*

14: 3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for *his* back, But the lips of the wise will protect them.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

14: 6 A scoffer seeks wisdom and *finds* none, But knowledge is easy to one who has understanding.

Wisdom is a gift from God; therefore, the one who **scoffs** at the source of all wisdom—the word of God—will never be able to find it no matter how hard he looks. God is not obligated to throw His pearls before swine or to give what is holy to dogs (Matt. 7: 6). But for the **one who has understanding**, God will give even more understanding. Through the practice of humbling himself before God, gaining **knowledge** will become **easy**, i.e. second nature, like riding a bicycle to one who has been doing it for many years.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. (Matt. 13:10-11 NASB)

14: 7 Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

14: 8 The wisdom of the sensible is to **understand his way**, But the foolishness of fools is deceit.

Folly may hold out the promise to be the solution to life's issues, but in reality folly fails people and thus is a fraud. Rather than guiding people, it misleads them.²⁶⁴

We encounter the phrase **understand his way** also in Prov. 20: 24.

Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man **understand his way**? (Prov. 20:24 NASB)

²⁶⁴ Longman, p. 299

The two proverbs are not contradictory. On the one hand, the alert traveler who knows the **way** of the Lord—that is, his law and precepts—will better **understand his own way**, how to conduct himself practically and wisely along life’s journey. Life’s struggles will be more **sensible** to him with the word of God guiding him. To be sure, he will not be able to **understand his way** exhaustively because much of the Lord’s will for him is His hidden, decreed will; thus, the rhetorical question begging a negative answer, “How then can man understand his way?” Answer: he can’t, at least completely, when there is so much mystery in how the Lord is leading him through various circumstances outside of his control (see commentary on 20: 24). Christians walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5: 7), but we do not walk blindly. As we grow in true knowledge and grace, we learn the ways of God more perfectly, thus helping us make sense out of life’s enigmas.

14: 9 Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

14: 16 A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless.

See under *P. Man’s Way*

14: 23 In all labor there is profit, But mere talk *leads* only to poverty.

14: 24 The crown of the wise is their riches, *But* the folly of fools is foolishness.

Riches are not evil. The evil lies in those who misuse them exclusively for their own selfish benefit rather than for the benefit of others (Lk. 12; the parable of the rich fool). This is one of many proverbs in which the reader is given an additional incentive to gain wisdom **first** as his most important priority.

The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life. (Prov. 22:4 NASB)

By wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established;⁴ And by knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches. (Prov. 24:3-4 NASB)

The wise are likely to accumulate riches for a number of reasons. First, from the context of 14: 23, wise men tend to be diligent in their **labor**, and labor is often rewarded with financial success. Fools sit idly by and **talk** about making money but have no sense or initiative to earn it. Their lack of initiative leads inevitably to **poverty**. Notice the proverb: **In all labor there is profit.** The amount of profit varies from person to person. You will not get rich laying bricks, but the skills you learn from laying bricks skillfully may get you to the point where you can make a steady income for yourself and your family. The worker should learn a skill, learn humility, and set goals to use that skill to succeed. One may even get to the point where he can hire others and profit from their labor. It is legitimate to profit from the labor of others, for many people are not capable of running a business of their own. By going out and contracting work, you would help others make a living for their families as well. The meaning of **wealth** and **riches** in Proverbs is relative to the times. A large percentage of the population lived in poverty and could barely feed themselves. If a person could provide food, clothing, and shelter even during economic scarcity, he was considered wealthy.

Secondly, **wise** people accumulate wealth by conservative spending and liberal saving. They don’t consume everything they earn. If they have extra money after buying what they **need**, the money

does not “burn a hole in their pockets”. That is, the extra money does not cause them buy something that they *do not need* just because they can. Instead, they put it aside for a future need, an emergency, or an appreciating investment like a house or land which may be passed down as an inheritance to one’s children.

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous. (Prov. 13:22 NASB)

Thirdly, wise men accumulate wealth because of God’s blessing to those who value wisdom above all else (Prov. 10: 22 cited above). Lady Wisdom will honor those who listen to her counsel with wealth. Wisdom is **better than gold** and **choicest silver**, but those who value God’s wisdom are likely to acquire both.

"Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness.¹⁹ "My fruit is **better than gold**, even pure gold, And my yield **better than choicest silver**.²⁰ "I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice,²¹ To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries. (Prov. 8:18-21 NASB)

Fourthly, wisdom produces humility and generosity, and these attributes result in God’s further blessings.

One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed. (Prov. 19:17 NASB)

God will not necessarily **repay** the generous man with material wealth, but when we are generous to the needy, we should not be surprised when the Lord repays us in like kind, that is, material blessings. **Humility** helps us to understand that we did not attain wealth simply through our own wits and abilities but that wealth is God’s gift. No matter how hard we work or how endowed with ability, if the Lord withholds his blessing, our hard work will be in vain.

It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it. (Prov. 10:22 NASB)
Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. (Ps. 127:1 NASB)

14: 33 Wisdom rests	A		
in the heart		B	
<u>of one who has understanding,</u>			C
But in the hearts		B	
<u>of fools</u>			C
it is made known.	A		

In Proverbs 1, **wisdom**—personified as a woman shouting in the streets—makes herself **known** to **the naïve, scoffers, and fools** (Prov. 1: 20-33). While lady folly crouches in the shadows and darkness (Prov. 7: 9), wisdom is the open secret willing to reveal the riches of her counsel to all who will listen to her. Notice that **rests** and **is made known** are antithetically parallel. Thus, the revelation of God’s wisdom is inevitable to *all people*, either from the written word or from an examination of creation; but it will find its **rest** or permanent dwelling only in the **wise**, that is, believers.

For the wrath of God is **revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly seen**, being understood **through what has been made**, so that they are without excuse.²¹ **For even though they knew God**, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.²² Professing to be wise, **they became fools**, (Rom. 1:18-22 NASB)

As with every verse in the Bible, there are other possible English translations.²⁶⁵

Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning and **even among fools she lets herself be known.** (Prov. 14:33 NIV)

Wisdom rests in the heart of a man of understanding, but **it makes itself known even in the midst of fools.** (Prov. 14:33 ESV)

In the heart of the discerning wisdom comes to rest, and **in the midst of fools** she reveals herself. (Waltke's translation)

Wisdom finds a permanent residence (**rests**) in the heart of the **wise** who seek her as **silver** and **hidden treasure** (Prov. 2: 4). She has no such resting place or residence in the hearts of fools who persistently reject her warnings (Prov. 1: 24-25). Nevertheless, she remains **in their midst** through the medium (means) of believers who live by her counsel and through creation which illustrates her splendor. Thus, wisdom shouts in the streets through the testimony, teaching, and example of God's people and through the inescapable wonder of the created world.

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, By understanding He established the heavens. (Prov. 3:19 NASB)

15: 12 A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, He will not go to the wise.

See under *C. Discipline and Reproof*

15: 31 He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise.

See under *C. Discipline and Reproof*

16: 21 The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

16: 22 Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, But the discipline of fools is folly.

As the wise benefit from their own **understanding**, fools suffer from their own **folly**.

In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his back, But the lips of the wise will protect them. (Prov. 14:3 NASB)

²⁶⁵ I have used the NASB because I believe that it is closest to the original Greek and Hebrew texts. This does not mean that the NASB translators are better Greek and Hebrew scholars than those who provided the NIV, ESV, NKJV, or other translations. The differences generally reflect the goals of the translators.

Understanding and **discipline** are parallel, either antithetically or synthetically. On the one hand, understanding prevents the wise man from the harsh discipline of fools. On the other hand, understanding is its own discipline. People who are disciplined in their behavior avoid the hardships of fools.

17: 10 A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.

See under *C. Discipline and Reproof and V. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

17: 12 Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, Rather than a fool in his folly.

When hiking in the national wilderness parks of the US, there is one thing you should never do—get between a mother **bear** and her cubs. She will automatically interpret you as a threat and will tear you to pieces, if necessary, to protect them. The parallel is not exact in that there is nothing noble about a **fool in his folly**, but his rage is similar to the bear's. You don't want to be around him; and in many cases, it is best not to confront him. This proverb, synonymous with 26: 4, must be balanced with 26: 5 which advises us to confront the fool.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him.⁵ Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, That he not be wise in his own eyes. (Prov. 26:4-5 NASB)

17: 16 Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, When he has no sense?

The sage presents the scenario in which the fool offers him money in exchange for wisdom. But **wisdom** cannot be bought at any price. The **fool** may have the money to pay the tuition for an education (although charging tuition was unknown in Jewish practice until the middle ages²⁶⁶), but he will not have the moral **sense** to make full use of the opportunity. Besides, obtaining an education is not the same thing as obtaining wisdom. There are many educated fools walking around elite universities and seminaries, blind professors leading blind students. Wisdom, on the other hand, is a gift of God's grace to those who humble themselves to receive it.

For the LORD **gives** wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. (Prov. 2:6 NASB)

...but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory;⁸ **the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;**⁹ but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."¹⁰ **For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit;** for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.¹² **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,**¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and **he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised.¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? **But we have the mind of Christ.** (1 Cor. 2:7-16 NASB)

²⁶⁶ Waltke, vol. 2, p.56

I should not be interpreted as diminishing the importance of a good education, formal or informal. After all, I am writing this commentary on Proverbs to help African pastors understand more about the wisdom literature of the OT. However, unless the reader has the heart to understand and apply the proverbs, reading this commentary will do little good. Even as the author, I have just as much trouble as anyone *applying* this wisdom. At times I feel somewhat helpless and frustrated at my failures, but I know that supernatural help from the Holy Spirit is essential for any success in implementing the wisdom of Proverbs. We must “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14 NASB).

I have now been teaching Africans for almost 20 years, and I have never emphasized the importance of “getting a degree”, something which seems to be the end-goal of so many Africans who pursue a formal education—along with the hoped-for material gain which many believe will accompany this education. What I *have* emphasized is the importance of gaining skills in interpreting the Bible, teaching, and preaching with the end-goal of feeding God’s sheep—skills which are developed over a life-time, not in a three or four-year residential school. Doubtless, those students whose end-goal has been material gain have been sorely disappointed in their theological education, and they are seeking other more lucrative means of making a living. Others have increased in wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2: 2-3) and are using this wisdom to bless God’s people with a greater understanding of Christ and salvation. They are the winners.

17: 21 He who sires a fool *does so* to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy.

See under *Q. Marriage and Family—the Home*

17: 24 Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, But the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

The one who has understanding knows that the most valuable treasures are not found in foolish pursuits to **the ends of the earth**—the US perhaps? “If I could only get to the US, all my problems would be solved!” No, they wouldn’t. The most valuable treasure, **wisdom**, can be attained by the humble seeker right where he is—in the heart of Africa. It is **present** with those who have the heart to receive it.

17: 28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent.

See under *X. Speech as a Reflection of Character*

18: 2 A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

18: 15 The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

A **prudent** man attempts to better himself by feeding his **mind** with worthwhile **knowledge**. His **ear** is tuned in to listen to the wisdom of the sages. Unmentioned in this proverb is the fool who listens to slander, gossip, and the ignorance of other fools rather than knowledge. Other related proverbs:

A wise man **will hear** and increase in learning, And a man of understanding **will acquire** wise counsel, (Prov. 1:5 NASB)

The mind of the intelligent **seeks knowledge**, But the mouth of fools feeds on folly. (Prov. 15:14 NASB)

The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body. (Prov. 18:8 NASB)

A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly. (Prov. 12:23 NASB)

19: 1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.

See under *B. The Better...Than Proverbs*

19: 2 Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, And he who hurries his footsteps errs.

19: 3 The foolishness of man ruins his way, And his heart rages against the LORD.

See under *G. God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility*

19: 10 Luxury is not fitting for a fool; Much less for a slave to rule over princes.

See under *H. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority*

19: 20 Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.

See under *C. Discipline and Reproof*

19: 25 Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, But reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.

See under *C. Discipline and Reproof*

19: 29 Judgments are prepared for scoffers, And blows for the back of fools.

As Jesus **prepares** a place for those who love Him (Jn. 14: 2-3), **judgments** and **blows are prepared** for those who continually reject His word, temporally through the secondary means of cause and effect and the civil magistrate, but eternally in hell. Temporally, these judgments consist of the fruit of their own ways as they sadly live out their lives running into one trouble after another.

"So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices. (Prov. 1:31 NASB)

Temporal judgments for sinners are preliminary warnings—and, therefore, measures of God's grace—foreshadowing the final judgment of hell. Sadly, the committed fool will not learn from the temporal **blows** to his **back** by repenting of his sins and humbling himself before God.

20: 1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

Wine is a mocker because it gives the heavy drinker false confidence, paranoia, delusions, and other forms of false reality. The sober man, on the other hand, keeps his wits about him and can

respond intelligently to changing circumstances. **Strong drink is a brawler** because it entices the foolish drinker into arguments and fights. If you want to find a fight, just visit the neighborhood bar every night and drink to excess. You're bound to find one.

Drinking in excess is **not wise**. It causes people to do all kinds of foolish things, including putting other people's lives at risk while driving under the influence. It loosens the tongue to speak things which are better left unsaid, things which hurt others permanently.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1 NASB)

20: 3 Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.

See under *A. Anger and Self-Control*

21: 11 When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.

See under *C. Discipline and Reproof*

21: 20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up.

This is a lesson in delayed gratification and planning. Delayed gratification is practiced by those who do not consume all of their disposable income (i.e. income that is not immediately needed) to gratify (satisfy) present wants. When their immediate needs are met, the remaining income is set aside in a safe place to be used when the need arises or even for future generations.

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous. (Prov. 13:22 NASB)

The problem with most people is that they never learn to distinguish between a **need** and a **want**. Thus, they **swallow up** their disposable income on things they don't really need, leaving their future uncertain.

21: 22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty And brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

The proverb expresses the final triumph of good over evil. The **wise man** is depicted as a warrior who is able to **bring down the stronghold...of the mighty**, i.e. the wicked who are strong in their own imagination.

A rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall **in his own imagination**. (Prov. 18:11 NASB)

The proverb represents the final superiority of spiritual virtue over vices such as intimidation, censure, systematic spreading of lies, murder (cf. 2 Cor. 10: 4), and trusting in one's own might (3: 7; 16: 32; 24: 5; Eccl. 9: 16). In spite of insurmountable odds, including famine, nakedness, the sword (Rom. 8: 35), and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places (Eph. 6: 12), Christ builds his church through saints who wear God's armor (Isa. 59: 17; Eph. 6: 10-18).²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Waltke, vol. 2, p. 185

21: 24 "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.

See under *K. Humility and Pride*

22: 10 Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.

See under *T. The Power of the Tongue*

CC. Women—Wise and Foolish

11: 22 As a ring of gold	A
in a <u>swine's snout</u>	B
So is a beautiful woman	A
who <u>lacks discretion.</u>	B

The **ring of gold** is to the **swine** as **beauty** is to the **woman who lacks discretion**. They are both depreciated in value by the animalistic behavior of the ones who wear them. No one appreciates a ring of gold in a pig's snout since it is a wasteful use of gold. Likewise, beauty is wasted on an immoral woman. The God-given gift of beauty should have been saved for her husband; but, acting like a pig wallowing in the mire, she tarnishes it with lewd and disgraceful behavior.

14: 1 The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.

The wise woman builds her house by respecting and supporting her husband in his efforts to lead his family in word and deed and in exercising dominion over the earth in his chosen work. She is a woman of discretion, compassion, and hard work who sets a godly example for her children to follow (Prov. 31). Through her example, her children may come to the faith and carry the good name of their family into future generations, thus **building** on what she has started. The **foolish woman tears down** her house through disrespect and constant complaints resulting in divorce and/or degenerate children whose lives disintegrate with unbelief. This can also be said of men, but this proverb is about women.

It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman. (Prov. 21:9 NASB)

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels...Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land...She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.²⁸ Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband *also*, and he praises her, *saying*:²⁹ "Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all." (Prov. 31:10, 23, 27-29 NASB)

21: 9 It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

21: 19 It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman.

See under *B. The Better...Than Proverbs*

DD. Work and Sloth

10: 4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

In this proverb, we have the normal cause/consequence sequence of hard work versus laziness. There will be some fools who have great wealth, but they will be the exceptions, not the rule. The normal expectation is that a person who is **negligent** in his work will know poverty as the natural consequence of insufficient labor. Notice that the proverb is not speaking of the one who *does no work at all*, but the one who works *insufficiently*. The command to rest the seventh day is equally a command to work regularly for six days. Some who work two or three hours a day and three days a week conclude wrongly that they have worked; but such a work schedule is not obedience to the command to labor.

10: 5 He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, *But* he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.

10: 26 Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, So is the lazy one to those who send him.

12: 11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, *But* he who pursues worthless *things* lacks sense.

The virtue of hard labor (in the fields or elsewhere) is compared to the pursuit of **worthless things** which may include get-rich-quick schemes requiring little work. The sinful nature of man prefers easy money rather than steady labor which produces useful goods and services. The proverb presents a general promise to the one who works hard at any task which has proven to be productive. On the other hand, one should be skeptical any plan which promises big returns with little or no work. The principle is amply important to be repeated in 28: 19.

He who tills his land will have plenty of food, *But* he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty. (Prov. 28:19 NASB)

12: 13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, *But* the righteous will escape from trouble.

12: 14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, *And* the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.

See under V. *The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice*

12: 24 The hand of the diligent will rule, *But* the slack *hand* will be put to forced labor.

The irony of the proverb is that those rule their own spirits by being independently **diligent** in their labor will eventually **rule** over those who cannot rule themselves independently, resulting in laziness (**the slack hand**).²⁶⁸ “To put it bluntly, the diligent rise to the top and the lazy sink to the bottom.”²⁶⁹

12: 27 A lazy man does not roast his prey, *But* the precious possession of a man *is* diligence.

13: 4 The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing, *But* the soul of the diligent is made fat.

13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, *But* the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.

14: 4 Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, *But* much revenue *comes* by the strength of the ox.

14: 23 In all labor there is profit, *But* mere talk *leads* only to poverty.

Mere talk presents the picture of lazy fools sitting around discussing easy ways to make money. While they are talking about making money, the hard worker is busy pursuing tried and true ways of producing useful goods and services.

²⁶⁸ Waltke, vol. 1, p. 540-541

²⁶⁹ Waltke, vol. 1. p. 541, quoting Ross.

15: 19 The way of the lazy is as a hedge of thorns, But the path of the upright is a highway.

Lazy people can come up with an endless list of excuses why they cannot accomplish their goals. Their **way**, therefore, is grown up in **thorns** which prevent them from making any progress. **The path of the upright**, however, **is a highway** which is cleared of obstructions and excuses. Whenever a problem emerges to hinder progress, a solution is proposed to solve the problem rather than giving up.

16: 26 A worker's appetite works for him, For his hunger urges him *on*.

Sinful nature being what it is, few people would work apart from economic necessity. And if few would work, given the option not to work, the creation mandate to cultivate the earth would remain unfulfilled. Consider the abundance of products (including food) and services which are produced daily only because those who produce them *must* work in order to eat. The **worker's appetite** which drives him is contrasted to the sluggard who craves food yet refuses even then to labor to fill his stomach.

The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat. (Prov. 13:4 NASB)²⁷⁰

18: 9 He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.

Destructive activity and unproductive laziness produce essentially the same results. If someone comes into his field and purposely burns it with fire, the destruction of crops which occurs is essentially no different from the unproductive field laden with thorns and thistles because the sluggard refuses to prepare the field for crop production.

I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,³¹ And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down.³² When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction.³³ "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest,"³⁴ Then your poverty will come *as* a robber And your want like an armed man. (Prov. 24:30-34 NASB)

In the same vein of thought, the Apostle Paul may be likening sloth to theft.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. (Eph. 4:28 NASB)

Paul could be talking to actual thieves posing as Christians, or he could be likening sloth to theft since the slothful person depends on the hard labor of others for his livelihood—a form of theft. If I am able to work but, instead, I rely on others to feed me, I am essentially stealing. Modern forms of wealth redistribution are often legal forms of theft since they reward those who refuse to work with the fruits of others' labor.

19: 15 Laziness casts into a deep sleep, And an idle man will suffer hunger.

19: 24 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, *But* will not even bring it back to his mouth.

²⁷⁰ Cited in Waltke, II. P. 32

20: 4 The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, So he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

Begging is presented in this proverb as a sinful activity. It is not sinful if the individual has exhausted all other means of providing a living for himself. It is sinful if he has neglected the means of production which would normally sustain his life. It is therefore, foolish for the sluggard to argue that those who have food are morally obligated to feed him. Instead, they are morally obligated to let him reach the point of starvation to learn the valuable lesson of labor.

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. (2 Thess. 3:10 NASB)

20: 13 Do not love sleep, or you will become poor; Open your eyes, *and* you will be satisfied with food.

Some people love to sleep, or they love extended periods of entertainment and inactivity. They have not learned that labor is God's gift to us without which life would seem meaningless. It is true that the ground has been cursed so that often our labor seems pointless and unproductive. Yet, what would life be like without it? Boring. Once more, regular labor is required of those who intend to succeed in life. No one ever got paid for leisure time.

21: 25 The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, For his hands refuse to work;

21: 26 All day long he is craving, While the righteous gives and does not hold back.

The **desire of the sluggard** is to sleep and waste his time on worthless pursuits (12: 11), leading to poverty and **death** through starvation. While the sluggard craves, the righteous **gives** because he is industrious and has something left over to give those who are poor through no fault of their own. Like many proverbs dealing with poverty, this one speaks to poverty of the mind.

22: 13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside; I will be killed in the streets!"

Any flimsy excuse for not working is good enough for the sluggard, however unbelievable.

EE. Relationship between Obedience and Worship

21: 3 To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.

The prophets constantly reminded wayward Israel that religious rituals were no substitute for obedience to the law. Speaking to Israel and Judah as if they were Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaiah prophesied,

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. ¹² "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? ¹³ "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ¹⁴ "I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. ¹⁵ "So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. ¹⁶ "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:11-17 NASB)

With what shall I come to the LORD *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? ⁷ Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8 NASB)

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6 NASB)

"For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Jeremiah 7:22 NASB)

Jeremiah was not mistaken in the last citation. The law pertaining to the proper worship of God and one's treatment of his fellow man came first, followed by the laws pertaining to sacrifice. Rushdoony takes note of this priority.

Before sacrifices were described by the law, Moses at Sinai on the first day commanded obedience (Ex. 19: 5, 6) and, on the third day, the law was given and sacrifices offered (Ex. 19: 10—24: 8). It is apparently to this primacy of obedience to the law that Jeremiah referred (Jer. 7: 21-24). Sacrifices should be linked to obedience, according to Jeremiah 33: 10, 11, and will be in the day of restoration. The prophets denounced a purely formal sacrifice: obedience was required to give the sacrifice meaning as man's full devotion to God.²⁷¹

Jesus applies this priority in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:23-24 NASB)

The same priority applies to uninformed Christians, or outright hypocrites, who believe that they can treat their fellow man any way they please as long as they contribute generously to the church offering—and many pastors are content to allow this misconception.

On the other extreme are those who believe orderliness in worship and giving are unnecessary as long as they are generally law-abiding. God does not say that sacrifice and offering are unnecessary; He simply says that they are not the priority. Malachi calls covenant people who fail to bring tithes and offerings "robbers" (Mal. 3: 8).

III. Collection III—The Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22: 17—24: 22)

Collection III is set apart from Collection II by the heading, "the words of the wise" (22: 17) followed by vv. 18-21 which continue the introduction to this section and should be read in context with v. 17. Furthermore, Collection III is set apart from II by the ***change*** from one verse aphorisms to "***more extended, flowing sayings***" which may cover two or more verses (Waltke, p. 14). Compare the following: Prov. 22: 2 of Collection II, "The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all." This short, pithy saying from Collection II consists of a

²⁷¹ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 80-81.
christcommunitystudycenter.org

single aphorism—a one verse statement of truth—divided into two *versets*. But now look at Prov. 23: 1-3 from Collection III,

When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you, And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

Notice that this proverb consists of three verses, not one, and flows more smoothly than the short aphorism from Collection I. The introduction found in 22: 17-21 alerts us to a change of format in Collection III. Furthermore, as Waltke has noted, the sayings of Collection III take the form of **admonitions or imperatives** (commands) followed by the **motivations** for obeying the commands (p. 14). To paraphrase 23: 1-3, “Curb your appetite when dining with the king [command], for the king may be testing you or trying to get information from you [motivation]”

Since many of the proverbs of this section consist of units of two or more verses, they are marked off as separate units divided by spaces.

A. Anger, Self-Control

22: 24 Do not associate with a man *given* to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man,
22: 25 Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself.

Notice that verse 25 provides the motivation for obeying the command of v. 24. Our associations with others are important for our future spiritual development. Although believers must reach out to unbelievers, vs. 24 presents the idea of an equal partnership or a friendship in which the innocent person is being unduly influenced by bad character. The wise man surrounds himself with wise friends.

B. Commandments followed by Motivations for Obedience

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,
23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.
23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

This proverb is intended for courtiers of the king. The sumptuous meal set before the courtier is a test of his character. If he cannot control his appetite, it may be an indication that he cannot be trusted when temptations to lie, steal, or cheat come his way.²⁷²

23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;
23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.
23: 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?
23: 30 Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine.
23: 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;
23: 32 At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.
23: 33 Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things.
23: 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.

²⁷² Longman, pp. 422-23

23: 35 "They struck me, *but* I did not become ill; They beat me, *but* I did not know *it*. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

Nine verses devoted to the evils of drunkenness, seven in context with one another. Overconsumption of alcohol produces **sorrow** and pain (**wounds**). While the effects of inebriation are enjoyable (v. 31), the end result is like a snake bite, implying that overconsumption can be deadly—and it often is. The sage's description is vivid. The drunk hallucinates (**will see strange things**) and he cannot control his speech (**will utter perverse things**) (v. 23). People at a party often enjoy listening to the incoherent speech of a drunk who is very entertaining. But alcoholism is no joke, one of the leading causes of highway deaths, divorce, unemployment and poverty. Homeless shelters are filled with people whose lives, careers, and marriages have been ruined by overdrinking. When drunk, the alcoholic feels like he is floating through life (**like one who lies down in the middle of the sea**), but he is subject to ill-treatment from others which he hardly notices at the time (v. 35a) but suffers the day after. Sadly, when he sobers up, he does not see the error of his ways. His only thought is another drink (v. 35b).

These verses must be balanced with the positive view of wine as God's blessing (3: 9-10; Ps. 104: 14-15). As with all blessings, it is subject to abuse. Sex and food are also blessings with the same potential for misuse.

24: 1 Do not be envious of evil men, Nor desire to be with them;
24: 2 For their minds devise violence, And their lips talk of trouble.

24: 19 Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;
24: 20 For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

Implicitly, these proverbs indicate that evil men can be prosperous and the object of envy by the righteous (Ps. 73). But such envy is inappropriate and misguided since their success is short-lived. They have **no future**. **Lamp** is a metaphor for life (20: 20). "The lamp (life) of the wicked is sin" (Prov. 21: 4b), but the **lamp** of the virtuous woman does not go out (31: 18). Once more, the sage motivates the righteous toward proper behavior with biblical reasoning.

24: 13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;
24: 14 Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

A simple object lesson for the righteous. Honey was commonly available, and it could serve as a reminder that the **future** would be **sweet** for those who consume **wisdom**.

'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. (Jer. 29:11 NASB)

Ultimately, only the righteous have a future. The wicked will perish from the earth without one (Ps. 1: 6).

The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Ps. 34:16 NASB)

24: 15 Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; Do not destroy his resting place;
24: 16 For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.

This is a warning to the **wicked** that the Lord champions the cause of the **righteous**. The righteous have no immunity from falling into calamity; but when he **falls**, he always **rises again**, even **seven times**, demonstrating the comprehensiveness of the Lord's protection. The wicked, on the other hand, will ultimately **stumble** without rising. Not only must the rewards of the righteous be extended into the future beyond clinical death, so must the punishment of the wicked be extended.

24: 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
24: 18 Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

A warning against the natural vengefulness of the sinful human heart. What is our first reaction when we hear of the calamity of those whom we dislike (hate?) or fear? We are often inclined to **rejoice**. But clearly, the Lord is **displeased** with such rejoicing. The higher motivation is love even for one's enemies (Matt. 5: 44); but if this higher motivation fails, the sage holds out the practical warning that God may relent from his anger and allow the enemy's situation to improve in response to our glee.

22: 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate;
22: 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.

Judges are motivated toward just treatment of the poor with the warning that there is a higher authority over them who **plead[s] their case**. If they rule against the poor who are incapable of bribing them in court cases, take their possessions and give them to others, God will **take the life of those who rob them**. Again, it would seem that this proverb is not true to those of us who have observed injustice firsthand. The poor continue to be oppressed in the marketplace and the courtroom. To believe the proverb, we must walk by faith and not by sight, knowing that the judgments of God will not all come in the present life. If they did, the wicked would cease and desist from their oppression of the poor. But since they continue to prosper, the wicked are encouraged to continue their oppression with the belief that there will be no retribution. "They say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?'" (Ps. 73:11 NASB) But the day of accounting is certain.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

22: 26 Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become guarantors for debts.
22: 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you?

C. Discipline and Reproof

23: 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.
23: 13 Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.
23: 14 You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.

D. Drunkenness

23: 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.
23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

23: 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?

23: 30 Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine.

23: 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;

23: 32 At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.

23: 33 Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things.

23: 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.

23: 35 "They struck me, *but* I did not become ill; They beat me, *but* I did not know *it*. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

See above under *B. Commandments followed by Motivations for Obedience*

E. Envy

24: 19 Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;

24: 20 For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

See above under *B. Commandments followed by Motivations for Obedience*

F. Generosity and Greed

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.

23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;

23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

All of these proverbs deal with the desire for wealth by means of association with powerful and wealthy people of questionable moral character (note: **deceptive food** and **his heart is not with you**) Notice the similarity between vv. 1-3 and vv. 6-8 with the moral teaching in the middle (vv. 4-5) forming a chiastic structure.

The proverb set is not a blanket condemnation of powerful people or of association with them: Mephibosheth's association with King David turned out to be an unmixed blessing for him. However, it is often the case that one's eagerness to get ahead in life (**weary to gain wealth**) robs him of wisdom in discerning people and motives. Powerful people often become powerful through deceit, and they attempt to gain more power and wealth by wining and dining potential competitors. What they really desire is not your friendship but information that will give them an advantage over you.

Jesus accepted invitations to dine with wealthy Pharisees, but only to win them to the truth. On one occasion, the Pharisee had invited him only to seek and accusation against him (Lk. 14). Most of the time he was dining with tax collectors and sinners who were despised by the rest of Jewish society. Never do we see him seeking approval from the rich and powerful; moreover, he advises us to follow his example by inviting **the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind** into our homes, people who have no advantage to offer us (Lk. 14: 13-14).

Disinterest in wealth is motivated by pointing out its uncertainty and temporariness, like a bird which is there one second and gone the next. One should not set his heart on it. Millions have dedicated their lives to attaining wealth only to lose their lives to it.

The eagerness for the earthly, and the neglect of the heavenly object shew, either that eternity is a delusion, or that the world is mad. For were the things of eternity really believed, would not the thoughts be fixed, and the heart be filled with them, with but little time or room for the engrossing vanities of life?...

But are there not moments of rest and indulgence, when “uncertain riches” become our confidence (1 Tim. 6: 17), and we need a sharp lesson to remind us, how *certainly they make to themselves wings, and flee away?*²⁷³

G. The Heart and Motives; Hope and Desire

23: 17 Do not let your **heart** envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always.

23: 18 Surely there is a **future**, And your **hope** will not be **cut off**.

23: 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your **heart** in the way.

There are a variety of reasons that **sinners** are **envied** by the righteous: money and possessions, popularity, prestige, social status, leisure time, seemingly carefree lives. God’s people, on the other hand, are often in want, hungry, tired, working long hours but living from hand to mouth with little **hope** for a better **future** in this present world. The psalmist addressed the problem of God’s confusing distribution of wealth in Ps. 73. His ways are often counter-intuitive. One would expect that God would give freely to his people while withholding his material blessings from those who don’t love him. Instead, it often seems the opposite.

For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. ⁵ They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them. ⁷ Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of *their* heart run riot. ⁸ They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high. ⁹ They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore his people return to this place, And waters of abundance are drunk by them. ¹¹ They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" ¹² Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth. ¹³ Surely in **vain** I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; ¹⁴ For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning. (Ps. 73:3-14 NASB)

The antithetic parallelism indicates that to *live [the verb is implied] in the fear of the Lord* is the antithesis of envying sinners for their prosperity and ease. Moreover, Proverbs teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, another word for **wisdom**. Thus, it is not wise to envy sinners; such envy is not based upon truth. Verses 17 and 19 imply that the heart is not some

²⁷³ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 425-26
christcommunitystudycenter.org

uncontrollable urge that must be obeyed. It is the core being of man which should be informed and controlled by the will. We must not allow our hearts to envy sinners. We must **direct** our hearts in **the way**, i.e. the way of truth and obedience, despite the seeming contradictions of life. The psalmist is giving us the OT equivalent of 2 Cor. 5: 7: “for we walk by faith, not by sight.” Walking by faith is a choice, as the psalmist later demonstrates in Ps. 73 when he stops himself short of complaining to the congregation about God’s confusing distribution of blessings.

If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. ¹⁶ When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight ¹⁷ Until I came into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I perceived their end. ¹⁸ Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. ²¹ When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, ²² Then I was senseless and **ignorant**; I was *like* a beast before You. ²³ Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. ²⁴ With Your counsel You will **guide** me, And afterward receive me to glory. (Ps. 73:15-24 NASB)

When the psalmist entered the sanctuary, God revealed the truth of His justice. The wicked may be prosperous in the short-term; but because God cannot deny His justice, they will not prevail in the long-term. The conclusion that it is **vain** to serve the Lord, despite the frequent difficulties, is based upon **ignorance** (v. 22). **The fear of the Lord** informs the **heart** that God is a God of justice who will set things right in the end. The wicked must not be envied because in the end, they will be **swept away** by God’s wrath and judgment. As with proverbs, the blessings and curses of the Psalms must be applied to believers and unbelievers beyond clinical death (Waltke’s terms); otherwise, they appear contradictory to common human experience. Many believers appear to have no **future** while the wicked are commonly at ease until death—followed by an elaborate funeral extolling how great they were in this life. The truth is just the opposite. It is the wicked who have no future.

For there will be **no future** for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out. (Prov. 24:20 NASB)

24: 13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;
24: 14 Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a **future**, And your **hope** will not be **cut off**.

Here, the father gives his son an object lesson. As he eats fresh **honey from the comb**, he should be reminded how **sweet** is **wisdom** for the **soul**. Only in the wisdom of God found in His word is there a lasting **future**, and it is lasting because the word of God itself abides forever.

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the **word** of our God stands **forever**. (Isa. 40:8 NASB)

Our **hope will not be cut off** because this would contradict the veracity (truthfulness) of God and subject Him to scorn. In this present age, God permits the wicked to ridicule Him.

They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" (Ps. 73:11 NASB)

But it would be contrary to the nature of God, who is jealous for His own name and honor, to allow the wicked to profane His name by saying that He could not protect His people. The **hope** of his people can have no other destination than the certainty of the new heavens and new earth; otherwise, the wicked will boast that God is incapable of delivering on His promises (cf. Ex. 32: 12).

H. Marriage and Family—the Home

23: 13 Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.
 23: 14 You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.

In the modern western world, physical discipline would be considered by many to be child abuse. The sage begs to differ. The opposite is true. Real child abuse results when discipline is withheld, permitting the child to form bad habits and behavior which will eventually result in eternal death. To **strike him with the rod** does not imply a beating so severe that the child's health could be damaged. **He will not die** assumes the father's restraint and self-control. There is a difference between discipline and abuse. Discipline originates from love and the fear of God (who disciplines his own children) and is controlled by love as well as wisdom. The purpose is not punishment per se but correction. Abuse springs from frustration and uncontrolled anger, resulting in excessive pain, provocation, and despair.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4 NASB)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. (Col. 3:21 NASB)

23: 22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.
 23: 23 By truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.
 23: 24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him.
 23: 25 Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her rejoice who gave birth to you.
 23: 26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.
 23: 27 For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.
 23: 28 Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men.

24: 3 By wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established;
 24: 4 And by knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.

I. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich

22: 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate;
 22: 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.
 22: 26 Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become guarantors for debts.
 22: 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you?
 22: 29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men.
 23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.
 23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.
 23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;
 23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.
 23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.
 23: 10 Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,
 23: 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.

23: 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.
 23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;

23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

J. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.

23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;

23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

24: 21 My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change,

24: 22 For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin *that comes* from both of them?

K. The Pursuit of Wisdom; the Value of Wisdom

22: 17 Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge;

22: 18 For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips.

22: 19 So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you.

22: 20 Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge,

22: 21 To make you know the certainty of the words of truth That you may correctly answer him who sent you?

23: 12 Apply your heart to discipline And your ears to words of knowledge.

23: 15 My son, if your heart is wise, My own heart also will be glad;

23: 16 And my inmost being will rejoice When your lips speak what is right.

23: 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always.

23: 18 Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

23: 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.

23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;

23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

23: 22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.

23: 23 Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.

23: 26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.

23: 27 For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.

23: 28 Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men.

L. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

24: 15 Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; Do not destroy his resting place;

24: 16 For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.

24: 19 Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;
 24: 20 For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

M. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

22: 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate;
 22: 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.
 23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,
 23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.
 23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.
 23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;
 23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.
 23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

23: 10 Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,
 23: 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.
 24: 10 If you are slack in the day of distress, Your strength is limited.
 24: 11 Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold *them* back.
 24: 12 If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts? And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?

N. Truth and Deception

22: 28 Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set.

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,
 23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.
 23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.
 23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

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23: 10 Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,
 23: 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.

23: 23 Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.

O. Vengeance

24: 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
 24: 18 Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

P. Wise Men Contrasted with Fools, the Naive, and Scoffers

23: 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.

24: 5 A wise man is strong, And a man of knowledge increases power.

24: 6 For by wise guidance you will wage war, And in abundance of counselors there is victory.

24: 7 Wisdom is *too* exalted for a fool, He does not open his mouth in the gate.

24: 8 One who plans to do evil, Men will call a schemer.

24: 9 The devising of folly is sin, And the scoffer is an abomination to men.

Q. Women—Wise and Foolish

23: 26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.

23: 27 For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.

23: 28 Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men.

IV. Collection IV: Further Sayings of the Wise (24: 23-34)

Collection IV is separated from III by 24: 23a, “These also are sayings of the wise.” The end of this collection is determined by 25: 1, “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.” Collection IV is concerned primarily with **three areas: A. behavior at court**—vv. 23b-25, 28; **B. speaking and thinking**—v. 26, 29; and **C. behavior at work**—v. 27, 30-34.²⁷⁴ I will be using the same categories used previously.

A. Work and sloth

24: 27 Prepare your work outside And make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house.

The sage warns against becoming a consumer before becoming a producer. Before we began spending our wealth on the things we want, we must be able to sustain ourselves. It is highly probable that the Amish in the US took this proverb to heart. They would build their barns first to protect their horses—their means of production, since they were religiously opposed to automation (tractors, etc.)—and their permanent houses later. In the meantime, they would build temporary housing. It is the same principle of capitalizing a business before enjoying the fruits of the business. The lesson here is that we must not jeopardize our means of production even with legitimate expenses. The necessary medical care of family can be an exception.

24: 30 I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,

24: 31 And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down.

24: 32 When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction.

24: 33 "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest,"

²⁷⁴ Waltke, p. 24

24: 34 Then your poverty will come *as* a robber And your want like an armed man.

The **robber** of v. 34 is the personification of poverty occasioned by the law of entropy.²⁷⁵ Personification is a literary device by which an inanimate object (a non-living thing) is given human characteristics, like Lady wisdom in the first chapters of Proverbs. Poverty comes as a thief upon the sluggard while he is sleeping. However, the poverty is not the result of theft, but inactivity. The law of *entropy* is the second law of thermodynamics which states “that there is a natural tendency of any isolated system to degenerate into a more disordered state.”²⁷⁶ Houses, automobiles, or fields that are left to themselves without regular maintenance—work, in other words—from the owner will deteriorate into something useless. Unless the sluggard is willing to introduce *more energy* into the “isolated system”, his vineyard, then the vineyard will continue to “degenerate into a more disordered state.” The ground is cursed (Gen. 3), and there is nothing we can do about that. What we can do, however, is continue working to lessen the effects of the curse the best way we can until the curse is lifted at the second coming of Christ.

B. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

24: 23 These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good.

24: 24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;

24: 25 But to those who rebuke the *wicked* will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

The fabric of society becomes shattered through lack of faith in legal system which sells justice to the highest bidder, the wealthy who offer bribes. The **wicked** of v. 24 are declared **righteous** by judges who accept such bribes. But judges who cannot be persuaded with bribes will **rebuke the wicked** by handing down just verdicts against those who are guilty. Their honesty will not be reward by the wicked, but **good blessing will come upon them** due to God’s retributive justice.

C. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

24: 24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;

24: 25 But to those who rebuke the *wicked* will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

D. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

24: 23 These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good.

24: 24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;

24: 25 But to those who rebuke the *wicked* will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

24: 28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, And do not deceive with your lips.

24: 29 Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."

When trust is lacking between neighbors—and when there is no justice in the courts (see vv. 23-25 above)—there is no safe place in a whole society. The proverb does not forbid testifying against a neighbor who is guilty, but conditions the testimony upon justifiable reasons for the accusations. There must be adequate cause. Many people have had their lives ruined through false accusations.

²⁷⁵ Waltke, II. p. 297

²⁷⁶ Live Science

The context of v. 29 indicates that the false witness of v. 28 is motivated by past offenses which he believes justifies a false testimony. Clearly, it does not.

"Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. (Lk. 6:31 NASB)

It is not we who are justified in doing to others what they have done to us. This is God's business.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:19-21 NASB)

E. Speech as a Reflection of Character

24: 26 He kisses the lips Who gives a right answer.

F. Truth and Deception

24: 28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, And do not deceive with your lips.

G. Vengeance

24: 29 Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."

V. Collection V: Solomon II (25: 1—29: 27)

Collection V is distinguished from IV by the heading, "These are the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah transcribed." It consists of two main sections: 25: 2—27: 27 and 28: 1—29: 27. In the *first* section we find primarily *synonymous* or *comparative* parallels with the exception of 25: 2; 27: 6, 7, 12 which are *antithetic* parallels. This collection also possesses a very large number of *similes* and a lesser number of *metaphors*. Prov. 26: 1-12 is the "Mirror of Fools" in which the word "fool" or "fools" occurs in every verse except v. 2 where it is implied. The *second* section of Collection V (28: 1—29: 27) consists primarily of *antithetic proverbs*. "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, *but* the righteous are bold as a lion" (28: 1). "He who keeps the law is a discerning son, *but* he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father" (28: 7; cf. 28: 10, 28; 29: 2, 7, 15, 23). This section is also characterized by a relatively high number of references to "*Yahweh*" (the Lord), used five times from chapter 28-29, while "*Yahweh*" is used only once (25: 22) in chapters 25-26.²⁷⁷

For a more thorough description of Collection V, see pp. 3-4 of your notes.

A. Anger and Self-Control

25: 28 *Like* a city that is broken into *and* without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit.

²⁷⁷ Waltke, II, pp. 25, 48-50

The **walls** of a city were its defense against an external enemy. A man who cannot **control...his spirit** is like a city whose walls have been broken down, for he is defenseless against the external circumstances of life which vex him.

His unchecked animal drives plunder him like an attacking enemy for several correlative [closely related] reasons. First, unless one masters his lust, temper, and evil inclinations of all sorts, sin will overpower him...The proverb knows the power of sin that drives one to death as surely as the narrator who represented that power as a crouching lion lying in wait to destroy Cain (Gen. 4: 6-7). Second, society will pay the fool back for the unrestrained folly that erupted from within and that he inflicted on them (cf. 10:6; 14: 17, 29; 15: 18; 19: 11, 19; 29: 22). Third, he remains defenseless before the wicked and/or temptation from without (see 7: 21-22); both can do him great harm (see 1: 16). Finally, he is easy prey to an enemy from without who can torment him and/or cause him to act rashly from within (cf. 1 K. 21: 1-26; Esth. 3: 5, 6; 5: 13). The unbridled person is defeated before the contest. His salvation is to embrace the Lord and his wisdom immediately for his defense (see 16; 32) and for victory (21: 22). Wisdom, which is a divine grace attained by faith, not native power, fortifies the inner self and so safeguards its possessor (see ch. 2; 14: 29; 17: 27; cf. 3: 5; 22: 19). For Christians, the fruit of the Spirit yields self-control (Gal. 5: 22-23).²⁷⁸

29: 11 A fool always loses his temper, But a wise man holds it back.

Paul says,

²⁶ BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity. (Eph. 4:26-27 NASB)

Anger is a natural reaction to a real or imagined grievance. It is not a sin as such, but can become sin if the grievance is allowed to fester and grow, producing bitterness and hatred leading to sin. A **wise man** knows himself, and he knows when his anger is getting out of control. Contrary to much modern psychology advising us to vent our anger, the sage says that the wise man **holds it back**, knowing that words spoken in anger will not heal the present situation. How many times have we wished to say something angrily but held our tongue, knowing that when the heat of the moment has passed, we would be more capable of answering correctly? And how many times have we allowed our **temper** to get the best of us, leading to the wrong response?

29: 22 An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.

B. The Better-Than Proverbs

25: 24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

27:5 Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.

Concealed love does no one any good, “like winking at a girl in the dark”.²⁷⁹ **Open rebuke** is loving since it cares about the character of the one loved—like a parent rebuking his or her child, or like God rebuking His children. In the law, reproving one’s neighbor was not considered contradictory to loving one’s neighbor.

‘You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; **you may surely reprove your neighbor**, but shall not incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the

²⁷⁸ Waltke, II, pp. 344-45

²⁷⁹ Waltke, II, p. 375

sons of your people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**; I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:17-18 NASB)

27:10 Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, And do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away.

The nearby neighbor is further defined as one who is *close* (see 10: 14), probably both literally in space and metaphorically in sympathy and spirit (cf. Lev. 21: 3; Ruth 2: 20; cf. Ps. 148: 14). If this social proximity is not intended, the adjective is tautological [unnecessarily repetitious] with “next-door neighbor” and the truthfulness of the proverb may be called into question, because not all nearby neighbors are friendly (see v. 14)...Such a neighbor is better in crisis *than a relative who is far off*. As the antonym of “close, next-door neighbor,” the far relative is distant both in space and in thought. “The Lord is *far* from the wicked” entails his unwillingness to draw near to one pleading for help, just as his closeness to Israel entails his helping them (Deut. 4: 7). In sum, in crisis the son should turn to a tried and tested friend of the family who lives nearby and is ready to meet his needs, not to a relative who lives far away and/or is not emotionally accessible. The proverb must be held in tension with 17: 17: “The neighbor is a friend at all times, and a relative is born for adversity.” The tried and tested friend and true neighbor stick closer than a remote brother (18: 24).

28:6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than he who is crooked though he be rich.

As wisdom is better than silver and gold (3: 14), **integrity**, defined as truthfulness and trustworthiness, is **better** than being **rich** and **crooked**. There is no long-term profit in being a crook, but there is eternal profit in being a man **who walks [lives] in his integrity** even if he lives in poverty.

Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death. (Prov. 10:2 NASB)

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death. (Prov. 11:4 NASB)

C. Discipline and Reproof

25: 11 *Like* apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

25: 12 *Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

Wise words spoken at the right time are like carefully crafted ornaments made of precious metals decorating one's table. Life-giving **reproof** is likened to **earrings of gold**. The one who hears this reproof is more blessed than the one who wears the gold earring. Other proverbs also stimulate the hearer to encourage others with wise speech rather than provoke them to wrath.

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, But a good word makes it glad. (Prov. 12:25 NASB)

A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1 NASB)

A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word! (Prov. 15:23 NASB)

They are mirrored in the NT epistles.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4 NASB)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (2 Tim. 2:24-25 NASB)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Gal. 6:1 NASB)

Easier said than done.

26: 3 A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, And a rod for the back of fools.

26: 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him.

26: 5 Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, That he not be wise in his own eyes.

Self-government is the most effective form of government. Another word for self-government is self-control, one of the nine characteristics produced in the believer's life by the Holy Spirit.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:16-23 NASB)

The Christian is not “under the law” in the sense of being controlled merely by an external system of morality called civil government or even the law of God. The law of God is “good”, Paul says (Rom. 7: 12), but by itself even the law of God cannot produce internal holiness of life leading to complete obedience (Rom. 8: 3). On the other hand, the Spirit produces fruit in the Christian's life “against [*which*] there is no law” (Gal. 5: 23). In other words, there is no moral or civil law condemning love, joy, peace, patience, and so forth. No one can present any case against such behavior, and if everyone were controlled at every moment by the Holy Spirit, they would be producing behavior (fruit) which rendered external law unnecessary. In heaven there will be no police force or civil government. But, of course, in this world no one, not even the believer, is consistently controlled by the Holy Spirit; and for this reason, we need external restraints to curb our behavior. (Even believers break speeding limits unnecessarily, to use one example.)

Horses and donkeys are physically strong animals which are very useful as transportation and pack animals; but they are not useful through their own volition. They must be trained and controlled with external restraints, a **whip** and a **bridle**. The whip lets the horse know that he is not in control and may not do as he pleases. He must surrender to the wishes of his master who will punish him if he does not go where he is supposed to go at the pace his master wishes. Being a horse, it instinctively wishes to go its own way without a human rider to hinder it, and it has no sense of moral obligation or conscience, only physical instincts. The donkey is known to be even more stubborn than a horse, the very reason that Jesus' ability to ride into Jerusalem on a young, untrained donkey without any trouble was a miraculous event (Matt. 21: 1-5). Jesus didn't need a bridle for his donkey; but for everyone else, the bridle in the donkey's mouth, a very tender part of its anatomy, makes the stubborn animal act against its will.

We don't expect horses and donkeys to have self-control or a moral obligation to be useful. They are animals. We do expect this of human beings. Even unbelievers have a moral consciousness and responsibility to treat fellow human beings with respect because they are made in the image of God and the work of the law of God is written on their hearts—not in the same sense that God's law is written on the believer's heart, but that all moral consciousness and sense of right and wrong are founded upon the presence of God's image (Rom. 2: 14-15). People are not animals, nor should they behave like animals.

The fool often resembles an animal because he lacks self-control and must be controlled externally. Therefore, just as the whip is for the horse and the bridle for the donkey, **a rod [is, implied] for the back of fools.** A just society must have some form of external restraint to keep fools in check, and these external restraints must be painful to be effective. The implication is that they *will be effective* if administered properly, even as the whip and bridle is effective in controlling self-willed animals.

The question arises as to which **rod** is effective in controlling fools: thieves, rapists, murderers, etc. The principle idea behind punishments for crimes in the OT was not punishment as such, but restitution. To quote Rushdoony once more,

The prison appears in Biblical law only as a place of custody, pending trial. There is no direct reference to prisons.^[280] The methods of dealing with criminals was basically threefold: *First*, capital punishment was required for capital offenses, and for incorrigible criminals. *Second*, for all other offenses, restitution was the law; where an order of law had been violated, restoration was the basic function of the courts. Emphatically, in Biblical law the goal is *not punishment but restoration*, not the infliction of certain penalties on criminals but the restoration of godly order. The center of attention is thus not the criminal but the righteous man and the total godly order. *Third*, where criminals were unable to make restitution, bond-service was mandatory in order to work out the required restitution [see Ex.22: 3].²⁸¹

Another word for “restitution” is “repayment”. Repayment is a form of “restoration” since it restores the law order designed by God. If the cart carrying bananas is overturned, restoration involves picking up the bananas and putting them back on the cart to restore order. Thus, restitution (repayment) restores the order that has been overturned. In OT law, a man who stole was required to pay back the value of his theft plus an additional amount, up to five-fold.

"If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double. (Exod. 22:4 NASB)

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. (Exod. 22:1 NASB)

"If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep *for him* and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. (Exod. 22:7 NASB)

"When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted *to him*, or through robbery, or *if he has extorted from his companion,*³ or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of

²⁸⁰ Earlier, p. 514, Rushdoony says, “Prisons were a part of Egyptian life and law (Gen. 39: 20-23; 40: 3, 5; 42: 16, 19).”

²⁸¹ Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 515; emphasis his, words in brackets mine
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the things a man may do;⁴ then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found,⁵ or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day *he presents* his guilt offering.⁶ "Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, (Lev. 6:2-6 NASB)

Theft was not allowed to be profitable. The thief must restore order by adding some increment or percentage to the thing stolen, as much as five-fold or as little as one-fifth. Otherwise, he had nothing to lose if he was caught; he could simply give back what he stole. But by being forced to add something, his theft became expensive. What was not done in Israel was imprisonment for theft. What good would this do? The victim would still be without his property, and the thief would be in a state of confinement, unable to work to restore what was stolen, and unable to be useful to society through labor (Eph. 4: 28). Even capital punishment was a form of restitution. The murderer, rapist, or kidnapper must repay the life he took with his own life. Order is restored in a land polluted with innocent blood by blood (Num. 35: 33; Deut. 21: 1-9).

The rod for the back of fools is restitution, not imprisonment. Either he forfeits his life for the life he stole, or he restores property plus a percentage. Biblical law is proportionate to the crime.

27: 22 Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his foolishness will not depart from him.

In support of what has been said about restitution, this proverb concludes that punishment alone will not change a fool. The purpose of the law is not punishment, as such, but restitution. The modern "penitentiary" or "correctional facility" is a delusion.

"The belief in the necessary working of affliction for our saving good is a fatal delusion." Prisons were made into penitentiaries through the mistaken notion that confinement would bring repentance and effect a cure. Instead, many prisoners become hardened criminals. Divine grace that regenerates the fool is his only hope of being converted into a useful person (cf. 26: 11).²⁸²

28: 23 He who rebukes a man will afterward find *more* favor Than he who flatters with the tongue.

29: 1 A man who hardens *his* neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

29: 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.

29: 17 Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.

D. Friendship

25: 19 *Like* a bad tooth and an unsteady foot Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.

27: 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

27: 9 Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

27: 10 Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, And do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away.

27: 14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

E. Generosity and Greed

²⁸² Waltke, II. p. 388. Citing Bridges, p. 522

- 25: 16 Have you found honey? Eat *only* what you need, That you not have it in excess and vomit it.
 27: 20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.
 28: 8 He who increases his wealth by interest and usury Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.
 28: 27 He who gives to the poor will never want, But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses.

Paradoxically [a paradox is an apparent contradiction], in God's economy, which is against natural reason, the generous do not lack and the stingy will not escape punishment because the compassionate Lord stands behind the stated principle of reciprocity [exchange].²⁸³

As Jesus said,

"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." (Lk. 6:38 NASB)

Jesus speaks in a world in which reciprocity (this for that) was the normative (moral) standard. Wealthy patrons solidified their status in society through calculated benevolence creating "never-ending cycles of repayment and liability". No act of kindness was free. All must be repaid in some form or other. Jesus turns this social order on its head by promising repayment from God who obligates himself to repay the kindness done to others without us expecting something from those who have received our kindness.²⁸⁴ It is clear from the immediate context of 6: 38 that God's people are called upon to give without expecting anything in return from their recipients.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them.
³³ "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same.
³⁴ "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*.
³⁵ "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*. (Lk. 6:32-35 NASB)

Moreover, we cannot obligate God to repay us in like kind. When we give to the poor, we should not expect God to replenish our funds. He may choose to give in very unexpected ways. All we know for sure is that God will be no man's debtor. We cannot out-give Him. We will one day look back at any kindness we have done to others—although we are not attempting to keep records (Matt. 6: 3)—and know that the Lord has rewarded us many-fold. Moreover, we must be constantly mindful that we are unworthy slaves who have done only what we should have done (Lk. 17: 10)—and, if we are honest with ourselves, much less than we should have done.

F. Heart and Motives

- 27: 19 As in water face *reflects* face, So the heart of man *reflects* man.
 28: 9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

False piety is condemned. A person may feign (fake) religion through a rigorous devotional and prayer life, but the one who loves God will keep his commandments (Jn. 14: 15, 23-24). This is not legalism, as if keeping the commandments were the means of earning salvation and the love of God. **Listening to the law** (equivalent to keeping the law) is an expression of love without which love is only a word. If a man says

²⁸³ Waltke, II. p. 428

²⁸⁴ Joel B. Green, *Luke*, p. 274

he loves his wife but is unfaithful, he does not love her. If he visits porn sites on the internet, he does not love her. No amount of prayer or church attendance will make up for his adultery (cf. Isa. 1).

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

G. Humility and Pride

25: 14 *Like* clouds and wind without rain Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.

25: 27 It is not good to eat much honey, Nor is it glory to search out one's own glory.

26: 12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

26: 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

27: 1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

James alludes to this proverb.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (Jas. 4:13-16 NASB)

Jesus goes a step farther by forbidding us to even worry about tomorrow.

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt. 6:31-33 NASB)

Like everything and everyone, **tomorrow** is in the hands of God. By worrying, we cannot add a single hour to his life; and, most likely, we will shorten it. (I'm preaching to myself, because I tend to be a "worry wort", a southern expression for someone who makes worry a habit.

"And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? (Matt. 6:27 NASB)

The word translated **hour** is literally "forearm" (*pechus*), about half a meter in length. Other translations follow.

^{ESV} **Matthew 6:27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? (Matt. 6:27 ESV)

^{NKJ} **Matthew 6:27** "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? (Matt. 6:27 NKJ)

Stature (*helikia*) is translated "span of life" by the ESV, but it can mean the height of a man's stature. The context—the sermon on the mount, preached primarily to poor people—seems to dictate the translation of **hour**; yet I wonder why Jesus would use a word which could be translated **cubit** instead of a word like *hora* which is used many times in Matthew's gospel for **hour**. Could Jesus be implying that worrying about what we eat, and put on finds its source in pride and the desire to boast before men? This may be speculation, but pride can be rooted in a man's possessions; and a person may worry about the humiliation of poverty which depreciates his **stature** in society. He worries about what his wife thinks of him, or his children who are living in poverty—or living in a small house rather than a big house.

Now we are back to the proverb's admonition against boasting.

27: 2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

Continuing with 27: 1, the sage advises us to keep our achievements to ourselves. This becomes difficult when none of our peers recognize our achievements, presenting the temptation to offer subtle hints, subtle boasts, of what we have accomplished. Implicit in the proverb is the reputation one may earn inadvertently (without trying) by doing good. We must let our works speak for themselves. The NT offers more detail with the assurance that God sees everything and will reward us according to our works.

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (Heb. 6:10 NASB)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58 NASB)

But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD.¹⁸ For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends. (2 Cor. 10:17-18 NASB)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

Finally, if we have the praise of God alone, this should be enough.

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' (Matt. 25:21 NASB)

27: 21 The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, And each *is tested* by the praise accorded him.

The Lord tests us with the praise of men in several ways.

1. Do we crave their approval more than His? The praise of men can be falsely interpreted as the praise of God.
2. Do we believe all the good things people are saying about us; or do we listen humbly, knowing that we are undeserving sinners who need God's grace daily to be saved? (Lk. 18: 13)
3. The praise of men may be interpreted to mean that God is in debt to us.

"Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'?⁸ "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink '?⁹ "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?¹⁰ "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.'" (Lk. 17:7-10 NASB)

On our best day, we are still not much. Our worth is defined by the infinite price paid for us, the blood of Christ, nothing more.

27: 4 Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, But who can stand before jealousy?

28: 11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding sees through him.

28: 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

28: 25 An arrogant man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

A wonderful proverb for those being counseled to “follow your own heart”, an oft repeated statement on western movies which has become the only commandment for many people. Jeremiah, on the other hand, had it right when he said that the heart is a liar.

"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9 NASB)

Men and women follow their hearts into adultery, theft, and murder. Rather, the sage tells us,

Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. ⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. (Prov. 3:5-7 NASB)

29: 23 A man's pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor.

Haman's prideful ambition led to his execution (Esther), and David's pride in taking Bathsheba led to unending sorrows the rest of his life. Citing Ps. 8: 3-4 in a footnote, Bridges quips (jokes),

The real value of man in himself is so small, that the Psalmist is at a loss where to find it. His undue value of himself is utter delusion; having lost all; striped of all; yet proud, as if he were the possessor of all.²⁸⁵

Perhaps Jesus was alluding to this proverb when he told the story of the wedding feast in Luke 14: 1-11, ending with the words,

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 14:11 NASB)

H. The Lord; the Fear of the Lord

- 28: 5 Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.
 28: 14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.
 28: 25 An arrogant man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.
 29: 13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.
 29: 25 The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.
 29: 26 Many seek the ruler's favor, But justice for man *comes* from the LORD.

I. Love and Hatred

- 25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
 25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.
 26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.
 26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.
 26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.
 26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.
 26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

²⁸⁵ Bridges, p. 582, citing Ps. 8: 3-4
 christcommunitystudycenter.org

The sage warns us that people are not always what they seem to be. Though love “believes all things”—i.e. it gives the benefit of the doubt—love is not gullible, believing everything. We are cautioned to read between the lines of a person’s speech, considering its source. Is this person generally reliable? What is he trying to gain? We must be generally inclined to think the best of people and to attribute the best of motives to them; but clearly, we cannot trust everyone.

J. Marriage and Family—the Home

25: 24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

27: 8 Like a bird that wanders from her nest, So is a man who wanders from his home.

A bird that wanders from her nest depicts a crisis situation in which the bird is fleeing danger; otherwise, it would remain in the security of the nest. A man fleeing his home does so because of some crisis such as war, famine, or loss of employment.²⁸⁶ There appears to be no contextual clues to the proverb’s full meaning, and we would have wished the sage to elaborate further. The sage was fully aware of the history of his own people, driven from their homes and marched to Assyria and Babylon. The proverb speaks eloquently to the crisis of displaced people all over the world living either in refugee camps or in foreign cities far away from the homeland they were forced to flee. According to World Economic Forum,

One in every 113 people on the planet is now a refugee. Around the world, someone is displaced every three seconds, forced from their homes by violence, war and persecution.

By the end of 2016, the number of displaced people had risen to 65.6 million - more than the population of the United Kingdom. The number is an increase of 300,000 on the year before, and the largest number ever recorded, according to the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR.

27: 11 Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, That I may reply to him who reproaches me.

27: 15 A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike;

27: 16 He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.

28: 7 He who keeps the law is a discerning son, But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.

28: 24 He who robs his father or his mother And says, "It is not a transgression," Is the companion of a man who destroys.

29: 3 A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes *his* wealth.

29: 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.

29: 17 Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.

K. Observations of Human Nature

25: 2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

25: 3 As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, So the heart of kings is unsearchable.

25: 17 Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Or he will become weary of you and hate you.

25: 20 *Like* one who takes off a garment on a cold day, *or like* vinegar on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.

25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.

²⁸⁶ Waltke, II. p. 378

- 25: 23 The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance.
 25: 25 *Like* cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land.
 26: 6 He cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.
 26: 8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling, So is he who gives honor to a fool.
 26: 11 Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.
 26: 17 *Like* one who takes a dog by the ears Is he who passes by *and* meddles with strife not belonging to him.
 26: 18 Like a madman who throws Firebrands, arrows and death,
 26: 19 So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?"
 27: 14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.
 27: 19 As in water face *reflects* face, So the heart of man *reflects* man.
 29: 19 A slave will not be instructed by words *alone*; For though he understands, there will be no response.
 29: 21 He who pampers his slave from childhood Will in the end find him to be a son.

L. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich

- 27: 7 A sated man loathes honey, But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet.

According to a German proverb, "Hunger is the best cook."²⁸⁷ In other words, if a man is truly hungry, anything will taste good. On the other hand, to the man who has everything and is full (**sated**), not even the sweetest food will satisfy him. The proverb acknowledges that there is some compensation for those who have few worldly goods in this life. They are easily satisfied with simple improvements—a roof that does not leak, clothes and shoes without holes, meat for a meal even if tough. But for those who have everything, even the most expensive delicacies (foods), cars, homes, clothing, exotic vacations, etc. become hum-drum and commonplace. After a while, nothing seems to give them the same level of satisfaction as before.

Delitzsch applies this to the spiritual realm by saying,

Let the man whom god has richly satisfied with good things guard himself against ingratitude towards the Giver, and against an undervaluing of the gifts received; and if they are spiritual blessings, let him guard himself against self-satisfaction and self-contentment, which is, in truth, the worst poverty, Rev. 3: 17; for life without God is a constant hunger and thirst. There is in worldly things, even the most pleasing, a dissatisfaction felt, and a dissatisfaction awakening disgust; and in spiritual life, a satiety which supposes itself to be full of life, but which is nothing else than the decay of life, than the changing of life into death.²⁸⁸

I believe Delitzsch is saying that we can become satiated (completely full) upon the good truths of the word of God and kingdom of God that we begin to take them for granted even to the point of despising them. Heavenly truth becomes commonplace and mundane, like honey to a gorged man. On the other hand, there is the new believer saved from a life of sin and disgrace, hearing new truth daily and feeding enthusiastically upon every spiritual morsel fed to him by pastors and fellow believers. He is hungry. Let us never despise familiar truth from the Bible, for it is by steady consumption that we grow in our understanding of God's grace. We will never fully comprehend it.

- 27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

²⁸⁷ Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, p.202

²⁸⁸ Delitzsch, pp. 202-203

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 And *there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

These five verses extol (praise) the virtues of an agrarian lifestyle. The master of the farm must not leave everything for his servants to do, but must take an active part in the running of the farm.²⁸⁹ There is something special about being able to produce the goods which are necessary to sustain life—**lambs** wool for **clothing**, **goat's milk enough for your food**. The farmer gathers **herbs** from the **mountains**. Modern life in the 20th and 21st centuries has seen a steady decrease in food production on family farms. Many western children, especially those living in cities their whole lives, scarcely know where food comes from—a grocery store, of course! Wendell Berry considers eating home-grown food to be the closest connection we have with creation.

Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.²⁹⁰

Adam was placed in the garden to cultivate it and keep it—before, not after, he fell—indicative of God's pleasure in the creation and His desire for man to continue exploring it.

28: 3 A poor man who oppresses the lowly Is *like* a driving rain which leaves no food.

28: 6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than he who is crooked though he be rich.

28: 8 He who increases his wealth by interest and usury Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.

28: 11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding sees through him.

28: 15 *Like* a roaring lion and a rushing bear Is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

28: 19 He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty.

28: 20 A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished.

28: 21 To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

28: 22 A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth And does not know that want will come upon him.

29: 7 The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.

29: 14 If a king judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever.

M. The Power of the Tongue

25: 8 Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?

25: 9 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,

25: 10 Or he who hears *it* will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

25: 11 *Like* apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

25: 12 *Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprovener to a listening ear.

²⁸⁹ Bridges, p. 523

²⁹⁰ Wendell Berry, "Pleasures of Eating," in *What Are People For?*, p. 152, cited from Bartholomew, p. 154.

25: 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

25: 15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.

25: 20 *Like* one who takes off a garment on a cold day, *or like* vinegar on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.

25: 23 The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance.

25: 25 *Like* cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land.

26: 2 Like a sparrow in *its* flitting, like a swallow in *its* flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.

26: 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.

26: 21 *Like* charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.

26: 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

26: 23 *Like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart.

26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.

26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.

26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 9 Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

27: 14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

28: 23 He who rebukes a man will afterward find *more* favor Than he who flatters with the tongue.

29: 5 A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.

N. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

25: 2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

25: 3 *As* the heavens for height and the earth for depth, So the heart of kings is unsearchable.

25: 4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith;

25: 5 Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.

25: 6 Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of great men;

25: 7 For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here," Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen.

26: 1 Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool.

26: 8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling, So is he who gives honor to a fool.

27: 18 He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit, And he who cares for his master will be honored.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 *And there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

29: 13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

29: 19 A slave will not be instructed by words *alone*; For though he understands, there will be no response.

29: 21 He who pampers his slave from childhood Will in the end find him to be a son.

O. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

25: 26 *Like* a trampled spring and a polluted well Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.
 26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.
 28: 1 The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.
 28: 4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them.
 28: 9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.
 28: 10 He who leads the upright astray in an evil way Will himself fall into his own pit, But the blameless will inherit good.
 28: 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.
 28: 28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; But when they perish, the righteous increase.
 29: 6 By transgression an evil man is ensnared, But the righteous sings and rejoices.
 29: 7 The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.
 29: 16 When the wicked increase, transgression increases; But the righteous will see their fall.
 29: 24 He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He hears the oath but tells nothing.
 29: 27 An unjust man is abominable to the righteous, And he who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked.

P. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

25: 3 As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, So the heart of kings is unsearchable.
 25: 4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith;
 25: 5 Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.

 25: 6 Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of great men;
 25: 7 For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here," Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen.

 25: 8 Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?
 25: 9 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,
 25: 10 Or he who hears *it* will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.
 25: 15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.
 25: 17 Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Or he will become weary of you and hate you.
 25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
 25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.
 25: 26 *Like* a trampled spring and a polluted well Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.
 26: 17 *Like* one who takes a dog by the ears Is he who passes by *and* meddles with strife not belonging to him.
 26: 18 Like a madman who throws Firebrands, arrows and death,
 26: 19 So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?"

 26: 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.
 26: 21 *Like* charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.
 26: 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.
 26: 23 *Like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart.
 26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.
 26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.
 26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.
 26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.
 26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 8 Like a bird that wanders from her nest, So is a man who wanders from his home.

28: 2 By the transgression of a land many are its princes, But by a man of understanding *and* knowledge, so it endures.

28: 3 A poor man who oppresses the lowly Is *like* a driving rain which leaves no food.

28: 4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them.

28: 5 Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.

28: 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.

28: 15 *Like* a roaring lion and a rushing bear Is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

28: 16 A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, *But* he who hates unjust gain will prolong *his* days.

28: 17 A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood Will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him.

28: 18 He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, But he who is crooked will fall all at once.

28: 21 To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

28: 28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; But when they perish, the righteous increase.

29: 2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.

29: 4 The king gives stability to the land by justice, But a man who takes bribes overthrows it.

29: 7 The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.

29: 8 Scorners set a city aflame, But wise men turn away anger.

29: 10 Men of bloodshed hate the blameless, But the upright are concerned for his life.

29: 12 If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers *become* wicked.

29: 13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

29: 14 If a king judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever.

29: 18 Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law.

29: 26 Many seek the ruler's favor, But justice for man *comes* from the LORD.

Q. Speech as a Reflection of Character

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

29: 20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

R. Truth and Deception

25: 8 Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?

25: 9 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,

25: 10 Or he who hears *it* will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

25: 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

25: 18 *Like* a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.

25: 19 *Like* a bad tooth and an unsteady foot Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.

26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.

26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.

26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

28: 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

28: 21 To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

29: 4 The king gives stability to the land by justice, But a man who takes bribes overthrows it.

29: 5 A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.

29: 12 If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers *become* wicked.

S. Vengeance

25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.

T. Wisdom's Protection

25: 4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith;

25: 5 Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.

26: 6 He cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.

27: 12 A prudent man sees evil *and* hides himself, The naive proceed *and* pay the penalty.

27: 13 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for an adulterous woman hold him in pledge.

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 *And there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

28: 1 The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.

28: 18 He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, But he who is crooked will fall all at once.

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

29: 3 A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes *his* wealth.

U. Wise Men Contrasted with Fools, the Naive, and Scoffers

26: 1 Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool.

26: 2 Like a sparrow in *its* flitting, like a swallow in *its* flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.

26: 3 A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, And a rod for the back of fools.

26: 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him.

26: 5 Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, That he not be wise in his own eyes.

26: 6 He cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.

26: 7 *Like* the legs *which* are useless to the lame, So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

26: 8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling, So is he who gives honor to a fool.

26: 9 *Like* a thorn *which* falls into the hand of a drunkard, So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

26: 10 *Like* an archer who wounds everyone, So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by.

26: 11 Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.

26: 12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

27: 3 A stone is heavy and the sand weighty, But the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them.

27: 12 A prudent man sees evil *and* hides himself, The naive proceed *and* pay the penalty.

27: 13 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for an adulterous woman hold him in pledge.

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

27: 22 Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his foolishness will not depart from him.

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

29: 1 A man who hardens *his* neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

29: 8 Scorners set a city aflame, But wise men turn away anger.

29: 9 When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest.

29: 10 Men of bloodshed hate the blameless, But the upright are concerned for his life.

29: 11 A fool always loses his temper, But a wise man holds it back.

29: 20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

V. Women—Wise and Foolish

25: 24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

27: 15 A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike;

27: 16 He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.

W. Work and Sloth

26: 10 *Like* an archer who wounds everyone, So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by.

26: 13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!"

26: 14 *As* the door turns on its hinges, So *does* the sluggard on his bed.

26: 15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again.

26: 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 *And there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

28: 19 He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty.

28: 20 A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished.

VI. Collection VI: The Words of Agur (30: 1-33)

Collection VI are the words of Agur which are primarily distinguished by three characteristics: (1) the epistemological question of knowing, (2) numerical sayings, and (3) sayings which pertain to the social order.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Waltke, pp. 26-27, I. *Proverbs*).

First, Agur presents us with the theoretical question of epistemology—the question which asks, “How do we acquire knowledge?” or to put it another way, “How do we really know what we know?” Agur develops his answer not philosophically in terms of method, but in terms of relationship. We know the truth because we know **Him** (God) who *is* the truth.

Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. ³ Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. ⁴ Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know! ⁵ Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. ⁷ Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, ⁹ That 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. (Prov. 30:2-9 NASB)

An example of the **second** characteristic is vv. 24-28.

Four things are small on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise: The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; The shephanim are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; The lizard you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings' palaces.

Another is vv. 29-31.

There are **three** things which are stately in *their* march, Even **four** which are stately when they walk: The lion *which* is mighty among beasts And does not retreat before any, The strutting rooster, the male goat also, And a king *when his* army is with him.

Agur's words are replete (well-supplied) with the use of **two's, three's, and four's**.

Thirdly, his work is pre-occupied with the **established social order** which should not be upset by aberrations (departures from what is right) of that order. Examples of this concern for proper social order are v. 11, 17, and vv. 21-23.

There is a kind of *man* who curses his father And does not bless his mother. (Prov. 30:11 NASB)
The 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. (Prov. 30:17 NASB)

Verses 21-23 are a combination of numerical sayings and sayings about the social order.

Under **three** things the earth quakes, And under **four**, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.

We will now pick up Waltke's outline with a few modifications.

A. Agur's Biographical Confession (vv. 2-9)

Agur begins his discourse in the same way that the book of *Job* ends—in the *confession that man cannot know wisdom independently of God* (Job 40: 4; 42: 3, 6). Left to himself, he is **stupid** and has no **understanding**. He has not “learned wisdom”, nor does he have “knowledge of the Holy One”. Agur makes *four statements* which are consistent with the numerical theme of the chapter. Each of these statements is a disclaimer to any wisdom possessed independently of God. But whatever is deficient in his human understanding is sufficiently provided by God in the special revelation of His word (vv. 5-6).²⁹²

The four statements disclaiming any wisdom are followed by *four rhetorical questions* demanding one answer: “God alone.” God alone has ascended into heaven and descended. God alone has gathered the wind in His fists. God alone has wrapped the waters in His garment. God alone has established all the ends of the earth. These four questions are then followed by *two* more questions: **What is His name or His son’s name?** The obvious answer to the first question is “God”. This is the name of the One who is implied in the four previous rhetorical questions beginning with **who**.

But what is **His son’s name**? Older commentators often interpret the son as Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity.²⁹³ Waltke, a modern interpreter, interprets the son as *Israel*. In the book of *Proverbs*, “son” always refers to the son who is taught by his father or teacher.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, the nation of Israel is often identified as God’s son (Ex. 4: 22; Hosea 11: 1; Isa. 63: 16; 64: 8; Jer. 31: 9; Rom. 9: 4). This interpretation would fit better with the context. Agur is arguing in a direct line from the inadequacy of human wisdom to the adequacy of God’s wisdom, and he is encouraging the son, who represents all Israel reading his words to acknowledge the name of the only One who can give wisdom. **What is His name** is likely a reference back to “Israel’s foundational question” when Moses announced the Lord’s intention to deliver them from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 3: 13). The solution to man’s inadequacy is the bridge which God supplies through His written word which makes men wise.

The answer to these questions, standing between humanity’s inability to know wisdom (vv. 2-3) and the presence of God’s word with his people (vv. 5-6), unravels the paradox [a seeming contradiction] of how inaccessible wisdom becomes accessible to earthlings [human beings]...

Job 28: 12-28 develops the same argument, moving from human inability to obtain wisdom (vv. 12-19) to the Lord’s finding and testing of it (vv. 20-27) to his revealing it to human beings (v. 28). Agur’s four questions in 30: 4a proceed along the same line of reasoning. The first question establishes the *unbridgeable gap* between the earthling and heaven, presumably where wisdom dwells. The last three establish that God must possess wisdom because he *demonstrates* it. In Job 38 the Lord asks Job similar questions to Agur’s and implies the answer, “Not you, Job, but God” (Job 38: 5, 25, 29, 36, 37, 41; 39: 5).²⁹⁵

The question Agur asks is not primarily one of method—*how* one can know the truth philosophically—but rather one of relationship—*who* does he know who *is* the truth? “What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know.” Quoting J. Pauls, Waltke remarks,

²⁹² Waltke, p. 470

²⁹³ Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 591-592; Matthew Henry, *Proverbs*, pp. 964-965; Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, p. 276).

²⁹⁴ Waltke, p. 471, 474

²⁹⁵ Waltke, II. pp. 472-473; emphasis and words in brackets mine

Agur “radically reshapes the crisis of knowing ...as a crisis of relationship. The preeminent [most important] rhetorical question, ‘No one but Yahweh’ and the dual request for personal names shapes the passage in a radical way, suggesting that the resolution to the epistemological crisis [the difficulty of knowing truth and gaining knowledge] is defined in *relational* rather than *intellectual* categories. True wisdom is *found* in a responsive and receptive relationship with Yahweh, who is wisdom’s sole possessor.” Similarly, Job’s epistemological angst [anxiety or worry] was relieved only when he humbled himself before the transcendent Sovereign. He replaced his prior state of being “without knowledge” with “I know that you can do all things” (Job 42: 2-3).²⁹⁶

Verse 5 leaves the reader in no doubt about the solution to man’s crisis (problem) of knowledge. The answer to all the “who” questions is found here. Agur combines Ps. 12: 6 and Ps. 18: 30.

The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. (Ps. 12:6 NASB)

As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tried; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him. (Ps. 18:30 NASB)

Refuge against the crisis of knowing is found only in Yahweh who is truth Himself. Here, as in the rest of the Bible, no effort is made to prove or verify the claims of Scripture—including Agur’s words—to be the absolute truth. There is no standard or canon *higher or more authoritative* than Scripture by which it can be judged.²⁹⁷ If human reasoning were necessary to establish the reliability of Scripture, then human reason, not Scripture, becomes the *final determination* of truth. This would, in turn, lead us back to Agur’s initial skepticism in vv. 2-3.²⁹⁸

Deuteronomy 4: 2 and 12: 32 are quoted in v. 6 as a warning to anyone who would attempt to add to the words of God. That Agur considered his words in Prov. 30 as the *inspired word of God* is made clear from the introduction, “The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the *oracle*” (or “burden”; cf. Isa. 13: 1; Nah. 1: 1; Hab. 1: 1; Mal. 1: 1). Thus, Agur considers his own words as part of the developing canon of the OT scriptures.²⁹⁹

The formula [of v. 6] emphasizes the authority of Agur’s sayings, reinforces their purity, and safeguards them against an apostate form of human authority by tampering with them. Anyone who alters them by adding to them is not seeking refuge in the Lord but arrogantly conforming the Lord to his own inspiration (cf. 1 Cor. 4: 6). Verset B provides the motivation for recognizing the canonical status of Agur’s sayings. Since a human being cannot know wisdom (vv. 2-3), anyone who adds to them will falsify them. In contrast to an empirical epistemology [a theory of knowledge based on human experience] that is accustomed to proving everything else by human experience, Agur argues it is *our word*, not God’s, that finally must be proven.³⁰⁰

Agur’s autobiography continues in vv. 7-9 with a prayer which is also in numerical form, “*Two* things I asked of Thee”. He asks that God deliver him from (1) deception and lies and (2) from poverty or riches. Truth and deception, poverty and riches are burning issues in the book of *Proverbs* with over 120 verses devoted to these two subjects. They are, of course, very much related to one another. Deception and lying can be the consequence of riches or poverty or vice

²⁹⁶ Waltke, II. p. 475, emphasis and words in brackets mine

²⁹⁷ Cf. “The Doctrine of Scripture” in McNeill, “Systematic Theology”

²⁹⁸ Waltke, II. p. 476

²⁹⁹ Waltke, II. pp. 465, 477

³⁰⁰ Waltke, p. 477; emphasis his; words in brackets mine

versa (the other way around); riches or poverty may be the consequence of lying and deception. Stealing is the “twin sister” to lying, and poverty may lead a person to deceive others in order to satisfy his basic needs. (I have been swindled a few times both in Africa and in the US by those who were poor.) On the other hand, those who are rich may lie in order to maintain their riches or to amass new fortunes (the World-Com scandal in Mississippi in which corporate executives “cooked the books” in an accounting scheme which cost investors billions of dollars, the life savings of many, and workers their jobs). Once a person has tasted of riches, he may be inclined to do anything to keep them. It is also true that a person’s lying tongue can bring poverty as just retribution.

Proverbs promises riches to those who are wise (3: 16; 8: 18; 22: 4), and it may seem that Agur is in tension with its teaching by requesting that God withhold riches from him. But Agur recognizes that though riches are a blessing from God, they can become a curse if they encourage one to underestimate his need for God. Riches can be used to meet the needs of others (1 Tim. 6: 17-19), but they are nevertheless dangerous to those who lack wisdom (1 Tim. 6: 9).

B. The Seven Numerical Sayings (30: 10-31)

1. First Single-Line Proverb (v. 10)

¹⁰Do not slander a slave to his master, Or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.

Verse 10 is not a numerical saying but is a transitional saying looking backward to the numerical sayings of vv. 2-9 and forward to the numerical sayings in the rest of the chapter.³⁰¹ If a person slanders a slave to his master the slave may invoke a curse against him that God will recognize. God offers a special measure of protection to the poor who have little access to public justice (14: 31; 17: 5; 21: 13; 28: 27; 29: 7; Ps. 34: 6; 72: 13; 140: 12). The slave of another is a poor man who has very little recourse (aid) against his more powerful accusers.³⁰² If the accusation is false, the assumption in this verse, then the only thing he can do is to cry out to God to avenge him, something God will do in due time (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9: 25-26; 36). Furthermore, Agur upholds the proper social order by discouraging an activity—the unjust slander of slaves—which is likely to incite rebellion leading to anarchy.³⁰³

2. The First Set of Three Numerical Sayings (vv. 11-16)

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. ¹⁵The 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."

a. Four characteristics of a generation

³⁰¹ Such a transitional statement in Hebrew poetry is called a *janus*; Waltke, p. 47, Vol. 1

³⁰² Waltke, II. p. 483

³⁰³ Waltke, II. p. 483

The transition between v. 10 and 11 is found in the reference to a curse. The reference to “generation” (or “kind”) in vv. 11-14 gives the impression that all *four* verses are talking about the *same* generation of people and not four different “kinds” or “generations”. Nevertheless, they do not condemn the entire generation but only individuals within it.³⁰⁴ The same generation or kind who curses his father (v. 11) would also be pure in his own eyes yet filthy (v. 12), proud (v. 13), and oppressive toward the needy (v. 14). Agur’s main purpose is to uphold the *acceptable social order* by condemning certain kinds of people or behavior who contribute to the breakdown of that social order. The family is the basis of any society, and if there is no respect for the authority of father and mother, there can be no basis for authority of any kind.

The fifth commandment (Ex. 20: 12), “Honor your father and your mother, *that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you*”, is the “first commandment with a promise” (Eph. 6: 2). The promise consists of long life, also promised in Prov. 3: 16, 9: 11, as well as many other proverbs. But honoring parents also includes the promise of *enjoying an orderly and healthy society* (“in the land”) in which everyone knows his proper place within (not outside) the authority structures. In the *proper social order*, parents are supposed to exercise authority over their children, and to be honored by their children, and not the other way around. The tyranny (oppression) of youth occurs in any family and in any society in which youth get their way by prevailing against their parents. They not only “curse” their parents through disrespect and disobedience, but they fail to “bless” them through positive appreciation and material support in the future (cf. Mk. 7: 10-13). The Mark passage indicates that honoring parents is not limited to people in their teens but applies to offspring of any age with certain qualifications. Those who fail to honor parents in their youth will continue this legacy of dishonor into their adult life and will suffer from it at the hands of their own children (Ex. 20: 5; Deut. 5: 9).

Society cannot prosper being led by young people who lack the practical wisdom which comes from years of submission to the law of God. When such “leadership” prevails, it is a judgment of God against that society (Isa. 3: 1-3). They are wise in their own eyes (3: 7), a problem related to the deficiency of being “pure” in their own eyes (v. 12). In other words, this “kind” of youth (not all youth) establishes a social order of their own with its own moral code.³⁰⁵ Thinking themselves pure because they measure themselves by themselves (2 Cor. 10: 12)—that is, by their own moral code—they are actually filthy from the pollution of sin (v. 12; “Yet is not washed from his filthiness”). They are also arrogant (v. 13) and become the greedy oppressors of the poor and needy. Thus, the kind of people who are guilty in one of the areas of vv. 11-14 are generally guilty in all these areas.

b. The Leech and His Two Daughters (v. 15a)

The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give." (Prov. 30:15a NASB)

The leech was common in all the still waters of Palestine. It had two sucking organs, one for drawing blood from its victim and the other for attaching itself. Perhaps the two daughters are metaphorical references to the two sucking organs.³⁰⁶ Everyone has met the leech. He is the con-artist who cheats another out of his money with credible lies. He is the person who is always

³⁰⁴ Waltke, II. p. 484).

³⁰⁵ Waltke, II. p. 485

³⁰⁶ Waltke, II. p. 487

running his mouth and getting into other people's business but never working, expecting others to subsidize his laziness by feeding him (2 Thess. 3: 6-12). He is the person who effectively "steals" from others by failing to provide for his own needs (Eph. 4: 28), for when he refuses to work and continually begs ("give, give"), he is effectively stealing from the productive members of society.

Again, Agur's warning is meant as a contribution to the proper social order. A properly ordered society is sustained only through the hard work of those who **add** to it with their labor, not by those who **subtract** from society by "mooching" or "leeching" from others. The Biblical writers are never opposed to the legitimate poor who are poor through no fault of their own, but they have much to say in condemnation of the lazy.

c. The Four Things Which Cannot Be Satisfied (vv. 15b-17)

There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, "Enough": ¹⁶ Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, And fire that never says, "Enough." ¹⁷ The 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. (Prov. 30:15b-17 NASB)

This is the first explicit numerical saying introduced by the words, "There are three things...four..."³⁰⁷ The subject of this numerical saying is given in the words, "that will not be satisfied...that will not say 'Enough.'"

Sheol and the barren womb are paired together. As Sheol is never satisfied with the number of the dead, the barren womb is never satisfied until it gives birth. Sheol is concerned with the **taking** of human life; the barren womb with **producing** it. Likewise, the earth is never satisfied with enough water for the **production** of crops, while fire is never satisfied with the **destruction** of crops. The two pairs complement one another in that the two concepts of production and destruction—life and death—are common to both pairs. But, as always, there is a moral principle involved which relates to people, not land and fire. As the verses are related to the greedy generation of v. 14, perhaps Agur wishes to say that while life endures, there will always be the wicked who snatch life and property away from others and the righteous who wish to preserve the lives and property of others.

3. Second Single-Line Proverb (30: 17)

¹⁷ The 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.

This single-line proverb complements what Agur has said in vv. 11-14 and expresses the retributive justice which is due such a person. Notice that the same eye which is haughty and is raised in arrogance against his parents, and which now mocks his father and scorns his mother, will be plucked out and eaten. The eye which has coveted the fields of others and **devoured** the poor (v. 14) will now be devoured.³⁰⁸ Agur uses the symbol of the covenant curse which every Hebrew reader would have understood. Moreover, the penalty for cursing parents was death.

³⁰⁷ Waltke, II. p. 487

³⁰⁸ Waltke, II. p. 489

"But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: (Deut. 28:15 NASB)

"Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten *them* away. (Deut. 28:26 NASB)

"He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Exod. 21:17 NASB)

Proverbs 30: 15 would be a good verse to use when preaching to a youth group at church or in secondary school, though I doubt it gets much employment. It would be "too controversial" for sensitive evangelicals.

4. The Second Set of Four Numerical Sayings (30: 18-31)

a. Four wonderful ways and one immoral way (vv. 18-20)

¹⁸ There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Four which I do not understand: ¹⁹ The 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. ²⁰ This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, "I have done no wrong."

In this set of numerical sayings, the four "wonderful" ways of animals and humans are contrasted with the degenerate (morally corrupt) way of the adulteress. The eagle soars gracefully and effortlessly through the air defying gravitational forces. The snake, with no hands or legs maneuvers skillfully over a rock. A ship, though heavily laden (loaded down) with cargo and men, sails smoothly and swiftly over the ocean without sinking to the bottom. These are things which the average person takes for granted, but Agur is a keen observer of nature and the laws governing nature. "Natural" laws governing the universe are God's laws which reflect the wonder of his well-designed creation, not chance collisions of molecules.

The "mysterious, magnetic attraction of romantic love" is depicted in the husband having the first sexual intercourse with his virgin wife—for there is nothing negative presented in this picture of sexual intercourse.³⁰⁹ The natural attraction between man and woman within the bonds of marriage are one of the more wonderful things God has created (cf. commentary above on 5: 18-19). Notice that the *natural* attraction is between two people of the *opposite* sex, not the same sex, something which is an abomination to the Lord and punishable by death in theocratic Israel.

'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (Lev. 18:22 NASB)

If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. (Lev. 20:13 NASB)

In contrast to the last **wonderful way** of a husband with his virgin wife stands the immoral way of the adulteress who engages in cheap sex with multiple partners. When she gets through with her adulterous act, she boldly proclaims her innocence. The picture presented is that of using sex to satisfy her sexual appetite in the same way she uses food to satisfy her nutritional appetite—casually and with no consideration of any future consequences—just like eating a meal. No big

³⁰⁹ Waltke, II. p. 492

deal! With this example Agur once again condemns any activity which eats away the *foundations of proper social order and decency*. Just as the man who curses his father and mother threatens to *unravel the moral fabric* which is essential for a just and orderly society, the adulteress (and the adulterer; implied) destroys the foundational building block of any successful culture, the marriage relationship—the creational ordinance God ordained from the beginning of humanity. One who despises the sanctity of marital sex despises God. This is why adultery between men and women was also punishable by death.

If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Lev. 20:10 NASB)

Interestingly, the emphasis in Mosaic law is on the adultery of the man while the emphasis in Proverbs is the adulterous woman. Both are guilty of a capital crime.

b. Four things under which the earth quakes (vv. 21-23)

²¹ Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: ²² Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, ²³ Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.

The main subject, once again, is the *proper social order*. Waltke calls this section “Four upside-down social situations”.³¹⁰ The rapid promotion of disadvantaged people to a higher status in life often leads to pride, chaos, and the oppression of those under their authority. Often the sudden change of environment and the power and privileges afforded them in their new social status are simply more than they can handle.³¹¹ Idi Amin, an uneducated boxer who became president of Uganda, is a prime example. In this verse, “official” is a better translation than **slave** and fits better with the context. An official was a freeman who was in a more strategic position to usurp the authority of the king by a well-planned coup. Once in power, such a person was most likely to misuse his power and prove to be a “pompous tyrant” over his subjects.³¹²

The **fool** who is **satisfied with food** is a man who is a scoundrel and an outcast from society. This is what the Hebrew word *nabal* means (cf. 1 Sam. 25: 2-25; especially v. 25). In this case he is also most likely a person who does not work but relies on the generosity of others or who steals for a living. A fool’s vice (evil ways) should not be rewarded (2 Thess. 3: 10) for when he gets more food for his stomach than usual, he is strengthened to continue his evil ways.³¹³ I have made this mistake before by giving a small amount of money to someone on the streets of Jackson, MS. He told me he needed something to eat, so I gave him a few dollars. No sooner than I had given him the money, I saw him go to a convenience market to buy some beer. My foolish act thus encouraged him in his wicked deception. I wish this had been the last time I was fooled, but it wasn’t.

There is nothing intrinsically negative about previously unwanted women being married later on in life. A variety of circumstances beyond their control may have prevented them from marriage, or they may not have met a man who was godly enough to lead them. Leah was “unloved” by

³¹⁰ Waltke, II. p. 492

³¹¹ See my commentary on Eccl. 10: 5-7 which is based on this passage in *Proverbs*.

³¹² Waltke, II. p. 494.

³¹³ Waltke, II. p. 494

Jacob, but God favored her and gave her more children than Rachel (Gen. 29: 31). The Mosaic Law made special provisions for the “unloved” woman in a polygamous marriage (Deut. 21: 15-17). In v. 23, however, the **unloved woman** is not simply someone who is much older when she is finally married but one for whom there was ample (sufficient) personal reasons for being unmarried. The implication here is that this is a woman who is quarrelsome and difficult to get along with. When she finally finds someone who can put up with her, she becomes even more arrogant and asserts her authority over the household servants with cruelty and injustice.³¹⁴

Admittedly, we have to read between the lines in these proverbs to understand the intent. Agur does not spell it out for us, so to speak, but assumes that the reader has seen these familiar situations for himself first-hand and needs no extended explanation.

The maidservant who supplants her mistress is a situation much easier to understand, like the situation with Hagar who becomes Abram’s wife and bears him a son, Ishmael. By her promotion in status from a simple maid to the wife of a very rich and powerful man, Hagar becomes arrogant and disrespectful toward Sarai (Gen. 16: 4).³¹⁵ The social order is once more overthrown leading to a confusing and chaotic situation.

The modern reader may be confused over Agur’s preoccupation with the proper social order. The western world, and African increasingly since the 1960’s, lives in a world of ostensibly (presumably) democratic government in which anyone may rise to a higher socio-economic level through hard work and industry. But this is not the scenario (scene) under evaluation in vv. 21-23. As I have mentioned earlier, the immediate promotion of unworthy persons to high positions can result in chaotic (confusing) social conditions simply because such persons are not equipped emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, or intellectually to accept the responsibilities of their promotion. As I noted in my commentary on Eccles. 10: 5-7, many political tyrants on the African continent have arisen from poverty only to turn around and oppress the very people who cheered their rise to power. The hopes and dreams of the poor who looked to such men for relief have been dashed to pieces when they discovered that their original intentions (sometimes) of helping the masses quickly gave way to the selfish goals of personal enrichment and power. This is not to say that rich people cannot also become tyrants, for they certainly can and have done so in the past; but this particular proverb is not concerned about that particular situation.

The NT is not altogether silent on the issue of proper social order even in light of the soteriological (salvific) elimination of all distinctions between social class and sex in the church (Gal. 3: 28-29). As far as our relationship to Christ is concerned, there is neither male or female, rich or poor; but biblical subordination is upheld between wives and husbands, masters and slaves (Eph. 5—6). Thus, there is nothing inherently sinful about wives being subject to husbands, slaves subject to masters, and children subject to parents. When Paul writes Philemon about his runaway slave, Onesimus, he does not appeal to him on the basis of the evils of the institution of slavery. While he advises Philemon to forgive Onesimus’ debts by charging them to his account (v. 18), he does not argue that Philemon was in sin for having slaves. Among the Jews, slavery was a **voluntary** institution in which a man could sell his labor for six years to repay his debts (Ex. 21: 2). Freedom after six years applied only to Hebrew slaves, but even if he was a foreigner (except in those situations in which slaves consisted of conquered peoples) he may still escape from his master

³¹⁴ Waltke, p. 494; cf. Delitzsch, p. 300)

³¹⁵ Genesis 14: 14 mentions 318 servants who were trained warriors born in Abram’s house, implying more than a 1000 servants overall; Leupold, *Genesis*, p. 458).

without the legal fear of being returned (Deut. 23: 15-16). Perhaps the rationale for this law was that ill-treatment may have been the motivation for running away. Kidnapping of either Hebrews or foreigners for the purpose of enslavement was forbidden by law and punishable by death (Ex. 21: 16; Deut. 24: 7).³¹⁶

Onesimus was returning to Philemon voluntarily on his own accord. He had been converted under Paul's ministry, and Paul was now sending him back to Philemon not merely as a former slave but as a fellow brother in Christ (v. 16). As for Onesimus' indebtedness to Philemon, Paul made it clear that he would either pay the debts or allow Philemon to forgive the debts on the basis of his spiritual debt to Paul (vv. 18-20). In a not so subtle way, Paul encourages Philemon to do the latter (v. 20). Once again it must be emphasized that slavery was not inherently (in itself) a social evil, but an institution regulated by Biblical law. God does not regulate something he categorically forbids. For example, God does not regulate murder; He simply forbids it and lays out the death penalty as punishment. In the same way, Paul does not instruct the Corinthians that slavery is a social evil without any exceptions, but that Christians should not enter into slavery voluntarily since they were bought with the blood of Christ. If they acquire their freedom, they should do so. On the other hand, if they cannot acquire their freedom, they should not worry about it since in Christ they are free indeed (1 Cor. 7: 20-24).

c. *Four small things that are very wise (vv. 24-28)*

²⁴ Four things are small on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise: ²⁵ The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; ²⁶ The shephanim are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; ²⁷ The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; ²⁸ The lizard you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings' palaces.

Agur presents the examples of four wise creatures in contrast to the four unwise upstarts in vv. 21-23 who do not know their proper place. All four are first noted for their limitations. Ants have no individual strength; badgers likewise are not strong; locusts have no leader; and lizards can be easily captured. However, their limitations are more than compensated by their wisdom. Ants survive by storing up food in the summer for use in the difficult seasons; badgers make their dwellings in well-protected areas among the rocks; locusts move in unison according to well-ordered patterns in divisions or companies; and lizards live among kings in luxurious places.³¹⁷

But what is Agur's point? He is obviously not concerned to give the reader biology lessons, for he assumes that the reader has already observed such phenomena. Again, he does not spell it out for us making the interpretation more difficult. The animals are likened to people who also have limitations but who can overcome their limitations through wisdom. A man may not be strong, but his lack of physical, social, economic, or intellectual strength may be overcome by Biblical wisdom. As the ant lays up food in the summer, the wise man will treasure up the wisdom of God in His word and will act upon it through diligence and labor (Prov. 6: 6-8). He will also plan for difficult days ahead by saving during better seasons. The rock badger is also weak in comparison to other animals, but he is safe in the shelter of the rocks; likewise, the wise man will seek his refuge in God (30: 5), the rock of his salvation (Ps. 62: 2) rather than in his own strength or the strength of men. The locusts have no ruler or king, but they march in unity with one another.

³¹⁶ See R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 136-137, 286

³¹⁷ Waltke, II. pp. 495-496

How much more should believers, whose king is the Lord, live in unity with one another rather than attempting to gain superiority over one another and oppressing one another as the four upstarts of vv. 21-23 (cf. Eph. 4: 11-16). If the lizard is careful, it may live among kings in luxurious palaces. Likewise, the wise man, though perhaps vulnerable to the mistreatment of others, enjoys a life which transcends his earthly troubles through his relationship with God (Prov. 15: 16, 17; 16: 8, 16, 19). His palace and fortress is the Lord. Paul tells Christians that although we are living in this world, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3: 20) and that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2: 6).³¹⁸

d. Four stately marchers (30: 29-31)

²⁹ There are three things which are stately in *their* march, Even four which are stately when they walk: ³⁰ The lion *which* is mighty among beasts And does not retreat before any, ³¹ The strutting rooster, the male goat also, And a king *when his* army is with him.

This is the last set of the seven numerical sayings. It would seem odd that Agur would wish to liken the wise man to a strutting rooster and a king strutting before his army, especially in light of the many exhortations in *Proverbs* against the sin of pride (see the category “Humility and Pride” in your notes). But the exaltation of man is obviously not his intent, and this is clear from what immediately follows in v. 32, “If you have been foolish in exalting yourself...put your hand on your mouth.” Throughout the **words of Agur**, the wise man has been encouraged not to lean on his own understanding (vv. 2-3). Confessions of stupidity and lack of understanding and knowledge are surely not signs of pride, but honest humility. If one wishes to be wise, he must rely fully upon the Lord who gives wisdom in His word, and this word will become to him a means of protection from all evil (v. 5). Having done this, ***the wise man need fear no one but God.***

The **lion** is known as an animal which fears nothing. The same can be said for the **rooster** and the **male goat** in their own realms. They are ready to fight any intruder who dares enter their protected territory. Dogs are known by all to be intensely territorial. Even a small dog will attack another animal five times its size if the animal intrudes upon its territory. Why? Because it knows that it has a **right** to its own turf or territory. On the human level, a king is ready to fight any other army, sometimes much larger, in order to protect his kingdom. The wise man also lives in a protected realm, the realm of wisdom (cf. your notes on “Wisdom’s Protection”). If we trust in God’s wisdom rather than our own, and if it is our life’s goal to be pleasing to the Lord, we do not have to fear anyone else.

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion. (Prov. 28: 1 NASB)

The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted. (Prov. 29: 25 NASB)

What we are not protecting is our own dignity or reputation, but the Lord’s honor; and this one factor will help determine whether our struggle with others is legitimate or illegitimate. The Apostle Paul was not being boastful when he said,

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10: 5 NASB).

³¹⁸ Cited by Waltke, pp. 496-498

Within this context we can hold our heads high, not in human pride, but in the confidence that we have a right to our own turf—the territory of wisdom which God has given us.

C. Conclusion: A Warning Not to Upset the Divine Order (30: 32-33)

³² If you have been foolish in exalting yourself Or if you have plotted *evil*, *put your* hand on your mouth. ³³ For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the churning of anger produces strife.

Throughout his speech, Agur has warned against any attempt to overstep the authority structures which God has built into the social order (vv. 11-14, 17, 20, 21-23). Man should never think more highly of himself than he ought to think (Rom. 12: 3). As Christians we should be content with the spiritual gifts God has allotted to us, not envying those who are more gifted. We should also be content with the social positions given to us. Contentment with one's place in life should not rule out godly ambition to reach whatever potential God has given to us, but unholy anxiety and ambition to fill places of higher status which were meant for others.

This is the message which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written down these words in a book at Jeremiah's dictation, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying:² "Thus says the LORD the God of Israel to you, O Baruch:³ 'You said, "Ah, woe is me! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest."⁴ "Thus you are to say to him, "Thus says the LORD, "Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to uproot, that is, the whole land."⁵ 'But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek *them*; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,' declares the LORD, 'but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.'" (Jer. 45:1-5 NASB)

Jeremiah, kidnapped and taken into Egypt by his own disobedient countrymen, had to live by his own words. He died living in exile, a fitting metaphorical ending of a faithful prophet who speaks God's word to a rebellious people (Jer. 43—46). When all is said and done, our rejoicing should be rooted in the fact that our names are recorded in heaven, not that we have certain spiritual gifts or status.

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."¹⁸ And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.¹⁹ "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.²⁰ "**Nevertheless do not rejoice in this**, that the spirits are subject to you, **but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.**" (Lk. 10:17-20 NASB)

Exalting ourselves and striving for recognition, **the churning of anger**—fueled by pride—produces strife just as surely as the **churning of milk** produces butter and **pressing the nose** produces blood.

VII. Collection VII: The Sayings of Lemuel (31: 1-31)

The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him: (Prov. 31:1 NASB)

The collection is divided into two parts: (1) advice to the king about ruling his subjects (vv. 2-9) and (2) advice about what virtues to look for in a wife (vv. 10-31). The fact that this oracle is one learned from Lemuel's mother is a further testimony to *the status of women as wisdom teachers* in the book of *Proverbs* (see comments on 1: 8).

A. *The Wise Ruler (vv. 2-9)*

² What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, **O son of my vows?** ³ Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings. ⁴ It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, ⁵ For they will drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted. ⁶ Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter. ⁷ Let him drink and forget his poverty And remember his trouble no more. ⁸ Open your mouth for the mute, For the rights of all the unfortunate. ⁹ Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.

Lemuel's mother made a vow to God that if He gave her a son, she would teach him to live according to wisdom (v. 2).³¹⁹ This text is a confirmation that she kept that vow. The advice against giving one's strength to women (v. 3) must be interpreted within the context of OT law. She is not speaking about living a profligate life of sexual immorality, although that would certainly be included. The multiplication of wives and concubines was the normal procedure of oriental kings, but Mosaic Law forbade such multiplication for the future kings of Israel in full recognition of its potential for apostasy (Deut. 17: 17). Solomon's refusal to listen to the Law in this regard costs him his faith and his kingdom (1 Kings 11; especially v. 11). Moreover, Lemuel is not being advised to live a life of celibacy (singleness), but to curb his appetite for many wives and foreign alliances.

Obsession with such women corrupts the king's sovereign power, including wasting his money. Gratification of lust distracts his attention from serving the people, blunts his wit, undermines his good judgment, exposes him to palace intrigues, and squanders the national wealth (see 13: 22) better spent to promote the national good. David's lust for Bathsheba made him callous toward justice and cost Uriah his life [not to mention his soldiers' lives], and Solomon's many sexual partners made him callous toward pure and undefiled religion and incapable of real love. In other words, obsession with women has the same effect as obsession with liquor (v. 5).³²⁰

Oriental kings were also known for their drinking habits. There was never any lack of money for the purchase of the most exquisite wines, and their parties could last for days (Esther 1: 5). In the same way that Lemuel's mother is not advising total abstinence from marriage in v. 3, she is also not advising Lemuel to be a "tee-totaler" practicing complete abstinence from alcohol. A king needs a level head to enact and apply just laws to protect the innocent and those afflicted by the powerful (v. 5b). Somehow, the muddled thinking of an inebriated (drunken) king does not contribute much to the wise legislation and adjudication (legal application) of just laws. Besides, too much sauce could even make the king forget from day to day what laws he enacted (v. 5a). Her advice, then, is moderation. Enjoy it but don't become obsessed with it.

For those who wish to employ this verse as proof of total abstinence from alcohol, two remarks: First, they may be proving too much. A desperate attempt to prove total abstinence from alcohol

³¹⁹ Waltke, II. p. 506

³²⁰ Waltke, p. 507, words in brackets mine

may also prove total abstinence from sex. Lemuel is advised not to give his strength to **women** or **strong drink**. Yet, I find no African pastors other than Roman Catholic priests who have taken the oath of celibacy.³²¹ Secondly, the total abstinence argument is contrary to Scripture; and Scripture never contradicts itself.

"You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.²³ "You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.²⁴ "If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring *the tithe*, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you,²⁵ then you shall exchange *it* for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses.²⁶ "You may spend the money **for whatever your heart desires**: for oxen, or sheep, **or wine, or strong drink**, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household. (Deut. 14:22-26 NASB)

This is known as the rejoicing tithe in which the Israelite is permitted to spend part of the tithe (*asar*; literally, "to take the tenth of") on food and drink, rejoicing at the same time in the Lord's provisions. **Strong drink** is the same Hebrew word as that found in Prov. 31: 4, *shekar*. **Wine** (Deut. 14: 26) is *yayin*, the same word used in Proverbs 20: 21, 31: 4 and Ps. 104: 15.

Wine (*yayin*) is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise. (Prov. 20:1 NASB)

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,¹⁵ And **wine** (*yayin*) which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make *his* face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart. (Ps. 104:14-15 NASB)

The resolution of all the negative references in Proverbs about wine with the positive references is simply that overindulgence is forbidden. The Bible as a whole teaches moderation—in alcohol, food, and even in our words. Sex within marriage, on the other hand, is given no limitations (see Prov. 5: 18-19, and commentary). African Christian attitudes toward drinking any quantity of alcohol, however small, is a classic case of straining at gnats and swallowing camels (Matt. 23: 24). The pharisees and scribes tithed on their herb gardens, something not commanded in the OT, but neglected the **weightier provisions of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness** (Matt. 23: 23). Another way to put it is that African Christians often forbid what God allows but allow what God forbids.³²² The context of Deut. 14 is the law of tithing ten per cent of one's produce. But while Africans forbid drinking, they refuse to tithe, thus neglecting their obligations to support their pastors. Satan has a subtle way of preoccupying Christians on secondary issues in order to prevent them from addressing the main issues.

Getting back to Lemuel's mother, her advice to anesthetize the poor and the perishing by getting them drunk must also be carefully interpreted (vv. 6-7). As Duane A. Garrett has observed, this was not a special welfare program of "free beer...as an opiate to the masses"³²³ Such advice would

³²¹ And given the sexual scandals plaguing the Roman Catholic Church, I wonder how many RC priests are truly celibate.

³²² Don't get me wrong, we in the west also strain at gnats and swallow camels.

³²³ Barrett, *Proverbs*, p. 246, quoted in Waltke, p. 508

have been completely out of character and inconsistent with the teaching of *Proverbs* elsewhere about the evils of intoxication (20: 1; 21: 17; 23: 29-35). Rather, the statement is a *sarcastic* critique of the conventional wisdom advising the “drown-and-out” to drown their problems in alcohol. Drunkenness solves nothing, and when the drunkard sobers up—*if* he does—he will be facing the same problems with less material resources.³²⁴

After sarcastically debunking (disproving a myth or exaggerated claims) the virtues of “happy hour”,³²⁵ Lemuel’s mother challenges him to pursue *real* solutions to the poor and the oppressed. Rather than filling his mouth with alcohol and blurring his speech, he must open his mouth with wisdom for those who have no voice in the courts, no respect from the judges, and no money to purchase good lawyers.³²⁶ Poor people need a righteous king to defend them, one who is not distracted with too much sex, too much booze (alcohol), and too much luxurious living in general, all of which lulls him into “la-la-land”, an imaginary kingdom where only rich people live—and where most US and African politicians live, isolated from their constituents’ need for justice. To contextualize this into the 21st century, presidents, legislatures, and parliaments should be accessible to all their constituents (people living under their authority), not just those who can purchase their favor through lobbying, campaign contributions, or outright bribery. This accessibility should not translate into elaborate welfare programs for the poor which for decades in the US have proven to be miserable failures in elevating the conditions of the poor and extravagant successes for the bloated bureaucracies administering the programs and for the congressmen advocating for the poor.³²⁷ What they need is fair representation in the courts which they often do not get. I have spoken personally with many prisoners awaiting their day in court who had not seen their court-appointed lawyers for months. Court-appointed lawyers operating with tax-paid funds do not make much money, and they don’t spend much of their precious time developing a strong defense for their clients. Many are so overworked that they can’t. The poor have less access to legal justice than the wealthy, and this has always been true throughout the history of the world.

B. The Valiant Wife (vv. 10-31)

¹⁰ An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. ¹³ She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight. ¹⁴ She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar. ¹⁵ She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens. ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong. ¹⁸ She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle. ²⁰ She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy. ²¹ She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet. ²² She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells *them*, And supplies belts to the tradesmen. ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future. ²⁶ She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. ²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband *also*, and he praises her, *saying*: ²⁹ "Many daughters have done nobly,

³²⁴ Waltke, II. pp. 508-509

³²⁵ “Happy hour” is an American expression used by bars and restaurants when they offer special deals on alcoholic beverages.

³²⁶ Waltke, II. p. 509

³²⁷ Most of whom are rank hypocrites who care nothing for the poor and everything for getting reelected.

But you excel them all."³⁰ Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.³¹ Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.

Unlike *The Song of Solomon*, the description of the valiant wife is not about romance, but industry, virtually all of the verses pertaining to her prodigious (amazing) economic activity. **Her worth** (v. 10b) has more than a figurative meaning and relates to the eastern practice of paying a bride-price for a wife, something Africans are very familiar with. In the case of the valiant wife, whatever price her husband pays for her will be nothing in comparison with the economic return she makes to his household. Her “cottage industries” include weaving (v. 13, 19) which provides the foundation for other economic ventures, including real estate (v. 16a) and wine production (v. 16b). The New American Standard Bible renders v. 16b, “From her earnings she plants a vineyard” while the King James Version renders the verse literally, “with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.” Therefore, we understand that from the “profits” of her weaving business she is able to purchase the field and plant the vineyard—no doubt complete with winepress.³²⁸

Although wealthy enough to have female servants (v. 15), she is physically strong and does not shy away from hard work herself (v. 17), following in the foot-steps of her wealthy female ancestors (Gen. 18: 6-8; 24: 18-20; 29: 9-10).³²⁹ Traditionally v. 18b, “Her lamp does not go out at night” has been interpreted as her habit of working at the spindle until the wee hours of the night. However, upon comparison with 13: 9; 20: 20; and 24: 20, this may be a reference to her enduring wealth or her enduring life (cf. Job 18: 5-6; 21: 17; Ps. 18: 28).³³⁰

Thus far her economic exploits have been the focal point of the passage, but the valiant wife is not a heartless entrepreneur (businessman or woman) whose only concern is making money. She is a woman of superlative (excellent) *inner character*. When she makes money, she shares it not only with her immediate family but with the poor and needy (vv. 20-21). Because of her expertise in weaving, her family is well-clothed and well-protected from extreme weather (snow can fall in Palestine in the winter from November to February). The prosperity which she contributes to the family, her reputation as a wise woman, and the domestic order she brings to the household enhance her husband’s reputation in the city gates where important political decisions and business transactions are made.³³¹ (A good woman makes her husband look good.) Her husband trusts her implicitly, and throughout her life she will be a constant source of good to him (vv. 11-12)—quite the contrast to the “constant dripping” of the contentious woman who makes her husband crave the corner of a roof or an isolated desert (21: 9, 19).

Verse 24 returns to her business exploits only to transition quickly again to her *inner character* and back again to her *tireless labor* (v. 27). Her physical strength is matched by her inner strength, dignity, and optimistic outlook for the future (v. 25). As we say in the US tongue-in-cheek, “The harder she works the ‘luckier’ she gets.” (Meaning: It isn’t luck, but hard work which increases prosperity.) She is also a wise person who speaks the truth in love (v. 26; cf. Eph. 4: 15); and, once again, she’s no lazy busy-body or gossip, but a tireless worker (v. 27).

³²⁸ Waltke, p. 525

³²⁹ Cited in Waltke, II. p. 525

³³⁰ Waltke, II. p. 527. The three passages in *Proverbs* mentioned above could also be given this meaning. However, the ability to keep the oil lamps burning all night [for protection against intruders (?)] was a sign of prosperity.

³³¹ Waltke, II. pp. 530-531

Her accomplishments do not go unnoticed by her children who rise up and bless her, and her husband who praises her saying, **Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all** (v. 29). “Honey, you’re the best!”

In verse 30, the oracle discloses the *source* of her inner strength and outward industry. She is a woman who **fears the Lord**, and this is what makes her special—not her outward appearance or economic ability. There is nothing inherently wrong with being pretty or charming, and Solomon recommends the importance of sexual attraction to his son (cf. Prov. 5: 19).³³² However, charm can be **deceitful** by promising something it cannot deliver, and beauty can be **vain** or “transitory” since any happiness in a marriage which is based on beauty or sex appeal alone is destined to fail with increasing age.³³³ Far more than just another pretty face, this woman should be **prais[ed] in the gates** for her many accomplishments (v. 31).

³³² Cited in Waltke, II. p. 535

³³³ Waltke, II. p. 535