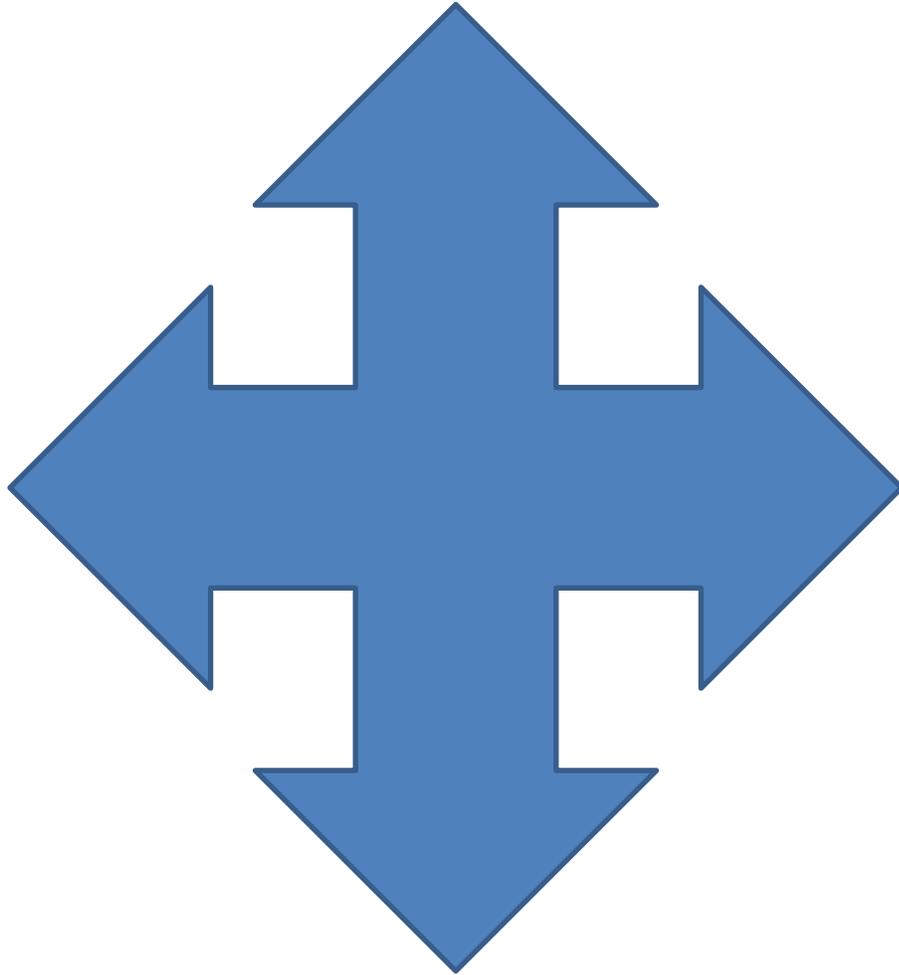


# **A Study of Life and Wisdom**



**A compilation of notes and thoughts...**

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## Proverbs – A Study of Life and Wisdom

A proverb is usually a succinct statement that stands in place of a long explanation and expresses a truth about reality. Proverbs are statements that paint a small word picture of what life is like or should be like. A proverb is a snapshot of life. However, as with every snapshot, a proverb does not always represent what life always looks like. One picture does not capture everything. A good proverb, like a good snapshot, captures what is typical. There are exceptions to the proverbs. They are not always true, but they are usually true. They represent life accurately, but not completely.

Proverbs are a form of literature (genre) that is essentially different from promises. One of the common mistakes that many Christians make when they read the proverbs is to take them as promises. Some are promises as well as proverbs, when the proverb expresses a truth that is always consistent, but it is important to be able to distinguish a proverb from a promise. Promises are straightforward statements of assurance that guarantee that stated effects will inevitably follow. Some promises are conditional, and others are unconditional. Proverbs and promises are really different forms of expression, and different types of literature.

Interpreting the proverbs accurately requires some knowledge of what God has promised elsewhere in His Word. This is the correlation step in Bible study. When reading a proverb, ask yourself, "Is this a promise elsewhere in Scripture?" If so, the proverb expresses an observation that is consistently true. We might say that some proverbs have a higher degree of accuracy than others.

This distinction between proverbs and promises raises some questions. If the proverbs are not 100 percent reliable as statements and they are Scripture, is Scripture less than 100 percent reliable? No, the proverbs do not claim to be 100 percent reliable. They only claim to be a safe guide to what usually happens. They are snapshots of life, not statements claiming to reflect what life always looks like. And they are a safe guide, because they express what usually happens in life.

Another question is: "Are we disobeying Scripture and sinning if we do not follow a proverb?" For example, some proverbs say do not countersign a loan with a stranger. If we do that, are we sinning? No, the proverbs are not commands. They are revelations of what will usually follow if we do certain things. We may choose to countersign with a stranger under certain circumstances, but the proverbs warn us about what we can normally expect to happen in most cases if we do. Another example is going into debt. It is not a sin to go into debt, but it is unwise in most cases, as some of the proverbs say.

Most scholars recognize that Proverbs is a book of poetry and didactic wisdom literature. One commentator wrote: "We're living in the 'information age,' but we certainly aren't living in the 'age of wisdom.' Many people who are wizards with their computers seem to be amateurs when it comes to making a success out of their lives. Computers can store data and obey signals, but they can't give us the ability to use that knowledge wisely. What's needed today is wisdom. The Book of Proverbs is about godly wisdom, how to get it and how to use it. It's about priorities and principles, not get-rich-quick schemes or success formulas. It tells you, not how to make a living, but how to be skillful in the lost art of making a life. Another one noted, "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

Three things mark biblical poetry, and these are prevalent in the proverbs: terseness, imagery, and parallelism. Terseness, or conciseness, is observable in Proverbs in its aphorisms (compact formulations of a truth) that are also epigrams (concise, wise, witty, and sometimes paradoxical sayings). Imagery is figurative language that is evocative and brief. Some important figures of speech in Proverbs are: simile,

metaphor, allegory, anthropopathisms, anthropomorphisms, synecdoche, metonymy, personification, hyperbole, litotes, and irony. Parallelism characterizes Hebrew poetry—in contrast to rhyme and meter, which characterize English poetry. Parallelism in Proverbs refers to the correspondence between two parts of one proverb. Sometimes sounds or syllables are parallel, but most often ideas are.

The Book of Proverbs contains little history. It is mainly didactic; it is a book of explicit instruction. Like the other Old Testament wisdom books, Job and Ecclesiastes, it does not contain references to Israel's laws, rituals, sacrifices, or ceremonies. It deals primarily with philosophy. A philosopher is, by definition, a lover of wisdom. Proverbs is a book that focuses primarily on wisdom, as do Job and Ecclesiastes. In this sense these books are philosophical.

There is a fundamental difference between the philosophy we find in these books and all other philosophy. Other philosophies begin with a question. Hebrew philosophy begins with an affirmation. Its basic affirmation is that God exists. Therefore, we can know ultimate truth only by divine revelation. The fundamental affirmation (God exists) is the deepest insight in Hebrew philosophy (Prov.1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."). There is a presupposition in this statement. It is that God is the repository of wisdom. We can only find wisdom in God ultimately. This presupposition underlies all of what we read in Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

This fundamental affirmation also contains an inevitable deduction: if wisdom is perfect in God, then wisdom in man consists of the fear of God. A person is wise to the extent that he or she apprehends and fears God. The "fear" of God does not mean a dread that results in hiding from God. It is rather an emotional recognition of God. That is the kind of fear that produces holy character and righteous conduct. Intellectual apprehension of God precedes this emotional recognition, and volitional submission to God's will follows it. When a person comes to have emotional recognition of God, he or she comes to the condition for being wise, not that in so doing he or she becomes wise. We can begin to be wise only when we come into proper relation to God as ultimate Wisdom.

Consider what God reveals in Proverbs; there are three progressive spheres of life dealt with in the book: the home, friends, and the world. In the home, the child must learn wisdom. In friendship, the youth must apply wisdom. In the world, the adult must demonstrate wisdom.

The first sphere is that of the home (Prov. 1:8-9). God did not teach the responsibility of the father and mother here, but took for granted that they would instruct their children. The child needs to hear parental instruction to live in the fear of the Lord. Young children cannot grasp abstract concepts. For them God is incarnate in father and mother. Fathers and mothers reflect the image of God to their children. Both parents are necessary to reveal God to the child fully. Children see some of God's characteristics in the mother's attitudes and actions (Matt. 23:37). They see other aspects of God's character in the father. Parents do not have to try to teach their young child systematic theology. They just need to live in the fear of God themselves, and their child will learn what he or she needs to learn about God for that stage of their life—just by observing mom and dad. For example, when small children see their parents loving one another, it prepares them to understand God's love. Children learn about God and wisdom by observing them as well as by listening to them. We all exert influence in two ways: with our words and with our works (actions).

The second sphere of life is friends and friendship (Prov. 1:10-19). The day must come when the child, in the natural process of development, moves out into a wider circle of experience. The Bible presents two duties that children have to their parents. When the child's sphere of life is his home, he is to obey his parents. However, that duty does not continue forever. When he moves into the larger sphere of life

outside the home, his duty is to honor his parents. This duty does continue forever. However, there is no more important stage in a young person's development than when he or she begins to choose companions. Then, and from then on, he or she must follow the wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord. The youth must submit to the Lord's wisdom, having learned that in the home, to succeed in the larger arenas of life. The choice of a mate is one of these companion decisions. Parents should help their children with these values, and qualities to look for in a mate.

The third sphere of life is the adult world, symbolized in Proverbs by the terms - street, the gates, and the city (Prov. 1:20-33; 2—9). The first word of warning to the youth who leaves home to enter the world by himself / herself is this: beware of the evil way of those who do not fear the Lord (Prov. 1:20-32). Wisdom does not say withdraw from the world. Wisdom says remember the fate of those who forget God. There is also a gracious promise (Prov. 1:33). Wisdom promises that those who live in the fear of the Lord will be quiet and safe, even in the turmoil of the world. It is clear how important preparation is for living in this sphere of life. Children must learn to take God into account in the home, and then in their friendships, before they launch out into the world. This instruction is what really prepares them for life.

As one reads Proverbs, follow these hermeneutical guidelines:

1. Interpret individual passages in light of the overall structure, purpose, and "theme" of the Book of Proverbs.
2. Recognize the various literary forms and devices (the "building blocks" of the individual passages or proverbs) as clues to the context.
3. Beware of the erroneous assumption that proverbs are unconditional promises.
4. Realize that some proverbs are unconditionally true.
5. Interpret the Book of Proverbs in light of the historical-cultural context of extrabiblical wisdom literature.

When applying a proverb to one's life:

1. Be sure to validate the application through the context of the Bible.
2. Utilize the characteristics and nature of proverbial wisdom as a foundation for graphic communication of timeless principles.
3. Explore the creative use of proverbial characters.

The message of Proverbs can be summarized as follows: The person who learns the fear of the LORD (i.e., to take God into consideration) in every sphere of life will be successful, but those who forget God will fail. Fearing the LORD means recognizing that He exists, taking the LORD into account in every area of life by being aware of His reality and presence, and then making decisions in view of His existence and revelation.

## Proverbs – A Study of Life and Wisdom

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## Introduction to Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is a didactic book; it is a book of explicit instruction that deals primarily in philosophy, Hebrew philosophy. Most philosophy in the world begins with a question; Hebrew philosophy begins with an affirmation that God exists. Therefore, we can know ultimate truth only by divine revelation.

To many people the Book of Proverbs seems to be a grab bag of wise sayings that lacks any system or order. Nevertheless, in a sense, this is the most carefully organized of all the books of the Old Testament. Proverbs 1:1 is the title page. Proverbs 1: 2-7 are its preface, which contains an explanation of the purpose of the book, the method of the Author, and the fundamental thesis of the book. Then the three parts of the body of the book.

First, there are discourses in defense and application of the fundamental thesis (Prov. 1:8—ch. 9). Then we have proverbs that Solomon collected and arranged to provide wisdom (Prov. 10—24). Next there are additional wise words from Solomon that other people collected after Solomon died (Prov. 25—29). Proverbs closes with an appendix that contains specific words of wisdom by two sages, Agur and Lemuel (Prov. 30—31).

### Introduction to the Proverbs - 1:1-7

These verses set forth the title, the purpose, and the thesis of the Book of Proverbs. Far from being a hodgepodge of miscellaneous sayings, the book gives evidence of careful organization in this opening segment.

#### Prov. 1:1 - The title of the book

Verse one introduces both the book as a whole and chapters 1—9 in particular.

What is a proverb? The English word “proverb” is the translation of the Hebrew noun “*masal*”. The verb form of this Hebrew word means "to rule." The idea is that the proverbs are to help rule life and conduct. “*Masal*” also has the meaning of “resemblance.” A parable is a resemblance and many proverbs are concentrated parables.

The English word "proverb" means a brief saying that says much in little space. It comes from the Latin “*pro verba*” meaning "for (in place of) words." A proverb is a wise saying in which a few words are chosen instead of many, with a design to condense wisdom into a brief form both to aid memory and stimulate study; a pithy allusion or parable that is rich in meaning and truth. Proverbs are insightful sayings that reveal truth.

#### The purpose of the book

The Book of Proverbs has two purposes: (1) to give moral skillfulness in godly living by wisdom and instruction and (2) to develop mental discernment. Wisdom is having mastery of a subject of knowledge; it encompasses discipline, knowledge, prudence, and other virtues such as industry, thrift, discretion, truthfulness, honesty, chastity, kindness, forgiveness; and provides warning against the corresponding vices. It is the ability to apply knowledge to overcome any problem in life. The words "wise" and "wisdom" occur about 125 times in Proverbs. Discipline has to do with warnings about the consequences of foolish behavior; or loving correction to those who have failed to heed stated warnings. Understanding means internalizing knowledge so that it directs activity.

**Prov. 1:2-4** - Biblical wisdom is a gift from God (Prov. 2:6). Biblical wisdom is "God's fixed order for life, an order opposed to chaos and death." Wisdom (Hebrew – "*hokmah*") basically means 'skill'. Therefore Biblical wisdom means being skillful and successful in one's relationships and responsibilities by learning and observing God's principles of order in the moral universe. Wisdom should not be restricted to a simplistic definition as 'the practical application of knowledge', which it is. Instead it must be thought of as a broad, theological concept denoting a fixed, righteous order to which the wise individual submits their life. Proverbs were written to encourage the reader to acquire disciplined skill in right living by attaining wisdom and discipline; and to gain mental acumen for understanding words of insight.

Wise men and women have the competence to grasp the meaning of a situation and understand what to do and how to do it in the right way at the right time. When a person knows the right and does the right they are wise. Wisdom is the wedding of knowing and doing—it is the junction of the good and the true. Essentially, wisdom is a proper and skillful orientation of one's life toward God.

Instruction is a reference to moral discipline (literally "the discipline of prudence"); usually warnings about consequences of wrong behavior with a goal to edify and educate. Prudence is a skill morally guided by righteousness, justice, and integrity; a talent for insight, observation, or scrutiny; practical wisdom that leads to success. Wisdom and instruction work together to allow a person "to perceive words of understanding" (vs. 2), "to receive instruction" (vs. 3), "to give prudence, knowledge, and instruction (vs.4). Understanding means internalizing knowledge so it directs action.

The key words in verses 2 through 4 have the following meanings.

1. Wisdom – 1:2a – Skillfulness
2. Instruction – 1:2a – Child training
3. Understanding – 1:2b – Discernment
4. Righteousness – 1:3b – Right behavior
5. Justice – 1:3b – Correct decisions
6. Equity – 1:3b – Moral Integrity
7. Prudence – 1:4a – Sensibility in practical matters
8. Discretion – 1:4b - Thoughtfulness

The inexperienced are naïve people; usually young people who are leaving childhood ("simple", "young man") and looking to become their own individual. They are not stupid, but untaught, inexperienced, and gullible. They generally lack wisdom or discernment and common sense (Prov. 7:7, 8:5, 9:4, 22:3, 27:12); they do not know what to allow and what to put out of their minds. Prudence ("shrewdness" or "sensible") is a positive term in Proverbs because it is a description of one who foresees and deals with difficulties as they come. If you see "shrewd" or "shrewdness" in Proverbs it does not have the meaning of "cunning or crafty".

Knowledge is collected, retained information. Knowledge is the tool, wisdom is the workman. Without wisdom to apply it, knowledge in itself is ineffective. Discretion is the ability to ponder and plan, to think independently.

**Prov. 1:5-6** – A wise man is understood to be a "discerning man"; a man that has the capacity to understand what he hears and to internalize knowledge so that it directs his actions. 'Listen' is one of the most frequent verbs in the wisdom vocabulary; it denotes an active listening, an obedience. To "listen" in Proverbs is to obey. The wise believe will have the ability to guide their own life and/or govern others with truth. The simple person needs wisdom, knowledge and discretion in their life. The

wise are reminded of their need to grow in wisdom and knowledge to exercise proper discretion. Proverbs seeks to sharpen the mind of the wise by schooling them in “parabolic speech” (parables) and “dark sayings” (enigma) that need reflection and interpretation.

A second purpose of the book is to solve riddles: thought-provoking problems about life. The riddles in view are any puzzles that are unclear and need interpreting. Scripture is sufficient to provide the wisdom needed for the perplexities of life.

In summary, Proverbs 1: 2-6 set forth four objectives. (1) God gave us the Book of Proverbs to impart an intimate acquaintance with wisdom and discipline (1:2a); (2) to impart understanding of wisdom sayings (1:2b, 6); (3) to impart moral insight (1:3) and (4) to identify the intended recipients of wisdom (1:4).

### **Prov. 1:7 - The theme of the book**

This verse enjoys almost universal recognition as the key statement not only in Proverbs but in all the wisdom literature of the Bible (Prov. 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Eccles. 12:13). The “fear of the LORD” is the overarching theme of the Book of Proverbs – a reverence for God. The “fear of the LORD” occurs at least 18 times in Proverbs (1:7, 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:2, 26-27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 31:30).

“Fear” includes not only a correct way of thinking about God but a correct relationship with God. It is an affectionate reverence that results in humbly bowing to the Father’s will. It is a desire not to sin against Him because His wrath is so awful and His love is so awesome. The “fear” of God is a reverential subordination to God as the One God, the Creator and Ruler of the world. This reverential awe, admiration, love, trust, and submissive fear are a mandatory foundation for all spiritual knowledge and wisdom.

“Beginning” does not mean that the “fear of the LORD” is where one starts learning wisdom, then he or she can move away from it as from the starting line in a race. Rather, the “fear of the LORD” is what must come first, the prerequisite, the controlling principle, the foundation, on which one must build a life of wisdom. What the alphabet is to reading, notes to reading music, and numerals to mathematics, the “fear of the LORD” is to attaining the revealed knowledge of this book.

“Knowledge” is a relationship that depends on revelation and is inseparable from character. Even though many unbelievers have acquired much information without the fear of God, true knowledge rests on a relationship to God that revelation supports. We can only learn the really important lessons in life this way. Here “knowledge” means “wisdom” (Prov. 9:10; Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10).

The references to “fearing the Lord” in Proverbs are unique and make this book distinctive and theologically relevant. The demand for faith underlies the whole book. While the unbeliever may make statements about life and truth, he does not have true or ultimate knowledge until he is in a redemptive relationship of reverential awe with God. Only in a right relationship to the true and living God can one enter into God’s foreordained, righteous order for life and find true success and happiness. The “fear of the LORD” is a state of mind where one’s own attitudes, will, feelings, deeds, and goals are exchanged for God’s (Psa. 42:1)

The fool despises God’s revealed order for life and the instruction that would lead him or her into it. There are 3 kinds of fool mentioned in Proverbs – all are obstinately immoral (Prov. 1:22, 10:8, 17:7).

This fool is self-sufficient and detests any wisdom, advice, or correction that may come to him from others.

The Hebrews believed people could acquire knowledge in three ways. One way was through observing nature and human behavior. Another way was by drawing analogies between traditional beliefs (e.g., creeds) and reality. A third way was through an encounter with the transcendent God. This is an imposing preface to the book. Note the progression here in Proverbs 1:2-7 based on the affirmation that God exists: (1) teaching about God, (2) learning about God, (3) fearing God, (4) knowing God, and (5) imitating God's wisdom. It is also quite unusual in that no other biblical work begins with a statement of purpose as clear as this.

## **The Call to Wisdom**

Chapter 8 is a call to Wisdom, and it is an apology (defense) of wisdom. The King Solomon personifies Wisdom and chapter 8 contains the longest sustained personification in the Bible. Throughout the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom and Folly are personified as women; calling on all who will listen to embrace them. Here Wisdom is a virtuous woman. She is seen the streets offering her services to all who will receive them (Prov. 8:1-3; James 1:5).

This call to Wisdom is the summit of Old Testament discipleship. It is a call to invite all to see God's righteousness, justice, goodness, and mercy; and from the vantage point of Wisdom to see life as God intended in those days when He called creation into being and shaped humankind in His own image. Wisdom laughed for joy when He did, and all who truly seek her by fearing God are promised a share in that joyful happiness.

The call to Wisdom and its apology is developed as follows: (1) Wisdom would be every person's guide (Prov. 8:1-5; Gal. 5:18, 22-23), (2) Wisdom is morality's partner (Prov. 8:6-13), (3) Wisdom is the key to success (Prov. 8:14-21), (4) Wisdom is the principle of creation (Prov. 8:22-31), and (5) Wisdom is the one essential necessity of life (Prov. 8:32-36).

### **Prov. 8:1-5 - Wisdom as guide**

By personifying wisdom Solomon was able to illustrate two things about it in these verses, both of which concern the guidance that is available in wisdom (understanding, insight). Wisdom is available (1) everywhere (Prov. 8:2-3) and (2) to anyone (Prov. 8:5). Both Wisdom and Folly appeal to the naïve (simple, inexperienced young adult). It does not take a superior intellect to be wise in the biblical sense. Wisdom extends an invitation to all – it is a public invitation in broad daylight – and it is an open and honest appeal to gain prudence and understanding. Her appeal is spiritual, her promise is life, and those who follow her acquire prudence for wise living. This is in sharp contrast to the appeal of Folly.

### **Prov. 8:6-13 - Wisdom and morality**

Wisdom and godliness are practically synonymous in Proverbs. Verse 9 means that the person who already has walked down wisdom's path for a distance can appreciate the moral rightness of wisdom better than someone who has not (cf. Phil. 4:8). A perceptive person is insightful, intelligent, and discerning. Those who seek knowledge diligently will discover it. Each person must choose to pursue either godly wisdom or riches (self-centered life). Wisdom is a companion to other virtues.

What the verses say is not that Wisdom's words are clear, intelligible, and simple to the one's being instructed, but that they commend themselves as true. The words that Wisdom speaks are worthy – they are right, true, and just – not crooked or perverse. Wisdom's instruction and knowledge is of great value. One who has wisdom has prudence, knowledge and discretion. The simplicity of integrity is the profundity of wisdom. Wisdom is moral and integrity is the moral dimension that separates wisdom from intelligence, learning and cleverness. True wisdom is resourceful and discreet; and the wise will reject evil behavior, arrogance, and perverse talk. Pride and arrogance are characteristic of those who refuse to acknowledge God and His wisdom. These verses speak of the essential excellence of wisdom.

#### **Prov. 8:14-21 - Wisdom and success**

Wisdom is the key to many material and immaterial benefits, but mostly the latter type. She enables wise counsel and sound judgment, understanding and power. Wisdom makes a person courageous. She rewards those who seek her (8:17-21). Wisdom is better than gold (8:19) in two senses: (1) the wise man is able to earn gold, but he is able to use wisdom to do more than he can with gold; (2) yet wisdom is available only to those who seek it; unlike gold, wisdom is not something one can inherit. Wisdom walks where she can be found and where she can lead her followers so they can be rewarded. The reward of her way contrasts with the disastrous way of the wicked and fools. God honoring living is the major benefit from having wisdom.

#### **Prov. 8:22-31 - Wisdom and creation**

As Creator, God counted wisdom most important. Wisdom is older than the universe, and it was essential in its creation. Nothing came into existence without wisdom. Wisdom is not God, but is God's. Wisdom has always existed as an attribute of God. Wisdom was made by God before the earth was created; before creating the universe, God installed wisdom for His use.

"The beginning of God's way" / "At the beginning of His work" (8:22) refers to the beginning of His creative work (Gen. 1), since that is what Solomon described in the verses that follow. Wisdom witnessed all of God's creative activity, and it was a craftsman in creation. Verse 30 pictures wisdom as God's constant and intimate companion. As such we should value it highly. One commentator concluded that Wisdom is a link or bond between the Creator and His creation.

Wisdom leads to joy because creation produces joy (8:30-31) both for the Creator and for the creature. Wisdom rejoices in God's presence, in His creation including mankind. God made and did nothing without Wisdom; wisdom that was delightful, and light hearted (joyful). Wisdom calls for a deeper reverence for God in conforming one's life to the Creator's design. Christ is Wisdom's source and its consummate expression. Therefore it is very important that we obtain it.

#### **Prov. 8:32-36 - The appeal to gain wisdom**

Solomon exhorts his sons to live by his words and thereby gain wisdom. Again, wisdom leads to life, but those who lack wisdom begin to die. Wisdom and life are more closely associated than any other concept in Proverbs; the goal of wisdom is life that is fruitful, joyful, and abundant (Prov. 4:13, 23; 10:17). By listening to Wisdom and following it, one becomes wise and they are blessed. It is clear that Wisdom is the way of life and that Folly is the way of death; these are people's two choices.

A secondary interpretation of these verses has equated Wisdom with Jesus Christ. This interpretive connection works only so far as Jesus reveals the nature of God the Father, including His wisdom, just as Proverbs presents the personification of the attribute. Jesus' claims included wisdom (Matt 12:42) and a unique knowledge of God (Matt 11:25-27). He even personified wisdom in a way that was similar to

Proverbs (Matt 11:19; Luke 11:49). Paul saw the fulfillment of wisdom in Christ (Col 1:15-20; 2:3) and affirmed that Christ became our wisdom in the Crucifixion (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). So the personification of wisdom in Proverbs can support the revelation of divine wisdom in Christ. But because wisdom is a creation of God (Prov. 8:22-31), it is unlikely that wisdom here is Jesus Christ.

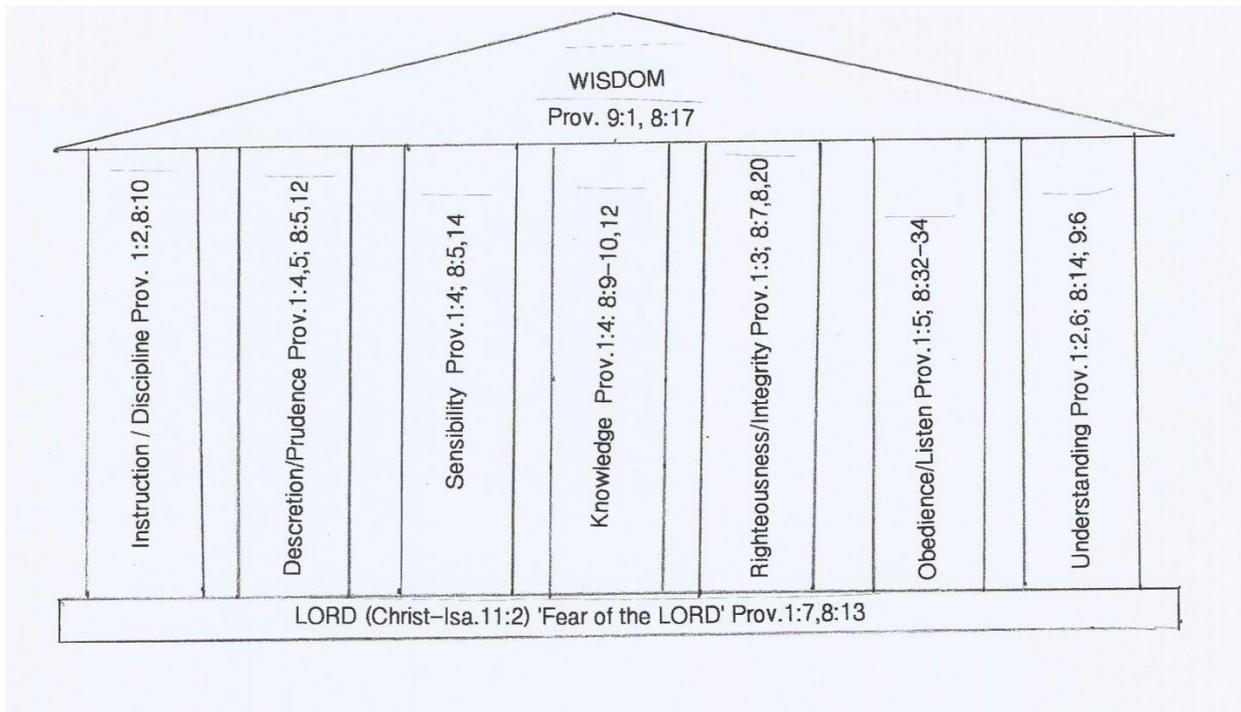
**Prov. 9:1-6 - Wisdom and Folly contrasted**

These verses contrast Wisdom and Folly in a very symmetrical structure. Both Wisdom and Folly invite the youth to seek them. The youth (inexperience, simple, young adult) must now make a decision: Which one will he or she follow? "Enter" literally means "turn"; it implies leaving one path in favor of another. There is no middle road, if Wisdom is not chosen – he will become a fool.

The "seven pillars" (9:1) may picture a typical banquet pavilion, which seems to be supported by the context of verses 2 and 3. "Seven" to the Jews indicated perfection. It could also mean "sufficiency," or it may mean "many." In my opinion the "seven pillars" refer to the teachings of found in the previous chapter, Prov. 8. Some believe they are an allusion to the cosmos that God made in seven days. Others believe that they stand for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the fullness of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2).

Wisdom's invitation (9:5) sounds like a gospel invitation (cf. John 6:51, 55). The parallel between Wisdom's invitation and the one Jesus Christ extended to everyone to come to His feast illustrates the connection between wisdom and responding positively to God's Word (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24). The parallel between wisdom and walking in God's ways (godliness) is again clear in these verses.

**Seven Pillars of Wisdom**



## The Benefits of Following Wisdom

### Proverbs 2 - Wisdom as a Treasure

Chapter 2 is Solomon's discourse to his son that sets forth the blessings that wisdom confers. He instructs his son on the moral values of Wisdom. He encourages his son (a simple, inexperienced youth) to earnestly strive after wisdom as the way to the fear of God and to virtue.

Solomon's admonition is positive, and he shows the blessings that come from pursuing the way of wisdom. He did this by interweaving conditions and promises. Chapter 2 highlights the benefits of following Wisdom: Wisdom comes from God and no one can enjoy it that does not choose God's paths.

### Prov. 2:1-5: The Need of Wisdom and the Challenge of Obtaining Wisdom

Even though Wisdom wants people to adopt her (Prov. 1:20-33), she is hard to obtain. Wisdom is not a power inherent in man, but something that God gives. The person who wants her has to work hard for her (Prov. 2:3-4). If understanding does not come easily, one must work harder to obtain it. Effort must be expended for one to become wise.

He or she must start with revelation (the Word of God / Bible), and study it diligently, in order to obtain spiritual rather than merely academic wisdom. The "fear of the Lord" emphasizes awe, and the "knowledge of God" stresses intimacy (Prov. 2:5). If you want wisdom, you must listen to God attentively (Matt. 13:9), obey Him humbly (John 7:17), ask Him sincerely (James 1:5), and seek Him diligently (Isa. 55:6-7); in a manner and similar way a miner searches for silver and gold. Getting Wisdom involves openness, retention, hearing (with the ear), applying (with the heart), requesting, and diligent searching; Wisdom is a skill given by God to accomplish a specific task.

Obtaining spiritual wisdom is not a once-a-week hobby; it is the daily discipline of a lifetime. But in this age of microwaves, fast food, video games, and instant gratification, most people do not daily invest any time or energy in digging deep into Scripture and learning wisdom from the Lord. Thanks to television, people's attention span is brief; thanks to religious entertainment that passes for worship, their spiritual appetite is feeble and spiritual knowledge is not 'pleasant to their soul' (c.f. Prov. 2:10). It's no wonder fewer and fewer people 'take time to be holy' and more and more people fall prey to self-centered interests; they proclaim victim mentality (it is always someone else's fault); and they are easily deceived in their own life.

### Prov. 2:6-9: The Giver of Wisdom and Its Moral Benefits

The searcher for wisdom will find what God gives Wisdom when he or she searches divine revelation ("His mouth" = Scripture / Bible – Prov. 2:6); wisdom is a gift from God. Each of us must strive for Wisdom, but also realize that Wisdom remains a divine gift. Seeking and valuing Wisdom leads to a person's understanding (discernment), the 'fear of the Lord', and knowing God. Therefore, when a person "fears the Lord", they gain Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Prov. 1:4, 2:2-3, 10-11). The knowledge of how to live comes with the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:7). The success in view here is correct behavior (Prov. 2:7-9).

Lovers of wisdom are godly (Prov.2:8, "loyal sons of the covenant"). Solomon identifies God (Yahweh) as the source of Wisdom. Only through a personal relationship with Him can a person be truly wise and experience the blessings of wisdom. And it is Wisdom that gives positive, health-inducing, moral benefits (it is a 'shield', 'guard' and 'preserver').

A person who strives for wisdom will find that it will enter his heart. As we store up God's commands, He stores up success as our reward. Success is competence or sound judgment. Upright means "corresponding to God's ethical instruction." Integrity implies genuineness and reliability. Understanding is a result of seeking wisdom.

**Prov. 2:10-22: The Fruit of Moral Integrity; the Protection of Wisdom from Immoral People**

Wisdom safeguards a person morally. A person who strives for Wisdom will find that it enters their heart. These verses show how God protects the wise (Prov. 2:10-11; cf. 2:7b-8). A person can live ethically when he has wisdom in his mind and heart.

The last number of verses in this discourse presents the temptations one can overcome as he or she seeks wisdom (Prov. 2:12-15, 16-19). "Discretion" is the ability to act wisely, and "understanding" is the ability to make wise choices. When a person submits himself or herself to God and gains wisdom, the ways of the wicked will lose some of their attractiveness. Having discretion and understanding will prevent self-destructive behavior.

The evil "man" is one enemy of the young, inexperienced youth (Prov. 2:12). The evil man uses perverse words to snare the youth. His words are wicked and are meant to lead the youth into dark and crooked ways. Without Wisdom the youth will follow for the "adventure" or "excitement". To do evil is to undermine society and applaud its overthrow. Treacherous people are unfaithful in relationships; here they have abandoned their relationship to God.

The second enemy of the young man is the "strange woman" is another (Prov. 2:16). The wise youth will see that the "woman" who promises thrills and adventure is offering something she cannot give, except in the most immediate sensual sense. The "strange woman" is one "outside the circle of a man's proper sexual relationship, that is, she is either a harlot or an adulteress. The word does not necessarily mean that she is a foreigner. Prostitution was partly sanctioned in the cultures of the Midianites, Syrians, and other nations neighboring to Israel, and it would have been regarded as customary. In Israel, however, it was contrary to the Law (Deut. 23:17-18). It was forbidden under penalty, and therefore it was chiefly practiced by foreign women.

The "strange woman" uses flattering words, enticing the young man. Someone has said that flattery isn't communication, it is manipulation; its people telling us things about ourselves that we enjoy hearing and wish were true. The "covenant" she has left (Prov. 2:17) refers to her own marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14), rather than to the covenant law that prohibited adultery (Exod. 20:14). The "land" (Prov. 2:21-22) is the Promised Land of Canaan.

Chapter 2 emphasizes moral stability as a fruit of wisdom. Merely escaping immorality is insufficient for a man of wisdom; he must also progressively pursue righteousness – then God will bless him. This chapter ends by contrasting the ends of the wicked and the righteous (Prov. 2:21-22; cf. 1:32-33). It is a long poem that appeals to the reader to pursue wisdom, and then identifies the benefits of following wisdom.

### **Prov. 3:13-24: The Value of Wisdom and Its Fruits**

Solomon continues his discourse with his son. In these verses he explains the high value of Wisdom in one's life.

"Gain" (Prov. 3:14) means Wisdom itself, not the profit that wisdom yields. Long life, riches, and honor (Prov. 3:16) were the rewards God promised the godly under the Old Covenant (cf. Ps. 16:11). Wealth does not bring genuine happiness, whereas wisdom does. Wisdom gives enduring riches along with honor, peace, and eternal life. The tree of life figure (Prov. 3:18) implies that wisdom is the source and sustainer of a long and beneficial life (cf. Prov. 3:16). Wisdom becomes a 'tree of life' to the believer who takes hold of her, and this is a foretaste of heaven (Rev. 22:1-2). Christ fulfilled wisdom's promise.

The point is that by pursuing the way of Wisdom, a person can obtain the best things God has to offer him or her. It is good to have the things money can buy, provided you don't lose the things money can't buy. What good is an expensive house if there's no happy home within it? Happiness, pleasantness, and peace are not the guaranteed by-products of financial success, but they are guaranteed to the person who lives by God's wisdom.

Wisdom brings happiness (Prov. 2:13, 18), therefore Wisdom's value far exceeds the wealth provided by silver, gold, precious stones and material things. Wisdom is profitable – one can be profitable in trading up to wisdom or one can be profitable by applying wisdom.

When God created the world, He used Wisdom (Prov. 8:22-31, 3:19-20). If God used Wisdom, certainly we need to gain and use it as well.

We are challenged to take hold of what God has revealed as Wisdom, to have it control the heart and life. This is continually insisted on in the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 3:21-24). Wisdom gives victory (the meaning of "sound wisdom" – Prov. 2:7), so seek it, obtain it, guard it, and walk in its ways. When you do so, it will provide the fruit of peace. Wisdom is the key to life – a full life now and eternal life in the future – because it is anchored in the Fear of the Lord.

## **The Dangers of Rejecting Wisdom**

### **Prov.1:20-33: Wisdom's Appeal**

Wisdom is here personified, i.e. represented as a Woman. There are four 'women' personifications in the Book of Proverbs. First is Wisdom (Prov. 1:20-33; 3:13-20; 4:5-9; 7:4; 8:1-36; 9:1-6); second is Folly (Prov. 9:13-18); third is the woman who is one's marriage partner (Wife) (Prov. 5:15-19); and finally, the Strange (Foreign) Woman (Prov. 2:16- 19; 5:1-14, 20; 6:24-32; 7:25-27).

Here the Wisdom personification presupposes that wisdom is more than a property and quality of human subjectivity; she is a divine power that exists independently. Submitting to Wisdom results in the happiness of men; to reject Wisdom is to meet with destruction. Here Wisdom calls the simple and the scorner (perverse) to repentance. Her call comes to people in the market (a public warning), in the hustle and bustle of life, not in the seclusion of the home or sanctuary.

Wisdom is calling out to three classes of sinners: the simple ones, the scornors (scoffers, mockers, perverse), and the fools (Prov. 1:22). The Simple are naive young people who believe anything (Prov. 14:15) but examine nothing. They're gullible and easily led astray. The Scornors are arrogant people

who think they know everything (Prov. 21:24) and are not willing to change (obnoxious, obstinate). The Fools are people who are ignorant of truth because they're self-centered and stubborn (Psa. 14:1). Wisdom calls them to account.

The Fool's problem is not a low IQ or poor education; their problem is a lack of spiritual desire to seek and find God's wisdom. Fools enjoy their foolishness but don't know how foolish they are! The outlook of fools is purely materialistic and humanistic. They hate knowledge and have no interest in things eternal; and they make a habit of continually rejecting Wisdom. Wisdom laughs at the fool's calamity (Prov. 1:26), not because she is hard-hearted but because it is so absurd to choose Folly. The figure of laughing reveals the absurdity of choosing a foolish way of life and being totally unprepared for disaster.

The Fool is one by his own action, not by fate (Prov. 1:30-31). It is clear here that people have a choice about which way they will go. Their lives are to a large measure the result of their choices. The choice between wise behaviors and foolish, between righteous conduct and wicked, has consequences (Prov. 22:8; Gal. 6:7; c.f. Jer. 6:19). Wisdom rejoices that through calamity the world is set right – the wicked are punished and the righteous are rewarded. God patiently permits Himself to be found but He does not respond to insincere seekers....and eventually it becomes too late.

Prov. 1:32-33 contrast the ultimate destruction of the unresponsive (the Fool) with the peaceful condition of the responsive (the Wise). These contrasts between the consequences of following Folly (Prov. 1:32) and of Wisdom (Prov. 1:33) set the tone for most of the Book of Proverbs. Turning away is a turning away from God, being unfaithful and rebellious. Complacency is a false sense of security in which some people trust. Security is false if the object of trust is not God.

### **Prov. 9:13-18: Folly's Feast**

Prov. 9: 13-18 personifies Folly as a harlot who is preparing a feast and issuing invitations. In Prov. 9:1-6 Wisdom is personified as a lady preparing a feast and issuing invitations. Prov. 9:4 and 16 are almost identical invitations – requiring discernment as both have different consequences. The contrasts between these sections are full of nuances.

Folly is loud (excited), simple (undisciplined, gullible), and ignorant; but she is attractive and offers immediate gratification (ignorant of morality and the consequences of choosing against it). She intentionally uses the same words as Lady Wisdom to entrap the simple. "Drinking water from one's own fountain" is a direct reference to sex within the bond of marriage (Prov. 5:15-16). Therefore "stolen water" can be understood to be illicit sex outside of marriage (Prov. 7:18-19, 9:17). The picture is that sexual immorality is the height of folly because it results in destruction, a point that the Book of Proverbs will continually point out.

In view of what God has revealed so far about wisdom, any person can determine just how wise or how foolish he or she may be. This is not a mystery. It has little to do with intelligence but everything to do with commitment. If a person recognizes divine revelation as such and commits to understand it, submits to it, and lives by it the best he can; he is wise. On the other hand, if he rejects God's Word and decides to live his life with no regard to what God has said; he is a Fool.

## Solomon's Plea - Acquire Wisdom

Proverbs 4 is comprised of three discourses on the value of wisdom, each including the reoccurring theme of instruction, exhortation, command, and motivation. This chapter is Solomon's plea, as a parent, to his children; it is an example of how a wise parent should admonish and teach their children.

### **Prov. 4:1-9: Teaching the love of wisdom**

The first section of verses in this chapter shows how parents can pass along the love of wisdom: mainly by personal influence. Solomon's instruction here was very positive. Rather than saying, "Don't do this and that!" which he did elsewhere (Prov. 3:27-31), he wanted his sons to realize that by heeding his counsel they could find the best life possible. This is a good example to follow. It appears that he had structured formal times of instruction for his sons.

The Hebrew word translated "instruction" (Prov. 4:2) can also mean "law" (Prov. 3:1). Normally those who keep God's commandments live (Prov. 4: 4), but there are exceptions. Nonetheless this is good motivation for parent and child. Tender means teachable; precious means to be treated as an only child.

The first step in becoming wise ("the beginning of wisdom") is deciding to seek wisdom; acquire wisdom and understanding. Those who keep their way in godly wisdom will in turn be watched over and guarded by wisdom (the Lord). Wisdom is supreme; it is the first thing to get. One writer paraphrased Prov. 4:7a as follows: "What it takes is not brains or opportunity, but decision. Do you want it? Go and get it." The second half of Prov. 4:7 means, "Be willing to part with anything else you may have to get understanding." God's grace and favor will be visible to all when you cherish and embrace Wisdom.

### **Prov. 4:10-19: The two paths; the value of wisdom in preserving from trouble**

In Prov. 4:10-19, two paths lie before the youth (simple): the way of Wisdom (Prov. 4:10-13) and the way of Folly (the way of the wicked; Prov. 4:14-17).

"The years of your life will be many" (Prov. 4:10) means more than just having a long life; it also means enjoying life. "The way of wisdom" (Prov. 4:11) is the way that leads to wisdom (cf. Job 3:23). "Upright" paths (Prov. 4:11) are straightforward ways of behaving, morally and practically. God's way is the best route to take (cf. Matt. 7:13-14). It offers the fewest potholes, detours, and dangers. God's commands are similar to the lines on modern highways. They help travelers stay on the proper part of the road so they do not have accidents, but instead arrive safely at the right destination.

The road metaphor does not depict life from the cradle to the grave, but the road to eternal life versus the road to eternal death. One writer restated Prov. 4:14-15 as follows. "Don't take the first step, for you may not be master of your destiny thereafter." Another writer wrote: "The true pilot may not know every rock or reef, but his wisdom consists in taking the safe channel: so the Christian need not make himself aware of all the evils of the day. He is to simply take the safe path." The crooked, devious path of sin is the way of problems and hardships.

A person can become as zealous for evil as for good. However, this is upside down morality (Prov. 4:16; cf. Rom. 14:21). Another writer commented on Prov. 4:16-17 in these words. "How sick is it to find peace only at the price of another man's misfortune!" Sin is so much a part of them that it is like their

food (Prov. 4:17). The wicked are addicted to doing evil – it is their refreshment and their nourishment. Interestingly, the wicked do not recognize that there is a connection between sin and punishment.

This section closes with another summary comparison (Prov. 4:18-19; cf. 1:32-33; 2:21-22; 3:35). "The full day" (Prov. 4:18) is midday, when the day is at its clearest and brightest. One writer wrote: "With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack? Surely we are the most favored of all creatures."

The main opposing elements are set in contrast in Prov. 4:10-19. They alternate between safety and danger, and between certainty and uncertainty. The path of the righteous (the way of wisdom) is characterized by bright light; the path of the wicked (the way of the fool) is characterized by intense darkness. Which is the better way to see the path of life before you?

### **Prov. 4:20-27: The importance of persistence in seeking wisdom, following instruction**

The last verses of this chapter emphasize the importance of persisting in the good practices that will lead to life; they stress the value of wisdom. The basic admonition in this section is: Avoid dishonesty (from within)! Success usually comes to those who keep concentrating on and perfecting the basics in their work. Our temptation is to leave these when we become adequately proficient in our work and move on to things that we find more interesting and exciting.

By using ears, eyes, and heart, Solomon is exhorting the whole person to receive the instruction of Wisdom. The heart of a person is the focus here; the heart controlled by the Word of God (Wisdom) assures a life based in the truth. "Heart" (Prov. 4:23) usually means "mind" (Prov. 3:3; 6:32a; 7:7b), but here it has a much broader meaning that includes the "emotions" (Prov. 15:15, 30) and the "will" (Prov. 11:20; 14:14); the values of the whole inner person (Prov. 3:5-6). In Prov. 4:23 the affections of life (life actions) are in view. To guard is to make sure that it doesn't get away and that it is safe from attack.

Prov. 4:23, in conjunction with Prov. 4: 20-22, help us see that the life in view is not some prize that one gains all at once. It is rather a growing spiritual vitality that empowers the wise person and enables him or her to reach out and help others effectively (cf. Mark 7:15-23; Luke 6:45; John 4:14, 7:38). The inclination of your heart directs your mortal life – and it will determine whether you enter into eternal life.

One's words (Prov. 4:24) reflect his or her heart's affections (life actions). We must be single-minded in our pursuit of wisdom (Prov. 4:25; cf. Ps. 101:3; 119:37). We must give attention to practical planning so we end up taking the steps we need to take to arrive at our intended destination (Prov. 4:26-27; cf. Heb. 12:13). We must remove all that can become a moral hindrance or a dangerous obstacle in our life-course, in order that we may make right steps with our feet. Attention to the right path assures that your way will be established; the passive voice used here implies that it is God who does this.

It is interesting that God is never mentioned in this fervent appeal 'to walk the walk.' However, there is no question that God is in view here. The goal is successful living and the route to it is the way of Wisdom. Though Wisdom keeps one in the right path, the encouragement here is to keep oneself on the straightway. It is important not to leave the only good way. That can only be accomplished through submission of oneself to God.

NOTE: Advocates of the "prosperity gospel," who teach that it is never God's will for believers to experience sickness or privation, appeal to Prov. 4:20-22 as support for their position (along with Exod.

15:26; 23:25; Ps. 103:3; Isa. 33:24; Jer. 30:17; Matt. 4:23; 10:1; Mark 16:16-18; Luke 6:17-19; Acts 5:16 and 10:38). It must be noted that the Book of Job and the life of Jesus are two lessons, among many in Scripture that prove this view is incorrect.

## Value of Wise Sayings - The Preeminence of the LORD

### Exhortation

**Prov. 22:17-21 – (Introduction to the 30 Sayings)** - This section of the Book of Proverbs begins with an exhortation to hear and give heed to the words of wisdom that follow. First, there is a call (Prov. 22:17) – “pay attention” and “listen” - followed by three motivations: 1 – memorize the wise sayings (Prov. 22:18), 2 – enter into a deeper trust in the Lord (Prov. 22:19), and 3 – use wisdom to become reliable (give sound answers) (Prov. 22: 20-21). The general thought of the exhortation is plain: the pupil is to devote himself to study, in order that his religious life may be firmly established, and that he may be able to give wise counsel to those who seek advice. There are 3 motivations given for gaining wisdom: to be pleasing, to have confidence in the Lord, and to be dependable when commissioned. Many of these proverbs are ones Solomon wrote or were attributed to him (**Prov. 25:1**).

### Fear of the Lord

**Prov. 9:10-12** - The theme of the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 1:7) is restated here, with 2 variations; 1 – “beginning here means “prerequisite/requirement” not “start”, 2 – “wisdom” is specifically used here instead of “knowledge”. Wise people are teachable because they are humble and fear the Lord. People do not usually live or die because of only one decision. They develop a pattern of life that ends in either death or life. If a person is open to God and teachable, he will become wise, but if he does not accept this instruction and closes his mind, he becomes a fool. It has been written that "the less a man knows, as a rule, the more he thinks he knows. The more he really does know, the more he realizes his ignorance and his limitations."

Verse 12 is a strong statement of individual responsibility. It stresses that the person himself or herself is the ultimate loser or winner in his or her decision to choose wisdom or folly. It reminds us that the Lord wants to build godly character into our lives, and we can't borrow character from others or give our character to them. This is an individual matter that involves individual decisions. Belonging to a fine family, attending a faithful church, or studying in an excellent school can't guarantee the building of our character. Character is built on decisions, and bad decisions will create bad character. Wisdom brings reward, whereas mocking brings suffering.

**Prov. 10:27** - Normally a person who fears the Lord lives longer, and a person who does not lives a shorter life (cf. Rom. 6:23). Though there are many exceptions, this proverb is true as a proverb. Since God's will is to bless people (John 3:16), those who live in harmony with His will normally experience His blessings, one of which is an extension of life here and now (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:2). Longevity for the righteous and brevity of life for the wicked are frequent themes in the Book of Proverbs; life is tied directly to the fear of the Lord.

**Prov. 14:2** - It is one's life that proves whether one is really walking with God or not. The testimony of the lips, if contradicted by the behavior, is of little worth (Ezek. 33:30-33). The one who fears the Lord will be characterized by righteousness, godliness and faithfulness. To understand the fear of the Lord is to know it is not as a fleeting emotion but is a habit; a straight, committed walk. A person's attitude toward the Lord shows in their behavior, it is either right or it is devious (crooked).

**Prov. 14:26-27** - These two proverbs are linked together. The fear of the Lord gives a person "confidence," and "his children" enjoy a measure of security ("refuge") because of their parents' faith (Ex. Abraham - Gen. 14; Isaac - Gen. 26:24). The fear of the Lord also sustains one's whole life, like "a fountain" of water sustains physical life. It will keep him out of the "snares" that can cause an untimely "death." Ex. - Caleb and Joshua feared the Lord, so the Lord sustained them, and enabled them to avoid the fate of the rest of their unbelieving generation (Josh. 14).

**Prov. 15:33** - The fear of the Lord is not just the foundation of a wise life (Prov. 1:7; 9:10), it is also the whole path of wisdom. To fear the Lord amounts to being wise in one sense, while it is also the foundation for wisdom in another. The fear of the Lord is the willingness to humble oneself before God and to let His Word guide us. The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom, but it also teaches wisdom. By fearing (which means reverencing, trusting, obeying, serving, and worshiping) the Lord, a person learns wisdom. The one seeking wisdom has a clear obligation as well—an obligation to recognize the need to learn and to do everything possible to aid that learning.

**Prov. 19:23** - One who fears the Lord is secure and at peace with themselves and others. This proverb highlights one of the psychological benefits of reverencing the Lord: sound "sleep" (Prov. 14:27; Ps. 91:1). A bad conscience or unwarranted fears does not keep the one who fears the Lord awake at night. This is supported by Paul's writing in Rom. 8:28. Also, Peter was able to sleep in prison, with trial before Herod on the docket for the next day, because of his trust in the Lord (Acts 12:6)

**Prov. 28:14** - The word "fear" or "reverent" here means "to be afraid". Therefore it is fearing sin that is in view here, not having a timid disposition or fearing God. This is a reference to the fear or dread of the consequences of sin. A person who is fearful of the consequences of sin will be happy and will not harden their heart. The contrast of hardening the heart supports this interpretation. Ex. - Joseph feared the consequences of committing adultery with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:8-9). The Pharaoh of the Exodus hardened his heart, continued in sin, and perished (Exod. 7—10).

#### **Trust in God or Self – The Law of Contrast**

**Prov. 3:5-8** - The trust of the wise son (Prov. 3: 5-6) comes from heeding sound teaching (Prov. 3:1-4), and it leads to confident obedience (Prov. 3: 7-8). The context suggests that the teachings of the parents are in view here rather than the Mosaic Law.

Prov. 3:5 - "Trust" and "lean" are very close in meaning. Trusting means to put oneself wholly at the mercy of another (cf. Jer. 12:5b; Ps. 22:9b). Leaning is not just reclining against something but relying on it totally for support. There are two sides to the matter of trust. There is the decision of trust and the habit of trust. The first is called 'commitment;' the second is called 'trust.' Trust follows commitment, not always right away, but it begins there. In the middle of our fears we make a decision to trust. This does not immediately bring the habit of trust, but if we will muster the courage to commit our way to God, we shall soon learn to trust.

Prov. 3:6 - "Acknowledge" means to be aware of, to think about and have fellowship with God, not just a nod of recognition to Him. It includes obeying God's moral will as He has revealed it. The promise (Prov. 3:6b) means that God will make the course of such a person's life truly successful in God's eyes. It does not guarantee that one will never make mistakes. God will make righteousness attainable.

Prov. 3:7-8- This proverb suggests some of the ways that God will reward the commitment of verses 5-6. Verse 7a gives the converse of verse 5a, and 7b restates 6a (cf. Rom. 12:16). This is the act of

acknowledging God in all one's ways. No wise man is ever arrogant. Turning away from evil and worshiping the Lord is repentance, which requires humility. In the end, fearing the Lord and not pursuing evil will generally yield health, as spiritual health and physical health are many times related.

This is a promise as well as a proverb, and it refers to the totality of one's life experience. How can we tell if a proverb is a promise as well as a proverb? We can tell by consulting the rest of Scripture. If a proverb expresses a truth promised elsewhere in Scripture, we know that we can rely on it being absolutely true. A proverb is by definition a saying that accurately represents what is usually true, not what is true without exception. In the case of Prov. 3:5-6 we have the repetition of a promise made numerous times in Scripture that people who trust God will experience His guidance through life (cf. Heb. 11; et al.). In our attempt to "handle accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) we must carefully distinguish proverbs that restate promises from those that do not and are only proverbs. Failure to distinguish proverbs from promises has led to confusion and disappointment for many readers of this genre.

**Prov. 14:12 (16:25)** - Without the additional light provided by Scripture, we might conclude that any number of beliefs will lead to a good end ("a way which seems right"). Nevertheless, God's Word helps us to see the end of some of these paths so that we can avoid them. Salvation by works is one example of this. Following this path will lead to eternal "death." As someone once said, "I was climbing the ladder of success, but then I discovered that it was leaning against the wrong wall." This proverb warns that apparently good roads may prove fatal to the moral life (Prov. 7:27; 16:25; Matt. 7:13-14) because their destination is wrong. One's way of life may seem right (level, straight) to men but it leads to death because it is the way of sin and folly. Men cannot get away with sin and its consequences.

**Prov. 16:3** - When we cast ("commit"; lit. "roll") our "works" and cares on God (1 Pet. 5:7), He will arrange our plans. The admonition to "commit to" connotes a sense of finality; roll it unto the LORD and leave it there. Some translations have "thoughts" for "plans," but the idea is the same. This proverb stresses the importance of depending on the Lord (cf. Prov. 3:5-6). It is a good idea to start each day by praying through what we anticipate happening. When we do that, the Lord will direct our steps so that the plans that He sovereignly approves come to pass. God is in no sense obligated to do what we want, but we have no hope at all of seeing our plans take shape unless we depend on Him for grace and guidance. Nehemiah's habit of praying first, and then working, provides a good model for us. Hannah is also another example (1 Sam. 1:9-20).

**Prov. 16:20** - "The word" in view is God's word; based on the parallel reference to "the LORD" in the second line of this proverb. It is through His Word that God provides guidance to what is truly "good." Paying attention to what God has said implies trust in Him, and that leads to blessings. A person who ponders (pays attention to the way / one who attends to business) and take note of instruction from God will prosper in God's blessing of happiness.

**Prov. 18:2** - When the fool should be listening and learning from others, he is speaking and trying to impress them with how much he knows. It is the simple fool who is always talking and babbling. A compulsive talker never listens, only pausing long enough to plan what he will say next. Every speech confirms what a fool he is. The dual trouble of a fool is a closed mind and open mouth.

**Prov. 18:4** - This proverb provides insight into the heart of man. Wise words are liked fresh water from a fountain. Foolish words are therefore the opposite, like brackish waters from a sewer. This leads us to consider what depths of thought, what riches of content, what power of spiritual and moral admonition

may be contained in the words of a wise man; and what shallow thoughts and content, what worthless moral value are the words from a foolish man. Note: Luke 6:43-45

**Prov. 18:10** - The "name" of the LORD is the person of the LORD. Those who seek safety from those who attack can find refuge by turning to Him as their "strong tower." A strong tower was a central place in a region or city to which people could run to when they were threatened. The righteous turn to the Lord, that is His revealed character, for safety and peace.

**Prov. 19:3** - The foolishness of a fool ruins his life. Instead of repenting of the sins that prompted the LORD to ruin him, the fool is so convinced that his sinful way of life is right that he blames the LORD, holding Him accountable for not granting what he thought, planned, and willed. He should not blame the results of his careless foolishness on the will of the Lord, but he does. A fool is always the victim, it is never his fault. It is the fool's own foolishness that undermines his way.

**Prov. 20:24** - The Lord guides man's steps (c.f. Prov. 16:3). Since God ultimately controls all that happens, people cannot be completely sure of the future ("understand their way"), no matter how wisely they plan for it (cf. Prov. 16:1, 9; 27:1; Ps. 37:23; Jer. 10:23; Luke 12:19-20; James 4:14). This is one of the most profound insights in the Bible, and it is difficult to understand. Since God has the ultimate say in one's life, it is often difficult from a person to fully understand his own way. It becomes imperative, therefore, that we commit our ways to Him and trust in Him (Prov. 3:5-6; cf. Jer. 10:24). Does this mean that God directs men to do evil? Or does He permit rebellious men to reap what they sow? No one can claim absolute control over their life.

**Prov. 21:22** - Wisdom is better than physical strength. A "wise general (man)" can defeat a stronger enemy by using his wisdom. One whose strength is his wise, godly character is pictured as conquering another who trust is in physical fortifications. Those who trust in physical fortifications have unfounded confidence. A wise man can overcome the most formidable obstacles. Jerusalem and Babylon were supposedly impregnable, but both of them fell to men of wisdom and cunning (1 Chron. 11:4-6; Jer. 51:27-33).

**Prov. 26:12** - A fool's arrogant self-esteem and perceived superiority to all instruction places them hopelessly beyond the reach of help. The only thing worse than a fool is a deluded, self-deceived fool; even a fool is better off than a self-deluded fool who is wise in his own eyes. Self-conceit and pride blind a fool to their need; even a non-conceited fool can sense a need for correction at times. Nabal was this type of fool. No one could reason with him (1 Sam. 25:17). Paul counseled: "Do not be wise in your own estimation" (Rom. 12:16).

**Prov. 28:26** - A person who trusts in himself is a fool (dull, thickheaded). Excessive self-confidence is in view here. In the second line of this proverb, "walking wisely" corresponds to trusting in the Lord (found in Prov. 28:25). Two objects of trust are contrasted: "the Lord" (Prov. 28:25), and one's "own heart" (Prov. 28:26). A person who is wise does not trust in himself but in God, where he will be safe. When Paul laid his plans, he submitted them to the sovereign will of God (Acts 21:14; et al.). Jesus also did this, in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42).

**Prov. 29:25** - The contrast in this proverb is between fearing "man" and fearing "the LORD." If we trust in man, we will be disappointed and caught in a snare (a trap). To fear man ensnares one in the sense that one's actions are controlled by a person who is dreaded. But if we trust in the Lord, He will exalt us. Paul illustrated proper fear (Gal. 1:10; cf. Luke 12:4-5; John 12:43). He who fears God will not fear man.

He who fears man does not fear God as he should. Trusting in the Lord removes (makes void) any intimidation by men.

### **Divine Providence – God Knows**

**Prov. 15:3** - Since God sees everything, we should live our lives aware that He is watching us and will deal with us according to what He sees. Paul wrote that no one is hidden from the sight of God – and that we will all give an account to Him for what we have done (Heb. 4:13). “Observing” implies in the Hebrew that proper action will be taken with regard to what is observed. This universal watching of men by God is a warning to the evil man but is a comfort to the good (righteous) man (II Chron. 16:9). David was aware of God's all-seeing "eye(s)," and asked Him to search his life and expose anything that displeased Him (Ps. 66:7; 139:23-24).

**Prov. 16:1** - Even though man has freedom to plan (arranging things in an orderly manner), in the end he only fulfills the will of God by what he says. Man plans his words, but what really comes out takes place because God sovereignly controls (cf. Luke 21:12-15). When someone is trying to speak, the Lord directs the words according to His sovereign will. We are totally dependent upon God, even though we are at the same time morally responsible for what we do and say. This is a conundrum. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility (accountability) of man (cf. Deut. 30:15-19). However, it is a truth that the sovereignty of God will always prevail over man's independent responsibility. Ex. - Balaam found that the Lord directed his words in a way that he did not want them to go (Num. 23—24).

**Prov. 16:4** - God works all thing for His own end, including the wicked for destruction. This is the same truth expressed in Romans 9 (c.f. Ex. 7-11). The actions of men create no situation by which God would be surprised and compelled to something which was not originally intended by Himself. That is what this proverb says: the wicked has his place in God's order of the world. This is difficult to understand but God is just and this truth is taught throughout Scripture.

**Prov. 16:9** - A man makes plans but God determines how he will go. People frequently think they are having their own way, when in reality the Lord is leading them with 'bit and bridle,' (cf. Jer. 10:23). Wicked schemes and good plans are in view here – all plans can only be established by a sovereign God. Naomi exemplifies this truth (Ruth 1:21).

**Prov. 16:33** - Casting lots may seem like chance but God controls the lot. God always controls the course of events, not man's plans or self-determination. The “lot” was a marked stone, held in the folds of one's garment above the waist—in the "lap, which would be dropped or thrown like we throw dice today. Even in this, there is no such thing as chance; God determines how things will turn out. We can see this clearly in the story of Jonah, especially where the sailors cast lots to determine who was responsible for the storm (Jonah 1:7; cf. Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55; Josh. 7:16-18; 18:10; 1 Sam. 14:41; Acts 1:26). God has freedom to use or not use the lot, but He will see to it that His will is done. Thanks to the completion of Scripture, the example of Christ, the witness of the Spirit, and the wisdom of fellow Christians, we have better ways of finding God's will than throwing marked stones.

**Prov. 19:21**- People plan all kinds of things, but only what God approves comes to pass. A person may and should make plans but God can sovereignly overrule and accomplish His purpose within or without those plans. God is sovereign and determines outcomes. Paul planned to go into Asia and Bithynia, but the Lord closed those doors and led him instead into Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).

**Prov. 21:30-31** - Human wisdom is no match against God's wisdom. "No wisdom," "understanding," or "counsel" will prevail "against the LORD." His Word is truth (John 17:17). No counsel that seeks to subvert God's will can succeed, for He is sovereign. Even though man makes his plans, and prepares for what he anticipates the best he can ("the horse is prepared for the day of battle"), God determines the final outcome. This is not to discourage thorough preparation, which is the better part of wisdom. It is a reminder of the sovereignty of God. He is the One who is due the credit ("victory belongs to the LORD") when our plan turns out well.

**Prov. 22:12** - In His omniscience, God guards knowledge. "The eyes of the LORD" represent His moral awareness. God protects the words of His faithful teachers of "knowledge". He will overthrow, or subvert / undermine, the words of those who deny His words of truth. To be wise is to seek knowledge and to be under God's protection. To be unwise is to reject knowledge and be under God's judgment. God fulfilled and preserved Jeremiah's prophecies regarding Jerusalem's destruction; but He frustrated the prophecies of the false prophet Hananiah that the city would not fall, and He put him to death (Jer. 28).

**Prov. 27:1** - A person should not praise himself (boast) about what he will do the next day because he has no way of knowing for sure what will happen. Boasting "about tomorrow" involves relying confidently on what one will do and experience in the future, even the near future ( James 4:13). If anything is certain, it is human ignorance of what will happen—this is a sphere that belongs to God. Jesus' parable of the rich fool, who planned to live many more years but died the next night, should be a warning to all self-confident people (Luke 12:16-21). The implication of this proverb is that we should use each day profitably, rather than procrastinating (cf. Exod. 8:10; Acts 24:25).

## The Sovereignty of God – Supplement to Proverbs

### Isa. 45:5-7

45:5 The issue is who the LORD is. Here the uniqueness of God is stressed – there is no other God. God (Yahweh) is the only true God, so He could choose whom He would, even though someone may not or did not know Him.

45:6 People are chosen by God at various times and places so everyone will come to know that He is the only true God (partially today, completely in the future). In Isaiah 45, Cyrus was chosen by God. Note the progression in the reasons in Isaiah 45 for God's choice of Cyrus: that he might know (45:3), that Israel might know (45:4), and that the world might know who is the only true God (45:6).

This is important an important fact. One - because it is true; all people should know the truth. Two - because only as people recognize God for who He is will they stop ruining their own lives with idolatry (serving other gods or self). At this time in history, God's use of Cyrus preserved the Israelites and thus made the first coming of Christ to earth possible. That event, in turn, has made salvation available to the whole world.

45:7 The point of this verse is that God alone is ultimately responsible for everything in nature and history. Everything that is in the universe exists because of the creative will of God. People will come to realize that all that happens: light (life), darkness (death),

peace (prosperity) and calamity (disaster) come from God. As the sovereign LORD of the universe, He can do (and does) everything.

God was and is not claiming that He creates moral "evil", but both well-being and calamity. He causes (allows) bad things to happen to people for His own reasons (cf. Job 1—2), as well as good things, but He does not cause people to make morally evil decisions (cf. James 1:13). God claims not to be those conditions, but to *create* both, and thus to overcome the inherent dualism in His sovereign rule over them. The LORD's creative will and wise purpose stands behind everything. Therefore, we should not be discouraged when bad things happen and things occur that seem contrary to His promises.

## Insight and Ignorance

### Wisdom and Folly

**Prov. 13:14** - The "teaching (or law) of the wise" refreshes, invigorates, and prolongs life, like water from a "fountain" does physically. This teaching is designed to turn others aside from those practices that ensnare people and lead to death (Prov. 1:8-19; 10:11; 14:27; 16:22). This is a good example of an integral distich (a unit of two lines of verse; a self-contained statement), in which the second line completes the thought of the first line (in this instance, the second line is a dependent clause of the first line).

**Prov. 14:24** - The outcomes of the wise and the foolish are in view here. The wise are crowned, that is, blessed with wealth (Prov. 3:16; 8:18,21; 15:6; 22:4) because of their diligence (Prov. 14:23), but foolish conduct results not in blessing but in more folly (Prov. 14:18). The emphatic language used ("foolishness of fools is folly") shows that the only reward for fools is more folly.

**Prov. 15:24** - Everyone goes to "Sheol" (the grave) eventually (except believers who the Rapture and do not die). However, the wise avoid the grave as long as they can by being wise. Living wisely tends to prolong life. The discerning person is on the path of life because he trusts in the Lord – and thereby avoids going to "sheol". King Hezekiah found this to be true (2 Kings 20; Isa. 38).

**Prov. 16:22** - "Understanding" (as used here it means prudence, insight, good sense) is a resource for life for a wise person; but "folly" is a reservoir of harsh and painful discipline for a fool. Fools do not learn and their foolish conduct requires discipline. A person's wisdom or lack of it determines his or her prospects in life. Fools are disciplined for their foolishness; they reap punishment based on their foolish actions. It has been stated - "The wise know they are ignorant, so they keep on learning."

**Prov. 17:12** – A person who meets a foolish person who is acting foolishly ("a fool in his folly") is in more danger than being put in the path of a mother bear that has been robbed of her cubs. Fools are less rational in anger than a wild bear robbed of her cubs. So it is wise to avoid such people.

**Prov. 24:7** – This is the 22<sup>nd</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. Wisdom is beyond the fool's reach. The arrogant fool cannot appreciate, comprehend, or say anything wise; therefore "at the gate" where legal and judicial decisions are made – the fool should be silent. Therefore "a fool" does not, if he has any wisdom at all, seek to give advice in the decision-making places of his world. It has been said - "This

saying inferentially commends becoming competently wise by warning against being an incompetent fool."

**Prov. 24:13-14** – This is the 26<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. This proverb pictures the pleasantness and desirability of wisdom; it is beneficial and pleasant. Wisdom is beneficial and desirable to the soul because it gives a person future hope. Wisdom prepares for the future. Folly does not. A writer has noted - "Wisdom has all the immediate sweetness of honey, but also the additional characteristic of a pleasure that lasts for eternity."

### **Dealing with Fools**

#### **Prov. 26:4-11**

26:4-5 – These two sayings belong together as they complete each other. These pieces of advice do not contradict each other because each is wise in its own way. Verse 4 means that in replying to a fool one should not descend to his level by giving him a foolish response; i.e. foolish comments should be ignored. Verse 5 means that one should correct a fool so he will not conclude that he is right; i.e. foolish ideas should be corrected. Some of a fool's comments do not deserve a reply (v. 4), but others require one (v. 5). A fool should not be answered with agreement to his own ideas or expressions or he will think he is right; but rather he should be rebuked on the basis of his foolishness and shown the truth so he sees how foolish he is. In unimportant matters one should ignore the foolish comment, but in important matters one needs to respond lest others conclude that the fool is correct. The truly wise person will be sensitive to human nature so he will know when to apply the one and not the other.

26:6 - Cutting off one's "own feet" is self-destructive and makes delivering a message impossible, and so does sending a fool to deliver a message. The "fool" will lose heart, get distracted, or for some other reason prove unfaithful to his duty. Drinking "violence" refers to drinking something that does violence to one's system, such as poison. Self-inflicted wounds come to the one who chooses to depend on a fool. You do not give responsibility to someone unless they are proven responsible.

26:7 - A fool cannot be trusted with a message. A fool does not know what to do with a proverb as he does not understand it or know how to apply it. The fool can as little make use of an intelligent proverb as a lame man can of his feet. A proverb in the mouth of a fool carries no authority or value because people consider the source...and gets him nowhere. A proverb's message in a flawed messenger falls flat on its face and has no impact. It is therefore unwise to arm a fool with wise sayings, ask him to deliver them, and expect others to profit from them.

26:8 - By giving honor to a fool one arms him to do damage. This can happen, for example, by promoting him to a position of greater responsibility. The figure of binding a stone in a sling seems to suggest that the person doing the binding does not know how to operate a sling. People did not "bind" stones in slings but simply lay them in the sling so that, when the sling was slung, the stone would fly out. A stone, bound in a sling, is useless; so honor, conferred on a fool, is useless (of no value). Bestowing honor on a fool for whom honor is inappropriate is senseless and will damage the reputation of the one giving the honor; his wisdom will be questioned. Therefore one who expects a fool to accomplish something honorable is himself demonstrating that he is a fool.

26:9 - A proverb in the mouth of a fool is as painful and dangerous as "a thorn [in] the hand of a drunkard." Both the teaching and the thorn turn out to be instruments of pain and danger for drunks and fools who hear them or have them. This could mean: 1 – the drunkard may inflict damage on others by waving a thorn bush around dangerously (misusing or misapplying wisdom); 2 – he may be so

insensitive to pain that he does not feel the thorn in his hand (insensitive to wisdom); or, 3 – he is so drunk he cannot pull a thorn from his hand (cannot apply wisdom). The implication is that the fool, by using a proverb, is as disgusting and out of control as a drunkard.

26:10 – This is a difficult proverb to interpret because the Hebrew is obscure, lending too many interpretations. Not only is a fool unfit to teach with proverbs (v. 9), but he is unfit for any work. He inflicts damage with both his words and his deeds. Solomon compared fools and those who "pass by" (i.e., are unknown and untested) to "loose cannons." Hiring a fool at random is as harmful as a berserk shooter in public. This proverb could also mean that although a man possesses much and has great ability to accomplish all he wants, that is not the case when he uses the work of fools, who not only do not accomplish anything but destroy everything.

26:11 - A wise man does not repeat "his folly," but a fool does. A fool does not learn from his experience. Just as a dog returns to eat its vomit, a fool returns to his folly (his bad experience). Therefore, a fool behaves like a dog, instead of a man, when he "repeats" his folly. Because a fool cannot accept correction, he will never improve; but will always return to what everyone else sees as repulsive. Peter alluded to this proverb when he described the habit of false teachers in becoming entangled again in the defilements of the world (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

**Prov. 27:22** – An arrogant fool becomes hardened by the punishment he receives for his foolishness. Even severe punishment ("pound . . . in a mortar with a pestle") will not drive a hardened fool's folly ("foolishness") out of him. Many mature fools, having previously avoided instructions designed to help them, become even more foolish and incorrigible. King Saul went from bad to worse. He even refused to pay attention to Samuel's warning that he would die the next day (1 Sam. 28:19; 31:1). Foolishness taints every molecule of a fool. This is the reason that prisons, most of the time, creates hardened criminals not restored citizens.

**Prov. 29:9** - A typical "foolish" response, to some disagreement ("controversy") that arises between two people, is that the fool loses his temper ("rages/shakes with rage") or tries to laugh off the disagreement, rather than dealing with the matter seriously, calmly, and with consideration for the other person. The foolish response of anger or laughter does not solve the problem; the fool follows emotion rather than logic...and there is no peace in dealing with a fool.

### **Discernment and Understanding**

**Prov. 10:13** - The words of the wise display discernment and are spoken at the right time providing good advice. These words are contrasted with the only language that a fool can understand—physical force. This is the first reference to corporal punishment as it is one of the most effective ways of dealing with the young who are disobedient. This is a contrast: a discerning person is characterized by his wise statements while the one lacking good judgment is experiencing punishment.

**Prov. 10:23** – A fool (a thick-headed person) enjoys sinning, whereas the wise person enjoys wisdom. Just as doing wickedness is a "sport" to the fool, so doing something wise is a sport to a "person (man) of understanding." Both enjoy what they do. The pleasure does not come from what is done, but from the attitude of the person doing it. The point is the moral bankruptcy of the fool, who takes his wrongdoing as a sport. This hardened cynicism is contrasted with the attitude of the intelligent person, for whom wisdom is the joy and delight.

**Prov. 13:15** – “Good understanding” can be translated as “a good name”; meaning a good name gains favor or grace from others. A “good understanding,” of precisely what, produces favor? It is godly insight provided by the Word, the will of God, and the way of wisdom. Those who follow God's instruction usually receive favorable treatment from others. This is contrasted with the life of the unfaithful (treacherous) which is always hard. “Hard” here means “ever flowing”, like a river – it is a pressure that never stops. Those who treacherously try to find a better way on their own discover that their journey becomes difficult – they cannot improve the way they go.

**Prov. 14:6** - It is unusual to read that the scoffer (mocker) seeks wisdom. This shows that sometimes the desire to be wise is not the problem but rather the source of wisdom is the problem. Therefore the fool who seeks wisdom most times looks at the wrong source for wisdom; anywhere but God because they don't fear God (Prov. 1:7, 9:10). Someone who scoffs at the truth often finds it difficult to find the truth; whereas believers who fear God develop the habit of receiving and yielding to the truth that God has revealed so they are entrusted with more truth. The perceptive person is open to learning more.

**Prov. 14:8** - One characteristic of a wise, prudent person is that he considers his conduct ("understands his way") and regulates it carefully; they think things through and are not easily deceived. One characteristic that identifies a fool as a fool is that he relies on himself to get ahead. They believe that they are always right....and in believing this they deceive themselves and others. The stupidity of fools is deceit; they deceive themselves through their own stupidity or their stupidity is evident in their deceit of others. Many times fools use deception to gain advantage – albeit this is a temporary situation.

**Prov. 14:15** – The simple, naïve person tends to believe everything they hear. The wise person learns to listen and evaluate what they hear and see critically. A prudent person evaluates information carefully and does not walk into a trap. Sometimes we need to test before we trust.

**Prov. 14:33** - A suggested paraphrase of this verse is: "A wise man does not parade his knowledge; a fool does." Fools may have knowledge, but not biblical wisdom. A slightly different interpretation is that the intelligent behavior of an understanding person manifests the "wisdom" in his heart, but the senseless behavior of fools reveals what is in their heart. Wisdom is quietly preserved in the heart of the wise for the time of proper use, while the fool is eager to blurt out their knowledge, which demonstrates their ignorance and folly. Wisdom may be acknowledged by the fool, but it comes to rest on the discerning.

**Prov. 15:21** - A fool finds great delight in worthless and sinful activities, but a person who understands what is worthwhile and meaningful leads a morally and ethically upright life. The wise person walks uprightly in a straight line, which implies that the fool walks a crooked and obstructed path.

**Prov. 16:16** - "Wisdom" and "understanding" are more valuable than "gold" and "silver" (Prov. 8:10, 19). People who give their lives to pursue what God considers wise, and to understand what He has revealed, rather than worldly treasure—such as Barnabas and Paul—live out the truth of this proverb. The false "wisdom" that does not begin with the fear of God, and does not depart from evil, is a satanic counterfeit to be avoided (cf. Col. 2:8-12). Wisdom is superior to precious metals because it bestows spiritual virtues along with material benefits (Prov. 3:13-18). Wealth without wisdom is vulgar and greedy; and more than likely is devoted to self-centeredness and self-indulgence.

**Prov. 17:24** - A man of understanding concentrates on wisdom, but a fool lacks concentration. His mind roams everywhere. Literally this proverb means “wisdom is in front of (in the face of) a man of discernment.” A wise person finds wisdom in obvious places but the fool's eyes wander and never

discover it. The eyes of a discerning man are focused on the teacher. He is fascinated by the instruction being provided and is a picture of unbroken concentration. The fool has the wandering eye and a vacant distracted mind. As a student who is hearing nothing of what his teacher says might let his eyes rove to every corner of the classroom, so the fool who is inattentive to the instruction of wisdom is said to have his eyes on the ends of the earth.

**Prov. 19:8** - The person who desires to spend time with wisdom will preserve his life ("loves his own soul"), and the person who lives by what God has revealed as being true and real will prosper ("find good"). "Wisdom" here literally means "heart"; "understanding" here literally means "sense". Living sensibly shows that a person loves his own soul. This does not mean living in vanity or self-gratification but rather in genuine concern for one's destiny. To "keep" watch over one's understanding results in benefits to one's soul, which allows him to prosper spiritually, emotionally, and materially. A person who loves himself is one who is open to discipline and correction, which leads to wisdom and success.

**Prov. 20:5** - An "understanding" person will as skillfully draw another person's "plan" from him as a pearl diver extracts pearls from the bottom of "deep water" (Prov. 18:4). A discerning person can help another bring to the surface their true thoughts, intentions, or motives. Often a wise counselor can help a person examine their true motives. Because the heart of man is desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), and because these plans are hidden deeply, the plans in view are probably plans to do evil.

**Prov. 20:12** - In Proverbs, the "hearing ear" usually refers to "teachability", and here, as often elsewhere in this book, the "seeing eye" connotes moral discernment. Together they imply application of the wisdom presented here. God has given to people the ability to receive instruction and to understand what is best, even though they are flawed by sin; He can open the ear and eye to wisdom. It is important not only to listen with one's ears to what people say but also to observe with one's eyes what people do. Both senses should be used to see if people are consistent. It has been said – "Your actions speak so loud I cannot hear what you say".

### **Knowledge**

**Prov. 10:14** – The wise 'store up knowledge,' guarding it like an investment that will pay them regular dividends. A wise person stores up knowledge; he holds it in until an occasion is presented to effectively use it. The fool says things that cause him trouble and ruin because he speaks the wrong things at the wrong time. The foolish mouth is close to 'destruction', similar to holding a lit firecracker in one's mouth.

**Prov. 13:16** - A prudent person bases his or her actions on information ("knowledge"), not feelings. Fools do not behave that way, and so demonstrate their folly. Normally a person's conduct is consistent with their character. One who has knowledge shows good sense (prudence). In contrast, the fool exposes his folly – similar to a merchant displaying his merchandise so all can see.

**Prov. 14:18** – The simple person is gullible and often receives folly (trouble) for not being well informed. The simple often refuse to seek wisdom, so they remain naïve and gullible and inherit foolishness for the action. A "naïve" person often gets into trouble, so one should take pains to be well informed. "Knowledge" acts like a crown on the head of the "sensible." They typically experience exaltation rather than humiliation; often receiving more knowledge in their life experience.

**Prov. 15:14** - The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge are life-long occupations; a person who has discernment seeks more knowledge. Just as our selection of food has much to do with making us what

we are, the same is true of us morally. We become like that on which we take in and we take in what we desire. The man of understanding values knowledge, and devotes himself to its pursuit. The fool does not care for that which would build true character and draw him from evil ways. The fool takes in (feeds – grazes like a cow) folly and becomes more empty and foolish than before.

**Prov. 18:15** - The prudently wise person seeks out gaining more ("acquires") "knowledge." The wise person is more impressed with what he does not know than with what he does know. The discerning and wise are eager to increase their knowledge. They desire it in their hearts and listen for it with their ears.

**Prov. 19:2** - Ignorance may be bliss, but it is also dangerous. The second line implies that the person making haste ("hurries his steps errs") is doing so to satisfy his greed. This is a proverb that warns against ambitious drive that is not tempered with adequate knowledge, because ignorant ambition may lead to hasty decisions and ultimate failure. Such haste may result in a person making a mistake; i.e. "haste makes waste". The argument here is from the lesser to the greater (a fortiori). Moral ignorance is bad, but deliberate disregard of moral consequences is worse.

**Prov. 20:15** - "Lips of knowledge" are lips that speak thought-through words that are consistent with God's Word and His principles (Prov. 3:13-15). These words presuppose "the long, hard work of education." Gold and rubies, though rare and valuable, are in abundance compared with the rare and valuable ability to speak knowledge – meaning the ability to speak wise and appropriate words that fit the occasion. This is another of the "this is better than that" type of proverbs.

**Prov. 21:11** – This proverb is very similar to Prov. 19:25. The public punishment of a scoffer (mocker) may cause the naïve (simple) to learn and become wise. The punishment of a scoffer should be a warning example; it should teach the simple, who might otherwise be easily drawn into the same activity or sin. When Paul rebuked Peter and Barnabas, they learned to take a different view of Christian liberty (Gal. 2:11-16). Paul gave Timothy advice that is very similar to this proverb when he wrote, "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning" (1 Tim. 5:20).

**Prov. 23:12** – The admonition of this proverb is to apply your heart diligently to instruction; to desire instruction, to pay attention and listen to the wisdom being provided by these proverbs. It has been said that a believer, given a normal life span, will have 'meditated the Bible through three times' in his life. This is very different from merely reading the Scriptures. It implies patient, careful study of each portion of Scripture. It is only by this means will there be true spiritual growth in one's life.

**Prov. 24:3-4** – This is the 20<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. The "house" in view is probably one's life experience—including literal houses, one's household, his business, etc. (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). If it takes "wisdom" to build a house, it takes more wisdom to build a household; and it takes even more wisdom to build a life. Wisdom is essential for all enterprises of life. Just as God established the world through wisdom, understanding and knowledge, so a house is established by the same. This wisdom is wisdom that originates from God; it is wisdom that is rooted in fellowship with Him, by which every household, no matter size or stature, prospers and succeeds.

## Sharing and Responding to Wisdom

### Advice and Rebuke

**Prov. 3:1-2** - The parent-child relationship is in view here. The son is having a message being delivered to him: don't forget the law and keep the law. The word translated as "teaching" means "law" or, more fundamentally, "instruction" or "direction." Here the context suggests that the teachings of the parents are in view rather than the Mosaic Law; though the Law would have been the basis of and a part of the parent's teaching to their child. If these teachings became a part of the children's life, two benefits were declared – (1) length of days, and (2) peace, meaning prosperity, wholeness, health, and harmony. God blesses those who learn from the wise. "Well-being" is to be healthy, free from threat or need; thus one is fulfilled, content, prosperous, and at peace in a way only God can grant.

**Prov. 9:7-9** - Simply stated, wise people receive reproof and rebuke (correction) with appreciation; fools do not, they reject it. People develop a pattern of life which becomes evident to all (expect the fool does not recognize or chooses to ignore it). If a person is open to God and is teachable, they will become wise, but if they do not accept this instruction and close their mind, they become a fool. The person who tries to help a fool by correcting him will get no honor from the fool. The fool's folly has closed his mind to correction.

These proverbs present 3 statements (7a, 7b, 8a) about what happens if one corrects a scoffer (fool), and 3 contrasting statements (8b, 9a, 9b) about reproving (correcting) a wise man. The statements create a point that is two-fold: (1) if a person desires to be wise they must examine how their heart responds to correction, and (2) in order to be wise, one must have the prudence to observe other people's actions. It is clear that a wise person does not rest content with the current attainment, nor do they view themselves as being "perfect". A wise person becomes wiser and will increase in learning through correction. A wise man will continue learning from God all his life. It has been said: "The less a man knows, as a rule, the more he thinks he knows. The more he really does know, the more he realizes his ignorance and his limitations."

**Prov. 10:8** – A wise person is teachable, willing to accept commands and correction. A fool (one who is coarse and hardened) is always talking – and does not stop talking long enough to learn anything – and eventually comes to ruin.

**Prov. 12:15** - The fool (hardened, thickheaded) is one who believes that they are always right. They see no need to seek instruction or counsel from others. They are unwilling to listen to correction or advice. They are immediately annoyed by correction or discipline (vs. 16). A fool is easily self-deceived, which leads to a hard, callous, cold heart. A wise person is open to advice and controls their response to correction or discipline.

**Prov. 13:1** – A wise child is receptive to parental instruction. "Heeds" is not in the Hebrew but it is implied. The opposite of a wise child is a scoffer (mocker) who refuses to listen to rebuke (correction) or discipline. It is part of true wisdom that the more experienced person can freely instruct the younger based on what they have learned from their experience in life. The self-confident scorner (fool) will ignore the experienced teacher, they are indifferent to the words of the wise and they learn only by bitter experience; experience they might have been saved from had they been humble enough to accept counsel from those competent to teach.

**Prov. 13:13** – This proverb deals with one's response to God's instruction - meaning for one to have contempt for instruction is to despise the Word of God. "The word" in the first line of this proverb refers to God's Word, in view of the second line, where the synonym is "the commandment." God, who gives the Word, will demand payment from those who despise it. Despising (hold in contempt, to ridicule) or dismissing instruction results in a person having to make a "payment" for this disregard – which is punishment / condemnation. But respecting and obeying instruction results in a person receiving a reward. God will reward those who fear (respect, yield to, and obey) His Word.

**Prov. 15:31** - People who pay attention to justified criticism ("life-giving reproof") that is designed to benefit them are on the path to wisdom. Heeding a rebuke (correction) demonstrates wisdom, and is a condition for being considered wise; they are at home with the wise (meaning "to spend the night").

**Prov. 17:10** - A wise person stays open to the improvement that can come from correction by others. It has been said, "Chastise the fool severely, and he maintains his self-complacency still; but gently reprove a wise man, and he will take it to heart. The one is so thoroughly enamored of his own poor judgment that he can conceive of none more capable than himself. The other realizes his own limitations, in measure at least, and is thankful for advice and correction." The fool is so obstinate that he does not respond to extreme discipline.

**Prov. 19:16** - "The commandment" in view is the commandment of God. "Soul" is the life. Normally people who live by God's instructions live longer than those who disregard them, though there are exceptions. Those who follow His instructions concerning salvation experience eternal life (keep their "soul"), but those who do not suffer eternal death ("will die"). The word "keeps" means "obeys" and "guards". To obey instructions (commandments) is self-preserving; to be careless (contemptuous, to despise, to disregard with contempt) of instructions is to be self-destructive. As the old saying goes: "God's Word will keep you from sin; or sin will keep you from God's Word." Disregarding one's own ways has to do with not wanting to watch carefully what one is doing, not taking responsibility – the opposite of making sure that one's ways are God's ways.

**Prov. 19:20** – The young (simple) need to "accept" the "counsel" and "discipline" of their fathers – the wise. A humble, teachable spirit, especially in one's youth, leads on to a life of wisdom. Listening to counsel and accepting instruction (moral correction and discipline) will make a person wise – in life.

**Prov. 19:25** – Three classes of people are noted: (1) the scoffers – scoffers are rebuked for learning nothing, (2) the simple – the simple (untaught, uninitiated youth) are warned by observing the rebuke of the scoffers, and (3) the understanding – the understanding deepens their wisdom from any correction (reproof) they receive. Punishing scoffers sends a helpful message to "the naïve": "Do not imitate this behavior." Punishment does have a deterring effect. Rebuking the wise also has a good result: it helps the wise correct his behavior (to "gain knowledge"). A part of wisdom is to be open to correction; the discerning is willing to learn from rebuke.

**Prov. 19:27** – When a person stops listening to instruction, they are not learning – the Hebrew used means "stop listening in order to stray." "To stray" is to be lost, to stagger, to be misled. Being wise is not a static state. Ceasing to persevere in gaining and observing good guidance will result in shame. Without constant attention to wisdom we, as natural human beings, will unconsciously stray from it.

**Prov. 23:9** – This is the 9<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. "The hearing of a fool" is literally "the ears of a fool." One should not try to speak words of wisdom to a fool (dull, thickheaded, and stubborn).

Fools hate wisdom and a fool is one who rejects God's words. The words spoken on this occasion are in harmony with God's, since they are words containing wisdom. Trying to teach someone divine wisdom when he or she rejects divine wisdom is a waste of time. God can change people's minds about divine wisdom; we cannot in our own power.

**Prov. 25:12** - This is another emblematic proverb; the emblems and objects of comparison in this case being a "golden earring" and a "golden pendant." The point here is that appropriate words are as attractive to the ear as beautiful jewelry is to the eye. A wise rebuke or correction to a listening ear is like gold jewelry that is beautiful and valuable because of its rarity. The appropriate timely, true word may be a rebuke, but it is attractive and valuable like gold jewelry. Likewise, untrue words are unattractive, if they are known to be untrue.

**Prov. 27:5-6** - It is better to be corrected—by anyone—than to be loved by someone who does not demonstrate that "love" overtly. Genuine love is demonstrated by telling the truth, even if it means to rebuke (or correct). A person may profess love yet do nothing to show it. Conversely, a person may be critical of us and let us know it by rebuking us ("open rebuke"). The latter person is more helpful than the former. Open rebuke affords a person the chance to reflect on their course of life, whereas hidden love fails to communicate the challenges and down falls that will occur if the person's course of life does not change. True love for another will result in occasional confrontation and correction, if needed. False love simply lets things go— that need correcting—in order to selfishly avoid conflict.

Criticism by one who truly loves us is beneficial, and thus "faithful," even though it may hurt. Therefore we should not despise the "wounds" of the true friend. On the other hand, someone who professes to love us (with "kisses," either literal or figurative) may gloss over our faults and mistakes, but by doing so reveals that he is really our "enemy." He cares nothing for the welfare of that person, because he is self-centered.

**Prov. 27:17** – When iron is rubbed against another piece of iron it shapes, forms, and sharpens them both. So it is true that the appropriate interaction of two people improves them both. The image is that interaction with a good man hones one's skills in handling challenge. People who live alone or avoid the company of others fail to benefit from this helpful give and take. There is mutual benefit that comes to those who receive and give correction – it improves the quality of both people. Sometimes it can be abrasive and unpleasant, but it usually yields a better person. Good friends encourage one another to grow in wisdom and godliness. Wisdom is not acquired nor maintained in isolation. This is one of the advantages of Christian fellowship (Heb. 10:25).

**Prov. 29:1** – A man who is stiff-necked is one who is hardened; he is one who refuses to repent or submit to correction. "Hardens his neck" is a figure taken from animal farming. It described a bull that obstinately and persistently turns away and avoids a yoke. It pictures someone who stubbornly resists doing what is in his own best interest to do. This type of person will normally experience a quick demise rather than a gradual decline; and no remedy will be available. The wise person listens to, and acts upon, the reproofs of family and friends, authorities and counselors. At the end of God's patient call to obedience comes sudden judgment against the obstinate.

### **Value of Advisors**

**Prov. 11:14** – The focus here is on guidance. The counsel (guidance) of wise advisors can be helpful. A wise person is open to other's opinions and counsel. A good decision is made when a multitude of wise advisors (not "yes" men) have provided input, thought and opinion. The more crucial the decision, the

more appropriate corporate counsel becomes. In general it is found to be true that it is better with a people when they are governed according to the laws and conclusions which have resulted from the careful deliberation of many competent and authorized men, than when their fate is entrusted unconditionally to one or to a few. To depend entirely upon one's own judgment is the height of folly. Without good counsel, one will make serious mistakes. It has been said: "We stand too close to the canvas to see the whole picture and we bring so much emotional fog to our decisions that what we do see is blurred."

**Prov. 15:22** - A person who makes his or her plans without asking for advice or comments from other people shows that he or she is excessively self-confident. However, someone who consults others and asks for their advice shows that he realizes he may be overlooking some factors and is not entirely self-confident. Counsel is private, personal advice from a friend. Seeking wisdom from godly, mature Christians allows one to increase their understanding of God and His will. Fools do not seek advice. Interestingly it has been said: "Foolish are the ministers who do not listen to their assistants; dangerous the pastors who do not seek the counsel of their secretaries." Advisers who speak contrary to the Lord's will bring failure.

**Prov. 20:18** – One should not make any major decisions without seeking the counsel of others. The establishment of plans should be done through the counsel and guidance of wise, godly advisors. If one has to engage in "war," he should do it only after obtaining "wise" advice, just as one normally prepares any plan after obtaining counsel. Before using force, one should make sure his goal and methods harmonize with the teachings of God and His word. Also, the focus of this proverb on making war particularly points to the need to find advisors who can keep matters private and confidential.

**Prov. 24:5-6** – This is the 21<sup>st</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. Again we see that the wise person is not completely self-reliant. He recognizes his own imperfection and looks to others to supplement his own personal deficiencies. "Wage war" means to seek to overcome any obstacle one may face in life. Wise strategy is always more important than mere strength ("in abundance of counselors there is victory"). The source of true strength is found in wisdom and by implication strength apart from wisdom is ultimately ineffective. Yet wisdom and wise counsel are always associated with strength. A man of knowledge increases strength. Wisdom carefully acquired and applied is the means to success in all of life.

As Christians, we need to overcome the obstacle of understanding the meaning of Scripture before we can apply it to our own lives and explain it to others. For this, God has given us a multitude of counselors in the writers of commentaries and other Bible study aids. The Christian is a fool who does not listen to these counselors by reading what they have written to supplement and challenge his or her own study and understanding of the text.

### **Discipline**

**Prov. 3:11-12** – It is important to continue to seek wisdom even though the price one has to pay for wisdom (i.e., life within the will of God) includes submitting to God's discipline. God demonstrates His love by discipline. This proverb sites 2 warnings – (1) do not despise or reject God's discipline, and (2) do not resent His correction. God does not enjoy discipline but He does so because the benefit that comes from such correction.

A wise parent will study God's discipline and will take action to act according to the pattern established by God when raising children (Heb. 12:4-6). While the idea of punishment is present, chastening

primarily involves teaching and training. The idea behind corporal punishment is similar to military training, when the implementation and threat of discipline is present but the main focus is to prepare and equip the soldier for battle.

"Loathe/detest/resent" (v. 11b) means "to shrink back from". Rejecting with your will and recoiling emotionally against correction are opposite actions from trusting in God. God's discipline may not produce all that God desires if we respond to it improperly (cf. Job 5:17). To ask God to refrain from giving us discipline would be to ask Him to love us less (Job 7:17-19; 10:10).

**Prov. 10:17** – We observe today that spoiled (undisciplined) children often live unproductive lives. A person who learns from discipline is an example to others of the way to a meaningful life. Those who refuse to learn from discipline cause others to go astray. God exerts loving and careful correction on His children (Heb. 12:3-11). Discipline is God's way to lovingly return His children to the right path.

**Prov. 12:1** - The person who loves instruction ("discipline") will demonstrate this by willingly putting themselves in the position of being a student. One who willingly accepts discipline shows that they are a person who loves knowledge. The person who does not want knowledge ("hates reproof") will reject information that corrects their false opinions, and they are stupid (meaning "brutish and dull minded like an animal – a brutish cow grazing) and will show their stupidity in the way they live their life. The fool that hates correction reveals a heart problem, not a head problem.

**Prov. 13:18** - The "discipline" of following instruction is in view here. Poverty and shame will come to those who consider it beneath them to pay attention to instruction; but the person who willingly and humbly accepts correction ("reproof") will receive honor. Ignoring discipline results in poverty and shame. A person without self-discipline is lazy.

**Prov. 13:24** - 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' This common maxim (a one-size-fits-all approach to child discipline) is often wrongly attributed to the Bible. This maxim comes from a poem written by Samuel Butler in 1664. In reality the book of Proverbs, when taken as a whole, encourages its readers to use multiple levels of discipline ranging from pointing out improper behavior (verbal correction) to the use of corporal punishment. This proverb simply commends corporal punishment as a means of training; details are left to the judgment of parents. Solomon linked love with "discipline," and hate with failure to discipline ("withholding the rod"). Early childhood requires parental discipline that balances kindness, love, and corporal discipline. Corporal punishment must have the correct motivation (Heb. 12:5-11) and appropriate severity (Eph. 6:4).

The popular cultural viewpoint is that hate produces discipline while love grants unbridled freedom. A parent who has genuine affection for their children but withholds corporal punishment will produce the same type of child as a parent who hates their children. Only a parent that hates their child would withhold discipline and permit him/her to be a fool – knowing that foolishness leads to misery, shame, and ultimately death. Taking into account all of the teaching of Proverbs on this subject, corporal punishment of a child must never be physically or emotionally severe and always exercised in love. Parents who love their children seek diligently to apply the best and most appropriate method of discipline.

**Prov. 15:5** - The young person who does not appreciate being disciplined by his or her parent is a fool, because discipline aims to help and improve. The youth who understands that parental discipline is for his or her welfare is prudent (i.e., "sensible," acting with thought for the future). To reject discipline is to

be a fool; to accept correction is to be wise – it is a clear choice with a clear distinction. Next to “fear of the Lord”, “honor of parents” may well be the highest value advice given in Proverbs.

**Prov. 15:10** - People who have forsaken the path of righteousness do not like to be corrected, especially with strong discipline. When a person leaves the path of righteousness, he will receive stern discipline; not responding to discipline, such a person will eventually perish ("he who hates reproof will die"). Headstrong people who want to live life their own way, rather than as God has counseled, are headed for trouble and heartache ("grievous punishment"). Wisdom's instruction is not always pleasant. Acquiring wisdom often requires discipline and correction. While discipline and correction are rarely enjoyable, it can mean the difference between life (temporal and eternal) and death (temporal and eternal).

**Prov. 15:12** - This proverb is similar to the one in Prov. 15:10, but here the emphasis is on the scoffer's avoidance of those who rebuke him or her. In pride, he or she refuses to expose himself or herself to ("he will not go to") those who are wise that offer corrective criticism. This shows that mocking (scoffing) is the evidence of being a fool.

**Prov. 15:32** - If a person "neglects" or does not submit to "discipline," he is hurting himself. This applies to self-discipline as well as to discipline imposed by others. Conversely, if a person pays attention to corrective discipline ("listens to reproof"), rather than resisting or rejecting it, he learns valuable lessons (cf. Heb. 12:4-13). To ignore discipline (moral correction) results in loss of life and knowledge, this shows that the “ignorant” actually hates and/or harms himself. To acquire good sense literally means “to buy a heart.”

**Prov. 19:18** – This proverb is an imperative; the command is to “discipline your son.” “Discipline” includes chastisement as well as instruction. If a parent does not discipline his child while there is hope of correcting him, he is really, though perhaps not consciously, willing for him to die. The child's sin (foolishness) will lead to his death if his parents do not curb it with discipline. Some parents allow their children to go astray out of neglect. Discipline postponed will be ineffective. Discipline should be administered when the offense occurs and before the child fully matures (Prov. 13:24). This is when parents have a chance to make a difference – when there is hope for turning a child from a course of destruction. It has been said: "Better the child is corrected by a parent than by a law enforcement officer in a correctional institution."

**Prov. 20:30** – Wise use of corporal punishment deters sinful/evil behavior. The purpose of corporal punishment is not to inflict pain but to influence one's behavior away from sin. Hurtful experiences (“woundings”) can have a positive side: they can discourage one from pursuing "evil." Evil practices often result in hurtful experiences, either for the perpetrator, or for the person sinned against, or both. “To cleanse” is to remove tarnish through rubbing or scouring – physical effort is involved. Whether the "stripes" come from God, another person, or oneself, they can be a powerful teacher. Therefore, we should appreciate the value of pain in modifying behavior; fear of pain helps one mature.

**Prov. 22:6** - “Train” means “to dedicate.” It has the idea of “narrowing” and in this proverb it implies channeling the child's conduct into the way of wisdom. That guidance might include dedicating him or her to God and preparing the child for future responsibilities and adulthood.

The Hebrew word translated "child" is na'ar, which normally refers to a "marriageable male while still single." So the "child" in view is not a very young child, but an adolescent of marriageable age. According to the Talmud a young man was cursed if he was not married by the age of twenty. "In the way he should go" is literally "according to his way." This may mean according to his personality, temperament, responses, or stage in life; or it could mean the way in which he ought to go. The Hebrew grammar permits either interpretation. However the context favors the latter view.

"Way" in Proverbs usually means the path a person takes through life, not one's personality, disposition, or stage in life. Consequently, this proverb is probably saying that the parent should train up a child in the way of wisdom, i.e., to live in the fear of God. If one takes the other meaning ("according to his way"), the proverb appears to warn parents that if they train up their adolescent and allow him to go his own way, they can expect that the child will continue along this bad path into later life. It highlights the importance of good parental training and teaching of children. When one stands back to assess the book of Proverbs, there is no other office ascribed to parents than that of education of children.

The second part of this verse has challenged the faith of many a godly parent. Obviously many children who have received good training have walked away from the way of wisdom later in life. The explanation for this seemingly broken promise lies in a correct understanding of what a proverb is. A proverb is a literary device whereby a general truth is brought to bear on a specific situation. Many of the proverbs are not absolute guarantees for they express truths that are necessarily conditioned by prevailing circumstances. Though the proverbs are generally and usually true, occasional exceptions may be noted. This may be because of the self-will or deliberate disobedience of an individual who chooses to go his own way—the way of sin and foolishness instead of the way of wisdom. It is generally true, however, that most children who are brought up in Christian homes, under the influence of godly parents who teach and live God's standards (cf. Eph. 6:4), follow that training.

This proverb clearly does not state a Scriptural promise, nor does it make the teacher responsible for the student. Scripture teaches that God allows people to make their own decisions. He does not force them to do what is right. This includes children as they grow up.

This proverb promises the teacher (parent) that original and early moral teachings have a permanent effect on a person for good. But that is not the whole truth about religious education. A parent should dedicate the child to God; prepare the child for future responsibilities, and train the child for being a responsible adult in adulthood. Early training helps secure life-long habits. Parents should teach the Word of God, live the Word of God, and enforce the Word of God with loving, consistent discipline.

**Prov. 22:15** – Foolishness comes with being a child; foolishness is an innate quality that youth cling to. Children demonstrate "foolishness" by wasting time, doing dangerous things, and misusing their abilities and talents; but "discipline" can correct these natural tendencies and make them more mature and wise. Parents need to correct children, not only because discipline purges wrong conduct but it points them in the right direction. Correction in this context includes teaching to distinguish right and wrong, which may sometimes involve corporal punishment.

**Prov. 23:13-14** – This is the 11<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. Wisdom advocates for discipline. Beating with "the rod" is not the only form of discipline advocated in Proverbs. It is simply one form used here as a poetic parallel to "discipline" (moral correction). Other forms of discipline (reproof, temporary isolation, "grounding," etc.) may be more appropriate in some situations with children of

differing ages and temperaments. These verses assure the parent that the child will not only survive the discipline, but he or she will survive because of it.

A Christian home is uniquely equipped to prepare a young person for life and eternity – and the reality of knowing God in a personal way. As a parent you cannot let the child bluff you or bully you to "withhold correction" by shouts, protests, or accusations; i.e. "I hate you," "I'll never speak to you again," "I'm going to run away," etc. These statements (or ones like them) should not deter the parent from their parental duties to correct their children when they violate the rules of the household. It has been said; "Uncorrected waywardness leads to rasher acts of disobedience, which, if left unchecked, can be literally life threatening. Parents who carelessly or fearfully turned their backs on substance abuse, on petty thievery, on modest acts of cruelty or violence, on companionship with unruly gang members have learned this lesson from a sheriff's phone call, a judge's verdict, or a coroner's report. Love may have to inflict moderate pain to 'deliver' a child from ultimate pain."

The idea is that discipline helps the child to live a full life; if he dies (prematurely), it could be a consequence of not being trained. In Proverbs such a death might be moral and social as well as physical. Discipline is not cruel, but to withhold it from a child is. However, the "rod" must be applied with warmth, affection, and respect for the child. Parents who brutalize their children cannot hide behind the "rod" doctrine of Proverbs. This proverb clearly affirms the place of corporal punishment in raising a child. The parent's overriding desire in using corporal punishment should be to teach the child rather than to vent their anger.

**Prov. 29:15** – A child who is not disciplined and is left to himself (being allowed to do whatever he wants whenever he wants) will become an unruly, undisciplined person. Both physical ("rod") and verbal ("reproof") discipline can instill "wisdom" in a child. But a child who is allowed to go his or her own way, without guidance and correction, will "shame" his or her "mother." We should heed the example in scripture of the over indulgent / helicopter parents; the parents of Adonijah. God recorded for eternity that Adonijah's father did not discipline his son - 'his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? (I Kings 1, 2:13-25).' No wonder he became a rebel; his parents never corrected him or disciplined him.

**Prov. 29:17** – Disciplining a child results in the parents having peace and joy because their child behaves and seeks after wisdom. This is an encouragement to parents to discipline their children. Before my father gave me a spanking, he would sometimes say: "This hurts me more than it does you." I did not understand what he meant—or believe it—at the time. Now I do. Some parents fail to discipline their children because it hurts them to do so. But this proverb reminds them that "comfort" and "delight" for them (and their children) will be the eventual outcome of proper discipline.

**Prov. 29:19** – This proverb views the mindset of an unprincipled and foolish person who is unresponsive to correction and is irresponsible. A foolish "slave" (employee) needs discipline as much as a foolish son. A slave (employee) who flouts the moral order will not be changed to it by the use of words. Sometimes words are not enough and other forms of correction are needed.

**Prov. 29:21** - On the surface, this proverb sounds as if it is a wise thing to "pamper" one's "slave." The importance here is one of discipline, not pampering. Failure to discipline and require a "slave" (employee) to carry out his responsibilities will result in grief for the "master" (employer). The point is that pampering, as opposed to disciplining, makes slaves (employees) disrespectful. Pampering will make the slave expect to receive all the rights and privileges of a son. A slave is not a son. The principle

is over-indulging the slave is not good. An overindulged slave will ultimately want to be cared for in life like that of a son; rather than as one who is to serve the master.

To bring this parable over into modern life, an employee should not normally receive the same privileges as a son. If he does, the relationship essential to the effective operation of the business will suffer.

### **Lawkeeping**

**Prov. 28:4** - It is natural that people who do not take "the law" seriously will applaud others who do "wicked" things. When people turn from obeying God's commandments they usually begin to praise and side with the wicked. When a person tries to justify the behavior of wicked people, others reasonably suspect his own uprightness. In contrast, people who respect the law oppose ("strive with") the wicked.

**Prov. 28:7** - The "son" who keeps God's commandments ("the law") demonstrates true intelligence, and so gives his father great joy. But the son who demonstrates his disregard for God's law—by joining in with other rebellious, undisciplined, and unrestrained people—brings him shame.

**Prov. 28:9** – Refusing to obey God has disastrous results; to reject God's Law implies lack of trust in God. When people refuse to listen to (pay attention to; obey) what God has said in His Word; He will not listen to what they say to Him in prayer. External acts of worship, even when they follow biblical standards, are repulsive to God when the heart of the worshiper is wicked. Such is prayer from a hypocritical person; those prayers are hated by God and not heard or answered.

**Prov. 29:18** - The KJV translation has resulted in misunderstanding of this proverb. The KJV phrase "where there is no vision" is not referring to new revelation or vision of the future; it means the revelation that a prophet receives. The "vision" (Heb. *hazon*) does not refer to some dream of success a person may have but to a prophetic vision that was a revelation from God (cf. 1 Sam. 3:1).

The KJV phrase "the people perish" does not refer to people dying in sin or becoming complete failures; it means "to cast off restraint." The Hebrew verb translated "perish" (AV; *para*) does not mean "die in their sins" (e.g., because someone did not see the "vision" of the importance of evangelism). It means "cast off restraint." Without the guidance of divine revelation, people abandon themselves to their own sinful ways (cf. Amos 8:11-12).

God's Word restrains human wickedness, and those who keep it are "happy." Therefore one's well-being depends on obedience to divine revelation. There must be knowledge of divine revelation through preaching and teaching for there to be obedience to it. Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they would truly comprehend the revelation that God had given: that they would not cast it off, but submit to it and apply it (Eph. 1:15-23). People are only truly happy when they earnestly and willingly subordinate themselves to the word of God which they possess and have the opportunity of hearing it and being taught by it.

### **Repentance**

**Prov. 14:9** – When a fool sins they make fun of the idea of making amends for it. It is foolish to "mock at sin/mock at the guilt offering"—to make light of it—because sin is deceptive and leads to destruction and death (Rom. 6:23). The "upright," in contrast, enjoy favor ("good will") with God and man. The upright person respects the need for restitution, while fools enjoy no goodwill. The point of the proverb

seems to be: Do not laugh about sin, or treat it as unimportant, but live an upright life so that you can enjoy God's favor and man's.

**Prov. 28:13** - This unique proverb speaks of God's mercy and defines true repentance. Trying to cover up one's sins, rather than confessing and forsaking them, will not work. They destroy the sinner like a cancer, and they incur the judgment of God. Confession results in God's mercy and forgiveness. "Confess" and "forsake" summarize what the Bible means by repentance. It is a good thing to confess and renounce sin – which is the definition of repentance. Genuine repentance elicits God's favor—and often the respect of others.

## Good and Evil

### Righteousness and Wickedness

**Prov. 10:6-7** - 10:6 - The righteous typically receive "blessings" from God and other people in this life. The righteous person will receive blessings but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. The wicked, in contrast, conceal violence within themselves, and sorrow will cover their faces (cf. Luke 6:45). The idea is either that the mouth of the wicked conceals (hides) violence or that violence characterizes what an evil person says.

10:7 - In contrast to 10:6, this proverb tells how the righteous and the wicked will fare after death. Even thinking about righteous people can be the source of blessing. In contrast, most people try to forget the wicked person; their names are corrupt and "rot" with time. It was considered a curse to have no one remember you or to fail to pass down your name in the next generation.

**Prov. 10:16** - "Wages" does not primarily refer to money but to the natural "return" for righteous living; the "return" is a meaningful life. The secondary meaning is that "wages" of the righteous will lead to success while the "wages" of the wicked provides more opportunity to sin. The "wages" of the righteous is eternal life while the "wages" of the wicked is eternal death. In New Testament terms: "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6).

**Prov. 10:28-30** - 10:28 - What the righteous hopes for will come to pass, and he or she will be happy; but what the wicked hope for will not come to pass, and he or she will be disappointed and sorrowful. This is true because they hope for different things, and God controls these things.

10:29 - "The way of the LORD" is the way in which God directs people to walk (cf. Psa. 143:8). It is "a stronghold to the upright" because God guards those who walk in His ways. It is "ruin to the workers of iniquity" because they refuse to walk in it and are, therefore, vulnerable to many troubles.

10:30 - The righteous person will never be permanently or ultimately shaken, though he or she may experience hardships and setbacks. However, the wicked will not experience God's blessing in the end. In general, the proverb means that the righteous fearlessly maintains the position he takes; which, on the contrary, all they who have no hold on God lose their position. The declarations "will never be removed" and "will not dwell" indicate the promised end for the righteous and the wicked. By going the way of the Lord, the righteous have safety and security; the wicked do not.

**Prov. 11:5-10** - 11:5 – Generally speaking, the person who deals with his or her sins appropriately will go through life with few major troubles. A blameless person will not grow weary or fall, so they will reach

their destination. However, the "wickedness" of the wicked will cause him or her to stumble and "fall." The faithfulness of the righteous guards and delivers them; it is the Lord who is the one who brings deliverance to the righteous and the fall to those who are wicked.

11:6 - This proverb is very similar to 11:5. A righteous person's "righteousness" will deliver him or her when that person is accused of some wrongdoing, because his or her reputation will incline the accusers to assume the best of him or her. However, a greedy person will discover that his or her treachery in acquiring what he or she covets ensnares him or her. The evil desires of the treacherous person will get them into trouble; they are trapped because their desires will lead them to sin.

11:7 - Because the wicked live for the here and now, when they die, what they hoped to obtain vanishes ("will perish"). The same is true for another kind of wicked man: he who relies on his own strength ("hope of strong men"), rather than on the Lord. Death for the wicked puts an end to all he hoped to accomplish with his wealth; and his power cannot divert death.

11:8 - The wicked do not experience deliverance from trouble ultimately, but finally they go to the "place" reserved for them—forever. The Lord delivered the Israelites through the Red Sea, but He drowned the Egyptian soldiers in it (Exod. 14). Daniel was delivered from the lions' den, but his accusers perished there (Dan. 6).

11:9 – The righteous person knows how to conduct themselves appropriately. He can escape the injury of slander from the ungodly in one of two ways: (1) he knows it is not true and moves forward, or (2) he knows to stay away from profane people. Godless men seek to destroy their neighbor through slander. Those who know the righteous person will realize that the slander is untrue.

11:10 – There is a beneficial effect that the righteous have on public life. The upright exalt a city (community / nation) because they help keep it sound morally and economically. In contrast, when the wicked die, citizens are glad because the city (community / nation) is safer for all.

**Prov. 11:18-20** - 11:18 - The wicked sows wickedness and reaps what he does not expect ("deceptive wages," cf. Rom. 6:23): divine punishment rather than blessing. Even the wages a wicked person earns is deceptive; he thinks his money will help him get what he wants but in the end he finds out that it is ultimately of no benefit. The righteous, on the other hand, "sows righteousness" and reaps what he sows: blessing (cf. Gal. 6:7). The former reward is often deceptive and disappointing, but the latter is truly satisfying (dependable).

11:19 - The full quality of "life" is in view in this proverb (cf. John 10:10), not just the possession of physical life. Righteous living is rewarded with life and wicked living is rewarded with death. Since life and death result from moral choices, righteousness must be pursued. 'Life' and 'death' describe the alternative courses of this life that result from choices made; and it also refers to what occurs beyond the grave.

11:20 – The Lord detests sinful attitudes and actions. A "perverse" person is one who persists in pursuing evil, even though he or she knows how it will end. In contrast, the Lord delights in those who are morally whole (blameless) and truthful. A poor man with integrity and whose conduct is blameless is well off because the Lord delights in him. A "blameless" person is not necessarily sinless, but he or she deals with sin appropriately. God hates the former and loves the latter.

**Prov. 11:23** - The "righteous" desire "only" is for good and ends in what is "good." Thus what they desire is well pleasing to God and is attainable; what the righteous longs for ends in good. Conversely, the "wicked" desire only what is bad, so what they desire is not pleasing to Him, and what they desire elicits His "wrath". This means either that God's wrath comes on the wicked and thwarts their desires or that the wicked desire only to vent their wrath. Since the wicked intend wrath for others, their only hope for the future is wrath upon themselves.

**Prov. 12:2-3** - 12:2 – Proverbs uses many different words to describe the righteous and wise person; upright, blameless, trustworthy, kind, generous, prudent, truthful, etc. Here "good" is another characteristic that has been noted to describe the righteous. A good person is blessed with God's favor. In contrast, the person who is deceptively shrewd is not favored by God and is declared condemned.

12:3 - A person, like a tree whose "roots" go down into "wickedness," will find that he or she will not be able to stand up to the winds of adversity. A wicked person will be uprooted like a plant being torn up by its roots, which is a description of exile and/or death. But a righteous person, whose "roots" are anchored in God, will endure the storms of life (cf. Matt. 7:24-27).

**Prov. 12:5-8** - This set of proverbs is united by word pairs; righteous/wicked, wicked/upright, and wicked/righteous. They progress from righteous counsel versus wicked counsel, to treachery versus deliverance, and finally to the destruction of the wicked versus the stability of the righteous.

12:5 - One of the marks of a righteous person is that his or her "thoughts" are fair and equitable ("just"). The wicked advocates deception; they counsel with self-serving and dishonest advice. Note the close connection in this proverb between a person's thought and his or her speech; one's thoughts and words are usually consistent with their character.

12:6 - The words of the wicked, particularly their false accusations, are an ambush; they seek to destroy. The upright try to rescue innocent victims; the words of the upright are straightforward and sincere.

12:7 - The wicked pass off the scene without leaving a lasting legacy—like houses washed away by hurricanes and floodwaters. The wicked try to overthrow others but they are overthrown by their own devices. But the righteous leave a legacy for good that outlasts them. The reward of righteous living also extends to one's household and/or family. David's dynasty ("house") continued, and will continue forever, whereas the "wicked" heads of the various dynasties in the Northern Kingdom of Israel were fairly quickly "overthrown" and replaced.

12:8 – People have attitudes towards other people. Men are commended for being wise. A person gains respect through speaking wisdom and for acting with wisdom; say what you are going to do then doing what you say you are going to do. Men are despised for being deceitful; telling people one thing then doing something else or nothing at all. It has been said, "Even among natural men wisdom is a commendation, while a vain and foolish spirit but exposes to contempt. The world can appreciate sobriety and spiritual intelligence, though it may refuse or even persecute it. But to pretend to either, while bereft of both, is to draw forth the disgust of all reasonable men."

**Prov. 12:12** – The contrast in this proverb is between two kinds of people. "Plunder/catch" is a reference to what is "caught in a net", meaning that the wicked want to have gain but expend little effort in getting it. The wicked want to gain from the work of other evil people (e.g., skimming money

off the top of a gambling operation). On the other hand, the righteous are content to earn wages from their own honest work and effort.

**Prov. 12:21** – The righteous experience joy and protection during their life. “Befalls/overtake” can be translated “shall be allowed to happen”. As a general rule, righteous people do not have frequent trouble of their own making, but wicked people's lives are full of trouble. The verse, which is hyperbolic, is ultimately true when one considers what happens to people after death, though the perspective of this proverb is primarily earthbound.

**Prov. 12:28** – Righteous conduct leads to life. This truth applies to all the righteous. Righteous conduct tends to result in a longer "life," whereas wicked behavior often shortens it. There are many exceptions to this proverb, but it still provides a reliable picture of how things usually turn out.

**Prov. 13:9** – “Light” is an image of life, prosperity, and joy. "Light" is a common metaphor of something good that emanates from a source (e.g., as life-giving light shines from the sun; cf. Prov. 6:23). In this case, the "light" probably represents all the good things that proceed from the righteous person, or the righteous person himself. These good things can be thought to go out rejoicing because of their beneficial effects. In contrast, the “lamp” (a source of light) will be extinguished because of sin and wickedness. The "lamp" (the source of benefits) of the wicked "goes out," because it is not fueled by God's blessing.

**Prov. 13:21** – Righteousness brings divine blessing and evil brings divine cursing. "Adversity/evil" (which is personified here) is seen as chasing after "sinners"; it inevitably follows them and bites at their heels. Trouble comes to the sinner like an animal chasing him; he can't escape. But God will reward "the righteous . . . with prosperity or with good. This is typically what happens in life, though there are exceptions.

**Prov. 13:25** - This proverb illustrates the difference between a proverb and a promise. It expresses a condition that is generally true in this life—all other things being equal. However, God never promised that He would keep every righteous person from starving to death (cf. Matt. 6:33; Lev. 26). David's statement that he had never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread (Ps. 37:25) was a personal testimony, not a guarantee that God will always provide all the physical needs of all the righteous. A righteous person will be satisfied with what he "has," be it much or little, because he accepts it as God's will for him, like the Paul did (Phil. 4:11). But the wicked are never satisfied, and always want more, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:12).

**Prov. 14:11** – Final destinies are in view here. This proverb contrasts the fate of all that the "house" and the "tent" represent in the cases of the wicked and the righteous. Destruction will befall the life of the wicked, but prosperity will mark the life of the upright. The destruction of the wicked is certain, just as the growth, prosperity, and stability of the righteous is assured.

**Prov. 14:19** – The custom of the time for Solomon was for the inferior to bow before the superior or wait humbly before the superior's gate seeking favor. Since the reality today is that good men are forced to bow down before evil men, this proverb may be speaking to the future when the wicked will be subject to the godly. One day good will humble evil; that is the day that Christ will begin His reign. One day every knee will bow to the King of Kings (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10).

**Prov. 14:34** - World history has proved the truth of this proverb repeatedly, but the great biblical example of it is the history of Israel, especially during the monarchy. When good kings and righteous conduct ("righteousness") prevailed, Israel flourished. But when bad kings led the people into "sin" and apostasy, judgment followed. Righteousness among a group of people exalts them, but sin brings disgrace. Just principles and actions preserve and exalt a society, their absence shames a society.

**Prov. 15:6** – A general principle in Proverbs is that righteous living results in prosperity, though there are numerous exceptions to this principle. Much "wealth" of many kinds, not necessarily just money, is "in the house[hold] of the righteous." For example, there will be peace, love, and joy, for starters—riches that money cannot buy, but which are more important than money that God provides. In contrast, trouble" will fill the house ("is in the income") of "the wicked." Money acquired by the wicked often leads to trouble.

**Prov. 15:9** – God hates the sacrifices of the wicked because they are given hypocritically; and because their life conduct is detestable. Offering sacrifices is an external act and it does not replace or substitute for a life of righteousness. Not only are the sacrifices of the wicked abominable to God, but their whole life ("way") is. Likewise, not just the prayers of the righteous ("upright") delight Him, but the whole course of their lives of those "who pursue" righteousness does. God love the righteous.

**Prov. 20:7** - The person who is truly just ("righteous"; consistently behaves correctly, morally whole, blameless), by God's grace, demonstrates it by the way he lives ("his integrity"), and his immediate descendants benefit from his uprightness. His children see his life and the example he is and are encouraged to live like him. One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is a name that they can be proud of.

**Prov. 21:18** - A ransom is a payment given to free a person from some penalty he has incurred, similar to posting bail to get out of jail. In this case, it appears that God punishes the wicked, and sets the righteous free. Such would be the case if the wicked were oppressing the righteous (cf. Prov. 11:8). God delivers the righteous by punishing the wicked that oppress them; the outcome being that the godly will no longer suffer at the hands of the wicked. The principle here is that in God's justice the righteous will ultimately go free and the wicked will be punished. For example, when God sends judgment on a group, the wicked who die serve as "a ransom for the just (righteous)" who are spared. An example is Daniel's accusers dying in his place (Dan. 6).

**Prov. 24:15-16** – This is the 27<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. To make a point, the speaker (writer) spoke to his son as though he were addressing a "wicked man". This device gives the warning more force, since the wicked man's main concern is his own self-interest. The point is that the "righteous man" is resilient ("falls" but "rises again") because he repents and trusts in God. It is futile for the wicked to attempt to destroy the righteous. God protects the righteous and they recover from robbery and attacks. Ultimately the wicked will be the ones who suffer loss – usually from the very action that they were perpetuating on the righteous. "Seven times" means "often or many". The righteous are able to rise repeatedly because they are sustained by the Lord (cf. Prov. 2:6-8; 15:29). The plots of the wicked against the righteous may experience temporary success, but they will not ultimately be successful – especially when they fall under God's eternal judgment. Ultimately God defends the righteous and virtue triumphs in the end.

**Prov. 28:12** - People's conditions depend on who rules over them: the righteous or the wicked. This is a contrast pointed out in Proverbs. When the righteous rule a nation the people are happy because there

is order and justice. When the wicked rule a nation, good people go into hiding to escape oppression. As an example, the Jews rejoiced when "righteous" Mordecai was exalted to rule over them (Esth. 8:17), but they hid in the mountains and caves when the "wicked" Midianites dominated them (Judg. 6:2). Therefore, if people have any say in appointing their leaders, they should realize that the character of their leaders will determine the conditions in their land.

**Prov. 28:28** - When "wicked people rise" to power many people "hide themselves" because they know that corruption and evil will follow. But when wicked people disappear ("perish"), good people know that it is safe to show themselves once more, and become active in public life again (cf. Prov. 28:12). When the wicked "perish" the righteous can thrive because they are not hiding. This proverb has far-reaching application to all aspects of life: religious, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, etc.

**Prov. 29:2** - Rulers who operate on the basis of just principles delight the citizens of their nations, but corrupt leaders cause the citizens to "groan" in grief (cf. Prov. 28:12, 28) because of the oppression of righteousness and the turning away from moral principles. In democracies one can contrast statesmen, who use their offices to serve the people, with politicians, who see their offices as prizes they won, often by exploiting class envy while catering to special interest groups whose agenda is detrimental to the nation and its religious, social, economic, political, cultural, and legal foundations.

**Prov. 29:16** - We must take the divine perspective here, as in all the proverbs. Some individual cases may not fit the principle written here, but generally the principle holds true. "When . . . wicked" people gain power and authority ("increase"), sin is encouraged and righteousness is deemed to be evil. Nevertheless, the righteous will prevail, and the wicked will fail—eventually. Paul wrote that in the last days wickedness would increase (2 Tim. 3:1-8). But he also wrote that when Jesus Christ returns, He will punish the wicked and establish a righteous reign (2 Thess. 2:1-12)

**Prov. 29:27** - The "unjust" person and the "upright" person typically dislike one another intensely. The reason is that they disrespect the basic convictions and conduct of each other. The righteous are so concerned for integrity and correct moral conduct that they, like God, hate whatever is corrupt and immoral. This hatred is "to consider something as abominable, detestable, and abhorrent." The inversion of this is true for the wicked. They hate the righteous because righteous beliefs reveal the perverseness of their values. The contrast is very real – and very bright. We can see this quite clearly in Jesus' dealings with the unbelieving religious leaders of His day. The conflict between right and wrong, good and evil—with which this proverb and so many of the proverbs deal—will continue until Jesus Christ returns to the earth to establish his kingdom of righteousness.

### **Integrity and Perversion**

**Prov. 10:9** – Integrity comes from the word "integer", which is a whole number in mathematics. Integrity is a mind-set and the willingness to be and do what is morally whole and completely right as defined by God – regardless of personal cost or place. Integrity, whether in public or private, has congruence. Those who have integrity live without fear of some evil being discovered in their life, while those who are deceitful and have secret sin will not be able to hide it – they will be discovered for what they truly are.

**Prov. 13:6** - Here Solomon personified righteousness and wickedness. "Righteousness" acts as a guard to protect the person of integrity. In other words, their own character wards off those who would seek to destroy them. People usually do not believe lies about a person of known, proven integrity. Conversely,

"Wickedness" subverts (undermines) the sinner. Wicked, unwise living offers no protection to the sinner, they are easily overthrown.

**Prov. 15:26** - "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD (Prov. 15:8)," and so are their "evil plans". The Lord detests not only sacrifices and the conduct of the wicked but also their thoughts, plans, and schemes (Prov. 6:18). "Pleasant words" do not fit with evil plans, because words express one's plans. God hates both the plans and the words of the wicked, but He delights in the plans and the words of the upright. Their words are pure in His sight because they spring from a true heart. There is no such thing as 'private thoughts' to God; for God in His omniscience knows everything.

**Prov. 16:17** – The upright person seeks to avoid evil. Guarding his way is a means of guarding his soul from sin; thus guarding against sinful desires and appetites. The person who purposes to habitually avoid evil sets out on a journey that is similar to the person who travels a broad smooth road ("highway"). If he stays faithful to his course, he will prolong ("preserve") "his life." The implication is that if he abandons this course or deviates from it, he will perish.

**Prov. 21:8** – The Hebrew words for "guilty" and "devious/perverse" occur only here in the Old Testament. This verse contrasts the evilness of guilty, wicked people with the uprightness of godly, righteous people. A person who continually has to explain and excuse his actions tips his hand: he is probably trying to cover up something bad that he has done. But a person who habitually tells the truth, and does right, proceeds straight on through life.

**Prov. 24:8-9** – This is the 23<sup>rd</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. Those who plan to do evil quickly get a reputation for it. A schemer is literally "an owner or possessor of evil plans". Often people will despise the person who dreams up plans that end in evil. Such planning is sin and the work of a fool. Fools are not necessarily unintelligent, but their plans often result in sin. Such scheming is foolish because it is sin and leads to mockery, which demonstrates the people's detest of such schemes. A scheme, as used here, means a shameful, depraved act.

**Prov. 28:18** – People of integrity will get the help they need. God delivers those who deal with their sinful humanity as He has ordained. A blameless life brings safety. But the perverse, double-dealing crook "will fall" to his final ruin "all at once." A person whose ways are evil will suddenly fall.

**Prov. 29:10** - This proverb contrasts the attitudes of two very different types of people toward those who live blameless lives. Honest people are hated by fools. Evil people "hate" them, and sometimes hate them so much that they kill them, thus gaining a reputation as bloodthirsty people ("men of bloodshed"; i.e., people who commit unwarranted violence; murderers). The "upright," on the other hand, do not hate the blameless, but hope and work for their continued preservation and wellbeing. The upright seek to take care of the honest person. Integrity is often translated as "blameless", such is the case here.

### **Appropriate Consequences**

**Prov. 3:33-35** – 3:33 - The Lord curses the wicked but blesses the righteous. The "curse" is not merely a deprivation of external goods which render life happy, and the "blessing" is not merely the fullness of external possessions; the central-point of the curse lies in continuous disquiet of conscience, and that of the blessing in the happy consciousness that God is with us in peace, which is certain through the grace and goodness of God. God's curse is the removal of His sustaining presence. A household includes all a person's family, possessions, and property.

3:34 - God mocks arrogant mockers, which causes their actions to boomerang on them; whereas the humble receive His grace. James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 quote the Septuagint version of verse 34. The humble are those who are poor, not from laziness but because they are exploited or oppressed.

3:35 - The wise are honored but the fools are shamed. This proverb means that fools will be exalted in their dishonor because that is what they get for their choices—in contrast to the wise, which get true honor. The clusters of synonyms in proverbs 33-35 reinforce and augment each other. Their power is in the buildup of intensity created by their repetition rather than in the meaning of the individual terms.

**Prov. 10:3** – This proverb should not be taken as a promise. It is true that the righteous will not lack what is most important in life, though they may lack food at times because God’s care for His children has its ultimate application in eternity. Conversely, God will not meet the deepest cravings of the wicked because they have rejected His ways (Prov. 13:25). For a while the wicked may seem to realize their desires, however, in the end God removes their accomplishments because they are evil (Psa. 37:16-20). The wicked are condemned to live forever with their unfulfilled desires; which are desires to bring about destruction and disaster.

**Prov. 10:22** – While having more than what one needs is not the object of wisdom, it is generally the result. If it is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, then how one seeks wealth is necessarily governed by a commitment to live righteously; the blessing of the Lord, it brings wealth. Those who are blessed are to always manifest a hope that rests in the Lord that provides, not in material things. When the Lord gives material blessing, He does not give it grudgingly or with condemnation but freely with joy. Wealth given by the Lord is not accompanied by trouble. The meaning is not that God literally "adds no sorrow" with His blessings that enrich people, but that, along with the blessing of prosperity, He also provides a joyful, peaceful mind (Psa. 127:1-2). None of the sorrow that is associated with ill-gotten wealth is associated with wealth provided by the Lord.

**Prov. 10:24-25** – 10:24 - The righteous receive what they desire, while the wicked receive what they fear. The long-term fruit of wisdom and evil are in view here. The wicked, however bold his appearance, has ever a gnawing fear at his heart of impending calamity. The desire of the righteous will surely be granted—even blessing forevermore.

10:25 - God sometimes sends calamitous judgment to remove the wicked from the scene, but the righteous remain. God is the ultimate source of both. A storm can come suddenly bringing disaster to the wicked by destroying their lives and property, but the righteous remain secure in the same storm. Yet we also know that, in the short view, the righteous frequently perish in tragic "accidents" or suffer destruction of life or property. But the truth remains that the righteousness are eternally secure.

**Prov. 11:21** – The combined power of the wicked cannot free them from just punishment, while the unaided righteous find deliverance by reason of their relationship with God. "Though they join/be sure of this" is a translation of "hand-to-hand", a reference to the clasping of hands over an agreement on a transaction that closes the deal. The evildoer will experience punishment, whereas "the righteous" will "be delivered" from God's judgment (as well as their descendants who follow after righteousness).

**Prov. 11:27** - Those who pursue what is "good" are on the road to gaining "favor" with others. If a person eagerly seeks good in and for others, he will receive goodwill in return. Conversely, those who pursue "evil" will find that it "will come upon (to)" them. If a person searches for evil (distress, tragedy)

to come on others, it will come to them. People typically get what they look for, either for good or for evil.

**Prov. 11:30-31** – 11:30 - A righteous person exercises a life-giving influence. Furthermore, a wise person wins others to wisdom. That is, he or she captures others with wise ideas or influence (cf. 2 Sam. 15:6). The idea here is that wise people influence others to follow the way of wisdom, which includes turning to God for salvation (cf. Matt. 4:19). The emblem (or symbol) of the "tree of life" illustrates something else that is a source of life (cf. 3:18; 13:12; 15:4; Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14). The symbol may derive from the fact that a hungry traveler would find the fruit on a fruit tree, that he or she passed, to be the source of nourishment and a sustainer of his or her life. Just as a fruit tree sustains life, so righteousness sustains and promotes life, in this proverb. The word "win" means "to attract or take". While it is true that evangelistic soul-winning is wise work, soul-winning is not all that this verse is talking about. The original Hebrew may have read – "violence takes lives" instead of ""wins souls is wise." One must keep this in mind when reading this proverb.

11:31 - If God rewards the righteous with blessings in this life, and He does, "how much more" will He repay wicked sinners before they die! If God judges the sin of the righteous, then the evil sinner will not escape His judgment. If the righteous must be punished for sin here on earth, then certainly how much more will the evil person be punished for the sin they have committed. No one sins with impunity. God will judge every sin. While ungodly people may appear to prosper and live carefree lives, they do not experience the blessing of fellowship with God, which is the greatest blessing human beings can enjoy in this life (cf. Phil. 3:7-11). On earth, the righteous experience God's personal care and goodness in their life, while the wicked are void of that experience.

**Prov. 14:14** – Both the wicked and the righteous – the faithless and the good – will be rewarded in accordance with the conduct. They will reap what they sow. The term "backslider" is a Hebrew expression that implies non-adherence to the right. The term is used here in such a way as to clarify who is a backslider; one who is in the category of fool, wicked, and disobedient; one who is in contrast with the good (godly, wise) man. A backslider is one who set out on the good way but then turned around. Having "his fill of his own ways" means that he has regrets; "He had a belly full of his own mistakes."

**Prov. 14:22** - People who plot evil deviate from the path of upright living. Their lives are marked with hatred and deceit. But people who pursue what is "good" usually experience "kindness and truth." A person who plans good actions on behalf of others is characterized by love and fruitfulness.

**Prov. 16:7** – This proverb is a general rule, not a promise. When a person pleases the Lord (by avoiding evil – Prov. 16:6), He makes that person's enemies to be a peace with him. As with most of the proverbs, there are some exceptions to this one. Not every godly person has been completely free of enemies, through no fault of his own (cf. 1 Pet. 2:20; 3:14, 17; 4:15-16, 19). Yet the point remains: When someone pleases the Lord, the Lord makes him pleasing to others (cf. Gal. 6:7).

**Prov. 17:13** – If a person pays back evil when he has received good, he shows that his heart is evil and foolish. Jesus taught His disciples to return good for evil (Matt. 5:43-45). But the person who "returns evil for good" can count on evil staying with and following his household from then on.

**Prov. 18:3** – Sinful living is accompanied by contempt and with shame comes disgrace. Sin and punishment are inseparably connected, as evil produces both the feeling of contempt in others and

reproach. The wicked fool brings the "contempt" of his community on himself by his wickedness, and his contempt for the godly results in his suffering shame and "dishonor." Most people disrespect ("scorn") those who are wicked, who have no respect for the godly. Sometimes the Lord judges these people by making them a reproach (cf. Jer. 24:9; 29:18; Ezek. 5:14; Hos. 12:14).

**Prov. 19:29** – Punishment and beatings are designed to correct evil behavior. God has ordained inevitable punishments ("blows") for intractable scoffers and fools. But many times they do no good for mockers and fools because they are incorrigible. Sometimes His "judgments" come directly from Himself. Sometimes His "blows" come indirectly through His human agents. In all cases, God is the ultimate source. Judgment is always God's final punishment, it is never meant for correction.

**Prov. 21:12** – God is the only one who knows that the wicked do and only He can bring them to ruin. God is "the Righteous One" who evaluates "the household" of every wicked person. God, in righteousness, brings ("turning") all the wicked "to ruin" eventually. Sometimes God judges the wicked directly; sometimes He uses others to do so. This should encourage the godly when they observe the wicked flourishing (temporarily).

**Prov. 21:16** - This proverb warns against departing from "the way of understanding." "Understanding" means discernment, seeing things as God sees them. It is not enough to pursue wisdom for a while; one must continue to do so (cf. Heb. 2:1). Deliberately turning one's back on wise, godly living results in death. Death awaits those who cease doing good and pursue the way of folly (cf. 1 Tim. 5:6). An unwise person leaves the company of the wise only to find himself in the company of dead people. "Rest" is the poetic equivalent of "dwell."

**Prov. 21:21** – Those who pursue righteousness and mercy receive more than they seek (Matt. 5:6-7, 6:33). The person who diligently pursues right conduct before God and kindness toward other people typically finds, along the way, the treasures of: "life," "righteousness," and "honor"; being righteous and loyal results in life, prosperity, and honor.

**Prov. 22:8** – The principle of sowing and reaping is emphasized here. A person who sows seeds of wickedness will reap a harvest of trouble; as trouble is always the inevitable result of sin. Anger/fury means overflowing rage. What the wicked achieve through their anger will not last, it will fail. The trouble the wicked brings on others will come upon them. This verse provides encouragement for the oppressed. The last line assures the sufferer that God will eventually break the oppressing rod of the person ("rod of his fury") who sows iniquity (cf. 24:16; Gal. 6:7). God will avenge the arrogant use of power.

**Prov. 26:1** - Honoring a fool is as out of place as "snow in summer" or "rain" is at "harvest" time. All three may also cause serious inconvenience, injury, or destruction. Putting a fool in a position of honor is inappropriate and may cause inconvenience, injury, or destruction on those who follow him or use him as a moral guide.

**Prov. 26:3** - Whips and bridles keep horses and donkeys under control, whips by spurring them to action and bridles by restraining them. Just as a horse is motivated by a whip and a donkey is controlled by a halter rather than reason, so a fool needs to be controlled by a rod (physical punishment) because he does not respond to appeals to his intellect. Therefore, "a rod" of discipline applied to "the back of [a fool]" keeps him or her under control (cf. 10:13; 19:29). The fool may need strong stimulation because

he or she is obstinate or lazy, or restraint for being too wild. God, in His love, applies discipline for these purposes (cf. Heb. 12:4-13).

**Prov. 26:27** – Destruction by one's own devices is the theme of this proverb. The person who tries to trap his neighbor ("he who digs a pit"), as people sometimes dug pits to capture wild animals, will often find that he himself becomes tangled up in the trouble that he planned. Positioning a large stone to fall on an animal or enemy ("he who rolls a stone") was another way of doing damage. But sometimes the stone fell down and hurt those who were setting the trap. The trap intended for others will come back to the one who planned it.

## Sincere Motivation

### Motive and the Heart

**Prov. 15:11** - This proverb makes its point by arguing from the harder to the easier. Since God is able to see the dead in their graves and what lies hidden in hell ("Sheol /grave and Abaddon/place of destruction"), which is impossible for us to see, He is certainly able to see what lies hidden in human "hearts. God see people's motive, thoughts and desires. It is the better part of wisdom to ask God to bring to our attention anything He sees in our heart that displeases Him, so that we can get it right with Him (Ps. 139:23-24).

**Prov. 16:2** – A person may think nothing is wrong with what they do – outwardly it seems right and innocent – but God knows the heart and one's true motives. To evaluate something is to compare it with a standard – if man's actions are not compared to God's standards then all action of men will seem right in their own eyes. Rationalization and self-justification are second nature to fallen humankind, even to those who fear the Lord. The Lord sees through rationalizations that we create and looks at our motives, which are not always apparent to us. The Lord judges people on the basis of why they act because He sees their heart. Man's heart deceives him, but God knows it (Jer. 17:9-10).

**Prov. 17:3** - As precious metals are subjected to intense heat in a "furnace" in order to refine impurities out of them, so the Lord subjects those who believe in Him to fiery trials to free them from the temporal things of the world and to purify them (cf. James 1:1- 18; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). Testing is an evaluation to determine genuineness. God tests us because He is not going to be deceived by us – but rather we will be evaluated to determine if we are genuine.

**Prov. 20:11** – What a person says does not always indicate what he is. "Conduct" is such a reliable indicator of character that even a child is known as good ("pure and right") or bad by his or her behavior. One's behavior reflects one's character. Profession of goodness makes little impression when practice contradicts it. It is important not only to listen to what people say but also observe with your eyes what they do. "Is known" means "to present oneself to be recognized" – so the child is being measured against purity and uprightness.

**Prov. 20:27** - God, even now, is "searching" out our "innermost" thoughts and feelings, which are "parts of our being". Our "spirit" (lit. "breath") is a "lamp" that God uses to investigate all the deepest parts of our being (cf. Matt. 6:22; 1 Cor. 2:11). Here the "spirit" is an equivalent to the conscience; a conscience that God uses to search your innermost being. God's Word also searches the heart of man (cf. Heb. 4:12).

**Prov. 21:2** - The implication of this proverb is that people should carefully examine their hearts (reasons, motives), because God does (cf. Prov. 16:2; 20:6; 24:12). Our natural tendency is simply to justify ourselves ("man's way is right in his own eyes"). It has been said: "Self-righteousness is perhaps the most human of all sins. Men will excuse and explain away in themselves what in others would be censured with severity." God, as a sovereign and omniscient being, will accurately evaluate man's heart (motives). See Prov. 16:2.

**Prov. 27:19** - If you want to see what your "face" looks like, look in a placid pool of water. If you want to see what a man is really like, look in his "heart; find out what he loves and values then you will know what kind of person he is. A glimpse into the heart reveals one's true character; what they love and value. The best mirror to use is God's Word (James 1:23). Jesus taught that what a person says reveals what is in his or her heart (Matt. 12:34).

This is a noted observation that I thought was interesting: "I have noticed that when a person retires from working full-time and now has more time on his hands, his choices of how he uses his time often indicate what he really values. Does he spend his new-found time almost totally on family, or on fishing, or on golf? Or does he see retirement primarily as an opportunity to serve the Lord in new and even more productive ways? Does he become more active, serving in his church or in some missions work, than he was before? The use of one's disposable time often reveals whether one's life is self-centered or Christ-centered."

### **False Worship**

**Prov. 15:8** – God hates the sacrifices (external acts of worship) offered by the wicked because those offerings are given hypocritically. It may appear that an animal or vegetable sacrifice is more difficult and costly to offer God than a prayer, in that it requires more work. So one might expect that God would value more highly—what cost the offerer more— than what cost him little. But God delights in the simple prayers of the upright. Material acts of sacrifice, though demanding more of the offerer, are an abomination to God, because He regards the person's relationship with Him as more important than his offering. God hates the sacrifice of the hypocrite because they take the occasion to worship God and modify it to an attempt to manipulate God through ritual. The material, visible sacrifice (a required performance) is much more related to dead works than prayer coming freely from a man with a relationship with God. Saul offered a sacrifice, but God did not accept it because "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22), and Saul was not obedient when he offered it. Jesus commended the publican, whose simple prayer was acceptable because it sprang from a sincere heart (Luke 18:13). External acts of worship are no substitute for a life of righteousness, which God loves.

**Prov. 15:29** - The Lord is "far from the wicked," because He has not promised to come to their aid when they call on Him for help. Being "far from" is not a limitation of God's omniscience, but refers to being removed from His communion, favor, and help. It is impossible for God and sin to dwell together (Psa. 5:4). God hears the prayers of the righteous and He responds to them, though only as He sees best (cf. Luke 11:11-13). God does hear one prayer from the wicked: "God be merciful to me, a sinner" , but no others.

**Prov. 21:3** – God prefers people's obedience – their doing what is right and just – over sacrifice (external acts of worship/"doing church"). External worship, though important, is no substitute for righteous living (1 Sam. 15:22, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:7-8). Samuel said virtually the same thing that Solomon wrote here, when he rebuked King Saul for offering a sacrifice to the Lord rather than obeying His word (1 Sam.

15:22). Jesus, also, rebuked the Pharisees for their attention to ritualistic detail while at the same time neglecting "justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23-24; cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27).

**Prov. 21:27** – God detests the sacrifices of the wicked but it is even worse when they intentionally have evil motives in bringing the sacrifice. In the O.T. times frequently rich Jews would bring trespass-offerings and other cash offerings to obtain forgiveness for their transgressions, and to purchase for themselves a blessing of God for their life. Such offerings of the wicked were to God an abomination; for in this case not only does the wicked fail in respect of repentance and a desire to forgive and obey after salvation, which were the conditions of all sacrifices (acts of worship) acceptable to God, but he makes God directly a minister of sin by assuming that God could be bought and paid off. The sad point of this is that there are priests and pastors who are willing to take the money of a wicked person as a minister of God.

### **Duplicity (Deceitfulness)**

#### **Prov. 6:12-15**

The person in view here is one who, for the amusement it gives him or her, causes other people to experience inconvenience or suffering. This person, a mischievous prankster, is "worthless" and "wicked" (Prov. 6:12). "Worthless" is literally "of Beliel," a word that became a name for Satan (2 Cor. 6:15). This worthless, wicked person lacks any desire to act in accordance with righteousness. The worthless person uses body language (signals, points, goes, winks) to contradict what they say – they desire to exploit situations, gain personal advantage, or cause conflict in what they do. The worthless person plans evil actions, which comes from a wicked heart. The worthless person pretends to be sincere but they are perverted and cause discord, dissension, and strife with others. These actions lay the foundation for disaster for the worthless person, which comes unexpectedly, quickly, and without a way to stop it or offset it.

**Prov. 10:10-11** - The winking eye is a clue to insincere speech or behavior. Winking with the eye has always been construed as indicating a lie. Winking suggests sinful intentions, which many times lead to grief for the person who is the victim. As a tiny gesture, a wink can do greater damage than many larger overt acts. Similarly the words of a fool will result in his or her own destruction eventually. The power of words is greater than that of "shifty signs. A talkative fool will eventually get himself into trouble. Generally the things that righteous people say tend to promote eternal life.

**Prov. 11:3** - When a person determines to walk in God's ways, he or she can count on God's Spirit to provide guidance and direction (cf. Psa. 32:7-8). Integrity refers to moral wholeness; being without moral blemish (genuine / reliable). When integrity is a way of life, it guides like a shepherd. Perversity / duplicity / crookedness are the contrast to integrity. Perversion is subversion, deceit, treachery, and destructiveness. The perversity of the wicked will destroy them.

**Prov. 16:30** – An evil person signals to others their intention by winking and pursing (biting) their lips. The winking of the eye, often behind the back of the intended victim, signals that the person winking does not really mean what he is saying but is deceiving and is up to no good (cf. Prov. 6:13). The biting of the lips is an action of deceit and manipulation. Therefore one is wise to note these warning signals and suspect something bad; these are non-verbal clues that a wise person should be aware of.

**Prov. 20:14** - In bartering societies, it is customary for the prospective buyer of some merchandise to tell the seller that his product is inferior and not worth what he is asking for it. A buyer can purposely undervalue the thing he is negotiating to purchase in order to bring down the price. After the

negotiation and the purchase, the buyer goes away with his purchase and brags to other people about what a cheap price he paid for it; showing that such a person is a self-idolizing liar – he praises himself. This proverb implies that this action is wrong and that the person selling should be on guard for such an approach. The proverb indirectly warns against conventional lying. Wisdom requires the weighing of the words of other people.

**Prov. 23:6-8** – It is futile to try to please an unwilling host. It is better to decline a dinner invitation from a miser because, if you accept, you will only have a miserable experience. He will begrudge you what he gives. When a guest realizes his host is only thinking about the cost of the food, while hypocritically pretending to be generous, the guest is repulsed. The guest wants to vomit up the food since it was not served honestly with kindness and generosity; he finds that his compliments were wasted. The guest of the unwilling host gains nothing from his visit.

**Prov. 26:23-26** - Flattery is as cheap or worthless as things that appear to be expensive but are really of little value. Cheap pottery can be made to look beautiful, just like fervent speech can disguise an evil heart. Hypocritical flattery cloaks a wicked heart. "Burning lips" pictures the flatterer speaking his lies with great fervor, implying that his words are absolute truth. Often people who are hateful and wicked speak to those they hate with gracious words. A malicious person plans deceit but disguises it with smooth talk. An evil person can use charming words but their heart is filled with abominations. "Seven abominations in his heart" (Prov. 26:25) means that the hypocrite is thoroughly evil. Though a malicious person can hide their true feelings temporarily through deceit, their true feelings will eventually become known. The assembly may refer to a group assembled to administer justice. Note: To say something both positively and negatively within the same statement is a Hebrew method of emphasis.

## Concern for Others

### Love and Faithfulness

**Prov. 3:3-4** – This proverb encourages devotion to kindness and truth. "Kindness / mercy / love" translates the Hebrew word *hesed*, which refers to faithfulness to obligations that arise from a relationship. "Truth" or "faithfulness" translates the Hebrew word *emet*, which refers to what one can rely on because it is stable. Together they form a relationship: true kindness and/or faithful love. Love and faithfulness should grace one's life like a necklace; and it should be written (figuratively) on one's heart. These statements were made to encourage association with and adherence to parental teaching. The son is admonished to make loyalty and faithfulness his permanent characteristics. The results of such adherence are favor and a good reputation; this includes the concepts of competence, effectiveness, and prudence.

**Prov. 16:6** - We do not atone for our own iniquity by being loving and truthful. This proverb is not a denial of our need for God's atonement. However, we can and should cover (atone for) the mistakes of others lovingly and truthfully (1 Pet. 4:8), just as God covers our sins. What will keep us all away from evil is the fear of the Lord. By God's mercy and truth, He affects the atonement for sin, which, for the believing sinner, inclines him to turn away from evil. After a person's sin has been atoned for by his trust in the Lord, he is not to continue in sin. He is to avoid evil by fearing the Lord.

**Prov. 20:6** - Many people are quick to assert their own loyal kindness ("loyalty" / faithful love). Many more affirm their own goodness, just ask them. But the test comes when they confront someone in need. The Good Samaritan proved to be "trustworthy" by the way he responded to his injured neighbor

(Luke 10:30-37). Therefore, the wise person will not judge a person's character by his words but by his performance. There are a lot of people who are eager to brag about themselves; but there are few who are truly faithful in their actions to testify of God's love and goodness. Loyalty (faithful love) and faithfulness are important characteristics of a believer. Keeping one's word and being loyal to one's commitments are important.

**Prov. 25:19** - Relying on an untrustworthy person ("faithless man") to do a job can (and usually does) result in as much pain (for those who place "confidence" in him) as a rotten "tooth" or a dislocated "foot" (Prov. 14:22; 17:17; 19:22; 20:6). An untrustworthy person passively causes pain because he fails to deliver when needed. Untrustworthy / unreliable literally means "treacherous."

### **Love, Hatred, and Compassion**

**Prov. 10:12** - Hatred of someone, which is of itself an evil, has companion bad effects; it creates strife, feuds, and factions, for it incites man against man. Hatred results in strife because people who despise each other cannot work together or live in the presence of another in peace. In contrast, love covers not merely little errors, but also greater sins of every kind by pardoning them, concealing them, and excusing them. Love covers (overwhelms) the faults of others by the one loving forgiving the other; love does not dwell on the faults of others. People who have genuine love within are willing to put up with insults or slander, and are willing to forgive those who wrong them.

**Prov. 15:17** - This proverb—another "better... than" proverb — states it is the presence of either love or hate that determines one's happiness. It is better to have only "vegetables" to eat (the typical dinner of the poor), if one can have "love" with them, than it is to have the best meat (the typical dinner of the rich), if one is served "hatred" as its side dish. The spirit in which a meal is shared is far more important than the kind of food that is eaten. Love makes one's circumstances enjoyable, where hatred causes all circumstances to be painful (un-enjoyable). A fatted ox was a great luxury because oxen were used as beasts of labor. A fatted ox was kept in a stall and carefully fed so it would yield quality meat – but the owner forfeited the labor of a working ox for this luxury. A meal was the daily allowance of food that was given to a traveler.

**Prov. 17:5** - The poor man is the work of God; as all men are created in the image of God. Thus, he who mocks the poor mocks God. Equally as bad is one being glad when other people experience misfortune. God will punish those who take pleasure in ("rejoice at") the misfortune of others (Prov. 14:21).

**Prov. 24:17-18** – This is the 28<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. God is disgusted with those who gloat over someone's failure or misfortune. Gloating over someone else's misfortune is a practice God disapproves of—even if the other person is the enemy of the righteous. Fear of God's displeasure should warn the wise away from this attitude and activity. Gloating may cause God to side with the enemy of the righteous and cause him to withdraw His wrath from the wicked. Gloating is hated by God because it suggests an attitude of superiority of one over another. In truth this proverb teaches that the LORD will not promote further sin by maintaining the situation that exacerbates it; meaning gloating is more serious a sin than the sin being committed by the wicked.

**Prov. 25:21-22** - Clearly the point of this proverb is to return good for evil (cf. Matt. 5:40- 46; Rom. 12:20-21). Such conduct will bring blessing from God and remorse to the evildoer. Still, what does "heaping burning coals on the head" of the abuser mean? This clause alludes to an ancient custom. When a person's fire went out at home, he or she would go to a neighbor and get some live coals to rekindle the fire. Carrying the coals in a pan on the head involved some danger and discomfort for the

person carrying them, but they were an evidence of the neighbor's love. Likewise, the person who receives good in return for evil feels somewhat uncomfortable even though he receives a good gift. His discomfort arises over his guilt for having wronged his neighbor in the first place. So returning good for evil not only secures the blessing of God (v. 22b), it also convicts the wrongdoer of his ways (v. 22a) in a gentle way. The way to turn an enemy into a friend is to act towards him in a friendly manner. Compassion, not revenge, should characterize the life of a believer.

### **Kindness and Mercy**

**Prov. 11:16-17** – 11:16 - The respect or honor acquired by a kindhearted woman is contrasted with the wealth attained by a ruthless (“one who strikes terror because of wicked behavior”) man. The contrast makes the point that wealth is inferior (of lesser value) than honor and respect. One of the greatest virtues is to be freed of greed; there is something more important than riches. It is also significant to note that one gracious woman will obtain a greater reward than many violent men.

11:17 - Here the contrast is between the outcome of the righteous and the wicked living. What one sends out is what one receives back – it is reciprocal. Kindness sent out will benefit its giver. Cruelty sent out will return in kind to its giver.

**Prov. 12:10** - The compassion of a righteous person extends even to how he treats his animals (literally he “knows the soul of his beast), because that is consistent with his character. But even the goodness (the best side of – the “compassion”) of the wicked is flawed by cruelty; what the wicked thinks is merciful is still cruel. The righteous has a concern beyond himself and his family as his concern extends to the condition of his animals; while the wicked has no concern for people or animals. The kindest thing the wicked does is actually cruelty.

**Prov. 12:25** - If a person is anxious about something he will feel weighed down. But any word of encouragement lightens one's load (“makes the heart glad”). Therefore we should seek to be encouragers rather than doom and gloom purveyors. A good word is any word that gives encouragement and relieves anxiety or depression. This is one of many proverbs that simply makes a psychological observation without giving an explicit command.

**Prov. 21:10** - We generally find in others what we look for. The man who seeks goodness in people will find it. The man who goes about looking for evil will readily find it in most people he comes in contact with. The wicked person craves evil as if he were addicted to it – so he is always looking for it. He is even mean to those who are near him.

### **Overstaying Welcome**

**Prov. 25:16-17** - Anything overindulged, even the most desirable of things, can become distasteful and repulsive; too much of a good thing is bad. Do not overdo anything that may lead to disgust or rejection. “Seldom set foot” literally means “make your foot precious (rare)”. Just as eating too much honey can cause a physical problem, so visiting a neighbor too often can cause him to hate you. As we say today: “Don't wear out your welcome” and “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Or as another writer has put it: “Visitors and fish stink after three days.” Staying too long, even in the presence of friends, is another example of overindulgence. It has been said, “Friendship ripens through discreet sensitivity not to intrude on privacy and to allow space for the other person to be a person in his own right, not through self-enjoyment, impetuosity, or imposition. Without that discretion, instead of enriching life, friendship takes away from it.”

## Concern for Self

### Pride and Humility

**Prov. 11:2** – This proverb presents a stark contrast; pride leads to disgrace, humility leads to wisdom. Pride, as used in the Hebrew here, means “overwhelming arrogance”; which is demonstrated by an arrogant attitude and behavior (“I am always right!”). Humility, as used in the Hebrew here, means “to walk humbly”; which is demonstrated by a submissive, humble spirit directed toward God and man. The Hebrew word translated “humble” here is a rare Hebrew word; it is only used twice in the Scriptures, here and in Micah 6:8. Pride makes a person an obstinate fool. Pride goes before a fall. A proud person refuses to accept instruction from God, which, if he or she would follow it, would result in his or her receiving honor. It has been said; “The wicked invite pride to come as their guest, but, like an inseparable twin, disgrace comes along with her as an uninvited guest.” The humble take God's advice, and that is their wisdom.

**Prov. 12:9** – This proverb presents a contrast but the contrast is presented by the words “better” and “than”; it is another “better...than” proverb. A better translation is, “Better is a man of humble standing who works for himself than one who plays the great man but lacks bread”. It is better to be an unknown with honor than to boast to become known but have nothing. The one “slighted” means to be a person of lowly rank; but because of honest gain they are able to hire a servant. The one who honors himself is one who is a false boaster who has nothing, one who is really poor. The point seems to be that some people live beyond their means in a vain show; whereas, if they lived modestly, they would have some money and be genuine.

**Prov. 13:7** - This proverb testifies to the universality of hypocrisy. The same pretense is presented in two contrasting weaknesses: one pretends to be rich while the other pretends to be poor. For example, the poor man “pretends to be rich” so that people will honor and respect him, and the rich man “pretends to be poor,” or at least poorer than he is, so that others will not attack him and take his riches – or so he does not have to share the needy. This proverb is another observation on life, but it carries the implication that we should be discerning when we hear the claims that people make, especially regarding their finances. Pretending to be rich ('one who makes himself rich') may deceive the community and create a false social status; but it demeans those who have worked diligently for what they have. Pretending to be poor to hide 'great riches' is equally contemptible. It provides an excuse for a person not to be generous and it mocks those who are truly poor because it shows ingratitude to the Lord who has made wealth possible. Alternatively, “pretends” may refer to an adopted lifestyle. A person may be rich in material goods but be poor spiritually. In contrast, a person may be poor but be rich spiritually. The Laodicean Christians claimed to be rich (materially), but really they were poor (spiritually; Rev. 3:17).

**Prov. 13:10** - This proverb contrasts those who proceed on the basis of their own “wisdom” with those who seek the “counsel” of others before making important decisions. Pride, in the Hebrew used here, means an “unyielding arrogance” (a know it all). A person of pride will not accept advice from another person. The result of the conduct of pride is “strife.” However, the wise person accepts advice from other people and this conduct results in “wisdom.” Strife can be avoided by seeking the counsel of others, rather than simply proceeding to do what appears at first glance to be the right course of action. Those that are humble and peaceable will ask and take advice. They will consult their own consciences, their Bibles, their spiritual leaders and mentors and their friends to preserve quietness and prevent quarrels.

**Prov. 15:25** – This proverb presents a contrast. The Lord opposes the proud but is near to those who act in humility born out of the fear of the Lord. The proud accumulate possessions (a source of pride) but the Lord tears them down. God frustrates "the work (house) of the proud," to teach them that He is sovereign. But He guards those who recognize their dependence on Him, such as "widows" who have no one else to turn to for help and who call on the Lord (cf. Ps. 138:6). Land was a precious commodity to a family and it was marked by boundaries. When the head of a family died, the widow was an easy target for thieves who would seek to steal their land; so the Lord Himself promised to keep the widow's boundaries from being moved.

**Prov. 16:5** – God detests pride; understood here to be independence from God. Therefore He will punish those who are proud. The phrase translated "though they join" or "be sure of this" literally means "hand to hand". This refers to the clasping of hands to close an agreement – God is assuring the proud that they will be punished for their pride. Pride here is a reference to arrogance where one thinks of himself as being better than anyone else – including God.

**Prov. 16:18-19** - These proverbs are "better...than" proverbs that discuss pride, humility, and disaster. Pride leads to a certain downfall. Pride is hated by God and should be avoided even if it means that one is poor because of avoiding it. If one shares in plunder (something acquired by violent or dishonest means) with the proud, they will be punished. The proud here also refers to those who have taken something dishonestly from the poor. It is better to avoid the proud who are destined for destruction. When we see pride in another person, we usually see it clearly and we are disgusted at what we see. The challenge is how often do we tolerate pride in ourselves and we rationalize our pride. It is better to be poor and humble" in God's sight than to be "proud" and rich. Do we realistically understand our true place in relation to God? The proud and the rich more often do not. Jesus illustrated this truth with his story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:1-13).

**Prov. 18:12** - This proverb connects with Prov. 18:11, which is about the rich person who trusts in his or her riches. Riches can give a false sense of security that eventually leads to pride. A proud person is one who thinks he is superior to others will experience a downfall. A "haughty" heart, whether it is trusting in money or anything else but the Lord, is headed for "humility" and a fall (humiliation). Conversely, those who are humble and understand their place before God and man will be exalted. Humility, as used here in the Hebrew, implies being bowed down by affliction – and then, when affliction shows that we are not self-sufficient, having a trusting relationship with God. Humility results in true strength and honor – God will exalt the humble. Having too-high expectations results in disappointment, but having realistic expectations leads to encouragement.

**Prov. 19:10** - A life of pleasure and luxury is "not fitting for a fool," because he usually does not deserve these things. However, sometimes fools do live in luxury, at least for a time. The second line of this proverb presents another type of situation that is out of place: "a slave" ruling "over princes." "Not fitting" and "much less" does not mean it is always wrong for a slave to rise to power to rule; otherwise Joseph's ascent to rule over Egypt would be contrary to this proverb. What is meant by this proverb is that just as a fool can become wealthy without doing anything of value or merit to earn that wealth; so a slave can rise to power without the ability to rule well.

**Prov. 20:9** – Some people may claim to be perfect and without sin, but such a claim is false. Even though "a righteous man walks in his integrity" (Prov. 20:7), and a just king can ferret out iniquity (Prov. 20:8), there is no one who can claim 100 percent purity of heart (cf. Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 3:9, 23; 1 John 1:8). No one can make themselves sinless. This rhetorical question is designed to move the reader to

seek cleansing outside himself or herself—a cleansing that only God can provide. Cleansing here means “being ritually clean and suitable for temple worship.” Most of the self-righteous Israelites of Jesus' day obstinately refused to acknowledge their need for His righteousness (cf. Matt. 23:36). And this continues to be the universal problem that keeps people from trusting in Christ—they prefer to trust their own goodness instead. Only God can forgive sin and cleanse a person.

**Prov. 21:4** – Arrogance, pride, and hypocrisy is what the wicked thrive on; they are all actions of sin. Pride is the “lamp” (the “plowing”) of the wicked; it is the essence of their life. The “lamp of the wicked” is their life and their conscience (Prov. 20:27). Here, in the light of the first line of the proverb, it seems to refer to the presumptuous pride of the wicked, which is at the very root of their being. If this is so, the verse is saying that arrogance and pride are the sum and substance of the life of the wicked, and that these are sin. The Lord detests their “haughty eyes” and their “proud hearts.”

**Prov. 21:24** – Three words for pride describe the mocker; proud, arrogant (haughty), and pride. The “scuffer / mocker” is a person who thinks he is superior to others. This is a person who acts with “insolent pride” disregards God. He is characterized by: his pride (he is overly impressed with himself), his haughtiness (arrogance toward others), and his scoffing (mocking what is true and good). The proverb does not aim as much to define the scoffer/mocker as to explain that his fury against God and humanity stems from his exaggerated opinion of his self-importance.

**Prov. 22:4** – Humility and the fear of the Lord go together. A person cannot fear God (worshiping, trusting, obeying, and serving Him) and be filled with pride at the same time. “Humility” and “the fear of the LORD” are two sides of the same coin, one side looking at self and the other side at God—with reverence for Him. The rewards of “riches, honor and life” come from fearing God (Prov. 21:21; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

**Prov. 25:27** – Seeking to exalt one’s self is as bad as overeating honey. Both practices in this verse are pleasant for the person who engages in them, but they can affect him adversely if he pursues them to excess. The second line of this proverb is difficult to accurately translate. “One's own glory” should probably read “weighty matters”, such as the hidden things of God and the king; “to investigate matters that are too weighty is not honorable.” Thus this proverb warns against focusing one’s life on trying to find the answers to questions that are unanswerable. The Book of Ecclesiastes is the record of Solomon's attempts to discover the answers to many such mysteries, and his frustration in being unable to do so.

**Prov. 26:16** – The ignorant are ignorant of their own ignorance! Ironically, the lazy man believes that he is a hard worker and he convinces himself that his laziness is justified. He becomes so sure of this that even “seven wise men” (i.e., a full complement of wise counselors) will have no success in changing his mind. His laziness has led to irrationality. A lazy person can invent excuses and plausible arguments in unlimited quantities to justify his behavior; and neither the disgust nor the anger of better men will affect him. A sensible answer implies discernment.

**Prov. 27:2** – Praising oneself is evidence of pride and therefore is wrong, it is sin. A person should not boast about what he will do (Prov. 22:1) nor should he boast about what he has done.

**Prov. 27:21** – Heat both tests and refines silver and gold. Praise and positive public opinion is for a person what a “crucible is for silver” and a “furnace is for gold.” A person's reputation indicates what that person is like, as does how he responds to praise. Praise given by others to a person will create one

of two reactions; one – a person will accept the praise and will become arrogant and prideful, or two – a person will accept the praise with modesty and will be humble. A person should evaluate the praise he receives before he accepts it, dismissing flattery and insincerity. Praise and prosperity has ruined more Christians' spiritual lives than adversity. A man is tested and proven by what kind of praise he receives and how graciously he receives it. It has been said - "If a man be made, by the applause that is given him, proud and scornful,—if he take the glory to himself which he should transmit to God, thereby it will appear that he is a vain foolish man, and had nothing in him truly praiseworthy. If, on the contrary, a man is made by his praise more thankful to God, more respectful to his friends, more diligent to do good to others, by this it will appear that he is a wised and good man (II Cor. 6:8)."

**Prov. 29:23** – Paradoxically, pride brings humiliation while humility brings honor. It is ironic – pride (seeking recognition for oneself) will result in one being brought down, while humility (not seeking recognition for oneself) will result in one being elevated with honor. The proud person is headed for a fall, because his attitude toward himself is unrealistic and inappropriate, and others will make him aware of it sooner or later. In contrast, a "humble" person will normally "obtain more honor," because his humility makes him worth it, and because others will confer it upon him, since he refuses to confer it on himself (Prov. 11:2; 16:18).

### **Selfishness**

**Prov. 18:1** - He who separates himself from other people does so because he wants his own way and does not want others to restrain him. This man seeks selfish gratification and accepts advice from no one. Their self-centeredness makes them enemies of sound judgment. Such an approach runs counter to sound wisdom because we all need input from other people to make wise decisions. Sound judgment is competence that leads to success.

### **Jealousy**

**Prov. 27:4** – When a person is angry and furious he can be cruel to others; sudden rage ("wrath") is hard to endure and boiling "anger" can overwhelm someone who is its target. Jealousy is even worse because it includes anger, fury, and merciless revenge. Therefore, "jealousy" (envy) is even harder to endure. We should avoid making others jealous and learn to manage it effectively ourselves; these emotions can destroy both the giver and the receiver. Jealousy is a passion that not only rages, but also incessantly obsesses through the mind, and when it breaks out the object of the jealousy will be cruelly and wickedly dealt with. "Who can stand before jealousy?" – this is a rare rhetorical question in Proverbs.

### **Envy**

**Prov. 14:30** – A person's emotions do affect their physical condition. A "tranquil/sound heart" at peace with God promotes good health, but a heart full of "passion" / "jealousy" / "envy" puts the body into turmoil and weakens one like rotten bones. Modern science has attested the truth of this proverb: stress shortens life, but tranquility/peace lengthens it. It is not wrong to be passionate for a cause but a person should not be envious of sinners or of the assignment God has given to others.

**Prov. 24:19-20** – This is the 29<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. "Fret" means to burn up emotionally (angrily excited, envious); to worry or fret is to be agitated with anger. Do not fret or envy wicked people who enjoy temporary prosperity (Prov. 23:17; 24:1; Ps. 37:1). Fretting over what sinners have and do and wanting to join them is wrong because they have no future. While it is right to be angry because of evildoers are sinning, it is wrong to be angry because they are prospering. They will

die with no hope. The "lamp" is the life of the wicked. The wicked are doomed; they will have no good outcome for their lives.

### **Greed**

**Prov. 28:25** - Arrogance demonstrates excessive self-assurance and pride, which most people react against—often with "strife" resulting. The proud heart is arrogant; it satisfies itself at the expense of conflict with others. The proud heart can be interpreted "greedy" (meaning "large of soul, uncontrolled appetite for material things"). Because greed is selfish, it will result in strife and dissension. Such a person will not prosper as much as the individual who commits his cause to ("trusts in") the Lord. The Lord will take up the cause of those who trust in Him. The humble before God will enjoy prosperity; the one who trusts in the Lord rather than riches gained by greed will prosper.

## **Control of Self**

### **Self-control**

**Prov. 25:28** - Both "a city with defective (without) walls" and "a man who cannot control himself (one who cannot control his spirit)" are vulnerable to attack and defeat by an enemy. Given the right pressure, anyone can lose control of himself or herself. For this reason we need to submit control of ourselves to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), who will produce the fruit of self-control within us (Gal. 5:23). Self-control relates to control of passions (anger, love, attention, etc.), appetites (desire for food, sex, material things, etc.), and will (impulsive decisions). The lack of self-control is the characteristic of a fool. Those who lack self-control expose themselves to temptation and evil influence and control. This proverb is a direct contrast to Prov. 16:32.

**Prov. 29:11** – A fool readily gives in to anger, he has a "quick trigger"; but a wise person has and maintains self-control. A fool vents all of his emotional feelings quickly without regard to what he is saying. Fools customarily vent their feelings ("let it all hang out"), whereas wise individuals control themselves. The phrase "holds them back / keeps under control" literally means "calms it back" like the sudden calming of a storm. Many things are better left unsaid; many opinions are better left unspoken, not only for the sake of others but for the sake of one's own well-being.

### **Rashness**

**Prov. 20:25** - The situation in view here is that of a person who impulsively pledges something to God and then, upon reconsidering, wishes that he had not done so (cf. Eccles. 5:5; Mark 7:11). Making rash promises without thinking it completely through is dangerous. It is better to wait to make the pledge, until one thinks through the implications of the decision carefully. We should avoid all decisions that have unconsidered action or consequences; the fool's mouth can be a trap. Jephthah made a vow "rashly" because he acted impulsively (Judg. 11:30-40). Making a vow rashly and then considering what the vow really involves can get a person in as much trouble as if he had stepped into an animal trap. Too many people will make promises under the inspiration of the hour only later to realize that they have obligated themselves to something they cannot do; they then try to go back on their word which is even more painful. Getting into something is much easier than getting out. It is better to take time to carefully think things through before acting.

**Prov. 29:20** – A man who speaks in haste is a fool because he blurts out thoughtless and insensitive remarks. Often this fool is pitied instead of being held accountable ("consider the source"). "Words" spoken in haste often disappoint, if not worse (Prov. 26:12). Jephthah lost his daughter because of his

hasty, rash words (Judg. 11). The arrogant man is continually uttering words which he has to recall, because he answers questions before he hears the entire question, he is impatient and tends to exaggerate. Speaking in haste and being arrogant are two things, when combined together that produce less hope for that person than for being a foolish person. There is little hope of checking such a man, unless there be true self-judgment and repentance. This kind of person brings trouble on himself and those associated with him.

### **Temper and Patience**

**Prov. 12:16** – A fool always believes they are right, so they are immediately angry if someone disagrees with them. A fool's reaction is "like an injured animal and so his opponent knows that he has been wounded." A fool brings dishonor on himself and becomes vulnerable by making a big deal out of some insult that he received. (Prov. 29:11). In contrast, a "prudent" person "ignores an insult / covers shame". A wise man does not get annoyed at insults or criticisms. The prudent man overlooks the insult; meaning that he controls his response to the insult or offense and forgives it (ignores an insult / covers shame).

**Prov. 14:16-17** – A wise person fears (the Lord) and shuns evil. Caution is the better part of wisdom, and the wise person, having anticipated danger, will "turn(s) away from evil" people who create danger. The foolish person, in contrast, relies too much on his own instincts and presumed "wisdom," and becomes "careless," and frequently gets hurt. The quick-tempered fool does foolish things; they do and say things they later regret and are unable to undo. A quick tempered man does bad things impetuously because he doesn't think. A schemer does bad things purposely because he is malicious. A person who schemes and works in an underhanded way to get his own way is hated by others because he is proven to be untrustworthy.

**Prov. 14:29** – The evidence of a wise person is being patient under trying circumstances; "patient" literally means "slow at becoming angry." People who do not become angry quickly show "great understanding." But people who are "quick-tempered" often do foolish things; impatient people lose control of their temper and they "exalt for all to see" their foolishness. Controlling one's temper is always wise, and losing it is never wise.

**Prov. 15:18** – This is a contrast of two types of people – one is a "hot-head" and the other is a "peacemaker". This is another warning about being "hot-tempered" (Prov. 14:17, 29; 29:22). Here the emphasis is on the extreme ramifications from being quick-tempered or slow-tempered; it is "strife" or peace ("calm"), respectively. It has been said - "A wrathful man is of necessity a proud man; otherwise he would not be so easily stirred by what touches himself. A humble man will be slow to anger, for he has learned not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, and therefore will not readily resent insults and offences."

**Prov. 16:32** – Contrary to those who say it is good to "vent" one's anger, most proverbs advocate being slow to anger. The ability to restrain anger is developed as a person yields to the Lord's control and the Holy Spirit's leading. A bad temper is often excused on the ground of "that is the way I am" or "that is the way he/she is", but it is rather the evidence of unbridled pride and impatience. Unless anger is controlled in your life, you will always be at its mercy. It is harder, but "better," to master one's "anger" and rule one's own "spirit," than it is to master many other people. The reason it is harder is that our own desires are frequently stronger than the antagonism that we face from others. The reason it is better is that if one cannot master his or her passions, then that one is vulnerable to mastery by others. It is generally a sign of weakness when one allows himself to become angry in the face of opposition.

Only a mighty person (one who is strong enough to take a city) is capable of controlling his anger. Conquering oneself is of greater virtue than conquering a city. A person who does not let his passions control him is better than a powerful military hero who lacks such control. Jesus demonstrated remarkable self-mastery during His unjust trials. 'Learn of Me,' said Jesus, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart' (Matt. 11:29). It has been said - "This is a proverb that is constantly quoted and very little believed. If men only recognized that there is more valor and heroism in self-control than in doughty deeds which others acclaim in song and story, how different our world would be. The meek man is not a spiritless man, but he is slow to anger. He can be righteously stirred when occasion requires, but not when it is his own dignity that is in question."

**Prov. 19:11** – It has been said - "An uncontrolled temper, manifested in hasty anger unjudged, bespeaks a man who has never learned, in the school of God, the great lesson of self-government. It is the pompous, conceited pedant who cannot overlook an injury done to him, but must vent his wrath upon the offender whenever an occasion presents itself. A man of sound judgment and discretion has learned to pass lightly over offences and seeming insults which would goad the one who is bereft of wisdom to intense indignation (Prov. 14:29; 26:21)." In many cultures any sign of disrespect to a man is a challenge to his honor, and he can only regain it by fighting whoever insulted him. Here patience and overlooking insults actually bring honor to a man. Patience is a mark of wisdom. A prudent, patient man is not easily impacted by people who offend him; in fact he overlooks and forgives the offenses knowing that to harbor resentment or to attempt revenge only leads to more trouble. When through insight a person gains patience, he gains the capacity to overlook sin when someone sins against him. Overlooking an offense and insult is his glory that is honorable.

**Prov. 19:19** – A hot-headed person does not learn; he is incorrigible. An uncontrolled temper will repeatedly send such a person into fresh trouble. The implication is that it is futile to bail such a person out of the trouble he gets himself into with his temper. He repeatedly gets himself in trouble and has to pay for it. If a self-controlled person would rescue the hot-tempered person from his penalty (or circumstance), the hot-head would probably take advantage of that help so that kindness would have to be repeated. It has been said - "Whereas the son is corrected by parental discipline, the hothead must be corrected by allowing the consequences of his own foibles 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. Repeated efforts of kindness are lost in ill-natured persons." A person with a hot temper should be left to pay the consequence of their anger; it is the only way they will learn.

**Prov. 22:24-25** – This is 2<sup>nd</sup> saying of 30 sayings in Proverbs. The warning here is against being a friend or associating with a hot-tempered person (literal meaning – an owner or possessor of anger). The influence of a hothead can prove detrimental (Prov. 1:10-19; 14:17, 29; 15:1). Such an association will lead a companion to become hot-tempered and be caught up and ensnared in the behavior and attitude of the hot-tempered person. Therefore, those around him tend to behave like him. His type of behavior displeases God and leads to ruinous complications. The implication of this proverb supports the principle that "what you send out will return back to you."

**Prov. 29:8** – "Mockers / scoffers" are evil troublemakers; they are arrogant, angry people. They do not have scruples and stir up (literal meaning – fan or blow on embers) trouble. They get others angry to the point of rebellion. They inflame their communities by ridiculing what is moral and ethical, misrepresenting the truth, and fanning unworthy passions with angry words. In contrast, wise people

create peace in their communities by advocating good things in right ways. The wise help calm others by not responding to anger or strife.

**Prov. 29:22** - Where there is anger, conflict ("strife") is sure to follow; and a "hot-tempered" person will violate many boundaries. The "angry" (literal meaning – owner of wrath) person causes strife and commits many sins. Evident sins of anger that cause strife – cursing, insulting, being rude, being ungrateful, being oppressive, being proud and arrogant are a few that could be named.

## Proverbs Supplement - A Study of Forgiveness – What is it?

**Forgive:** To grant pardon for an offense; to cease to feel resentment against; to cancel an indebtedness or liability.

**Forgiveness:** The act of forgiving.

**Forgiveness is not forgetfulness.** God does not forget our sin; He chooses not to remember it (Isa. 43:25; Heb. 8:12, 10:17). God refuses to call our sin (as a believer) to mind or to bring them up again. This is what we are to do. We may not be able to forget the offense but we can refuse to recall it to our memory....or to the memory of the one who offended us.

**Forgiveness is a willful act.** Forgiveness is the willful act of granting a complete, unconditional pardon to the person who offended you. It is not hypocrisy to will forgiveness when your emotions are screaming for revenge. We are to be obedient to Christ and biblical principle and standard, regardless of how we feel. If you refuse to safeguard, nurture, harbor, or dwell on the offense – evil emotion will be starved and the Lord will set your heart right if you surrender to Him. What you focus on will eventually become who you are – so the very offense that you dwell on will become alive within you and you will be guilty of perpetrating the very offense that hurt you. Ultimately a conscious, deliberate, willful choice to forgive is the only thing that can free you from the bondage of bitterness created by unforgiven offense.

**Forgiveness is a biblical principle** (Eph. 4:31-32). Forgiveness is a biblical principle that is not open to debate or opinion. The believer in Christ is required to offer forgiveness to all men in all situations and circumstances. The forgiveness principle is based on:

1. The transformation of life that takes place in salvation (II Cor. 5:17). Are we who we say we are (Matt. 5:48)? Is our behavior consistent with who we say we are (Gal. 5:22-23)?
2. The submission of one's life to the principles outlined in God's Word and the obedience to those principles. The Bible is the authority, not our opinion (Heb. 4:12-13).

The transformation of life at salvation couple with submission and obedience to biblical principles establishes a strong foundation for the life-action requirements of a believer. The believer does not have the luxury, privilege or right to a personal opinion when a principle is clearly stated.

**Forgiveness is a biblical standard** (Col. 3:12-13). Believers are called upon to forgive – "even as God in Christ forgave you"; it is not a choice. We are to forgive no matter what a person may have done to you; we are to forgive in the same way that God, because of Jesus Christ, has forgiven you (c.f. Psa. 86:4; Rom 2:4, 5:8,10).

This biblical standard of forgiveness employs two laws: the “law of personal relationships” (Gal. 6:10; c.f. Col. 3:23-24, I Cor. 10:31) and the “principle of personal relationships (John 13:13-17). We are to treat others in the same manner as Christ treats you today.

The standard of forgiveness coupled with the “law” and “principle of personal relationships” establishes that forgiveness offered by a believer is:

1. Magnanimous – it is generous in forgiving insult, injury or offense; it is free from petty resentment that proceeds from a noble character. This is established by the “principle of giving” (Acts 20:34-35).
2. Unlimited – it will always be given and without reservation. (Luke 17:3-4; c.f. Matt. 18:21-35)
3. Complete / Total – it is without bounds or conditions. (Matt. 5:43-48)

Forgiveness, as a biblical standard, is not conditional. No matter what someone has done; no matter how much it hurts; no matter what it is; we are to forgive (Luke 6:35-36). Some has twisted Col. 3:13 to mean that forgiveness cannot be granted until the other party repents and seeks forgiveness. Scripture does not support this teaching; this is a false teaching (Matt. 5:37-42).

Forgiveness, as a biblical standard, is an obligation. There is nothing that anyone has ever done to you in any situation that is unforgiveable. It does not matter what the offense was, nothing falls outside the context of Scripture to support a position of unforgiveness. There is no such thing as something for which you cannot forgive someone else (I Pet. 2:20-23). There is nothing that you have ever done in your life that is outside the forgiveness of God – and that is the standard we are required to live by. You are to forgive just as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven you (I John 2:12).

**Refusing to forgive an offense enslaves you to the offense.** Refusing to deal with an offense and the resentment it causes or rationalizing that you have a right to be resentful because of the offense puts you into bondage to the offense.

1. If you hold resentment towards someone you cannot shake the memory of the offense.
2. If you hold resentment towards someone you cannot wish them success in their endeavors in life.
3. If you hold resentment towards someone you want that person to hurt just like you do.

Resentment (unforgiveness) that is held internally will turn into bitterness. The evidence of resentment (unforgiveness) in your life can be seen by others – but you will ignore its features (Eph. 4:31-32).

1. Bitterness will exist: a smoldering resentment will reside within you and will be seen as you holding a grudge against someone as demonstrated by your attitude (irritability).
2. Wrath will be demonstrated: a wild rage that occurs publicly in the passion of a moment when things do not go your way.
3. Anger will reside internally: an internal, smoldering resentment will reside within you that will feed your resentment subtly and with deep emotion through rationalization.
4. Clamor will be seen: a crying out or outburst of public anger that exhibits a loss of control of your emotions.
5. Slander is presented: a public expression of defaming or ridiculing a person or persons that comes from bitterness within the heart from real or perceived offenses.
6. Malice will be close by: an internal leaning toward evil thoughts, words and deeds, which is the root of all vice and evil.

As stated before:

**Forgiveness is a willful act.** Forgiveness is the willful act of granting a complete, unconditional pardon to the person who offended you. It is not hypocrisy to will forgiveness when your emotions are screaming for revenge. We are to be obedient to Christ and biblical principle and standard, regardless of how we feel. If you refuse to safeguard, nurture, harbor, or dwell on the offense – evil emotion will be starved and the Lord will set your heart right if you surrender to Him. What you focus on will eventually become who you are – so the very offense that you dwell on will become alive within you and you will be guilty of perpetrating the very offense that hurt you. Ultimately a conscious, deliberate, willful choice to forgive is the only thing that can free you from the bondage of bitterness created by an unforgiven offense.

**Psa. 86:5.** God is always ready to forgive those who call on Him. The call out for forgiveness by a lost person is always heard by God. But it is important to recognize that the call out for salvation is different than one asking for forgiveness or one forgiving another. God draws men unto Himself for salvation. Men are to be Christ-like in their living before others. As such, we are to seek to forgive those who have offended us and seek out those who you have offended to ask them for forgiveness....we are on both sides of the equation at the same time as we deal with relationships with other men.

**Col. 3:12-13.** Some people have twisted this verse to mean that God does not forgive apart from the repentance of the offender; therefore they have used this verse to develop an excuse to withhold forgiveness until the other person who offended them asks them for forgiveness. Refusal to forgive someone on the grounds that the offender has not repented or asked for forgiveness is unsupported by scripture (even Luke 7: 3-4 does not support this). Because Christ, who is the model of forgiveness, has forgiven all our sin totally, we must be willing to forgive others – reaching out first to forgive and not waiting for the other person to initiate the request for forgiveness.

**Matt. 5:39-41.** A true believer has the attitude of “others first”. Even when evil and unfairness is being forced upon the believer, we are to extend our favor to them to show them Christ (see answers to question 1 above). To keep an account of wrongs and constantly demanding recognition of personal affronts violates the very Spirit of Christ.

**Matt. 18:21-24.** Peter thought he was being magnanimous to forgive someone for offending him up to 7 times. The rabbi’s taught that since God forgave Israel’s enemies 3 times (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13) then that was all that was necessary for a person to forgive another person; to go beyond 3 times was presumptuous and unnecessary. Christ responded to tell Peter that he was to forgive 70 times 7; meaning that Peter was to forgive innumerable times, times without end. This was not a conditional forgiveness where the person came to ask for forgiveness, it was to be presented without condition.

**Luke 17:3-4.** Here in Luke it appears that the forgiveness is conditional because it states that if a person repents you are to forgive them. The focus of this verse is not on the fact that a person comes to you and repents for their offense against you (even though this is a very good thing). The emphasis of this verse is our response to those who have offended us; we are to offer forgiveness that is lavish, enthusiastic, eager, freely offered and unconstrained.

**Eph. 4:32.** Scripture is clear here on what is required of a believer. Each believer has been forgiven so much by God that of all people they should be ready to forgive any and all offenses against them. The illustration of this forgiveness is found in Matt. 18:21-35.

**I Pet. 2:20-24.** As a believer we are not higher or greater than Christ. When He was falsely accused He did not seek revenge; Christ never retaliated. He willingly suffered offenses against Him – and we must be ready to do the same because we will have similar experiences of being wronged without cause or justification (Luke 23:34).

**Heb. 10:17-18.** Forgiveness may not entail forgetting because many times the offense cannot be purged from one's memory. Scripture states that God "will remember no more". To forget is to have no memory of it. To remember no more is a refusal to call the memory to mind; it is a promise to not bring them up. It has been stated that this is a threefold promise: you promise not to remember his sin by bringing it up to him, to others, or to yourself; it is buried.

**I Cor. 13: 1-8a.** Christ-like genuine love is to be the feature all are to see in us as a believer. Love obliges us to assume the best about those who profess repentance, or those to whom we forgive. Is there a risk that people will walk all over us? Yes, but God is the keeper of the books and one day each person will stand before God and answer for the things done in their life. Scripture indicates that true repentance will show bear visible fruit (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8-9).

### **Drunkenness and Gluttony**

**Prov. 20:1** - "Wine" (primary definition is fermented grape juice mixed with water – secondary definition is unfermented grape juice mixed with water) and "strong drink" (definition is beer or hard liquor made from dates, barley, grapes, pomegranates, etc.; all other alcoholic beverages besides wine) were personified to teach that those who are controlled by them often mock what is holy, and violate the limits of morality and propriety (cf. Eph. 5:18). To stagger means "to wander and get lost." The use of alcohol is not specifically condemned in Scripture, but one's being intoxicated or controlled by alcohol is always condemned (Isa. 28:7). Two aspects of alcohol are addressed in Scripture; its use and its abuse, its benefits and its curse, its acceptance in God's sight and its abhorrence. Alcohol may gladden the heart of man (Psa. 104:15) or cause his mind to err (Prov. 28:7). It can be associated with merriment (Eccl. 10:19) or with anger (Isa. 5:11). It can be used to shame man (Gen. 9:21; 19:30-38) or to honor man (Gen. 14:18). Alcoholic drink of any kind was forbidden to be partaken of by priests (Lev. 10:9), Nazirites (Num. 6:1-3), and those who have addictive behavior (Isa. 5:11). Alcoholic (intoxicating) drinks can and do lead people astray, causing them to do foolish things because their judgment is hampered or compromised.

**Prov. 23:19-21** - This is the 14<sup>th</sup> saying of 30 sayings in Proverbs. Overindulgence in food and drink can lead to sleepiness, then laziness, then poverty (Prov. 23:29-35; 20:1). We should avoid the constant companionship of people marked by the characteristics of "heavy drinkers" and "gluttons." These two sins of excessive eating and drinking are often symptoms of deeper problems; but they cause laziness and create poverty. Moderation is preferable. This saying also implies that the influence of bad companions is strong. By listening and heeding to his father's instruction and desiring the right path, the son is wise. One way to stay on the right path is to avoid drunkenness and gluttony.

**Prov. 23:29-35** - This is the 18<sup>th</sup> saying of 30 sayings in Proverbs. This classic description of drunkenness, in the form of an ode, ironically illustrates the folly of excessive drinking of alcohol. The ode presents 6 questions (vs. 29) and the answers (vs.30). Following the questions and answers come the exhortations (vs. 31-32) and a description of a drunkard's delirium (vs. 33-35). The father urges his son to remember how too much drinking will end—so its present enjoyment will not enslave him. The father's instruction was real and valid as one of the marks of an incorrigible son in Israel, that justified his execution, was

drunkenness (Deut. 21:20). Paul wrote to the Corinthians not to keep company with a professing Christian who was a drunkard (1 Cor. 5:11; cf. Eph. 5:18). Alcoholic beverages seem attractive – they are colorful, sparkling, and smooth – they appeal to the senses of sight, taste, and smell – and they are associated with happiness and fun. But in the end alcohol is as devastating and painful as a snake bite. This is a powerful exhortation on the tragic consequences of overindulging in alcohol. While many consider alcoholism is a medical problem, it is definitely a moral problem because it involves choices and brings danger to other people.

### **Adultery**

**Prov. 5:1-6 - The danger of seduction** - This chapter of proverbs on the perils of adultery begins with an exhortation – pay attention and listen, for in doing so gives discretion and knowledge. Speaking (lips) wisdom helps one to ignore the seductive words of a seducer. The "lips" of the youth (vs. 2) contrast with those of the seductress (vs. 3), which in turn contrasts with the previously mentioned "lips" of Wisdom and the father who teaches wisdom. Knowing what is right and being able to articulate that with one's lips is really a protection against the power of the seducer's speech (vs. 1-6). The seducer comes with words that are sweet (flattering) and smooth (delightful, vs. 3). Nevertheless these flattering and smooth words are taken in by the one being seduced, they make the person tempted by them feel bitter (ashamed) and wounded (hurt, vs. 4). Even flirting produces this effect sometimes. What seems attractive at first becomes bitter and sharp later; it becomes like tasting bitter gall or being cut with a double-edged sword. There is an old saying, 'Honey is sweet, but the bee stings'. Typically the seducer will lead a person down a path that takes him or her to death and the grave (vs. 5). They have no concern with living a truly worthwhile life but only with gaining some immediate physical and emotional thrill (vs. 6). The seducer is unaware that their ways are crooked (literal meaning – staggering or unstable). God created sex not only for reproduction but also for enjoyment, and he didn't put the 'marriage wall' around sex to rob us of pleasure but to increase pleasure and protect it.

**Prov. 5:7-14 - The price of unfaithfulness** – The exhortation continues – listen and obey – don't turn away from this teaching. Failure to listen and obey will result in heavy losses; there is a high price to pay for unfaithfulness. The price of unfaithfulness is so high that it is unreasonable. Therefore one is wise to avoid tempting himself or herself by continuing to admire the "merchandise"; the unwise give up their vitality (authority while in their prime), they are not overpowered or robbed. Fascination with a "stranger" destroys two loves: love for one's spouse, and love of Wisdom. When marriage becomes viewed as a "business arrangement", human passion will seek other outlets. Most marital infidelity occurs because the parties involved continue to spend time together. We are exhorted to avoid the company of the seducer (cf. Gen. 39:10; 2 Tim. 2:22; Matt. 5:28-29). The price of unfaithfulness is very high; it results in the loss of strength (losing health, self-respect, etc.), loss of long life, loss of money and loss of health. The price of unfaithfulness is total personal ruin. The use of both 'flesh' and 'body' (vs. 11) underscores the fact that the whole body is exhausted when involved in unfaithfulness. Infidelity (unfaithfulness) causes the loss of one's powers (vs. 9a); others will exploit him (vs. 9b-10), he will hate himself (vs. 11-13), and he will suffer ruin in his community (vs. 14). Historically the most painful loss caused by unfaithfulness is public disgrace in a community. While this has lessened today, there is still a stigma on those who have been unfaithful. There can be confession and forgiveness, but there is not a restoration of one's honor and reputation that one enjoyed before being unfaithful. Although sexual immorality today may not lead to slavery or public disgrace, it still leads to alimony, child support, broken homes, hurt, jealousy, lonely people, and venereal disease. The path of unfaithfulness is hard and unforgiving; its price is high and its value is worthless.

**Prov. 5:15-20 - The delights of married love** – There is a better way, namely fidelity (faithfulness) to one's marriage partner; the first marriage partner, not looking for another partner. Strict faithfulness does not result in unhappiness or failure to experience what is best in life, as the world likes to try to make us think. Rather, it guards us from the heartbreak and tragedy that accompanies unfaithfulness. The figures of a cistern and a well (vs. 15) refer to one's wife (cf. Song of Sol. 4:15); a woman who satisfies natural desires. One drinks water to quench thirst; here drinking is a figure of the satisfaction of conjugal love. This figurative language presents a clear contrast: the wife's water is sweet and life-giving, as contrasted to the seducer's honey, while temporarily sweet, turns bitter and is life destroying. The Hebrew text favors taking verse 16 as a positive statement ("Let your streams . . .") rather than as a question, as in the NASB / KJV. When taken as a positive statement the meaning of verses 17-18 then becomes, "The influence of the faithful man (His 'springs') become a blessing to others." However, this verse also tends to call the imagination of the reader to understand how he would feel if his wife were to commit adultery – "show your springs to be scattered abroad." "Hind" and "doe" (vs. 19) are common Semitic figures for females on account of their beautiful limbs and dark eyes. The erotic language of verses 19-20 may be surprising, but it shows that God approves sexual joy in marriage and it is a defense against unfaithfulness (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5, 9; Heb. 13:4). A man is to find his exhilaration (sexual stimulation, also translated intoxication in 20:1 and Isa. 28:7) in his wife. The issue is self-discipline empowered by God's Spirit. Unfaithfulness offers no benefits, so to justify it is senseless.

**Prov. 5:21-23 - The importance of fidelity** - Fidelity (faithfulness) should be desired and sought after. Four motivations are given to be faithful: one – God sees man's ways (vs. 21); two – God examines man's conduct (vs. 21); three – unfaithfulness ensnares and ties down a man into bondage (vs. 22); and, four – undisciplined morality results in death (vs. 23). (Note: "Lack of discipline" is a better translation than "lack of instruction.") People usually do not become unfaithful to their spouses because they do not know better but because they do not choose better. The man is exhorted not just to a single-focused commitment but also to a single-hearted, impassioned affection for his wife. If he is not captivated (intoxicated) by his wife but becomes captivated (intoxicated) with a seducer, then his own sin will captivate him, and he will be led to ruin. To yield to sexual lust is folly. Being unfaithful is foolish because it leads one astray from God's standards. The wicked man will be lost to eternal death because he did not let discipline replace his stupidity with wisdom.

**Prov. 6:20-29 – The guilt of adultery** - This extended warning against one of life's most destructive practices is classic. The mother is the teacher, in contrast to the father. The mother represents respect for the institutions of family and marriage. Verses 20-23 stress the importance of the precepts that follow. "Walk," "sleep," and "awake" (vs. 22) picture life in its totality. These noted activities parallel the 3 circumstances of life (Deut. 6:6-9; 11:18-20). The instruction being given provides guidance, protection and counsel. This teaching should be like a "lamp" and a "light" giving guidance to one's conduct just as God's commands and law. Disobedience will lead to discipline to help keep a person on the right path. Godly righteous wisdom taught by parents will help protect the child against adultery. The immoral act begins with the lustful look (vs. 25) and the initial attraction must be consistently rejected. The warning is against coveting another man's wife or another person, which is the place to weed out the temptation, when it is still small. Verse 25 is a warning – lusting in one's heart after an attractive woman is wrong. Nothing feeds adultery like fantasy. Imagination is the fuel which causes immorality. Immorality is costly! The prostitute is after money – and it costs a man to be involved. The unchaste married woman brings on a man destructive social (and possibly legal) punishment. In verses 27-29 we have a series of physical analogies designed to illustrate spiritual cause and effect. Adultery brings inescapable punishment; it is a natural and inescapable consequence. Dire consequences are inevitable. One may contain the fire (vs. 27) at first, but others will discover it if it continues to burn. It is impossible

to hold fire in one's lap without it burning one's clothes. "His clothes" (vs. 27) implies outward reputation, namely, what others see. "Touches her" is a euphemism for sexual intimacy (cf. Gen. 20:6; 1 Cor. 7:1). Adultery ignores tomorrow's consequences by emphasizing today's delights. It comes with a spiritual, emotional, and financial price – and the price is always high. Some people argue that sex is a normal desire given to us by God that needs to be satisfied; therefore, we have every right to use it, even if we're not married. It's like eating; if you're hungry, God gave you food to eat; if you're lonely, God gave you sex to enjoy. Some of the people in the Corinthian church used this argument to defend their sinful ways (1 Cor. 6:13, NKJV). But Paul made it clear that the believer's body belonged to God and that the presence of a desire wasn't the same as the privilege to satisfy that desire. Wise instruction that has been internalized sustains a person who faces moral challenges.

**Prov. 6:30-35 – Adultery is without restitution.** Verses 30-35 draw another kind of comparison. Adultery is a practice good people look down on because it is never necessary. It is always the product of lack of self-control. It is this lack of self-control that is the foundation why an unfaithful husband should not be a church elder (1 Tim. 5:6). According to this comparison, adultery is a greater sin than stealing. People may sympathize with (but not approve) a theft if one is attempting to avoid starvation for himself or his family. But if he is caught he has to repay 7-fold....so he can repay for the theft, thus making restitution with the ability to put the crime behind him. However, an adulterer does not have any recourse to repay – they only receive the severest of consequences – there is no restitution for an adulterer, the consequences are irreparable. The adulterer destroys their reputation; they are disgraced and shamed with a reproach that will never go away. The picture of the adulterer as social outcast may seem greatly overdrawn in light of today's society. However, in a healthy society such an act of adultery is social suicide. Also – the jealous husband will have no mercy on the man (apparently blaming the guilty man more than his wife). The jealous husband will not be appeased by money.

**Prov. 7:1-5 - The lure of adultery** – Chapter 7 begins with a plea for the son to hear, assimilate, and live by the parent's teaching. This chapter dramatizes the arguments Solomon advanced in Prov. 6:20- 35. The need for sexual discipline, the need to say 'no' to offers of physical intimacy outside of marriage, is the dominant theme in the wisdom speeches of Proverbs. In chapter 7, it occupies the entire speech. The son is to keep, store up, and guard this teaching like a treasure. The apple (pupil) of the eye (vs. 2) is its most sensitive part (cf. Deut. 32:10). The "apple" is literally the center of a thing. The pupil, the center of the eye, is the most sensitive of the human body's exposed organs. Because it is the source of sight, it is to be carefully protected. Truth (divine wisdom) was to be given a paramount place in one's mind and conduct (bind/write). To write something on the heart is to internalize it so that it directs one's actions. In the O.T., one's "sister" was considered to be an intimate relative. Similarly, a person was to be intimate in relation to wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and understanding were to keep the son from the adulteress and/or seductive woman.

**Prov. 7:6-9** – Solomon now tells a story that illustrates the points he was teaching. The story begins by describing the victim of temptation as one who has not adopted Solomon's counsel. In Israelite culture, the person viewing what was going on in the street would often have done so from a second story window, since the lower story would typically have lacked windows as a precaution against theft. The youth is "naive" (vs. 7), foolish innocently or deliberately. He is walking, going somewhere but not necessarily purposely going to the house of the seductive woman....but he was going in that direction because he knew she lived there – he was going to where the temptation was located. It has been said – "If you want to avoid the devil, stay away from his neighborhood." The young man had not yet acquired the protection available to him by his commitment to wisdom and discretion.

**Prov. 7:10-12** - Verses 10-12 pictures the woman as being on the prowl for sensual gratification, preying on anyone foolish enough to encourage her. She went out dressed seductively, looking for self-satisfaction or looking to satisfy the power to control another person.

**Prov. 7:13-20** - Verses 13-20 show her tactics: sensual assault (vs. 13), justification of her intent (vs. 14), flattery (vs. 15), visualization of delight (through eyes and nose, vv. 16-17), proposition (vs. 18), and reassurance of safety (vv. 19-20). We should probably favor the marginal reading of verse 14: "Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me." The idea is that she had made a peace offering and had some of the food that was her portion of the offering at her house where she needed to eat it with someone else. Some peace offerings followed the end of a vow (votive offerings). This seems to have been the case here. This woman appears to be indulging herself after a period of self-sacrifice, as some people who fast during Lent do at the end of that season. Her religious activity was a pretense, an effort to cloud any sense of wrong doing she may have. It is quite clear that this woman knew exactly what she wanted. Her flattery includes the lie that she searched specifically for him (which he would believe). In reality, she was on the hunt for any vulnerable young man. She promises that they won't get caught, ignoring the eternal consequences of their sin.

**Prov. 7:21-23** - Verses 22-23 portray the "kill" of the naïve young man with two figures: a dumb ox led to slaughter, and a foolish criminal led to prison. Evidently the youth hesitated, but then "suddenly" (vs. 22) yielded. Sin leads to death (cf. Rom. 6:23; James 1:15)—along the same line, Solomon looked at the end result of the youth's action, not its immediate effect. It is known that animals see no connection between traps and death; similarly morally foolish people see no connection between their sin and death. They are oblivious to the danger of such immorality. Those consumed by seeking relationships outside of marriage always rationalize their behavior. One commentator wrote: "Such a story as this would serve the lewd profane poets of our age to make a play of, and the harlot with them would be the heroine; nothing would be so entertaining to the audience, as her arts of beguiling the young gentleman. Her conquests would be celebrated as the triumphs of wit and love, and the comedy would conclude very pleasantly; and every young man that saw it acted would covet to be so picked up. Thus fools make a mock at sin."

**Prov. 7:24-27** - In the epilogue to this story (vv. 24-27), Solomon exhorts his son and advises him on a three-fold defense against this temptation. First, guard your heart (vs. 25a). We are in danger when we begin to desire and long for an adulterous affair. Fantasizing such an affair is one symptom that we are in this danger zone. Second, guard your body (vs. 25b). Do not go near (do not wander by) or stay near someone who may want an adulterous affair. Third, guard your future (vv. 26-27). Think seriously about the consequences of having an adulterous affair before you get involved. A man's life may not be destroyed in one instant; it may be taken from him gradually through disease, poverty, or spiritual and/or emotional anguish (from the fear of being found out). Military terms are used to describe death and victims. Also, there may be an angry husband to deal with as well.

**Prov. 22:14** - Solomon compared the "mouth" of an adulteress to a "deep pit." She lures the naïve by her flattering and fateful words into a dangerous place from which they cannot escape. Those who succumb to her temptation do not do so because God has previously "cursed" them, but God's curse rests on them (they suffer the consequences) because they yielded to her seductive influence. The dire consequences of adultery are part of God's punishment in His wrath on sin.

## Prostitution

**Prov. 23:26-28** – This is the 17<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. It is an exhortation to apply what follows the prefaces of this saying; it is especially important. Our culture glamorizes sexual promiscuity, but these verses reveal its true consequences: entrapment, constraint, painful loss, and treachery. Two types of harlots are in view in vs. 27: the unmarried (Heb. zonah, "harlot" or "prostitute") and the married (nokriyah, "adulterous woman" or "wayward wife"). These immoral women are like a deep, narrow well; it may be easy to get into but once in they are trapped – confined without the ability to escape. There are always consequences on becoming involved with a person outside of marriage. Immorality seeks men and women to seduce – and many times springs on them with suddenness, like one being robbed.

**Prov. 29:3** – This proverb is a proverb of contrast. The first line of this proverb expresses its point about "wisdom" positively and generally – a son who loves wisdom is the joy of the father. The second line gives the negative contrast with a specific example of foolishness. Wealth is consumed by prostitutes; if a son associates with them they will take his money – this will not bring joy to the father since, in this day, the father was responsible for his son's debts. Immorality is ruinous to body and soul; whereas wisdom is beneficial to body and soul.

## Control of Tongue

### Wise and foolish talk

**Prov. 14:3** - The idea is that a fool's words often become the instrument by which he suffers ("a rod for his back"). The talk of a fool (one who is arrogant, hardened, and thick-headed) results in his punishment with a rod on his back. The Hebrew word translated as "rod" is rare because it means "small shoot", similar to a thin tree branch that would be used in corporal punishment. In contrast, "the words (lips) of the wise" have no such detrimental effect on them, because they speak wisely. Wise words protect a person from such punishment. Words come back to the one speaks them – what you send out is what you will receive back. What people say has a great bearing on how they are received.

**Prov. 15:2** - The contrast here is not between the quantity of words that the wise and the fool utter. The wise not only possess knowledge but their use of it makes it attractive and desirable. It is the fact that the wise man considers what he says before he says it, but the fool does not. Consequently what the wise says is "acceptable" (lit. "good") and what the fool says is "folly" (unwise). The wise person knows when to speak and when to keep quiet, but the fool speaks even when he should not. A fool gushes (bubbles forth) his folly. The many words that flow out of a fool demonstrate how foolish he is.

**Prov. 15:7** - The words of wise people "spread knowledge"—not that they are always uttering profound truths, but they focus on what is edifying; they deliver useful facts and truth. In contrast, foolish people speak much that is useless and vain, which is what occupies their hearts; their words reveal the content of their heart.

**Prov. 16:23** - What is in "the heart of a (the) wise" person affects what he or she says, and makes that person's words more influential ("increases persuasiveness"). A wise person is careful about what he says because he wants to help, not hurt. He does not blurt out whatever comes to his mind. As a result his speech promotes instruction.

**Prov. 18:6-7** - A fool's words frequently cause strife and violence because he speaks thoughtlessly from a corrupt heart. Not only do a fool's words cause trouble (vs. 6), and can lead to others' "ruin," but they also cause the fool trouble leading to his own "ruin." People who do not respect the Lord's ways often resort to lies to advance their purposes. But lies have a way of returning to roost and bringing shame, contempt, and judgment on those who tell them. Even if the fool does not lie, his words usually cause him or her trouble, because the fool does not live and speak in the sphere of God's Word, which is ultimate reality. This proverb is a dramatic description of the price the fool will have to pay for his unbridled speech: it brings destruction, it is a deadly trap. A fool's words causes trouble, escalating from strife and beating to devastation, even death.

**Prov. 19:1** - This proverb contrasts "a poor" person who has "integrity" with someone else (Prov. 28:6); it is a "better...than" proverb. In this case, the contrast is with a rich fool who speaks lies. The poor man is better off, because God rewards integrity, and the rich fool is really the poorer of the two, because God punishes deceivers. It is better to be poor and honest, morally whole, than to be a fool. "Poor" means destitute or hungry because of the loss of means, not because of laziness. The amount of their material wealth may suggest that the poor man is poor because God is punishing him, and the rich man is rich because God is blessing him. But in this case, appearances are deceiving.

**Prov. 23:15-16** - This is the 12<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings. The child's choice is as vital as the parent's discipline; the child learns from parental discipline. The affectionate "My son" adds a warm touch and removes any inference that the parent enjoys disciplining (corporal discipline) his child. This father's greatest concern was that his son should learn wisdom. Wisdom is not inborn in anyone, it is to be taught and learned to be internalized in one's heart. Parents "rejoice" in their innermost being when they observe their children making wise choices. A wise heart is revealed by speaking what is right. Innermost being is literally "kidneys", which was seen as the seat of the strongest emotions.

### **Righteous and wicked talk**

**Prov. 10:20-21** - The "tongue" and the "heart" are closely related, the latter controlling the former. The words of the righteous are uplifting; therefore they are to be valued like choice silver. Good words are scarce, precious, and valuable. Integrity, tact, kindness, and encouragement in speech is what makes speech truly sterling silver—not just the ability to string words together in artistic sentences. Sound teaching benefits many. However, fools thoughts and words have no value because they lack wisdom. The speech of the fool is vain and has little worth. They lack sound judgment and discernment; they cannot nourish themselves spiritually or physically. The righteous produce life-giving nourishment while fools cannot even keep themselves alive.

**Prov. 10:31-32** – These are proverbs of contrast. The words of wisdom that flow from "the mouth of the righteous" reflect God's revelations and perspective. The words of the righteous manifest wisdom; which is a blessing (bear fruit) to themselves and others. The words of the wicked are twisted ("perverted") and inconsistent, because they are antagonistic to God's revelation. The perverse tongue manifests the state of the person's heart; they have been ruined from the inside out and they will be cut off. The end is that those words will fail to ring true, which is compared to having one's tongue "cut out." Speech indicates character. "Fitting" (NIV) is better than "acceptable," and "perverted" means inappropriate – turned away from what is normal. Perverse' is the opposite of acceptable; it means saying things in deliberately distorted way. Lying, cursing, slandering, and misleading would be its most common forms.

**Prov. 11:11** – This proverb points to the beneficial effect that righteous people have on public life. A city is exalted because God blesses the righteousness of the people of the city; such people help keep the city sound economically and morally. Conversely, wicked people, through their words and actions, destroy a city economically and morally.

**Prov. 12:13-14** - An evil person who tells lies usually gets tripped up ("caught"), because his lies become known eventually. But a righteous person does not tell lies, so he escapes such trouble. Satan, the father of lies, will end up in the lake of fire, because God knows his lies and will punish him for them (John 8:44; Rev. 20:10). Jesus did not tell lies (John 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:22). The trouble that He experienced was not due to His righteousness but to the sinfulness of others. The righteous man speaks positively and well, because good words flow from the mouths of good people. Therefore, those words will result in good things coming back to the righteous speaker. How we speak and act will dictate how we are treated; we reap what we sow. The fact is that the work of a man's hand comes back to him. It is either a blessing or a curse, depending on the character of the person and the nature of the work. After a person accomplishes good things through his words, good, in turn, will provide a reward for him.

**Prov. 13:2** - A person's good words can produce many good things, but treacherous people prefer violence. Violence may be simply defined as the deliberate, willful effort to inflict harm on others by whatever means are available. A man of good words prospers but a man of evil words provokes violence against himself. Treacherous people will not receive good things; in fact they have no appetite for good things.

**Prov. 15:28** - Righteous people are usually more careful with their words ("ponder how to answer"), because they have a higher regard for people, for the truth, and for God than the unrighteous do. They know that untruthful and ungracious speech can do much damage. A fool gushes out evil words – quickly and with great violence. James warned about the powerful effect of words (James 3:1-12).

**Prov. 17:4** - When a person's heart is evil, he or she readily "listens to" lying, "wicked lips" and an evil, "destructive tongue." It has been said - "Birds of a feather flock together." A wicked person and a liar both feed on what their heart is presupposed to do. They are ready to listen to gossip, slander, lies, and evil schemes. They listen eagerly to malicious tongues that seek ruin and destruction. They make their situation worse because they listen to lies. In contrast, when a person's heart is godly, he or she rejects untruthful and hateful speech.

### **Appropriate speech**

**Prov. 15:23** - It is not just important to speak the truth. One must also speak appropriately in view of the time, place, and circumstances. An apt answer or good word applies as much to a fitting response to receiving instruction as it does to giving advice to another. The Hebrew word for "answer" means the most appropriate and effective thing to say in a given situation. The second line of the proverb begins with an "and", indicating parallel thoughts. The right thing said at the right time ("a timely word") can be a source of joy and happiness to many people. Saying the right thing at the right time delights not only the hearer but also the one who says it. Timely words, whether of love, encouragement, rebuke, or reconciliation, are beneficial.

**Prov. 16:21** - The "wise in heart" will use "sweetness of speech", which are "honeyed words" that indicate and reflect intelligence, judiciousness and discernment in speech. That is the thought linking the two lines of this proverb. Two things will be characteristic of such a person: he or she will rightly enjoy a reputation as a discerning person, and his or her words will persuade others. Sweet words are

helpful words that promote instruction because they make learning desirable; the words are revitalizing and encouraging. Harsh words do the opposite.

**Prov. 16:24** - Words that are pleasing to hear are like "sweet" honey to the taste buds. They also have a "healing" effect, in that they calm and settle one down— a condition that is conducive to good health. Delightful words, appropriately spoken, can encourage, soothe, or commend; they are pleasant and uplifting, even to the point of helping a person feel better physically.

**Prov. 25:11** – This proverb uses the imagery of beauty to describe well-chosen words. Gold" may refer to the color of the fruit (an orange) or, probably, to the precious metal. "Settings" suggests an appropriate background, such as an attractive basket or frame, if the picture of an apple (or orange / apricot) is in view. The point is that just the right words spoken at the right time in the right way can be as pleasing as a beautiful piece of fruit in a suitable container or as jewelry of gold set in silver – it is stunningly beautiful and valuable – perhaps because of its rarity. When a person is receptive to a wise rebuke, they are improved.

**Prov. 27:14** – Blessing a neighbor is commendable but not early in the morning. The person who hypocritically "blesses" his neighbor, for example by praising him unusually loudly at an inappropriately "early" hour, will receive a curse from other people. One's manner of blessing others will be shown to be hypocritical if he does it in excess. Therefore, one needs to be careful to do good things in the right way and at the right time—sincerely rather than hypocritically. The wrong time for the right action causes it to be received as a curse. Timing, tact, and sensitivity to the life order of others is important as friendliness incorrectly applied can become obnoxious. An old Italian saying goes something like this, "He who praises you more than he is wont to do, either has deceived you, or is about to do it."

### **Maintaining silence**

**Prov. 10:19** – Constant talking will eventually lead to sin and get a person into trouble. Transgression" means to break across. When we speak too much, we break across into an area where we should not go. This can happen in private as well as public speech (Eccles. 5:1-7; James 3:1-12). Some people transgress when they engage in inappropriate transparency. We should only share our lives with people to the degree that they have committed themselves to us. Prudent speech begins with restraint in communication; wisdom is to restrain the tongue.

**Prov. 12:23** - A prudent person is not always airing his knowledge, but a fool typically says more than he or she should (Eccles. 5:2). Unlike the fool who makes all hear his folly, the wise person is a model of constraint and humility; speaking what he knows at the appropriate time. A prudent (shrewd) person is slow to speak, is not anxious or eager to show his knowledge, and does not blurt out words thoughtlessly. "Proclaims foolishness" means "utter careless words". A president of a university once stated, "In sizing up people as potential participants....., whether as administrators or trustees, I carefully observed their patterns of speech. Obviously, what they said needed to make sense. But I watched for much more than that. Did they wait their turn? Did they step on the lines of others? Did they have a need for the last word? Did they try to top everyone else's stories? Did they sound off in their areas of incompetence? Could they say, 'I don't know'? Did they repeat themselves badly or wander aimlessly through their subject matter? Persons with these and other verbal liabilities do not usually make it to my team. They are not sensitive enough, not succinct enough, not modest enough, and not gracious enough to work well with others. They waste time, hurt feelings, and shatter morale. They, with the rest of us, need to sit longer at the wise teachers' feet and learn that restraint in

communication is essential to prudent speech." A wise person holds his tongue until the situation is right to speak; the fool does not restrain himself – and his words are pure stupidity.

**Prov. 13:3** – Being careful about what one says helps keep one out of trouble; but speaking hastily and thoughtlessly brings trouble to the one who speaks. This caution applies to inappropriate transparency as well as excessive (verbose) communication. Both can bring ruin to the speaker. By his reckless words he makes promises he cannot keep, divulges information he should not share, offends others by what he says, and misrepresents the truth before others. People learn not to depend on what he says and do not want to be around him. A wise man guards his mouth.

**Prov. 17:28** – Restraint in talking may even cause a fool to be considered wise. Not only is it "wise" to restrain one's speech, but other people will consider him wise who does so. It has been noted that this proverb is not saying that fools show wisdom in their silence, but that silence conceals their foolishness from others. When a wise person exercises restraint in talking, they will be respected even more because of their restraint.

**Prov. 18:13** – This proverb indicates the need to be teachable. When one "answers" a question too soon before they hear the whole question, they often suffer "shame" or embarrassment for answering too quickly. The best course of action is to get all the information one needs before making a decision.

**Prov. 21:23** – Being careful and wise in what one says is a way of keeping out of trouble. By saying no more than he should (guarding "his tongue"), a person can guard himself from unnecessary trouble (Prov. 11:13; 13:3; 15:1; 17:20; 18:6-8; James 3:2-12).

### **Controlled speech**

**Prov. 15:1** – A gentle answer can dispel a potentially tense situation by calming down a person's rage. Gentle is best described by the soothing oil used to treat a wound. Being conciliatory in such a situation requires forethought, patience, humility, self-control, and kindness. A harsh word (a word of pain, a word that is hurtful), by contrast, arouses anger. Wisely chosen words promote calm interactions; they instruct by example and they encourage rather than discourage. It has been said, "It is considered unmanly by many not to resent an insult, and to allow wrathful words to pass unchallenged; but it takes far more true character to meet an angry man in quietness of spirit, and to return cool, calm words for heated, hasty ones, than it does to give railing for railing, or malice for malice. The latter bespeaks a man who does not yet know how to rule his spirit; the former, one who has his personal feelings in subjection."

**Prov. 17:27** – A wise man is cautious in what he says; he thinks before he talks. The first line of the proverb recommends controlling the tongue, in contrast to inconsiderate and untimely talk; the second line recommends a calm (cool) spirit, in contrast to passionate heat. Control of speech is a prime mark of wisdom and understanding. Those who have mastered this art possess a calm (literally 'cool,' as in 'cold water') spirit, where no anger (steam or smoke) obscures their speech. They say what they mean and mean what they say. Christ was the ultimate example of this cautious restraint.

**Prov. 25:15** - This proverb advocates moderation in speech. By the forbearance of speech a ruler may be persuaded; this means that one should not speak too long or too forcefully. A gentle tongue, when it is patient, restrained, and moderate, can be very powerful. Calm and patient speech can break down insurmountable opposition. The fracturing of bones referred to in this proverb refers to the breaking

down of the deepest, most hardened resistance to an idea a person may possess. A gone here represents strong resistance to persuasion. Softly spoken words can accomplish difficult things.

### **Flattery**

**Prov. 26:28** - The "lying tongue" and the "flattering mouth" are metonyms (a figure of speech that uses the name of one object or concept for another to which it is related) for deceptive speech, which has two effects. First, it does great damage to the person spoken to, who hears the lies and gossip, and it also hurts the person spoken about. People who lie are actually hateful people who desire to harm others. Second, it eventually ruins the speaker. People who flatter do so to help achieve their selfish desires. This often brings ruin to themselves and/or their victims. The lying mouth is a gun that shoots its owner in the foot. The liar seeks the ruin of the godly, but he causes his own ruin. Interestingly, Judas Iscariot's tongue ("Hail, Rabbi," Matt. 26:49) and his mouth ("kissed Him," Matt. 26:49) led to the arrest of Jesus and the suicide of Judas.

**Prov. 28:23** - This proverb recommends loving confrontation over hypocritical flattery (cf. Prov. 19:25; 20:30; 26:28; 27:6). The emphasis here is on the consequences of these actions. Giving a needed rebuke rather than overlooking a problem or sin and flattering a person is difficult. Flattery has no value but reproof does, so it often leads to gratitude when accepted. Rebuke will gain "more favor" with a wise man than flattery.

**Prov. 29:5** - Flattering words are like a "net" laid out to trap an animal. They can captivate (charm, seduce) the person flattered, and bring him or her under the control of the flatterer. "Flatters" literally means "makes smooth". Flattery here is smooth talk that deceives because it intends to harm. However, a flatterer suffers for using flattery because he will be caught in the very net he has set for others. For example, if someone "flatters" another because of his or her physical appearance, the person flattered will be tempted to spend more time with and be more favorably inclined to the flatterer, even though that person's character may be corrupt. Therefore the wise person will beware of flatterers, and will not use this tactic himself to win friends and influence people (cf. Prov. 28:23).

### **Slander and gossip**

**Prov. 10:18** – When a person hates someone but tries not to show it, he is often forced to lie. Hatred often leads to slandering the person who is despised. The use of "and" at the beginning of the second line of this proverb shows that hatred and slander are partners. Such lying and slander born out of hatred are characteristics of a fool.

**Prov. 11:13** - Bearing tales about people and incidents can too often result in revealing "secret" information (cf. Prov. 20:19; Lev. 19:16). The person who slanders cannot be trusted with private, confidential matters. One who slanders speaks words deliberately intending to harm. It makes no sense to slander since it only creates friction and dissension. A gossip spreads slander. It is wise to keep quiet, even if you know something unpleasant about someone. Jesus advocated loving, "private" confrontation rather than gossip (Matt. 18:15). Divulging a secret is a betrayal of trust.

**Prov. 16:28** – A perverse man stirs up dissension; he is a contrary man who distorts speech, he turns things upside down, he says hurtful things, he distorts the meaning of things told him or he twists the things he observes into something that does not exist. Someone who unnecessarily spreads information that causes strife is a twisted person, not an upright person. The root word for "sows" is the same word used for releasing flaming foxes in the grain field of the Philistines. A "perverse" person is one who turns things upside down. People who pass on untrue information about other people can ruin the most

"intimate" relationships ("friends" or partners). He speaks his own lies and subverts what others say by the way he spins it. He is someone who is always complaining and always finds fault in others – but avoids open discussion and confrontation with others he talks about. Gossip and slander can have devastating results (cf. Prov. 10:18; Ps. 31:13; 1 Tim. 3:11) Gossip causes close friends to doubt and distrust each other.

**Prov. 17:9** - When we minimize the mistakes of others, rather than drawing attention to them, we provoke "love" in the heart of the person whom we protect; and perhaps even others who are onlookers. God has covered our sins with the blood of Christ, and we love Him for it (1 John 4:19). But if we "repeat" (tell) someone's failings to others, we can lose even our closest friends, including the friend who made the mistake because retelling someone's failures creates distrust and suspicion (cf. Prov. 10:12; 11:13; 25:23). When we do this, we take the part of "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10; i.e., Satan himself). "Concealing transgression" here does not mean ignoring it, but refraining from broadcasting it. Covering over an offense is an evidence of love and therefore promotes love; as it is an acknowledgement that God is in control and any vengeance is God's to perform. Silence is never more golden than when we refuse to make personal capital by gossiping about the failings of a friend.

**Prov. 18:8 (26:22)** - Gossip damages other people. Secret information about others is as appealing as delicious food is to some people, and they greedily devour it. Gossiped untruths enter the ears and lodge in the memories of those who welcome them, like candy (or "dainty morsels") that pleases the lips and soothes the stomach. Gossip, like food being digested, is assimilated into one's innermost parts where it infects one's thinking and poisons one's heart; and is remembered and retained. Gossip is highly contagious because the human heart has no resistance to it. The wise quarantine it by not repeating it and by avoiding the company of tale-bearers. This proverb is repeated verbatim in Prov. 26:22.

**Prov. 20:19** - A "slanderer" who "reveals secrets" is not careful with his words; he uses flattery to learn secrets, only to tell them to others. His lack of love reveals his lack of wisdom. Therefore one should not associate with a "gossip" (cf. Prov. 11:13; 18:8; 25:23; 1 Tim. 5:13). Because gossiping betrays a confidence, one must be careful with whom they share a secret or bring into a personal, private deliberation. Association with people who talk too much should be avoided because they will probably divulge confidential information to others. It has been stated, "He who flatters to the face will as readily scandalize behind the back. By soft, sinuous words and ways he will gain the confidence of his victim, appealing to his pride and love of approbation, and thus loosening his tongue, till he relates things far better left unsaid. When he has thus lured him on to unbarring his heart, he will go to others, and pour into their ears what he has just learned, flattering them in the same way, and giving them to suppose that they alone are the recipients of his favor. No character is more detestable."

**Prov. 26:20** - If gossips would stop gossiping, interpersonal conflicts would die out— just like when someone stops adding fuel to a fire, it goes out (cf. Prov. 10:18; 11:13, 27; 16:27-28; 18:8; 20:19). The "whisperer" uses innuendoes and half-truths, and he or she distorts and exaggerates facts. This causes distrust, which in turn creates contention and strife. A quarrel dies down without gossip to support it.

### **Hurtful talk**

**Prov. 11:12** - "Despises" means "belittles". A man of understanding remains silent rather than spreading harmful information that he might know about his neighbor. The person who gossips and/or slanders destroys others with words. It makes no sense to slander someone who lives close by since that makes for dissension and friction between neighbors. It is wise to keep quiet even when you know something unpleasant about your neighbor. God wants His people to treat their neighbors well (Matt. 22:37-40).

**Prov. 12:18** – The contrast in this proverb is between cutting words that are blurted out and thoughtful words that bring health. Thoughtless or critical speech can wound others (cf. Ps. 57:4). Wise people do not cause harm by reckless talk, but instead "bring healing" with their words. A fool's speech pattern is constantly accusing, belittling, mocking, insulting, or condemning; designed to hurt or manipulate other people. Their words are like the piercing of a sword into one's body; speaking without thinking can lead to saying something inconsiderate or making reckless vows. The words from a wise heart are just the opposite – instead of hurting others their words heal. They use words of kindness, encouragement and truth. The focus here is not on winning an argument but rather to avoid speech which creates bitterness and erects barriers between the speaker and others.

**Prov. 15:4** - "Soothing" words can heal and sustain life, like a fruit tree. But words used inappropriately can have the opposite effect; they can wound, "crush the spirit," and discourage. A gentle, rightly spoken word will often bring life and 'healing', but gentle speech can also be used to mask evil intent, which crushes the spirit, damages morale, and causes injury. Words that are deceitful ("subversive", used only once in the O.T.) and duplicitous crushes the one the words are used against. Speech has as much power to help or hurt today as it ever had. It lies so close to the center of human life that it is still the most important art for each of us to master. A tranquil tongue heals and a healing tongue is tranquil.

**Prov. 16:27** - The person in view here ("a worthless man"/"a scoundrel") is not a whistle-blower, or an individual who legitimately exposes evil, but one who without reason stirs up mischief for others (cf. Prov. 11:13; 17:9). He plots evil, meaning he puts forth a major effort to plan and execute a trap; as one who would literally dig a pit to entrap his neighbor. He is like a flamethrower that scorches people, by using incendiary words to set fire; his words burn like fire (cf. James 3:5-6). Whatever a worthless man can cook up, his intent is to use evil destructively.

**Prov. 25:23** – The theme of this proverb is cause and effect; as surely as a rain cloud brings rain, slander produces anger. The "angry countenance" belongs to the person who is the target of the backbiting (slandering) tongue. Sly words can infuriate people just as a northerly wind brings rain. A north wind is not the usual source of rain but when rain comes from the north it usually brings damaging winds and rain. So a back biting tongue brings sudden and severe damage, which results in anger. The unaware victim, when he hears the slander generated by character assassins, realizes that the benefits he was to receive from his work are suddenly ruined.

**Prov. 26:2** – A bird's aimless flight without landing is compared to a fool who utters an undeserved curse – it does not land either. If someone curses another person who does not deserve it, the "curse" will not be effective (cf. Num. 23:8). It will not "alight," i.e., attach itself to the person cursed. It was commonly believed in the O.T. that blessings and curses had objective existence—that once uttered, the word was effectual. Scriptures make it clear that the power of a blessing or a curse depends on the power of the one behind it – God, not man. A curse that is causeless is a wish by a fool for harm to come to a righteous person, but it does not land because God, who is sovereign overall, gives no heed to it – He does not enable it to come to pass. The Word of the Lord is powerful because it is the word of the Lord—He will fulfill it. Man is powerless to empower a curse. God determines whether a blessing or curse will be fulfilled.

## Quarreling

**Prov. 17:14** – Do not let an issue fester, a quarrel should be dropped before it even starts. One should not provoke another in anger in the first place. Starting an argument may seem small, even justified, but to do so is like digging a small hole in a dam ("letting out water"); it will only lead to a larger hole and greater damage. A small crack in the dam can lead to a break in the dam resulting in a large, damaging flood. This proverb counsels avoiding quarrels as little grievances can easily lead to greater conflicts. To stop a quarrel is to drop it and leave it alone.

**Prov. 17:19** – A person who loves to argue loves sin; because arguing inevitably leads to trouble (sin). Transgression is in the heart of a person who loves to quarrel. By quarreling a person demonstrates that he cares nothing about "strife," because strife will certainly descend on him for his willfulness. Likewise, by elevating himself in pride, a person demonstrates that he cares nothing about "destruction," because destruction inevitably falls on the proud. "Raising the door" does not mean opening it, but building a higher, more splendid door for the sake of impressing others. This practice was common in the ancient Near East. Just as a person "who loves transgression" thereby sets himself up for strife, so the person who loves to display his wealth is setting himself up for destruction. His door publicizes his wealth; sometimes the door was built so large and high that it could not be supported, leading to its fall. In reality, when one seeks the ruin of others, they are seeking their own destruction. Those who love to fight often push others to a breaking point, and many times those who love to fight are destroyed by their own actions and words. Such arrogance invites the Lord's destruction on that person.

**Prov. 20:3** – Avoiding strife is honorable. The prudent person who cares for his "honor" ceases striving when the strife becomes passionate, and he removes himself from it (cf. Phil. 4:5). But the person who is quick to fight shows himself or herself to be a fool (cf. Prov. 17:14). Arguments can be avoided by overlooking insults (Prov. 12:16), by dropping issues that are potentially volatile (Prov. 17:14), and by getting rid of mockers (Prov. 22:10). People who keep their tempers in check not only refuse to start quarrels even if they are baited, but they also are ready to diffuse a quarrel when someone else begins to start one.

**Prov. 22:10** - A "scoffer" is one who ridicules and opposes what is right and good (cf. Prov.18:6). They are persons so entrenched in foolish and spiteful behavior that they make sport of those who try to do right (cf. Prov. 1:22; 3:34; 9:7- 8). A scoffer can create harm among God's people, (the Church) by evil speaking, coupled with his contempt for all godly restraint, and if unchecked, will damage the entire body of Christ. Therefore, we should listen to the word of God and obey it when we read, 'Put away from among yourselves that wicked person' (1 Cor. 5:11-13). By removing a troublemaker, trouble also leaves.

**Prov. 26:21** - "Contentious" people stir up strife, just like adding fuel to a fire causes it to keep burning. Fire goes out when fuel is removed; conversely, quarreling is the fuel (kindling – "heat up") to build up and continue strife – it adds fuel to the fire.

## Lying

**Prov. 12:19** – Words spoken from a wise heart can heal a hurt. The person who speaks the truth will have long-lasting effects for good and typically endures, whereas the person who tells lies will not usually last as long. The effects of words of kindness, encouragement, and truth endure over time. Whereas a falsehood lasts for a moment until the truth is known (even though its impact may last a lifetime). A "moment" means "a blinking of the eyes".

**Prov. 12:22** – The Lord hates lying because it so directly opposes His standard of truth. Most times lying is employed by an individual for self-centered reasons. In a self-centered society, lying becomes the norm. When words can't be trusted, then society starts to fall apart. Contracts are useless, promises are vain, the judicial system becomes a farce, and all personal relationships are suspect. In the long run, the greatest threat to what we are as a people and society is our compulsive failure to tell the truth. Truthfulness is commended because it promotes integrity and justice; and promotes a good relationship with God.

**Prov. 17:20** - The connection between heart ("mind") and speech ("language/tongue") are noted in this proverb. Just as perverted thinking leads to bad results, so does corrupt talk. "Perverse" means "twisted or distorted". A person whose motives and morals are distorted will not be blessed by God - they will do evil. A deceitful heart creates a perverse tongue. This can only result in evil (trouble / calamity).

**Prov. 19:5** – A false witness is a liar. Here the context is an individual being a false witness in court, which is perjury. He who tells lies in court is one who "spews out / breathes out" lies without remorse. Their actions will not go unpunished. What one sows he or she will reap, in this life or the next (Gal. 6:7). Even if God does not punish some perjurers and liars before they die, He will nevertheless do so when they stand before Him at their judgment (Heb. 9:27). Liars will not escape the judgment of God.

**Prov. 19:22** – People long for kindness provided with integrity and faithfulness. Such kindness, when coupled with loyalty, is a virtue desired by all. God desires to see this lived out in the relationships His people have with one another. But lying is the opposite; it is the absence of kindness and loyalty. It is so despicable that poverty is preferred to that of being a liar. Liars are self-centered; they are not kind since their lives bring harm to others. A kind, loyal, poor man is more desirable as a friend than a self-centered rich man. It has been said, "A kindly, benevolent spirit appeals to all men, and charms by its unselfishness and thoughtfulness for others. But to promise large things while unable to perform them is reprehensible. It is far better to be poor and frankly admit one's inability to do what the heart might desire, than to promise largely and be at last proven untrustworthy." Character ("kindness" and honesty) is more valuable than riches in the long run. It is better to be a faithful poor man than someone who craves what he does not have and lies to get it.

**Prov. 21:6** - People who think that they can get rich by deceiving others are themselves deceived. Their plans will not work out in the long run, and rather than obtaining a better life, they will find themselves on the road to death. Wealth acquired by dishonest means will not last; it will fade away quickly like a vapor. Those who gain wealth dishonestly are described as "those who seek death". The thought is that money gained dishonestly by lying will ultimately bring that person to death or that seeking money dishonestly is like seeking and pursuing death. Wealth cannot save anyone from eternal death.

### **Power of the tongue**

**Prov. 18:20-21** - The sense here is that we will have to be content to accept the consequences of what we say. The consequences of one's words should produce satisfaction and fulfillment. "Satisfied" does not mean happy but filled; productive speech is to be satisfying. We have to live with the consequences of what we say. So we should speak carefully. The thought is that whatever a person dishes out, whether beneficial or harmful, he himself will receive what those who hear return back to him. Not only do we have to live with the consequences of what we say, but what we say can have the power of life or death. The antecedent of "it" is "tongue," and "its fruit" refers to "death and life." This proverb is a warning to the talkative. Much talk will produce death and life, so be prepared for both if you talk a lot. Many words can produce much destruction as well as much blessing. Many have died because of their

tongue; or they have caused the death of others by their tongue. Also, many have saved their life by a prudent gentle tongue, and saved the lives of others by interceding for them. Those who love to talk will receive the consequences of what they say – good or bad.

## Disharmony and Strife

### Solicitation to Evil

**Prov. 1:10-19** – This section is a warning against enticement by sinners – people who are unbelievers whose sin is continual. The warning itself appears twice (vs. 10, 15). The sinner will succeed if the believer fails to embrace wisdom. It should be noted that ‘my son’ is not to be taken in a gender exclusive since, it is a reference to all believers. The pressure of peers can be very strong – “come with us.” The answer to peer pressure is to refuse the invitations to wrong doing which comes from sinners. To consent to their pressure is the first step on the path to self-destruction. Sin must be rejected at the first temptation. This warning appeal consists of three parts: 1 - the hypothetical invitation of those who seek to ambush (attack) the innocent (vs. 11-14), 2 – the warnings to reject those invitations (vs. 10, 15), 3 – three reasons for ignoring and rejecting the invitations (vs. 15-19). The sinners promise to divide their ill-gotten gain with the young man is a false promise. There is a problem – the sinners become trapped in the very trap they are setting for others. The ill-gotten gain does not provide happiness or safety but rather it takes their lives. The lifestyle a person chooses lead to a certain destiny; therefore, a person should not try the wicked lifestyle for even a moment.

The invitation of the sinner is founded on the immorality of the conduct of the sinner (vs. 16); they seek trouble which will ultimately result in eternal death. The audaciousness of the invitation is seen in verse 17. Verse 18 identifies the self-destruction which the sinner brings upon themselves. An animal that sees a net has the sense to avoid it, but the wicked who know their lifestyle is self-destructive don't have the sense to turn away from the snare. The fact that this alarm of the dangers of bad company is the first specific warning sounded in Proverbs suggests that foolishness is not just an individual matter but a social one as well. We travel in groups—whether they are our social friends, our service club, our fellow believers or our business colleagues. What we become is determined in some significant measure by the company we keep. It is important that we avoid the beginnings of sin at the first temptation. Verse 19 articulates the point of the comparison. The Hebrew word translated "gains" (v. 19) implies a money-grabbing attitude.

**Prov. 16:29** – This is a warning to watch out for violent people, who often have "magnetic personalities," because they have the ability to enlist others, who would otherwise not be attracted, to participate in their sinful activities. A violent man is not content to sin alone; he wants to lead others to participate with him in his sinful ways. Sinners often want to lure others to join them in their sin to excuse their own sinfulness. Misbehavior loves company.

**Prov. 25:26** – A righteous man who lets his reputation be compromised is like pure water being tainted and ruined by mud, silt, or pollutants. If people or animals walk into clear, clean water, they pollute it by stirring up mud and sediment. Once a spring is contaminated it may never be pure again because of its being contaminated. Therefore, a good person ("righteous man") can pollute a good situation by allowing evil people to disturb it. When a righteous person betrays those who trust in him, it is disastrous. A righteous person who gets involved in sin contaminates their life and they find it difficult, if not impossible, to be a righteous example to others again. It is important that wise people oppose evil people to maintain their righteous example.

**Prov. 27:3** - People who have to bear the angry wrath ("provocation") of a fool will find it harder to endure than carrying a heavy stone or a load of sand. In fact, the burden is heavier than a large stone and more burdensome than sand. A wise person should not react to a fool even when the fool's actions and words are personally irritating. Therefore, a wise person should avoid the fool and his wrath.

**Prov. 28:10** - The person who deliberately "leads" someone who is "upright astray," i.e., into trouble, error, or danger—will himself experience those things (cf. Prov. 26:27). False teachers, who mislead others doctrinally, will receive great punishment for leading people away from the truth. In contrast, the blameless will be blessed with good. The opposite condition (line 3) is leading others in the true, safe way; such a person ("the blameless") "will inherit good" things from the Lord. It is an unavoidable truth that God will avenge the innocent. Jesus applied this truth to causing one of these "little ones" who believe in Him to stumble (Matt. 18:6).

### **Violence**

**Prov. 3:31-32** – At times we may desire to sin because it appears that those who sin are profiting from their actions. Sometimes good people envy the evil man because of the money he has or the pleasures he is supposedly enjoying. The evil (violent) man is one who commits crime against society because of greed and hate. But there are reasons why such envy is uncalled for; 1 – the Lord hates a devious person and, 2 – His counsel (fellowship) is with those who are upright. Specifically, an abomination is an attitude or act that is incompatible with God's nature and is intolerable to Him. God is angered by abomination and He judges it; whereas God reveals Himself and His truth (secret counsel) to the upright in heart. One must decide if he or she wants to be an enemy to God or be His intimate friend (v. 32). That is the issue in choosing the ways of the wicked or those of the upright.

**Prov. 21:7** – It is an irony that people who resort to "violence," to do away with others, often get caught up in the violence themselves, and perish. The Hebrew verb "garar" (translated "destroy" or "dragged away") is used to define the catching and dragging of fish in a net. The wicked will be caught and ultimately destroyed by the violence they bring upon other people. They will be punished because even though they know what is right they refuse to do it. This fate befalls them because they have no respect for "justice."

**Prov. 21:29** - A wicked man puts up a show of confidence, but it is a bluff. His "bold face" (to act brazenly) reflects a hard heart that holds the opinions and views of others in contempt. He becomes obstinate, maintaining what suits him without regard to others or the truth. He tries to persuade people to believe him by using deceit and lies; he uses bravado without caution. The "upright," on the other hand, does not need to pretend to be something he is not, because he is walking on the right path ("he makes his way sure"); he walks with integrity. His conduct is honest, non-hypocritical and consistent in all he does. His desire is to be sure that his actions are right.

### **Murderers**

**Prov. 28:17** - This is an interesting proverb. This proverb presents the case of a murderer who is in flight until the end of his life, whether pursued by an avenger or driven by a bad conscience. This observation applies to those who are inwardly tormented by the murder of someone, who then takes flight to escape the just punishment for the crime. The murderer who flees will find no rest until he dies. The innocent should be rescued from death but not those who are guilty of shedding innocent blood. The advice that is given in this situation is: Do not interfere; do not work to save him from his punishment for in doing so you become a partner in his sin; let justice be done. We are to let justice take its course;

we are not to give a murderer any assistance in escaping justice. A commentator wrote, "Grace cannot come into the place of justice till justice has been fully recognized. Human sympathy or empathy, shown under the false title of grace, does not stand in contrast to this justice." God's sentence on Cain was that he would be "a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth" for murdering his brother (Gen. 4:12). Cain feared that whoever found him would kill him (Gen. 4:14).

### **Causing Others Harm**

**Prov. 3:29-30** - The Book of Proverbs is the best manual you'll find on people skills, because it was given to us by the God who made us, the God who can teach us what we need to know about human relationships, whether it's marriage, the family, the neighborhood, the job, or our wider circle of friends and acquaintances. If we learn and practice God's wisdom as presented in Proverbs, we'll find ourselves improving in people skills and enjoying life much more. Verses 29 and 30 are illustrations of what it means to love one's neighbor. These verses begin with the words "Do not", which indicate these verses are truths to be followed like a command. These verses are examples of what it means to be wise. To harm (to do evil to) a neighbor means that you have violated a trust; to plot (devise) indicates that the evils is thought up and cultivated (premeditated and meditated on) before being enacted. To accuse your neighbor is to lie about your neighbor to create a problem for your neighbor or to gain an advantage for yourself; such action is sin. We could apply verse 30 by taking it as a warning against hauling someone into court on flimsy accusations. Bringing accusations without just cause is a malicious betrayal of community trust.

### **Revenge**

**Prov. 20:22** – God, not man, avenges evil. To avenge is to exact payment. No lesson is harder for us to learn than that of confiding all our affairs to the hands of the Lord, especially when we feel we have been wronged and ill-treated. We, as men, are poor judges because we experience distortions in judgment caused by the biases we have based on our experience and/or teaching. Each person makes their own decisions and is responsible for them; but paradoxically God directs the steps of each man (Prov. 20:24). This paradox demonstrates the limitations of man's discernment; if a person does not fully comprehend the pattern of his own life, how can they be competent to judge others? It is far better to leave the punishment of injustice in the Lord's hand....because, in time; He will deliver justice to all men. Paul probably had this proverb in mind when he wrote: "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. . . . 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. 12:17, 19).

**Prov. 24:28-29** – Prov. 28:28 is the 4<sup>th</sup> saying of the additional 6 sayings. Being a witness against a neighbor means testifying against him. The admonition is to keep quiet unless your testimony is necessary, and be truthful when you do speak. We are not to speak the truth needlessly against any, and never a falsehood.

28:29 is the 5<sup>th</sup> saying of the additional 6 sayings. This proverb expresses the opposite of the golden rule (cf. Prov. 20:22; Matt. 5:43-45; Rom. 12:9). We are to commit to giving an honest answer when requested, and are to refrain from false testimony or deception to get back at a person for past acts of injustice. This is a warning to not seek revenge for an injustice through perjury; we are not to seek vengeance.

### **Dissension and Strife**

**Prov. 6:16-19** – The Lord's hatred of a sinner's (a fool's) activities are described in verses 16-19. The "six....seven" pattern is used in various other proverbs and in Job. The numerical pattern—'six . . .

seven"—plays several roles: (1) it aids memory by numbering the items in a list; (2) it encourages recitation or repetition of the items by making a sequence of the text; and (3) it presents the final item as the climax and primary focus of the list. The purpose of this numerical pattern is not to give an exhaustive list but to point out or stress the final item, which is the culmination or product of the preceding items. Yet this pattern does represent totality by its use of "7", and it is a means of focusing one's attention to the issue at hand, the sinfulness of man with specific emphasis on the 7<sup>th</sup> item. This list is not exhaustive of what God hates, though it is explicit. These seven practices deal with attitude (v. 17a), thought (18a), speech (17b, 19a), action (17c, 18b), and influence (19b). The items listed – the proud look, the lying tongue, the murder, the wicked plans, the evil actions, the false witness, and the sowing of discord – are sinful activities of a fool. These sinful activities involve the entire being of the sinner – eyes, mouth, tongue, mind, hands, heart, and feet. These items and activities embody the character of a sinner – a worthless person.

**Prov. 17:1** – This is a "better...than" proverb. Harmony in one's relationships is to be desired over a bountiful supply of food or material things. The emphasis is on the value of tranquility ("quietness") as opposed to "strife." A simple meal at home is better than "feasting" with a multitude, where there is turmoil. Feasting literally means "sacrifice"; and the context is specifically focused on the peace offerings of the animals sacrificed to the Lord; such offerings would provide for a meal for the extended family and would include meat, a luxury item at the time. What counts is the mood not the menu.

**Prov. 18:18** – Casting lots was a method often used in the O.T. to reveal God's purposes in a matter; since all believed God controlled all things. This proverb does not imply that people today should cast lots to make decisions because there is no such indication or command for casting lots given in any of Jesus' teachings or in any N.T. writings. Today we have the written revelation from God (the Bible) and direct access to God through prayer, which is what we are to rely on to make decisions. In the O.T. the action of casting lots expressed a desire to obtain God's verdict, since He controls the casting of lots (Prov.16:33). This was counsel to strong people ("mighty ones"; e.g., soldiers) to settle their internal disputes ("strife") by seeking and following God's will, rather than by physical force. It is better to seek God's will, and to do it, than to "settle" disputes with fighting; and the "yes/no" decision given by lots help avoid conflict or litigation between opponents. Casting a lot can put an end to even the harshest argument.

**Prov. 18:19** – There are no relationships more difficult to restore than those with relatives or former close friends who have been offended or between which a dispute has arisen. Even though a barrier caused by an offense or dispute may exist between two people who had a close relationship ("brother"), restoration of fellowship is possible—albeit very difficult (cf. Prov.17:14). The offense may be real or it may be perceived. No disputes are so hard to straighten out as those in which those involved were once close friends or family that had true affection for one another. An estranged relationship is like barred gates; it is very hard to remove the barrier to restore the relationship. To win back a brother who has been offended is more difficult than to win back than it is to defeat a walled city. Hence great care should be taken to avoid such conflicts. Of note, the preceding proverbs advocated humility as a key factor in achieving harmony (Prov. 18:12, 13, 15, 16).

### **Meddling**

**Prov. 26:17** – One who grabs a dog by the ears can expect to get bitten. This proverb can be understood as one who steps behind a passing dog and grabs it by its ears. They are temporarily in a safe place from harm but in reality they are actually trapped because when they let go of the angry dog, it will attack him; the aggressor is bitten for his unprovoked act. The busybody who unnecessarily gets involved in

conflicts that do not concern him can be sure that he will get hurt. The passer-by (the busy body) who meddles (literally “excites himself over”) in someone else’s quarrel; they will be in harm’s way because they are interfering in a situation they know little about.

## Honesty and Justice

### Truthfulness

**Prov. 12:20** - A desire to deceive lies in the heart of those who stir up ("devise," plot) "evil," but "joy" will fill the hearts of those who promote "peace." Deceit is a characteristic of the wicked. In contrast, joy comes to the people who desire and work for others’ well-being (peace). To “devise” or “plot” comes from the Hebrew root word – “to plow”, which conveys the idea that evil plans are thought up, laid out, and executed like furrows in a field. Peace is the opposite of evil in the sense that success is the opposite of disaster.

**Prov. 13:5** - A characteristic that marks the righteous person is his or her truthfulness. The righteous person hates lying; just as God hates lying (falsehood). Lying degrades and results in mistrust and injustice. The wicked prefer to generate lies (false statements); and it brings shame and disgrace to others and themselves. The word “shame” literally means “a cause to stink”; meaning that a wicked person causes a bad odor and shame.

**Prov. 24:26** – This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> saying of the additional 6 sayings. One paraphrase of this verse is as follows: "The right word spoken seals all, like a kiss on the lips." An honest answer treats the other person involved with both respect and affection. Truthful speech is a mark of friendship; honesty demonstrates love. A just and righteous response is as desirable as the most intimate expression of friendship – the kiss. Just as a sincere kiss shows affection and is desirable, so an honest answer shows a person's concern.

**Prov. 26:18-19** - The first man (vs. 18) is a berserk, crazed warrior who is armed and dangerous (a madman). Because he is "a madman," out of his mind, he is doubly dangerous: he is armed and he is crazy. The second man (vs. 19) is a troublemaker who needlessly does damage to this neighbor with malicious intent. He justifies his behavior to escape punishment, when he is suspected or caught, by claiming that: "It was only a joke!" He is a liar and is as dangerous to society as a berserk warrior. To say “I was joking” does not reverse the damage that has been done; deceit always leaves a mark on the one who has been deceived. The serious damage done by deceit cannot be dismissed as a joke. Therefore these two people are alike, in that they both do damage wherever they go. They are unlike each other, in that the first one does his damage without malice aforethought, but the second one does so deliberately. The point of the comparison is that the trouble-maker is worse than the madman, because he hypocritically disguises his motives.

### Accurate Weights

**Prov. 11:1** – God detests dishonesty. A false balance refers to deception by altering the standard of either the scale or the weight being used to measure the quantity of an item being bought or sold. The O.T. Law instructs against such practice (Lev. 19:35-36, Deut. 25:13-16) as being a practice against what God desires. This proverb puts commercial matters (daily business) into the spiritual realm because a deceitful balance indicates a lack of honesty in the heart. In the absence of coinage in the O.T and N.T. scales were used for daily commercial transactions. Dishonest merchants of the day had two sets of

stone weights that they used; when weighing merchandise they were selling they used the lighter stones on the scale, when weighing merchandise they were buying they used the heavier stones on the scale.

**Prov. 16:11** - Commercial justice (equity; fair business practice) is important to God. Usually the king (ruler) of a country established the standards for weights and measures, but here the statement is made that the Lord is the ultimate One who establishes the standard weights and measures being used. Therefore the country's (kingdom's) standard weights and measures should be honored. To use dishonest weights and measures is to disobey God and king (ruler).

**Prov. 20:10** - Deceitful ("differing"; dishonest, diverse) "weights" (on scales) and "measures" (in containers) are only two examples of fraud and deception in all of their various forms. God hates all such perversions of justice, because He is just, and because deceitful dealing is contrary to His nature and will (cf. Prov. 16:11; 20:23). It hurts the buyer, who is defrauded, and the seller, who falls under divine judgment for his deceptive dealings. An evidence of a wicked person (a fool, a sinner) is dishonesty in daily business dealings. God hates deceptive weights and measures used in selling or buying merchandise when that deception is used to gain more money. Jesus overturned the moneychangers' tables in the temple courtyard, not only because they were doing business in a place that was intended for prayer, but also because they were cheating the people (Matt. 21:13).

**Prov. 20:23** - This proverb restates the advice already given (Prov. 11:1a; 16:11, 20:10). God detests all forms of willful distortion. A form of taking inappropriate revenge is tilting the scales in one's favor (Prov. 20:22). It would have been tempting for Israel's priests to tamper with the scales when the people came to present their annual "half shekel," since the shekel was not a coin but a weight of measure (Exod. 30:11-16).

### **Boundary Stones**

**Prov. 22:28** - This is the 4<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. A landmark was a stone pillar or pile of stones that marked the property boundaries of land. This is a warning against illegally appropriating someone else's property by not respecting historical markers. Farmers marked the boundaries of their property and individual fields with stones. Moving the stone pillars or piles of stones that established the boundaries in fields resulted in individuals losing and gaining property and wealth. If a boundary stone was moved annually only about a half-inch, in time it would add up to a sizeable land grab.

**Prov. 23:10-11** – This is the 10<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. In this proverb reason is added to the warning in the fourth saying (Prov. 22:28; cf. 22:22-23). Prov. 23:10a is identical to Prov. 22:28a; and 23:10b-11 is similar to 22:22-23. Stealing land from a neighbor by moving the boundary marker is wrong, but to take fields from children of widows is worse. Here the movement of the boundary stone is identified as an open seizure of another family's land; and to take land from the children of widows will move the hand of God to defend them. God opposes all who mistreat and steal from fatherless children. The Lord opposes all who mistreat and steal from fatherless children. He is their Defender (Redeemer) – a title that means the person responsible for meeting the needs of a troubled or defenseless close relative. God is in view rather than a human kinsman-redeemer; God is the rescuing avenger ("their Redeemer is strong") of the defenseless (Genesis 28:16; Exodus 6:6; Job 19:25; Isaiah 41—63). This is another warning against taking unfair advantage of a defenseless person.

### **Wrongfully Obtained Gains**

**Prov. 10:2** - The understanding of this proverb lies in remembering that the writer of the Proverbs had the whole course of a life in view, not just the immediate consequences of an act or condition. Ill-gotten

gains are literally treasures of wickedness – wealth obtained by harming another person. The greatest of all treasure in life is life; life gained by righteousness (faith in Christ). The righteous escape death in that they have greater true riches (as God's beneficiaries) than the wicked, simply because they are righteous, regardless of their financial condition (cf. Prov. 11:4). Monetary treasure has no value because it cannot stop death from coming. Noah is an example of a righteous man who literally escaped death by flood because of his righteousness (cf. Gen. 6:8-9).

**Prov. 13:11** - "Wealth obtained by fraud/dishonesty" would be money gotten improperly or illegally. This kind of income dwindles; it vanishes quickly and does not last. The person who receives wealth for which they have not worked for often does not understand its value and has not learned how to manage it. But money that is earned through honest work will grow. Accumulating financial resources does not require abundance but faithfulness – a continual investment will multiply with patience, self-discipline, and time. Wealth accumulated by consistent hard work tends to increase. God prefers diligent, patient, careful labor that will increase wealth over time. Haggai's auditors had been working hard, but they could not manage to hold onto what they earned; their pockets seemed to have holes in them (Hag. 1:6). The reason was that they were robbing God (Hag. 1:9). Laban cheated Jacob, and lost much of his wealth, while Jacob, on the other hand, worked hard for Laban and accumulated a fortune (Gen. 29–31).

**Prov. 20:17** – The taste of food gained dishonestly may at first seem sweet (cf. Prov. 9:7) but eventually it is as unpleasant as eating gravel. This demonstrates the contrast of the short-range pleasure of sin with its long-range consequences. Sin is usually attractive in its immediate pleasure, but it will ultimately turn on its host to yield unattractive, even tragic, consequences.

**Prov. 20:21** – An inheritance gained quickly may refer to getting one's inheritance prematurely (like the Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-20) or to gaining wealth dishonestly in an unjust way. Wealth given too soon will be used foolishly and will not be blessed. Such wealth, many times, is squandered and it often discourages initiative and work. As a result, the recipient of the wealth is not blessed later in life; many times they lose their wealth quickly by foolish spending, schemes, or self-inflicted consequences (punishment).

### **Bribery**

**Prov. 15:27** – The problem with wealth is that it is never enough; no matter how much a person gets, they want more. Those who are wealthy are many times consumed by getting more so they can obtain more. The Hebrew word translated "greedy" means "to cut or break off", suggesting that the one who is greedy is getting gain unjustly or by violence. A dishonest man who provides for his family by unjust or violent means will eventually cause his family to suffer troubles. God forbade giving and receiving "bribes" because a bribe is used to pervert justice (Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; cf. Job 8:3). The Hebrew word for bribe used here means gift. For example, the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb were bribed to give false information (Matt. 28:11-15). To take a bribe, and by doing so pervert justice, amounts to profiting "illicitly," and it usually leads to trouble for the bribe-taker eventually. The person who refuses ("hates") to participate in bribery will enjoy God's blessing of longer life and it will prevent trouble for his family.

**Prov. 17:8** - The owner of the bribe (present) is the person who gives it. This proverb is an observation, not an endorsement; it speaks from the giver's perspective. The wise person will ponder the reality of a bribe and will face it as a temptation. A bribe is an effective tool because it can work like a charm – a stone of favor is a charm that makes people treat others favorably. This proverb is not advocating

bribery, only acknowledging that money talks. It describes reality. We need to be aware of its powerful influence.

**Prov. 17:23** - The taking of "a bribe" identifies a "wicked" person for what he is, and it has the effect of perverting justice. This proverb affirms the purpose of a bribe (of money taken under the table) – a bribe can be used to pervert (bend) justice. The Hebrew word for bribe used here indicates it is money given with strings attached. It is money given secretly “from the bosom” – from within the folds of one’s cloak.

**Prov. 21:14** - While not advocating bribery, this proverb teaches that kindness toward others defuses hostility, especially kindness shown "in secret" or privately (cf. Prov. 18:16; 19:6). Giving someone a gift may help calm his anger because the gift evidences love or at least concern. Here the proverb states that a secret bribe can work to alleviate anger; it can achieve a temporary end of avoiding punishment. This does not condone bribery but states a fact. While bribery may appease the immediate situation or cause a temporary stay of punishment, no one can evade justice forever. God hates bribery.

### **False Witness**

**Prov. 12:17** – The truthful talk of a righteous person is seen in his testifying honestly. But the unrighteous person who has first-hand knowledge of the truth deliberately tells lies. The truthful witness promotes justice; while a false witness promotes injustice. The point seems to be that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Good people usually tell the "truth," but wicked people more often speak lies ("deceit"). To declare what is right is to provide the necessary information for a correct verdict.

**Prov. 14:5** - This proverb is simple and can be clearly understood. It contrasts a truthful witness with a false witness. One tells the truth, the other one lies. A person can tell the quality of testimony by considering the character of the witness. It is a statement of reality.

**Prov. 14:25** - A person who tells the truth produces good results from what he says—the best possible result being the saving of someone's life who was falsely accused. A person who lies promotes treachery by leading others astray into false conclusions. False testimony is given to deliberately deceive; it will send the innocent person to death while it will spare punishment for the guilty. A person called to be a witness must be truthful because lying will pervert justice.

**Prov. 19:9** - This proverb is almost identical to the one in Prov. 4:5. The only difference is that the proverb in 14:5 ends the statement "will not escape", and this one ends with the statement "will perish". In Prov. 14:5 we learn that the liar will not escape; and here in Prov. 19:9 we learn of his future punishment.

**Prov. 19:28** - The first line of this proverb warns against perjury, especially if motivated by contempt for the legal system. A corrupt witness deliberately distorts and mocks justice. “Corrupt” means “worthless and wicked”. “Iniquity” means that wickedness, i.e. that which is morally perverse. It is a delicious morsel for the mouth of the godless, which he eagerly devours; to practice evil is for him is a true enjoyment. A false witness associates with the wicked who gulp down evil; they pursue sin with an insatiable appetite.

**Prov. 21:28** - The "false witness" is not a reliable listener, but a true witness (the man who hears) listens attentively and critically and is able to give an accurate account. The first person has little concern for

listening carefully, but the second person listens, learns, and applies. The one who testifies falsely has chosen not to listen carefully to the matter at hand or the requirements that a witness tell the truth. Such a person will ultimately perish because it is the Lord who clearly sees and judges all things. Also, the one who listens may be the accused person who listens to a lying witness and then provides an accurate rebuttal. The one who listens – their word will last; they will have the last word. The man who listens (Isa. 50:4) is the man worth listening to.

**Prov. 25:18** - "False witness" is a destructive weapon that can severely injure another person, so we should avoid using it. "Clubs," "swords," and "arrows" all do their deadly work in various ways; similarly, lying and perjury can injure a "neighbor" in a variety of ways. Giving false witness against a neighbor can crush, divide, or pierce like a club, sword or arrow. A liar is as destructive to one's reputation as those weapons are to one's body.

### **Open-mindedness**

**Prov. 18:17** - This is another warning against making premature judgments. Get all the facts first. Do not rely on superficial research or limited information. The context here seems to be a judicial setting. This is the way things work in court. The prosecutor's "case" may seem strong ("right"), until the defense attorney has his say. To cross examine is literally "to search"; to diligently test and scrutinize to find what is hidden. Proper cross examination avoids hasty judgment and incorrect conclusions. This is true in court but also in life. It has been said, "We must remember that we have two ears, to hear both sides before we give judgment."

### **Judicial Justice**

**Prov. 17:15** – Injustice in a court case, whether acquitting the guilty or condemning the innocent, is hated by the Lord. A dishonest judge is in view in this proverb, but the principle applies to all people (cf. Isa. 5:20). Justice, in the end, is not just a matter of custom or culture, of law or regulation, of power or authority. It is an expression of God's will to be done on earth as in heaven. Failure to maintain it is to profane the Lord.

**Prov. 17:26** – This proverb is a clear statement on political, religious, and social injustice; focusing on the equally bad mistreatment of the innocent and/or righteous. It is "not good" to punish a good person ("the righteous") when he or she does not deserve it. Specifically, governments should not punish innocent people. Neither is it good to punish blameless leaders ("the noble") for being upright. It is an age-old trick for guilty people to blame the innocent in order to divert blame from themselves. Such behavior is a perversion of justice.

**Prov. 18:5** - This proverb warns against giving special favors ("partiality") to the wicked. Being partial to the wicked is an injustice. Equally bad is depriving the innocent of justice; which is not giving the righteous their just reward. The context is the administration of justice in court. This is one of many proverbs that condemn unwarranted favoritism (cf. James 2:1-4; 1 Tim. 5:21); which is often created by innuendo, gossip, and lying. To show partiality literally means "to lift the face." It may refer to a superior lifting his own face and looking into the face of the inferior to announce judgment / vindication; or it may be that the inferior has his face lifted up by the superior to receive judgment / vindication. To pervert justice literally means "to turn aside from judgment."

**Prov. 21:15** – When justice is practiced, it is a joy for those who walk in its ways and a terror to those who have perverted them. The righteous rejoice at the "exercise" (execution) of justice," because the wicked have been defeated. In contrast, the wicked are terrified when justice is done, because it is not

good for them—they do not want what they rightfully deserve: punishment. Only the righteous can welcome justice because evildoers are its victims. “Terror / destruction” means “dismay, ruin, unloving”, which will ultimately always come to the sinner (evildoer).

**Prov. 24:11-12** – This is the 25<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. The people carried away in verse 11 are evidently innocent victims or unjustly oppressed individuals. We have a responsibility to help such people. If we claim ignorance of their condition as a reason for not helping them, we need to remember that God knows the true condition of our heart and will reward us accordingly. We are responsible to rescue those who are innocent victims or unjustly oppressed. This includes warning and teaching those who are lost, on their way to eternal death and destruction. In verse 12 God is the One 'who weighs the heart.' He knows and considers every individual's inner motives and thoughts. God is concerned about the plight of the poor and the helpless. The one who embraces wisdom can never be content with only seeking the well-being of himself or his family; he will also seek justice as widely as he can. When he does, God will repay him according to his work.

**Prov. 24:23-25** – This is the 1<sup>st</sup> saying of the additional 6 sayings in Proverbs. This proverb advocates justice and straight talk. It is particularly relevant for judges of all kinds. Partiality in judging is condemned as a sin; partiality here means to treat people differently based on their status or position. The courts must render honest verdicts; convicting the guilty and acquitting the innocent. The perversion of justice results in leaders being cursed and denounced by the people they rule over. Such perversion of justice is evil and it destabilizes a society. On the other hand, exercising justice against the guilty brings rich blessing – those who judge righteously are respected and appreciated, and they stabilize society.

**Prov. 28:5** – When people disobey the Law and the Lord, their sense of right and morality are perverted. The sin of "evil people (men)" blinds them to true "justice." For them, wrong is often right. Having hardened their hearts to God's will, they become incapable—but for the grace of God—of recognizing some forms of sinful behavior as sinful. (Ironically, such people sometimes become quite judgmental about what they believe are wrong.) In contrast, those who seek the Lord and follow His will see things more realistically; they have the most accurate grasp of justice, they have a keen sense of justice. To seek the Lord can mean to consult Him for wisdom and knowledge or to pursue a relationship with Him.

**Prov. 29:26** – A person who seeks only a man (a ruler) for justice demonstrates a lack of belief that God is in control and is the one who will bring justice to bear. People may seek an audience with a ruler to gain his favor, influence, or justice...but they have no guarantee that justice will be done. True justice comes from the Lord; He will make all things right in the end. The moral is to seek the Lord's favor since He alone can and will exact justice for all men.

## Economic Well-Being

### Wealth and Poverty

**Prov. 3:9-10** – Honoring the Lord with the firstfruits of all one's crops was a way of expressing gratitude to God for His provision (Deut. 26:1-3). This is the act of acknowledging God in all one's ways. The Hebrew word for 'honor' means “heavy” or “weighty”; meaning the persons of authority command appropriate respect and should be treated accordingly. Honoring God was a way of acknowledging Him and His provision. This proverb applies the principle of acknowledging God to the financial side of life. To 'know' God in our financial 'ways' is to see that we honor Him. The tragedy with many people is not

that they don't claim to have God in their lives, but that, while they claim to have Him, they still don't trust Him. The most significant telltale symptom of this lack of trust is that they never get around to honoring the Lord with their money (their wallet or savings account). Our focus becomes making sure that we or the family has financial security; and we usually don't give in such a way as to put our security at risk....unless we really believe that God is our security. In return for honoring the Lord with the firstfruits of your labor, He promises to provide abundantly. This kind of generalization is common in Proverbs; it is not a promise it is a proverb. The general principle is true; when one is faithful to give God honor first God will bless - godliness produces gain, piety brings prosperity (Deut. 28:1-14, Matt. 6:33: components: 1- trusting God – Prov. 3:5; 2- giving the firstfruits – Ex. 22:29, 23:19; 3- being fair – Prov. 3:27-28; 4- giving generously – Prov. 11:25; 5- expressing gratitude and thankfulness of all He gives – Deut. 6:10-12). To view this as an investment formula is wrong and such an attitude and thought dishonors God and His sovereignty. Honoring God requires giving proper weight to your use of what God has provided by using it only for righteous, just, and equitable purposes....which begins with the offering of the firstfruits of everything to the Lord (Deut. 18:1-5). To give firstfruits is to declare that all that you have been given belongs to the Lord; that ownership is acknowledged by giving the earliest and best of what you reap or earn to God. It has been said, "No wise man is ever arrogant." "New wine" refers to grape juice before fermentation. It should be noted that Christians should recognize this verse as a proverb, rather than a promise, since the Lord has revealed that as Christians, we should expect persecution for our faith rather than material prosperity (2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 12:1-11).

**Prov. 10:15** – This proverb is an observation of the ways things look from an earthly perspective. Even though "wealth" is not most important, it still can result in security— and its absence can result in poverty, so people should not despise it. The point of this proverb is to invite reflection on the benefit of wealth versus the ruinous effect of poverty. Wealth can provide safety, resources, and protection against economic misfortune; poverty often leads to ruin – and it should not be embraced out of romantic thought or out of laziness. While the wealthy think they have security with their wealth...and the poor know they have little security because they do not have wealth, both should trust in the Lord as their only protection.

**Prov. 11:4** - Riches will not buy a way of escape in the day of God's wrath (cf. Prov. 10:2; Job 21:30; Ezek. 7:19; Zeph. 1:18). Wealth cannot buy long life, only righteousness can aid in that. It has been said, "Nothing that is God's can be obtained by money."

**Prov. 11:28** - This is one of many warnings about the folly of trusting in riches for happiness, security, and status (cf. Mark 10:25; 1 Tim. 6:10, 17). To trust in one's riches is the beginning of distrusting God. A bank account should never be the source of a person's trust – so to trust in money is wrong. Genuine riches are moral—not material; it is the righteous who are truly wealthy. The righteous who trust in the Lord will flourish like a green leaf on a well-watered tree.

**Prov. 13:8** - The idea in this proverb of contrast is that a rich man may lose his money by having to buy himself out of trouble; but a poor man is not the target of robbers and kidnappers because he has little money. The more money a person has the more financial obligations become his. Money creates differences. The rich person can use his wealth to deliver him, but the poor man cannot buy himself out of trouble since his means are limited. The poor man has little at risk so threats of robbery or extortion do not concern him; but the poor man may also brush off warnings and rebukes, i.e. a rebuke of laziness which keeps the poor man poor. He may not listen to the rebuke that threatens him with loss of property because he does not have the money or means to save it.

**Prov. 14:20** - This proverb is an astute observation of human behavior. "Poor" people are the targets of much hatred, for various reasons. Sometimes people hate them because they think the reason they are poor is because they refuse to, or cannot, provide for themselves. Other times people hate them because they are an embarrassment to the community. Even those closest to them, who should love and care for them, often hate them. "Neighbor" refers to any person with whom we come in contact, not just someone who may live nearby (cf. Luke 10:31). This proverb is a warning against prejudice against the poor (cf. James 2:1-13). "The rich," on the other hand, find that they have many "friends": people who profess to "love" them, but only because the rich have the means to help them. This proverb is a warning to the rich to watch out for false friends. This proverb observes that riches create differences in social life. This proverb provides a factual view of human nature but it is not an approval of this fact.

**Prov. 15:16** – This proverb is one of the "better... than" proverbs – generally comparing much of one with little of another. Generally a person would choose wealth over poverty. But when a person has poverty along with the fear of the Lord that is a preferred position to be in instead of having great wealth with turmoil and trouble. The fear of the Lord brings peace; without it life is full of turmoil and confusion. We can fear the Lord or our circumstances. If we choose to fear the Lord, we can be content with "little" else besides His fellowship. If we fear our circumstances, even "great treasure" will not make us happy. Paul learned to rejoice "with little or with much," because he found the source of his joy in his relationship with God (Phil. 4:11-12).

**Prov. 17:16** - The idea here is that it is foolish for a fool to try to buy wisdom when he does not have the sense to comprehend it, or does not intend to follow that wisdom. Why go to school and pay good money for tuition if you do not plan to put into practice what you are learning? It has been said, "It is possible to be educated and to have no heart for truth, for truth has a moral dimension which education cannot provide." This proverb expresses the irony of thinking that wisdom is a commodity that can be bought with money..... and that if a fool could buy wisdom he would not because he has no desire to follow it. A fool lacks the one resource necessary for gaining wisdom – the genuine, heartfelt desire to learn it so he could follow it.

**Prov. 18:11** - "Wealth" does provide some security, but one may falsely imagine that it is a stronger safeguard against trouble than it really is. Money cannot replace the Lord as the foundation of security. The wealthy think that their wealth can protect them from harm and trouble just like a high wall is used to protect a city from enemy forces, but the wealthy are wrong in thinking this way. Money cannot shield people from problems – it can only provide a false sense of security; it is security based on imagination. The rich fool that Jesus described unwisely thought that his wealth guaranteed his safety, but it did not (Luke 12:16-21; cf. James 1:10-11; 5:1-6).

**Prov. 18:23** - This proverb states a fact; poor people often have to ask for things ("supplications"), rich people often order others around ("answer roughly"). Money may tempt people to act like bullies (cf. James 2:6). A poor person's plea for mercy from a rich person is often met with harsh words. The arrogant treatment of those who are legitimately less fortunate is wrong. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant pictures both kinds of people that are mentioned in this proverb (Matt. 18:23-35).

**Prov. 19:4** - Wealth attracts many so-called friends, and the "friends" of the poor are likely to abandon them. The literal translation states that "wealth adds new friends while poverty alienates existing friends who grow weary of the demands of the poor." This is a warning to evaluate your friends. In both cases these are false friends.

**Prov. 19:6** – Flattering (literally – “stroke the face” – meaning to use blatantly insincere flattery; “entreat the favor”, “curry the favor”) a ruler is often done to take advantage of the ruler to gain advantage or to pervert justice. The rich, with money to “buy” friends, are subject to many offerings of friendship. A person with a reputation for being “generous” will discover that many appeals for money will come his way. Gifts are used by people to buy friendships or favors.

**Prov. 19:7** – In contrast with the rich, the poor person often cannot find friends (advisors / counselors). In fact, he is often considered a nuisance even to his family and relatives – sometimes for good reason. The point is that people avoid the poor—their relatives do, and even more, their friends do. Even their overtures of friendship are ineffective. The poor’s efforts to find a friend are often unsuccessful because people avoid them because they do not want to be burdened with their demands or problems.

**Prov. 22:2** - "The rich" and "the poor" have a common "Maker" – the Lord, therefore they have a "common" value and humanity. In God's sight, all people have equal value and dignity, so we should respect them as such (cf. Prov. 3:31-33; 14:31; 17:5, 15; 29:13; Job 34:19). This is important to know and understand, because the rich tend to oppress the poor, and the poor tend to despise the rich. A person who acquires wealth cannot completely separate themselves from the poor because both of them are creatures whose Maker is the Lord. God is therefore concerned about everyone regardless of their economic station. There is no class structure in God’s eyes.

**Prov. 22:7** - This proverb does not forbid borrowing. In Israel, the Jews borrowed from one another. The Mosaic Law permitted this, but condemned charging other Jews interest (Exod. 22:25; Deut. 23:19; 28:12, 44), though the Israelites could charge foreigners interest (Deut. 23:20). The New Testament does not forbid borrowing either, though it condemns not paying debts (Rom. 13:6-8). It may be unwise to go into debt in some situations, but it is going too far to say that the Bible condemns going into debt. It has been said, "While a certain amount of honest debt is expected in today's world, and everybody wants to achieve a good credit rating, we must be careful not to mistake presumption for faith. As the familiar adage puts it, 'When your outgo exceeds your income, then your upkeep is your downfall.'" This verse warns the borrower that he puts himself in a vulnerable position by borrowing. He becomes dependent on another or others by borrowing. An unscrupulous lender might take advantage of him. Most lenders will not take unfair advantage of someone who borrows from them, but the borrower should be aware of this possibility. This suggests that a person should be careful before taking out a large loan because in the end, he may become the “slave” to the lender. It was a common practice of Israelites selling themselves into slavery to pay off debts (Exod. 21:2-7), which is not too much different from anyone today who is working just to keep up and pay off bills.

**Prov. 23:4-5** – This is the 7<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. Rather than wearing one’s life out pursuing wealth, pursue the wisdom of God and what glorifies Him. He will bless with prosperity as He chooses. This proverb does not speak against being industrious but against consuming oneself for obtaining wealth. Discernment in this area is needed. The reason for this advice is that riches are temporary and unstable – wealth can fly away like an eagle....at any time. Diligence along with godliness and wisdom bring riches but only as God blesses. It is futile to try to get rich easily, illegally, or quickly. Therefore, people should not wear themselves out trying to get rich. It is a truth that what has been gained by many years of labor often passes away suddenly and is lost in a moment. Jesus and Paul warned of the danger of trusting in riches (cf. Luke 12:20; 1 Tim. 6:7-10).

**Prov. 27:7** - The point of this proverb is that the quantity of a person's material possessions affects his attitude toward them. Those who have much do not appreciate some things, even some things that are

valuable. On the other hand, a person with little tends to appreciate even the comparatively insignificant items that he receives or owns. Those who have much do not appreciate or value a gift as much as those who have little. This applies to money, praise, and power as well. In light of the theme of this proverb, it has been said, "Hunger is the best sauce."

**Prov. 28:6** – This is another "better.....than" proverbs. Most people would rank "integrity" of greater value than riches, because integrity has proven to be worth more in the long run than material wealth. Other people tend to trust men and women of integrity, and trust creates many opportunities, whereas they tend to distrust the rich. This proverb states that a rich man's ways can be perverse (twisted), which is evil in the sight of God. It is better to be poor, honest, and blameless (morally whole) than to be rich and wicked....destined for eternal punishment.

**Prov. 28:8** – Justice eventually overtakes injustice. In the providence and justice of God, wealth gained by charging exorbitant interest to those who borrow money will eventually be lost to someone who treats the poor fairly. This illustrates the fact that a person who amasses a fortune dishonestly often loses it eventually (cf. Jer. 17:11; James 5:1-6). The moneychangers in the temple, whom Jesus opposed, were taking advantage of the poor, as well as providing a "service" for temple worshippers when Jesus disrupted their business (John 2:13-22; cf. Matt. 21:12-13). Note: It was against the Law for a Jew to charge interest on a loan to a fellow Jew (Deut. 23:19-20). In this life or in eternity, God will punish those who exploit the poor and reward those who help them.

**Prov. 28:11** – This proverb contrasts the discerning poor with the rich who are deceived by their own self-confidence. Riches are not always possessed by the unrighteous and wisdom by the poor, but more often than not this is the case because of the "blinding" nature of wealth (Prov. 11:28, 18:23, Matt. 19:23-24). A discerning poor person can see through the pretentious façade of a conceited rich person who thinks they know it all. Sometimes "rich" people think that they are "wise" because they have accumulated much money (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17). Pride and conceit frequently accompany great wealth. Riches give a false sense of security, as well as independence from God (cf. Prov. 10:15a; 11:28a). However, a "rich" wise person, or even a "poor" wise man, can see that his wisdom is not the ultimate reason for whatever amount of wealth (or lack of wealth) he has accumulated. "Riches" are a blessing from the Lord.

**Prov. 28:20-22** - The "faithful" person in view is one who conducts his affairs in harmony with God's will. Blessings are the product of honest labor. "He who makes haste" is one who cuts ethical corners to get rich (cf. Prov. 22:1, 16; 23:4; 27:24); meaning they may use unethical or immoral means to gain wealth. The way to become richly blessed is by being faithful and trustworthy. Being eager to get rich often leads to dishonest means and devious actions. We usually suspect anyone who gets rich quick. Bribery is a get rich quick scheme. It is one reason that showing "partiality" to some people at the expense of others is not good. Even "for a crust (piece) of bread" some people will show favoritism. Once a person takes money in return for a favor, it becomes more tempting to repeat the act. Money gained so easily becomes addictive, and eventually the person taking the bribe will do so for very little. It is ironic that justice can be so easily perverted by bribery – when it is so firmly denounced. This proverb counsels us not to start down that road (cf. Prov. 18:5; 24:23). Also, a miser is motivated by greed. The "evil eye" represents the wicked purposes or intent of a person. In this case it is a selfish desire to get rich. The person with the "evil eye" is miserly and hates mankind, whereas the person with the "good eye" (Prov. 22:9) is generous and others oriented. The person with an "evil eye" fails to look into the future to when he will stand before God, if not before men. Greed leads to poverty (cf. Prov. 20:21). The first

servant in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant wanted to extract every last cent out of his fellow servant, but in the end his master ended up condemning him for his unbridled greed (Matt. 18:21-35).

### **Benevolence and Generosity**

**Prov. 3:27-28** – This proverb deals with relationships with others and it is an example of what it means to be wise. This proverb begins with “Do not”, which indicates that it is a command. The Hebrew can be literally interpreted to say, “Do not withhold good from its owners.” The situation in view in verses 27-28 is one in which someone owes money, not one in which giving is an act of charity (cf. Lev. 19:13). When you tell a person to whom you owe a debt, “I will pay you tomorrow” or “I will pray for you to have your need met”, it is dishonest when you have the ability to repay them that day. The point is: pay your debts promptly. A neighbor is anyone in need whom God brings across your path. To plot or devise literally means “to plow”, which indicates that plans are thought up to be executed – like the laying out of a field to be plowed. Neighbors should be trusted; therefore you should show them trust and not violate that trust with evil plans. “Tomorrow”, whether in Hebrew or Arabic can be a statement used as a ploy to infinitely postpone an event or obligation. Good should never be withheld from others when it is in your power to help them.

**Prov. 11:24-26** – These proverbs encourage generosity. By giving freely a person has plenty, a seeming paradox. Paradoxically, the possessions of the generous giver (“one who scatters”) typically increase, even though he gives many of them away. But the possessions of the selfish person normally decrease, even though he retains (“withholds”) them. Generosity usually brings a blessing. “Scatters” here means distributing widely, generously, perhaps brashly, and paying little attention to where the gift or giving goes. The synonymous parallelism of verse 25 commends “generous” giving. By being generous a person prospers and is in turn helped when they are in need. The stark, contrasting parallelism of verse 26 contrasts the outcomes of stinginess and generosity. If one has what others need and does not give it to them, they “will curse him.” But if he distributes it, even at a cost, others will bless him. God, the One who is the Great Giver, will not be out given. God makes sure that generosity is returned (II Cor. 9:6-7). With Him giving is an opportunity for gain. Through Him generosity is profitable, while stinginess and greed leads to an impoverished life, even poverty. Perhaps these proverbs were in the mind of Apostle John when he wrote about sharing what one has with others in need (1 John 3:17).

**Prov. 13:22** – A morally good man is blessed; and he helps his grandchildren by including them in his will. In addition to a monetary or material “inheritance,” the “inheritance” that “a good man leaves” to his grandchildren is an honorable reputation and a good example. The wise father also provides a legacy of moral discipline (Prov. 13:24), wise decisions, and integrity. It has been said that “the worst thing parents can do for their children is to leave them a lot of money because everyone should have to learn to make his own money, rather than living off what someone else made.” While a wise man’s inheritance remains with their families, the wealth of the wicked man does not. Often the wealth of the sinner does not survive over the generations. What the wicked considers his treasure often quickly passes into other hands after he dies. For example, creditors often take possession of what the wicked dead person owed them, and the wicked man's reputation soon disintegrates. In the providence of God, the wicked man’s wealth will ultimately belong to the righteous.

**Prov. 14:21** - The "neighbor" in view in line one is "poor," in view of line two. Rather than despising or belittling a poor neighbor, one should be "gracious" toward him. Doing so will bring joy to both parties. In most cases in Israel, neighbors would reside in the same village. They were not the drifters, panhandlers, and street people who knock at the door of city churches and tell us tragic and often false stories of urgent need. Neighbors would be in touch with each other daily so their needs would be well

known; being gracious resulted in ongoing good relations. The proverb contrasts showing hatred toward one's poor neighbor with giving kindness. The attitude of despising (literally – to hold in contempt, to belittle, to ridicule) is sin; whereas being kind to the needy brings blessing from the Lord. We should regard every human being, especially since God has placed us near to him, as a being having the same Creator, created in the image of God; and we should consider our self as being under an obligation to love him.

**Prov. 18:16** - "Gift" is not necessarily a "bribe." The Hebrew word here (*mattan*, cf. Prov. 15:27; 21:14) is not the same as the one translated "bribe" in Prov. 17:8 and 12. It can be an innocent courtesy. It means "what a person gives to someone else." What is being addressed are acts of courtesy and thoughtfulness that pay honor to important persons and mark the giver as a person worthy of being associated with. Yet, *mattan* can describe a gift given for selfish reasons to gain an advantage over others. While this is not necessarily a bribe that perverts a judgment, it can be used to influence the formation of opinion. Therefore, it can be open to abuse, as the 'lobbying' in current affairs in almost every modern country demonstrates. Also, it is legitimate to apply this proverb to one's personal abilities (gifts) that he or she uses in the service of others as well as to material presents. Through liberal gift giving, one usually does not lose but gains; and at times it helps an individual over the challenges of difficult circumstances, gains for him affection, and helps him to improve his lot in life. This proverb is not approving or encouraging the use of gifts to gain influence, but it is stating that gifts influence when given.

**Prov. 19:17** – Being kind to the poor (feeble, weak, helpless) refers to concern that goes beyond pity. It refers to giving a helping hand in meeting a need. It is offensive to God when the legitimately poor person is purposely neglected; because He is their Maker as well. The lack of benevolence and kindness being given to the poor is condemned (Prov. 14:31, 21:13, 22:16, 28:3, 27). Giving to the poor is like lending to the Lord as it is an investment God will reward. God blesses genuine generosity with His generosity. Money and goods given with loving concern for those in distress are not gone forever. God takes note of every gift given and makes Himself responsible to see that all that is given shall be repaid; and the repayment is usually greater than the gift given – we are blessed beyond the value of the original gift (Prov. 28:27, II Cor. 9:6-8). The widow of Zarephath was richly rewarded for ministering to Elijah in his distress, with an unailing cruse of oil and an unending supply of meal (1 Kings 17:10-16).

**Prov. 21:13** - The person who heartlessly disregards the needs of the genuinely poor individual (feeble, weak, helpless) will find himself without help one day ("will also cry himself and not be answered") when they are in need. This is because the Lord is the Defender of the poor, and He takes notice of what is done to, done for, and not done for them (cf. Prov.19:17). God pays back what is given in kind; an unanswered cry for help will be rewarded with an unanswered cry for help (cf. James 2:13). This is known as "talionic judgment." God does not answer cries for help if they are insincere.

**Prov. 22:9** - This proverb sets forth both the consequence and the cause of generosity. A generous man is literally "the good of eye"; it is literally the opposite of the evil eye of the greedy person. They see the needs of the poor and are willing to give help; they are genuine, looking to help, not take advantage. The consequence of being "generous" is divine blessing from God (cf. Prov. 19:17; 2 Cor. 9:6). The cause is the desire to give some of what one has to those in need (cf. Luke 14:13). The principle of reaping and sowing is demonstrated here.

**Prov. 25:14** - As a cold drink on a hot day refreshes, so a windy, cloudy sky that indicates rain for a dry land but does not deliver it, disappoints. This image illustrates the person who brags that he will give a

gift, but has no intention to fulfill his stated promise. Similarly, people who promise that they will give but never keep that promise are frustrating to those to whom the promise was made. We should never promise something if we know that we cannot or will not follow through. Also, such is the person who proudly claims to have certain abilities ("gifts"), but fails to show them when called upon to do so, is a person who disappoints. Jude used this figure—of "clouds without [that fail to produce] rain"—to describe false teachers, who deliver a lot of wind but no refreshing revelation (Jude 11-13; cf. 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1).

**Prov. 28:27** - Those who "give to the poor" will not lack what they need ("not want"), which is God's blessing. This is because God has promised blessings to those who give to the poor (destitute, hungry). In other words, the giver will not have to "do without" because God will make sure he lacks nothing; generosity is rewarded. Security comes from God, paradoxically, through generosity. Those who give will receive the blessing of other people and material benefits that God promised generous people. We may legitimately make this statement because the contrast given is with curses in the second statement (cf. Prov. 28:8; 11:25; 14:21; 21:13). "To hide the eyes means to refuse to see poverty. The person who ignores the needs of the poor will receive curses from them....and God does not bless those who ignore the legitimate needs of the poor.

### **Oppression of the Poor**

**Prov. 13:23** - The Lord provides "abundant food" in the uncultivated farmland of the poor, but sometimes they cannot obtain it because tyrants sweep it away through "injustice." Though a poor man may have opportunity, the more powerful may snatch it from him. A poor man, by his labor, may produce enough food to feed his family, but without protection from injustice he may lose it. The contrast here is between the poor but industrious man, who will be rewarded for his labor, and the rich man whose efforts bring about injustice – taking away the provisions earned by the poor. The causes of poverty are complex; it can be caused by oppression and injustice (Prov. 22:16, 28:3, 15), or by laziness (Prov. 6:9-11, 28:19), or by God's punishment for wickedness (Prov. 10:2-3, 13:25), or by God's providence (Prov. 22:2). Despite the cause, this climactic (or integral) proverb is a word of warning: opportunity by itself does not guarantee success, even when taken advantage of diligently.

**Prov. 14:31** – It offends God when one neglects the poor; ones who are a part of His creation. To take advantage of the poor is sinning against God, since God is the Creator of all men. It has been said, "So seriously does biblical faith take the doctrine of God's image in man as a gift of divine creation that acts done to a human being are as weighty as though done to God. Scarcely any idea has more power than this to change life our view of others." The wise righteous person is kind to the poor because this honors God. To ignore those who have legitimate need is to offend God who made both rich and poor. He who honors God will view the poor correctly, with the correct vision, and will value the privilege of ministering to them by which they show them the kindness of God.

**Prov. 15:15** - When afflictions come, we have a "bad day." But a "cheerful heart" can overcome bad feelings. If one's "heart" is right, he can rejoice in spite of adversity. The joyous inward condition of the wise man's heart is described as a "perpetual feast." Real happiness is always determined by the state of a man's heart. The contrast is of the oppressed (afflicted) person who is miserable with those who are cheerful, enjoying life in spite of adverse circumstances. Even if a person is oppressed and miserable, if he has a cheerful heart he can experience a virtual continual feast. Remember Paul, who rejoiced while in prison (Phil. 3:8-17).

**Prov. 16:8** – This is another “better...than” proverb. It is better to live an upright life and have few possessions ("little"), than to be corrupt and have "great wealth (income)." The reason is that what really matters and satisfies in life is God's approval and fellowship, not the abundance of one's possessions (Luke 12:15). Righteous living, even if it means having little, is better than having much income that was gained dishonestly.

**Prov. 22:16** - This proverb warns against two ways of making more money, neither of which pays in the long run. The first is to squeeze as much out of the poor as possible. The second is to bribe the rich; the one who gives to the rich usually has an ulterior motive. Giving them preferential treatment so they would "return the favor," is one example. The gifts given to the rich to secure their favor are not given out of love for them but to gain advantage (cf. Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 28:3). Ironically, both actions will ultimately result in poverty, not wealth.

**Prov. 22:22-23** – This is the 1<sup>st</sup> saying of 30 sayings in Proverbs. These verses give a strong warning against taking advantage of the poor. The poor are easy prey for wicked people who can get their way in court by bribery and false accusation. "The gate" of a town was the place where judgment was rendered. The point of this first saying is that God will avenge the poor on those who oppress them (cf. Exod. 23:6). The Lord presents Himself as the defense attorney of "the poor," who have not received justice on earth. The Lord champions the cause of the poor and justly takes from those who unjustly take from the poor (the feeble, weak, and helpless). God is the ultimate defense attorney...and He is the judge – the accuser cannot prevail.

**Prov. 29:7** - One of the marks of a "righteous" person is that he cares about "the rights" (the legal position and decision) of those who tend to be abused by others: "the poor," the powerless, and the disenfranchised. Righteous people want to see justice practiced. In this righteous shares God's heart (cf. Prov. 14:21; 24:12). "The wicked do not understand" such concern, because their interest is their own welfare and prosperity; they have little time for those who need help and any profession of concern for the poor usually has an ulterior motive. One's relationship with God is demonstrated by one's attitude toward the poor (the feeble, weak, and helpless).

**Prov. 29:13** - "The poor man" represents the oppressed, and "the oppressor" represents the rich. They are opposites in this regard but both owe God their life, even their physical eyesight, and all the common blessings He bestows on everyone (cf. Prov. 22:2). God allows both of them to see each other.....as all men are created by God and equal before God. The grace of God is the great leveler of humanity. Therefore one should not "think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). A similar principle is that the Lord "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). The Lord determines the outcomes of both men.

### **Industriousness**

**Prov. 6:6-8** – The sluggard is addressed in this proverb. The Hebrew word for sluggard only occurs in Proverbs and it is used 14 times. The sluggard is a lazy, irresponsible, shiftless person who lacks self-control. The sluggard is being challenged to learn from the ant and be wise. They are being instructed to observe the purpose driven labor of the ant. Ants are known from their industrious labor and unparalleled initiative and diligence to a task. They do not have a commander to direct them, an overseer to inspect their work, and a ruler to lead them or prod them on. Yet they diligently work to prepare for their future needs; gathering and storing while the weather is warm and the earth is producing food....and doing so before winter sets in. The ant serves as a stinging rebuke to the sluggard. The virtue of wisdom in view here is being busy to anticipate and meet future needs – understanding

the need and taking the initiative to meet that need through timely action. Those who act only when commanded do not possess wisdom. The sluggard is the example of a fool, the opposite of a prudent person. A prudent person is one who is capable of exercising sound judgment in practical matters. They are cautious and discreet in conduct, circumspect and sensible. We often describe a prudent person by saying that he or she has common sense. A prudent person can foresee the consequences of possible actions and behaves accordingly. A godly (wise) person can be prudent because God's revelation helps them see the usual consequences of their actions before they commit them. It has been stated, "Improvvidence (lack of foresight, neglect to provide for future needs) is not faith; it is the grossest presumption to act the part of the sluggard and then to expect divine provision in the hour of need. In this, as in all else, sowing follows reaping." Hard work ought to be the normal routine of us who serve Christ.

**Prov. 6:9-11** - Verses 9-11 warn against laziness. The lazy man has an inordinate devotion to sleep rather than work; it is a demonstration of a lack of initiative. "How long" generally implies that something bad has gone on for too long. The sluggard may rationalize his late rising and frequent naps as "just a little", but they destroy productivity. This proverb cautions against always finding an excuse to relax and never the impetus to work. The lazy man always learns too late that need and poverty have overtaken him, just like a victim being surprised and overpowered by a robber. With his time squandered, the lazy person cannot rectify his situation and has little to no means to meet his needs; therefore the sluggard will meet a ruinous end. A "vagabond/prowler" is a "highwayman," namely, a robber; his attack is usually sudden, unexpected and devastating.

**Prov. 10:4-5** - These proverbs show how one person succeeds and another fails. They contrast the sluggard ("negligent") and the "diligent" (cf. Prov. 12:24, 27; 19:15). If a person refuses to work, he will be poor whereas a hard worker will eventually be rewarded. The diligent (wise, righteous) person works and the reward is stability (rich). There is an indication in Proverbs that it is the Lord who instills diligence in the righteous....and this His means to provide for their physical needs. There reference to the necessary timing in agriculture can be applied to all work – we need to take hold of opportunity when it is presented. If a person does not take an opportunity when it is timely presented, it may not come again for some time, if ever. When a person takes opportunity when it is presented, it usually will bring success. Hard work and prudence are rewarded. The Apostle Paul is an example of one who redeemed the time that he had and put it to good use (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58), while Demas quit too soon (2 Tim. 4:10).

**Prov. 10:26** - This is a parabolic (or emblematic) proverb. A sluggard (lazy man) is similar to "vinegar to the teeth" and "smoke to the eyes." Acidic vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and smoke inflames the eyes. Likewise, sending someone to do a job or run an errand that has little will for it will prove exceedingly irritating to the one who sent him. A sluggard (shiftless, lazy person) is irritating to the prudent person because they can never be relied upon; he is aggravating because he fails to carry out his responsibilities. A commentator noted, "Our dependence on others in societies where division of labor is a way of life proves most frustrating when those we count on for an important assignment—plumbers, electricians, administrative assistants, or stockbrokers—fail to do their work on schedule." In Jesus' parable of the minas, the slave who did nothing with what was entrusted to him is a good example of what this parable pictures (Luke 19:20-26).

**Prov. 12:11** - Industriousness pays off; diligent work creates positive results, i.e. diligent farming results in food being produced. But the frantic pursuit of things that are empty or worthless yields nothing. The individual who follows worthless pursuits lacks common sense and will probably end up living in

poverty. To neglect one's work while thinking about others things shows a lack of understanding – it is foolishness. The opposite of productive work is pursuit of fantasies such as get-rich-quick-schemes or gambling.

**Prov. 12:24** – Diligence and laziness are contrasted here. "Diligent" workers will normally be promoted to positions of greater power and authority, but lazy man will be demoted to positions of less responsibility ("put to forced labor," or be given less enjoyable work). Unlike the diligent that have charge over their work or their situation, the lazy are eventually forced to go to work for the diligent in order to survive. Ironically, laziness may lead the lazy person into servant hood (forced labor), in which he has to work harder than if he had been diligent to begin with.

**Prov. 12:27** - The "lazy man" does not finish his projects because he lacks commitment to make something of his opportunities, i.e., he does not roast and eat the game he has hunted. He throws away his chances for something better by quitting too soon; he does not put in the time. It also suggests that a lazy person does not value what he owns or the opportunities that come his way; he does not finish what he has started. However, the person who has mastered diligence and finishes his task has a precious tool at his disposal, namely: perseverance. The diligent man takes care of what God has given to him. The servant who hid his talent in the ground illustrates the first line (Matt. 25:25).

**Prov. 13:4** - The "soul" stands for the whole person (cf. Matt. 16:24-27; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 9:56; Rom. 13:1; 1 Thess. 5:23; James 1:21; 5:20). The lazy man wishes and dreams of prosperity and abundance, but his desire remains unsatisfied, since the object is not gained but only lost by doing nothing. This "desire" is a deep-seated craving, but this desire/craving is not satisfied because he is not willing to work. In contrast, the industrious gain, and that richly, what they desire through diligent hard work. Diligence enables a person to be satisfied.

**Prov. 14:4** – To achieve successful results; time, money, and hard work must be invested. A farmer might think that a "clean manger" is more desirable than a dirty one but that has a direct impact on his farming operation. If he decides to farm without oxen, he would keep his manger clean. But this would be a mistake because meaningful sacrifices and investments must be made to attain greater benefits and success. In this case, having productive oxen far outweighs having a clean manger. When one invests time, money, and labor into sources of income, as illustrated by the oxen, the benefits exceed the cost and inconvenience. Even though not all labor invested is pleasant – it is necessary for achieving good results. "Clean" can be translated as "empty". You do not have to worry about cleaning up after oxen if you don't have any – but then you will not have anything to harvest either. The benefits of investment can outweigh the cost and inconvenience involved. Spiritually there is an application for the church to consider in this proverb. It has been said, "It is the case for sorrow to notice the readiness with which churches sometimes resort to getting rid of troublesome believers. When they do this they cut off much increase and blessing which might have been realized had patience and grace been exercised."

**Prov. 14:23** - Actually working on a project will produce a "profit," but only talking about it will yield no profit, only "poverty." This is a rebuke against people who are always talking and planning but never doing – never accomplishing anything. People who talk about work but never work are the ones who become poor. Dreamers and individuals with great ideas are a dime a dozen, but it is only those who follow through and go to work that are successful; they are priceless. Hard work is labor that is physically and/or emotionally demanding and draining.

**Prov. 15:19** - A sluggard's pathway through life is beset with many difficulties, dangers, and painful experiences ("a hedge of thorns"); and he is too lazy to remove them. "Thorns in the path" depict the problems and obstructions (obstacles) that keep a person from getting what he wants. But, in comparison, the pathway of the upright is unhindered and unencumbered by these obstacles ("a highway"). The upright are diligent and capable of overcoming the problems they encounter. It has been said, "If God commands, I have simply to obey. He makes Himself responsible to clear the obstacles from my path, or to give me the ability to overcome them."

**Prov. 16:26** - As the desire for food motivates one to work, so all of one's desires and appetites propel him to productive activity. One might think that "hunger," which is uncomfortable, is a bad thing, but really it has a beneficial result. It forces people to work and keeps them from idleness. Therefore one should not despise what is distasteful (like hunger), because it can lead on to what is good and profitable; a man's appetite forces a man to work. A commentator stated, "It is because of his desire to be satisfied with the fruits of his toil that the laborer pursues his occupation. His appetite craves it of him, and so he presses on in his service. This is as God ordained when the fall had shut man out of the garden of delight, and in the sweat of his face he was commanded to eat his bread. Wealth gotten without labor is generally a very dangerous acquisition." Labor is hard but necessary, even for the lazy man.

**Prov. 18:9** - The negligent person is as destructive, in his own way, as the deliberately destructive person (the master, skilled in destruction). The latter wastes his goods, the former wastes his time; both come to poverty. A person who does his work poorly or carelessly is the same as one who destroys a work or project. A poor or unfinished job differs little from a project or work effort that is destroyed by someone – both are worthless and of no value. To leave work half-done or poorly done is the same as destroying it. To be truly lazy is to sink down, relax, and let go to the point of being slack, feeble, and ineffective.

**Prov. 19:15** - This proverb is one of many that warns against "laziness" (Prov. 6:6, 9-11; 10:26; 13:4; 20:4; 24:33-34; 26:16; Cf. Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). Laziness is evil because it involves squandering a precious gift from God of which we are stewards: time. The lazy person is always too tired to work. Then his laziness becomes more and more severe until he is in dire poverty. "Deep sleep" refers to heavy sleep where one is oblivious to everything that is occurring round about him. "Idle/shiftless" literally means "lax" – being oblivious to one's needs. Such laziness and laxness is dangerous because it leads to worse things: idleness generally, and hunger eventually.

**Prov. 19:24 (26:15)** - This humorous and ironic picture is of a person so lazy that he cannot even lift his food from his plate to his mouth. The sluggard is so lazy that he will not even do the work necessary to move his food from his dinner plate to his mouth. The point is that a lazy person will bear the consequences of his own laziness. Perhaps there is a connection, between at first being unwilling to feed oneself (19:24), and later being unable to feed oneself (26:15). Laziness is irrational and it leads to poverty and hunger. Paul instructed that if any Christian refused to work, he should not eat (2 Thess. 3:10). This warning is applicable to those who are too lazy to finish the projects they begin.

**Prov. 20:4** – In Israel, the grain harvest began after Passover (around April) and the plowing / sowing of the crop began in the fall after the Feast of Tabernacles (around November). So the lazy man avoids working during the fall/winter rainy season because it is hard labor, but the result is no harvest since nothing was planted. "He looks" indicates that he comes to his fields to inquire about the harvest coming off them – there is none because they were never planted. One commentator wrote, "Ready

upon any pretext to abandon his labor, the sluggard neglects the cultivation of his fields when others are at work. Therefore when harvest-time arrives, his fields are bare, and he is found begging of (as he would put it) his more fortunate neighbors. The fact is, fortune has nothing to do with it. Their diligence has brought its own reward and his slothfulness its natural consequence." Without advance planning, initiative and work, there are few-to-no results; a lack of work leads to a lack of benefits. This is another proverb that demonstrates the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7).

**Prov. 20:13** - This is another warning against laziness (cf. Prov. 20:4; 6:9-10; 19:15; 24:33-34; Eph. 5:15-16). Laziness leads to poverty and being deprived of all your possessions, but diligence, referred to here as "staying awake" (open your eyes), leads to having your needs met (abundance of bread).

**Prov. 21:5** – The contrast here is between careful, "diligent" planning and "hasty" ill considered action. A person who diligently and carefully plans his work – then works his plan, is usually successful and profitable. The person, who is careless and makes hasty decisions without thinking them through, will usually fail and seize poverty. The "diligent" approach normally results in advantage for the person or persons involved; whereas the "hasty" approach typically leads to poverty because he lacks forethought and diligence. "Haste makes waste" is common modern day equivalent of this proverb.

**Prov. 21:17** - It was customary at feasts in these days in Israel for the participants to drink "wine" and to pour "oil" and other fragrances on people's heads and clothes (cf. Prov. 27:9; Amos 6:6). Loving pleasure and luxurious living can lead to poverty (deficient, destitute, in need). The proverb's point is: be moderate in your celebrations, because excess will drain away your money. This is a warning against living only for pleasure and self. Wine and oil are blessings from God, but when God's blessings are pursued without God they become vices. The Prodigal Son lost his inheritance because he celebrated excessively (Luke 15:11-30).

**Prov. 21:25-26** - The "desire" of the slothful ("sluggard") is idleness, and refusing to work will lead him to ruin. Even though he has strong desires for things, he refuses to exert himself. Laziness leads to constant greed and craving (covetousness). The righteous person, on the other hand, not only works but gives to others part of what he earns. He is a productive and beneficent individual; he is a generous giver (cf. Prov. 12:27; 13:4; 19:24; 20:4). The sin of covetousness marks the lazy man, whereas the virtue of benevolence marks the righteous man.

**Prov. 22:29** – This is the 5<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. The quality of a person's work, not his bribes or flattery, will ultimately determine how his career progresses. Therefore a person should seek to improve his or her skills and not rely on deception. "Skilled" means experienced, learned, efficient, and accurate; and it can also mean "quick" or "prompt". Being diligent and prompt in one's work is the best way to influence an employer or customer. Being diligent, skilled, and prompt often results in promotion – even winning the respect (or commission) of kings. The implied exhortation is that one should never be careless about the quality of one's work and the timeliness of the work performed. It has been said, "'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord,' is the canon for the ordering of the believer's daily service" (Rom. 12:11).

**Prov. 24:27** – This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> saying of the additional 6 sayings in Proverbs. This proverb is about priorities. The farmer must pay more attention to the cultivation of his fields (i.e., the source of his livelihood) than to his personal comfort. First, secure by diligent planning and work a good living, then build. In other words, build a financial base so all the necessities and appropriate contingencies are secure, then move forward, i.e. move from the tent (which is acceptable) then to a house (which is

desirable). Everyone should put a well-ordered life, including a measure of financial security, ahead of buying a home, getting married and starting a family. In a broader application, we should keep first things first (cf. Luke 14:28-32). It is important to have one's priorities straight.

**Prov. 24:30-34** - This is the 6<sup>th</sup> saying of the additional 6 sayings in Proverbs. This lengthy proverb is an ode. This ode illustrates how proverbs are supposed to function: Upon walking by a field, vineyard, ground, and stone wall that have fallen into ruin through laziness, the observer takes it to heart and rightly recognizes that the wise instruction he has heard about the sluggard applies to the situation he is observing. Whatever a slacker manages comes to ruin because of his laziness. Both the observer and reader are encouraged to believe that sustained and diligent labor is a part of the path of wisdom. "Poverty will come as a robber," in that it will overtake the sluggard surprisingly and suddenly. Continued laziness typically leads to poverty (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:10). The parallel statements about the man being lazy and devoid of understanding (one lacking sense) makes it clear that the laziness in view was not the result of a weak back but a weak will.

**Prov. 26:14** - Rather than getting out of bed and going to work, the sluggard uses his energy uselessly: turning from side to side on his bed or couch. Doors in Solomon's time rotated on pivots that rested in sockets rather than on hinges. A door at least fulfills its function, by opening and closing, but the sluggard does not, because he or she stays in bed, tossing from side to side, going nowhere. The proverb implies that the sluggard will not exert the energy needed to even get up.

**Prov. 27:18** - The faithful servant who tends to his responsibility ("cares for his master") will one day benefit from his labor. Nurturing and cultivating a fig tree are necessary if a farmer is to harvest a good crop of figs. Likewise, a servant who attends to the needs of his master will be honored; meaning that working well at one's job will bring favorable results. A person who patiently serves his employer with integrity, God will see to it that he is properly rewarded. Paul was confident that the Lord would honor him one day for his faithful labor (2 Tim. 4:8).

**Prov. 27:23-27** – This is a treatise on life, expressed in poetic form. This poem contrasts the farmer's labor and God's provision with the fleeting nature of uncertain riches and power. In the time that this proverb was written, all land reverted back to the original owners every 50 years, so animal flocks represented stable wealth. Only by care and diligence could these flocks be perpetuated and managed profitably. God's sovereign providence impacts the farmer's effort to properly use the blessings provided by the land. All persons in positions of leadership should be good stewards of their human and material resources.

27:23 - Throughout this treatise/poem we see the application that the family manager needs to know what he owns, and what condition his possessions are in, to lead wisely. Moreover, he needs to care for what he owns in order to preserve his livelihood/income. A farmer should care for his flocks and herds because they are a good long-term investment. Flocks and herds have the capability to multiply through their offspring, but money is gone when it is spent.

27:24 - "Riches" and "crown," the symbols of prosperity, are transitory, perishable, and they depreciate, rather than maintaining themselves or appreciating. With wisdom they can be preserved and increased, but by themselves they tend to diminish. The history of nations shows that crowns do not last forever; being a king does not last forever.

27:25 - Therefore one should take good care of one's sources of income, in this case "herbs." He must harvest and store the good grass and other crops at the proper time. In other words, he must work hard to ensure his future. Of course, the Lord is responsible for providing these resources, but human responsibility plays an important part as well.

27:26 - When the farmer is faithful (God the divine "Farmer" always is), there will be sufficient lambs so that clothes for the family can be made from their wool. And there will be enough goats so that they can be sold for income enough to pay the landlord or even buy more land. It should be noted that hay and grass provide food for the livestock, which in turn supply the farmer's needs for clothing (lamb's wool) and money (selling goats).

27:27 - There will also be an abundance of "goats' milk" to drink and animals to slaughter for meat. The farmer's household and servants will not go hungry. It is important to care for one's resources. This requires diligent effort, but the reward will be ample provision—with the divine blessing. Though a person may think his wealth will last forever, it will not. Therefore, we should be diligent workers and wise stewards of God's provision, always keeping careful account of what God has given to us. This is the point of this treatise / poem.

**Prov. 28:19** - Plodding (plowing) yields plenty, but fiddling around - indolence ("empty pursuits") produces "poverty." The contrast is between the person who concentrates on his work, and the one who allows himself to become distracted—and spends his time and energy on non-productive activities. Recreation and diversion are necessary, but too much of them can lead to ruin. Proverbs like this do not unconditionally promise material blessings to those who work hard, but they highlight the general truth that prosperity is often the result of one's willingness to be diligent and industrious. This willingness is a sign of wisdom. Here, one who works hard will have plenty to eat. Whereas the unwise man who chases fantasies (empty pursuits) will not get their work done and they will receive poverty for their efforts.

### **Conservation**

**Prov. 21:20** - This proverb advocates anticipating a time of future material need and making advance preparation to get through it. The wise person does not live only for the present. A wise person stores up food and resources for future use in time of need, but a foolish person is short sighted and does not plan for the future. The Bible condemns hoarding money, and relying on it instead of God for one's ultimate security, but it does not condemn saving for the future. When a person spends his money for the pleasures of the present time, he does not save for the future. He consumes all his resources and has nothing to survive on when those resources are gone. The person who spends all that he has, or gives it all away, is not wise. Paul reminded the Corinthians: "Children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (2 Cor. 12:14). The wise person accumulates wealth but the foolish person spends his money as fast as it is produced or obtained.

### **Surety for Another**

**Prov. 6:1-5** - Solomon instructs his son about the seriousness of assuming liability for the debts of others. The advice in these proverbs provides a good example of what prudence is. A prudent person is one who is capable of exercising sound judgment in practical matters. He or she is cautious and discreet in conduct, is circumspect, and is sensible. We often describe a prudent person by saying that he or she has common sense. A prudent person can foresee the consequences of possible actions and behaves accordingly. A godly (wise) person can be prudent because God's revelation helps us see the usual consequences of our actions before we commit them. "Surety" means "security" in the sense of taking

on another person's obligations as one's own, as when a person co-signs a note to pay another person's loan, for example. The foolishness here is making one's self responsible for someone else's debts by pledging to pay the debt if that person defaults. "Neighbor/friend" and "stranger" together mean anyone; these two kinds of people are not the only ones in view. This is a figure of speech called a *merism* in which two extremes represent the whole. Solomon strongly counsels to avoid this type of obligation. Anyone who becomes responsible for someone else's debt can be trapped because he has yielded control over what God has given to him as a steward; one should not be in a position where his labor, wealth, or goods could be squandered by someone else's action (i.e. defaulting on paying a loan back). If one finds himself in it already he should do everything he can to get himself out of it before he discovers that he is in even worse trouble. "Humble" means "to crush or tread one's self down, to demean"; and "plea" suggests being "boisterous". One should free one's self from a risky debt agreement, even if doing so demands great humility and obnoxious pleading. Nothing should stand in the way, not even 1 night – a person snared by a bad debt obligation should frantically fight to set themselves free from it. Solomon did not command his son never to become surety for his neighbor; he told him what to do if he had already done this so he could escape the consequences that typically follow such an act. While there is precedent for cosigning a loan, it is far better to give to those in need (Prov. 19:17) or to lend without interest (Prov. 28:8). There is no implication that cosigning for someone is morally wrong but this it is generally unwise. The reader is not disobeying God if he or she becomes surety for a stranger, but this proverb warns of the possible consequences and gives advice about how to avoid them.

**Prov. 11:15** - We have heard this advice before (cf. Prov. 6:1-5). Here Solomon expressed the truth concisely. It is very dangerous to take another's debts on oneself. The contrast is insecurity and danger to discernment and security. While the one who puts up his own possessions and wealth to secure the loan of another person is in danger of serious problems in the future, the one who does not do so is secure from being in danger of those problems. There may be occasions when one might choose to do so, but this usually proves costly.

**Prov. 17:18** - This is another proverb that warns against the danger of assuming the financial obligations of someone else. Being a reliable friend in times of adversity (Prov. 17:17) is different than being an unwise friend who enters into a foolhardy agreement to provide financial security for a loan. There are limits to what it means to be a friend. When one becomes surety for another's loan, such action is labeled here as sheer stupidity because such a person lacks common sense or good judgment. There are times when assuming the debts of others may be advisable. But if one does this without counting the cost, he is a fool.

**Prov. 20:16 (27:13)** - Solomon instructs that a person who takes on the obligations of another person who is a stranger or a foreigner to him—is not very wise; because they are a bad risk. If you lend to him, make sure you have some collateral, such as his garment or some other pledge, so he will repay you. The proverb encourages us to hold people to their obligations. A debtor's outer garment could be taken by a lender, in the O.T., as collateral to guarantee that the debtor would pay their debt (Ex. 22:26-27). Here the lender is commanded to take the garment of the person who borrows....and also from the person who cosigns or is a surety for the loan. This was especially true if the stranger was a wayward woman. "Seductress" is more likely to be better understood as "foreigner". Anyone who foolishly takes the responsibility for the debt of a stranger or immoral woman will likely never be paid back; so without taking their outer garments as collateral (pledge), the creditor is taking a big risk that he will never be paid back by the borrower or the cosigner. "Polonius was not far from the mark in his advice to his son and Hamlet's friend, Laertes: 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be, For loan oft loses both itself and

friend, And borrowing dulleth the edge of husbandry.'—Hamlet, act I, scene iii." Also, this proverb indicates that a foolish guarantor who has pledged himself to pay the debt of a foolish stranger has also indebted himself to the unchaste wife. The proverb instructs the wise, discerning man to have nothing to do with these fools, neither the guarantor, nor the debtor, nor the creditor.

**Prov. 22:26-27** – This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. The high risk of becoming surety for other people's debts has been mentioned in numerous proverbs (Prov. 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16). Striking hands in pledge means to confirm an agreement. If a debtor fails to pay, the creditor will come after the cosigner to pay the loan; and if the cosigner cannot pay then his personal possessions may be taken as payment. The phrase "why should your bed be taken from under you" specifically references a person's cloak, which is the bed the cosigner sleeps on (Deut. 24:10-13). The cloak could be given as collateral but it was not to be held in pledge overnight. This is a good way to lose what one has. This is a serious consequence for becoming involved in someone else's financial matters.

## Persons and Attitudes

### Parents and Children

**Prov. 1:8-9** - God reveals to us in Proverbs three spheres of life; the home, friendship, and the world. In the home, the child must learn wisdom. In friendship, the youth must apply wisdom. In the world, the adult must demonstrate wisdom. Teaching implies a person of authority passing on moral guidelines.

The first sphere is that of the home (Prov. 1:8-9). God did not teach the responsibility of the father and mother here, but took for granted that they would instruct their children. The child needs to hear parental instruction to live in the fear of the Lord. Young children cannot grasp abstract concepts. For them God is incarnate in father and mother. Fathers and mothers reflect the image of God to their children. Both parents are necessary to reveal God to the child fully. Children see some of God's characteristics in the mother's attitudes and actions; they see other aspects of God's character in the father. Parents do not have to try to teach their young child systematic theology. They just need to live in the fear of God themselves, and their child will learn what he or she needs to learn about God for that stage of their life—just by observing mom and dad. For example, when small children see their parents loving one another, it prepares them to understand God's love. This does not mean that we exclude verbal instruction. Young children learn wisdom by observing their parents as well as by listening to them. We all exert influence in two ways: with our words and with our works (actions).

This proverb begins with a plea to hear the warning that follows (Prov. 1:8), with a promise that heeding it will be good for the youth (Prov. 1:9). That is heeding parental instruction will give the youth an attractiveness of life and position. They will be honored. The implied contrast is that disobedience and rebellion by the youth will lead to dishonor.

**Prov. 10:1** - The title "The proverbs of Solomon" probably describes the proverbs between 10:1 and 22:17. Solomon authored the proverbs contained in chapters 1 – 9, so he was the human author of approximately 84% of the book of Proverbs – but all of the proverbs was inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit.

A wise son is contrasted with a foolish son. The reference to "father" and "mother" in the positive and negative is not meant to focus or assign a specific emotion to each of the parents. Both parents will experience either the joy or the grief of the actions of their child; just as both are involved in the teaching of the child.

**Prov. 11:29** – The one who mismanages (“troubles”) his house will see all that he has be blown away - he will have nothing left in the end. To bring trouble on one’s own family member’s means that such a person may be disinherited from the family, receiving nothing. Troubling one's "house" may also refer to leaving a bad example for those coming after to follow. "Wind" here represents being left with nothing, something that cannot be grasped; it may also imply something bad and destructive. In the O.T., the foolish man who mismanaged his accounts may have to sell himself as a servant to the wise person who is a better manager. An example today would be a person who gets too far in debt and has to sell all his possessions to pay off his creditors.

**Prov. 15:20** – This proverb is very similar to the proverb found in 10:1. The full thought behind this proverb seems to be, "The wise son honors and gladdens his father, the foolish laughs at and saddens his mother." As in Prov. 10:1, both parents are in view here experiencing joy or sorrow. Wise conduct of a child brings joy to the parents. Foolish conduct grieves the parents. In the proverb the fool’s attitude is clearly stated: it states that the fool is callous (disrespects, despises) in their behavior toward his mother (and father). The fools despises his mother (father) because she offers wisdom and requires obedience – both of which the fool hates. Since this proverb is very similar to Proverbs 10:1, one must understand that these two proverbs heighten the warning to the youth.

**Prov. 17:2** – A wise (prudent – gives heed to instruction) servant can rise above an unworthy son and receive an inheritance of a family. In King Jeroboam 1 of Israel we have an example of a servant—he was Solomon's servant (1 Kings 11:26)—ruling "over a son": Solomon's son Rehoboam. Jeroboam was able to gain ascendancy over Rehoboam through his wisdom, and Rehoboam is infamous for acting shamefully by not following the counsel of his elders. Jeroboam shared in the leadership of his brethren: God's people. Since a dependable servant is to be preferred over a misbehaving son, we should be careful to give responsibility to people based on their ability rather than their family background. Through diligence one can overcome disadvantage of one’s position; just as through undisciplined behavior one can lose advantages of one’s position.

**Prov. 17:6** - "Grandchildren" are like a crowning gift to grandparents, assuming they are honorable, which this proverb assumes, otherwise they would not be compared to "a crown." This proverb pictures grandchildren gathered around their grandfather like a crowning diadem. Likewise sons take pride in their fathers, especially if they are admirable. Godly influence generates mutual love and respect in a family; and it should expend from generation to generation. Family interaction and respect establishes a child’s identity and joy (or sorrow). Both young and old should cherish their inter-generational relationships. Both generations should encourage honorable behavior. Families depend on one another for their identity and happiness (joy). Children should be proud of their parents. Parents should have a proper relationship with God and with each other. Such blessings can only occur when wisdom is pursued.

**Prov. 17:21** - The "fool" (foolish child) not only brings about his own ruin (Prov. 17:20), but he also breaks the hearts of his parents (Prov. 17:25). Two different words are used for “fool” in this proverb. The first “fool” is one who is “dull and thickheaded” (immoral, obstinate, and dangerous). The second “fool” is one who “lacks spiritual perception and sensitivity” (sacrilegious). These types of fools break the heart of parents.

**Prov. 17:25** - This proverb is very similar to the one in Prov. 17:21; but it adds that grievous distress comes to the mother of "a foolish son" as well as to his father. The word “grief” is a strong word that

conveys “sorrow, annoyance, and irritation.” Such emotion brings about bitterness; bitterness is misery not malice.

**Prov. 19:26** - Parental abuse is in view in this proverb, not just disobedience to parents. It violates the fifth commandment: to honor one's parents (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1-3). This proverb promises shame and disgrace to the violator, the very opposite of honor (cf. Gal. 6:7). A child who mistreats their parents brings shame and disgrace on themselves. This mistreatment may be verbal, physical, or both. In these last days, it is increasingly common for sons and daughters to assault their parents, verbally and or physically, and to drive them away rather than caring and providing for them in their later years (cf. Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2). Jesus condemned the Pharisees for piously skirting their parental responsibilities (Matt. 15:4-7).

**Prov. 20:20** - Cursing "father or mother" is the opposite of honoring them; here it means to be declared inconsequential / to treat with contempt. The person who curses his or her parents may experience an untimely death (Prov. 19:26; Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9), because God has commanded people to honor their parents (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1-3). In Israel, sons who persisted in stubborn rebellion against their parents were subject to stoning (Deut. 21:18-20). "Curses" means “to declare someone of no account” in order to defame him or her. "His lamp will go out" is a metaphor of death (Prov. 13:9; 24:20; Job 18:5), and "in time of darkness" (meaning “the darkest part of the night”) refers to an evil time.

**Prov. 23:22-25** – Prov. 23:22-23 - This is the 15<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. Heeding wise parental instruction is hard for some children, but it is necessary for them to become wise (Prov. 4:7-9); because children have a tendency to go their own way totally absorbed with themselves. By listening to and obeying his or her parents, the child learns to listen to and obey God. Submission to parental authority makes submission to divine authority easier (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-4). Honoring parents here means listening (paying attention) to their instructions; but it does not necessarily mean obeying their instructions. Acquiring wisdom is a duty in that it is the best way one can fulfill the command to honor one's parents. “Buying the truth” indicates spending whatever energy or resource is necessary to acquire the truth – along with wisdom, discipline, and understanding. Being wise in God's view means to be righteous; note that righteousness and wisdom were synonymous in this proverb.

Prov. 23:24-25 – This is the 16<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings of Proverbs. Children who follow God's way of wisdom not only bring joy to themselves but also to their parents (Prov. 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 29:3, 15). Wise, godly living in obedience to the parent's discipline not only benefits the child but also benefits the parents.

**Prov. 28:24** - One way of robbing one's parents would be to take what is theirs and justify the taking on the grounds that one would eventually inherit it anyway. Anyone who takes what rightfully belongs to his or her parents is no better than a common thief. A person who destroys (robs) is one who destroys the honorable reputation and peace of a family. To rob one's own family is an unthinkable crime but it is made worse when it is denied by the one who has stolen. Refusing to call a sin a sin destroys society. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for failing to discharge their duty to their parents, because they claimed that what they owed their parents had been dedicated to God (Mark 7:6-13; cf. Prov. 19:13, 26).

### **Elderly**

**Prov. 16:31** – Older men and women may take pride in their gray hair, which is like a distinguished crown. As a general rule, the godly live longer than those who have lived an evil life; and when they

have white hair, it is as a "crown of honor (glory)" on their heads for being righteous (Prov. 3:16; 20:29). The person who stays on the way of righteousness attains the respect that elders deserve. Riotous living in one's youth generally means premature death; but God is in control of life and death. Temperance and righteousness tend to strengthen the body and prolong the length of one's life.

**Prov. 20:29** - This proverb glorifies both the "strength" of the young ("glory" of their youth and physical strength) and the strength of the old ("honor" acquired by a well-lived life of integrity and wisdom). Though they are contrasted, the parallelism is synonymous, highlighting the strengths of each different group of people. There is not a stated preference; there is not a preference of youth to old age or old age to youth; each has its strength. The advantage of young people is their physical strength: strength of body, strength of vision, strength of energy, etc. The value of old people is their wisdom, gained over years of living, and symbolized by "gray hair" (Prov. 16:31). The young and the old each has a particular excellence not possessed by the other.

### **Women and Wives**

**Prov. 11:22** - This is a parabolic (or emblematic) proverb. A beautiful and valuable "gold ring" is just as much out of place in a swine's snout, as a beautiful woman is a contradiction, if she lacks moral discretion. A nose ring was seen to be an ornament intended to beautify a woman at this time in the O.T. Such an ornament was out of place in a pig's nose; an animal that was unclean to the Jews. The comparison is being drawn that a beautiful woman who lacks moral discretion (good morals) is valueless. This presents an unusual comparison – an ugly pig to a beautiful woman. The negative quality cancels out the positive one. Beauty without wisdom is the height of being out of place, in the wrong order. If the contrast is carried out, one will recognize that the swine will quickly destroy the luster and beauty of the gold ring; and so a woman lacking discretion will surely destroy her own beauty.

**Prov. 12:4** - An "excellent" or virtuous wife is one in whom all noble qualities shine (Prov. 31:10-31; Ruth 3:11); i.e. a wife with strength of character. Such a partner brings glory to her husband, like a "crown" does to the head. A woman of good character helps her husband live faithfully and brings him visible public honor. But the wife who is weak morally and lacks character brings shame on her husband and makes it difficult for him to stand; creates suffering like a painful, incurable condition.

**Prov. 14:1** - This proverb makes better sense if for "house" we read "household." Either translation is legitimate. A wise wife can, if her husband is dead or neglectful of his duty, always keep the household together; but if the wife has neither understanding nor wisdom for her calling, then the best will of the husband cannot stop the destruction of the household. A wise wife builds up her household through loving care; the foolish wife tears down her household through neglect and rebellion. The implication is that the women are encouraged to be the kind of wife who would build up rather than tear down.

**Prov. 18:22** – This proverb references both the human action ("finds") and the divine governance ("from the Lord") of a marital relationship. The pronouncement of "good" in this proverb agrees with the Lord's assessment that it was "not good" for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). The favor God bestows is His blessing. The wording here in this proverb strikingly resembles that of Prov. 8:35, and so suggests that after wisdom itself, the best of God's blessings is a good wife. Prov. 31:10 makes a similar comparison, putting her price, like wisdom's (Prov.8:11), above rubies. It is understood that not just any wife is "a good thing"; only a good wife is (Prov. 19:13, 14). The wife described in Proverbs 31:10-31 is an example of a good wife, one who is a suitable helper.

**Prov. 19:13-14** - A "foolish son" and a "nagging wife" both make life miserable for a man. A foolish son "destroys his father," in the sense that he robs him of pleasure, support, and family continuity (Prov. 17:25). A foolish son literally brings ruin to his father – a catastrophe that causes a person to fall into a deep pit. The wife who continually contends with her husband turns his home, where he expects to find peace and support, into a place of turmoil so that he can find no rest. An obstinate, argumentative, irritating wife is literally like a leak in a leaky roof so irritating that the husband has to run from it to escape. The phrase "constant dripping" is only used in Proverbs and it means "to quarrel continuously, to continuously irritate, to be difficult to restrain."

19:14 "Fathers" can provide a physical inheritance of houses and riches for their children, but only "the LORD" can provide the spiritual inheritance of a godly wife. Therefore it is wise to look to Him in prayer for this great gift. This proverb is not guaranteeing that every man who asks God to provide him with a godly wife will get one. But it credits the Lord, in contrast to the husband's human wisdom, for a godly wife when a man has one. In these proverbs the prudent wife is seen in contrast with the quarrelsome wife.

**Prov. 21:9 (25:24)** – This proverb is a "better.....than" proverb. This proverb makes sense if we keep in mind that roofs at this time were flat and people used them as patios. It is better to live alone outside, exposed to the elements, than in the sheltered, comfortable interior of one's house if one has to share the inside with an argumentative, contentious woman. Spartan conditions with peace and quiet are better than physical comforts with strife. While the proverbs focus on the woman in the marriage relationship, the principles outline apply to both men and women; so these principles also apply to the overbearing and quarrelsome husband.

**Prov. 21:19** – This proverb uses yet another metaphor to describe the misery that comes with living with a cantankerous woman. Living in the heat of a "desert" without water is better. The life of an outcast living in the desert is better than the life of one married to a cantankerous, quarrelsome woman. A hot tempered person vexes others, causes grief and aggravation, and expresses displeasure.

**Prov. 25:24 (21:9)** - This proverb's identical twin is in Prov. 21:9, and its fraternal twin is in Prov. 21:19. "Contentious" in each of these proverbs is a word that suggests constant quarreling about decisions – who, how, what, and why. The contentious woman is one who never backs away from her nagging commitment to quarrelsomeness. Paul urged wives to be submissive to their husbands rather than contentious (Eph. 5:22-24).

**Prov. 27:15-16** – This proverb uses the illustration of a man going into his house during a rainstorm expecting to find protection, but instead he finds that his roof leaks and gives him no relief from the downpour. Similarly, a man gets married believing that his wife will partner with him to meet the demands and challenges of the world. But if he marries unwisely, he may find that his wife is more of an irritant than she is a comfort (Prov. 21:9, 19). Therefore, this proverb should encourage a man to be careful when proposing marriage. A man should examine the character of the woman before marriage....and he should examine the way his behavior affects his potential marriage partner – since marriage is a mutually formative relationship. Both the leaky roof and the "contentious wife (woman)" make staying in the house intolerable. The proverb compares the restraining of a contentious wife to restraining "the wind". As it is impossible to control the wind, so it is sometimes impossible to stop the torrent of words that come from a contentious woman's mouth. Getting control of her, and restraining her, are similar to grasping "oil." She is impossible to control; slippery and elusive. Often it is her arguments and rationale that also prove slippery and elusive; even her actions at times. If after

marriage the husband tries but fails to restrain his wife, the marriage turns into a marriage that works against itself rather than a marriage where each person is working with and for the other.

### **Kings and Rulers**

**Prov. 14:28** – This proverb is a truism. A ruler's honor comes from the support of the people he is ruling over as they increase and prosper. It is a credit to a ruler when he rules over many people and they prosper and increase, but it is a discredit to him when his people decline in number and wealth. This is true because part of a governmental leader's responsibility is to generate prosperity while maintaining peace. When this occurs people seek to be in that nation. When this does not occur, the people seek to leave that nation weakening its strength and prosperity. Ultimately, having few people to rule over makes a high position worthless (of little value). Also when people turn against a ruler, the ruler is ultimately disposed.

**Prov. 14:35** - People who serve those over them by behaving "wisely" ("prudently") obtain the "favor" of those who supervise or rule over them, which often takes the form of rewards of various kinds. Conversely, those who prove unfaithful to those who rule over or supervise them by acting "shamefully," incur disfavor and punishment ("anger"). The meaning of "shame" means "deep personal embarrassment" (disappointment, confounded). The word "wrath" means "an outburst of anger". So the proverb is admonishing a servant (worker / citizen) to be prudent, thinking through things before acting or talking to avoid embarrassing his master (ruler / supervisor).

**Prov. 16:10** – "King" is mentioned in Prov. 16:10, 12 and 15. The "king" reference appears to be very specific to a king of Israel – one who is wise, one who is representing God to the people of Israel. When a king of Israel spoke and oracle (divine wisdom), he did so as God's representative; therefore he was to be a just ruler – he was to seek out and speak God's wisdom. A king's edict becomes law for his people. His ordinances are the will of God for them (unless his commands are contrary to God's revealed will; cf. Acts 4:19-20). Consequently it is very important that the ruler not err in his judgment; he has a great responsibility to judge fairly.

**Prov. 16:12-15** - 16:12-13 - Kings are to hate wrongdoing and value honesty. It is especially bad for leaders and rulers to be wicked (or "commit wicked acts"), because the very foundation of equity is doing what is right ("righteousness"). A righteous, honest ruler will establish (make firm, secure) the king's throne. Dishonesty and injustice will cause a king's reign to be destroyed. Kings should value honesty in themselves and in others. A wise king knows that dishonest counselors can be disastrous.

16:14 - If someone angers a king, he may be executed. Kings, in biblical times, were absolute rulers with great power; so it was incumbent on the people to be careful and respectful around the king. Only wisdom (wise counsel) can appease a king's anger; one's only recourse to appease a king's anger is to pacify it. Anyone who can "appease" the wrath of a leader is "wise," because a leader's wrath can do much damage to many people.

16:15 - When rulers smile on those under their care, conditions are as beneficial and refreshing as a "spring shower (rain)," and the sunshine that follows. Their favorable attitude promotes life and well-being. The king's favor signaled a much better future than his wrath. A king's power could be abused or used for good.

**Prov. 17:7** - A profound utterance ("excellent speech"), spoken by "a fool," is discordant ("not fitting"), because it is out of harmony with his character. Likewise, a lie spoken by one in a position of authority is

equally repugnant. There should be consistency between character and conduct. "Lying lips" can be translated as "arrogant lips". The phrase literally means "lips of excess" and refers to one who talks too much. The word "fool" used here is only used 3 times in Proverbs and means "one who lacks spiritual perception and sensitivity"; one who curses God and denies His existence. This means a fool should not talk a lot because he seldom knows what he is talking about. Lying is inappropriate for a ruler. A ruler should be a man (woman) of integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness because his words carry great weight. A ruler who lies is a fool.

**Prov. 17:11** - Almost all of the close to 100 references to a "rebellious" (meri) person in the Old Testament describe one who is willfully defiant against God – one who insists on being rebellious. The "cruel messenger" that God sends to judge such a person could be: his or her king, God's angel, or death. Eventually the rebel will be brought to justice and punished by a merciless official. Just retribution comes against people who rebel and the king's messenger will have no mercy.

**Prov. 19:12** - "Kings" can use their power to unleash "wrath" on those whom they do not favor. The "growling of a lion" is frightening and usually precedes an act of aggression and/or violence that may take life; whereas dew is gentle and gives life. A king's "favor" can result in great blessing. Therefore, this proverb counsels, avoid a ruler's fury and seek his favor. This proverb does not say that a king's anger or favor (good will, pleasure) is always justified or right – just that it is powerful.

**Prov. 20:2** - It is as dangerous to arouse the anger of a ruler as it is to disturb "a lion". Both of them can do much damage to the one who "provokes" them. A king's anger is not always justified – and it can be lethal as he has the power given to him to take a life. Therefore, one should take care of how they speak to or treat a king. Those who provoke the anger of the Greatest King by rejecting His Son will taste His wrath (cf. Rev. 6–19).

**Prov. 20:8** – Kings often served as chief judges – judges with absolute power. By carefully examining a case ("with his eyes"), a just king could detect evil motives and actions; he would not be easily fooled. He understands or perceives what evil is afoot and acts to preserve justice. He is to "winnow" all evil – meaning he sorts it, separates it out, and then removes it; similar to the winnowing of the chaff from the grain. Not every king does this, but those whose thrones are characterized by justice do.

**Prov. 20:26** – A wise king must root out evil in his kingdom for the health of his kingdom. Winnowing wheat, and then driving a "threshing-wheel" over the grain, separated the grain from its hulls (chaff). So this proverb advocates subjecting "the wicked" to processes that bring out the truth, so that the ruler can deal justly with the wicked. Kings are responsible to separate the evil from the righteous by trying to correct the behavior of the wicked by inflicting just punishment. A king should see that the wicked are found out and punished as this is important to maintaining social order and justice during his rule. When Jesus, the Great King, comes again; He will separate the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, and determine who will enter His millennial kingdom— and who will die (Matt. 3:12; 25:32-33; Luke 3:17; Rev. 19:11-21).

**Prov. 20:28** – Love and faithfulness are necessary requirements for an effective ruler. Not only accurate judgment (Prov. 20:26) but covenant "loyalty" (or loyal love), "truth," and right dealing ("righteousness")—sustain a king's rule; it keeps him on the throne. The real security of a king's rule is his steadfast love and faithfulness for truth and integrity. This is a striking truth because the king's security is usually thought of in terms of military and police power. But ultimately it is the Lord who is

responsible for the king and his rule (cf. 2 Sam. 7:15; Ps. 18:35; 20:2; 41:3; 89:33; 119:117; Isa. 9:6). These are virtues that each one of us should value and apply to our own life.

**Prov. 21:1** – The heart of the king (ruler, leader) is in God’s hand (Eccl. 9:1). A farmer directs water by digging a canal or ditch for the water to follow – and a skillful farmer can turn flowing water to wherever he wants it. Similarly, the Lord directs the heart of the king – as God is sovereign (Prov. 21:30). God gives to the world good or bad kings (rulers), according as He seeks to bless it or to visit it with punishment. This is one of the great affirmations of the sovereignty of God in Scripture (cf. Prov. 16:14-15; 19:12; 20:2, 24). There are many proofs of the truth of this proverb: Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4), Belshazzar (Dan. 5), Ahasuerus (Esth. 6:1-10), and Cyrus (Ezra 6:22; Isa. 45:1-7), to name a few.

**Prov. 22:11** - There is a connection between "purity of heart" and "gracious speech" (cf. Matt. 12:34). The person of pure heart and gracious speech will be welcomed by the king – as good kings are drawn to the wise (Eccl. 10:12). So purity and graciousness are advantageous – they are foundations for friendship. Both qualities endear people to those in positions of power.

**Prov. 23:1-3** – This is the 6th saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. This is primarily a proverb of warning – the ruler may be using the power and luxury he has to entrap his guest so they feel obligated to do his bidding. His hospitality is deceptive. The fact that the ruler (leader) serves delicacies may not indicate that he esteems his guest highly. The ruler (leader) may simply be getting him in a good mood for his own selfish reasons. He may want something from him or be evaluating him. The secondary instruction of this proverb is to be humble and restrained in the presence of a ruler (leader). The guest should "put a knife to [his] throat" rather than to his food (i.e., curb his appetite, control himself); literally meaning you are to "threaten your appetite with death." As a guest, he should be aware of what is around him and if he is tempted to be gluttonous he should restrain his appetite.

**Prov. 24:21-22** – This is the 30<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. Fittingly, the last of the 30 sayings begins with "fear the Lord"; just as the beginning of Proverbs (Prov. 1:7). The Lord and the king are the agents who punish the rebellious. The "change" in view is deviation from the will of God or the laws of the king. The phrase "both of them" (v. 22) refers to God and the king. The structure is again chiasmic, to emphasize the central thought of the proverb. People should fear God and the king (government) because they both punish rebels (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:17). They should not entertain rebellious thoughts against God and the king. Loyalty to the king is proper because he is the agent of the Lord’s rule (and wisdom). That loyalty, per this proverb, includes having no part with rebels who seek to subvert or overthrow the king. The "calamity" can refer to the troubles of the rebellious bring on others or to the "calamity" that God and king will bring on the rebels.

**Prov. 25:2-7** - 25:2 - The roles of God and the king are compared. God, whose knowledge is above all human knowledge, keeps things to Himself because He needs no counsel. The fact that God has chosen not to reveal everything human beings want to know has resulted in our holding Him in awe and glorifying Him (cf. Deut. 29:29; Rom. 11:33-34). Both God and kings are unfathomable, their respective subjects cannot entirely comprehend their knowledge or motives. However, a king’s subjects hold him in awe and glorify him when he diligently investigates a matter, and does not make his decisions on the basis of superficial understanding.

25:3 - God hides some of His knowledge from kings (Prov. 25:2). In turn, kings hide some of their knowledge from their subjects. Rulers are responsible for knowing what is going on; investigating matters to their fullest extent – yet they do not (and should not) reveal everything they know.

25:4-5 - Like dross separated from silver, evil people must be removed if a king's rule is to be righteous (Prov. 17:3; 20:8). A nation is established as wisdom replaces and purifies wickedness. It is not enough for a ruler to be just; his associates must also be people of integrity for his administration to do right ("be established in righteousness"). The close advisors of a ruler must be righteous, not wicked; they must be chosen with care. Each advisor should seek to pursue and practice righteousness; and when they do the kingdom will be established in righteousness. The same principle abides in regard to the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wicked shall be destroyed and all the transgressors rooted out of the land when He returns in triumph to usher in the great day of the Lord (2 Thess. 1 and 2; Rev. 19).

25:6-7 - This proverb advocates humility in the presence of rulers and others in authority. Honor is better bestowed than wrongly presumed. The person who thinks highly of himself or herself may not be so regarded by others—either legitimately or illegitimately. Self-seeking and pride will cause one to fall, so be humble. The elevation of the humble is honorable but the humbling of the proud is disgraceful when it occurs before those in authority. There is a decent middle way between being a braggart and 'pushy,' and simply groveling; one has to have the understanding and wisdom to know one's ability, one's place. Such prudence will be observed and rewarded accordingly.

**Prov. 28:2-3** – 28:2 - Unrighteousness in a nation produces political instability with many vying for power; wickedness causes a high rate of turnover in the leadership. The tenure of a leader is short in an unrighteous nation. Nevertheless, a single wise ruler can bring stability to a land. Wisdom promotes social order and long tenured rule. Order is maintained in a nation by good rulers who have wise insight and knowledge on how to govern. A wise ruler must uphold what is known to be right and not tolerate legal offenses either in himself or in his citizens.

28:3 - The Hebrew word translated as "ruler" or "man" has a different meaning than "ruler" found in Prov. 28:2. Here the word means "a strong man who is destitute or hungry." When such a man comes to power and oppresses the "feeble, helpless, weak" poor – he is oppressing those who are experiencing or have experienced the same circumstances as he has. Such oppression and perversion of justice are like a hard rain which causes destruction rather than nourishing the ground – it is a destructive storm that floods the field versus gently watering the field. When the poor come to power and oppress those who are poor – it is bad. Poor men who are suddenly elevated to positions of trust and confidence, are likely to be far harder on those of their own who are poor than on one born in a different station of life.

**Prov. 28:15-16** – 28:15 - A "wicked ruler" is as dangerous to poor people as a strong, fierce, wild animal that has been let loose. A wicked ruler is pictured as a powerful, destructive wild animal who feeds off of poor people rather than protecting and providing opportunity for them. The "lion" and the "bear" were the two most savage animals that roamed Canaan (cf. 1 Sam. 17:34). Often their attacks were unexpected and unprovoked. These two animals were also symbols that rulers in biblical times likened to themselves. But instead of defending and protecting those under their authority, the wicked among them turned on their own people and attacked them. The "poor" were the "helpless and weak." Such a ruler is cruel oppressor who lacks the wisdom needed to rule and (by implication) seeks unjust gain.

28:16 - Leaders who oppress (much extortion) their people, rather than supporting them, "lack understanding." They do not realize that God upholds the moral order and will punish them. The motive of personal "gain," in the second line, gives the reason for the unjust oppression in the first line. Lengthened life for righteousness was a promised blessing under the Old Covenant, but it still holds true

that people who live by God's rules usually live longer than those who do not. A wise ruler refuses to use his power for ill-gotten and unjust personal gain – and he will enjoy the blessing of a long life.

**Prov. 29:4** – A just leader brings a nation stability and joy. A just king through his fair dealings stabilizes his kingdom, but an unjust ruler can bring about its demise by taking "bribes." An unjust greedy ruler will lead a nation to its downfall. The Hebrew word for "bribes" used here lends itself to being understood as forcing high taxes on the people – implying that a greedy ruler is one who seeks to impose high taxes on the people to enrich the government. Rulers can destroy a nation through corruption and burdensome high taxes.

**Prov. 29:12** - If "a ruler pays attention to" and believes lies, he will encourage his ministers (servants) to lie to him; and will accumulate wicked counselors and attendants. By doing so, a corrupt leader will draw wicked, corrupt people around him to serve him. But, if he accepts only true words, "his ministers" will be encouraged to speak only the truth to him. Leaders become role models for their followers, whether they want to or not – it is important for a ruler to reward honesty and punish lies.

**Prov. 29:14** - One of the primary responsibilities of leaders is to distribute justice evenhandedly ("with truth"). Fairness toward the poor (weak, feeble, helpless) is the mark of a good king – and his throne will be secure. The ruler who treats the defenseless poor fairly, rather than abusing them for personal gain, will enjoy God's blessing on his reign. His kingdom (rule) will thrive and his people will support him, because they can count on him to do what is right.

### **Messengers**

**Prov. 13:17** - The contrast here is between an untrustworthy ("wicked") and a trustworthy ("faithful") messenger. The wicked messenger will run into trouble, while the faithful messenger will contribute to "healing" in relationships. The unreliable messenger gets into trouble through laziness or foolish conduct, which results in disappointment. The reliable messenger contributes to the welfare of those for whom he works and works for. Accurate news and effective diplomacy benefit the officials and governments served by a good messenger. Good communication is essential to good relationships. In the work of the gospel this is all-important. We live in a day of restlessness and endless activity. There are a few who wait to get the mind of the Lord as revealed in His Word before acting. This results in false teaching and/or faulty instruction, which confuses those being taught. Precious is the message of the faithful ambassador as he goes forth proclaiming the Gospel (2 Cor. 5:20).

**Prov. 25:13** – The phrase, "The cold of snow", probably does not refer to a snowfall at harvest time, since this would be unwelcomed and possibly a disaster. It probably refers to a drink cooled with snow like with ice cubes, which would be welcome and refreshing during the heat and work of the harvest. A support to this interpretation is the historical fact that the peasants of Damascus store up the winter's snow in the clefts of the mountains, and carried it down in the warm months to Damascus and the coast towns. Here the interpretation is that a trustworthy messenger is refreshing to the one who sends him and to the one who receives him. Is it possible that this proverb shows us how God feels when we, as messengers, deliver His Word with love and concern? An O.T. example is when the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites attacked King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah; the message promising victory that God sent through Jahaziel the Levite proved as refreshing and invigorating as a drink of cold water on a hot day (2 Chron. 20:14-17).

## Companions

**Prov. 12:26** – A righteous person does not take on just anyone as a friend; he chooses his friends carefully – he searches out and investigates. The righteous man investigates his neighbor to make sure he will not mislead him. The righteous person seeks to be a positive help ("a guide") to those around them. The wicked, on the other hand, try to gain an advantage by misdirecting others – or their plans lead others astray – and the trouble they seek to cause often comes back on them. The righteous provide proper direction, whereas the wicked leads him and others into trouble. The antecedent of "them" in 26b is "the wicked" (plural, 26b).

**Prov. 13:20** - Outcomes are contrasted – regular companions inevitably influence each other. The result of making friends with, and keeping company with, wise people—is that one becomes wiser himself. But the result of spending a lot of time with (being a "companion of") "fools," is that "harm" eventually befalls him or her (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33). The power of association does shape one's character – choose your associations wisely.

**Prov. 14:7** – Avoid association with all who cannot teach you wisdom. The writer of the proverb counseled us to not spend much time with fools, because they do not impart knowledge, and one's own understanding and speech can degenerate as a result. When it becomes evident that a man is bent on acting foolish or wickedly with no concern about righteousness, it is best to leave him to himself. To argue or reason with such a one is useless; it is defiling to the wise but gratifying to the pride of the fool. "From such turn away (2 Tim. 3:5) because they cannot offer anything of value. Sometimes the only choice we have is to leave the company of the foolish and remove ourselves from the hearing of foolish talk.

**Prov. 17:17** - This proverb praises the value of true friends. The greatest example of its truth is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both "friend" and "brother" to believers. A friend rejoices and weeps with you (Rom. 12:15) and is a constant source of love. A brother, while in one's family, may not be close but is drawn near when there is trouble. A brother (a relative) may function more as a safety net. It has been said, "Foul-weather friends are the only ones worth having." This also implies another important point of the proverb; "foul-weather friends" are the only ones worth being. The text is not just about gaining a stalwart friend; it is also about being one. True friends and relatives are faithful in times of adversity as well as prosperity.

**Prov. 18:24** – "A man of many companions may come to ruin" is more true to the Hebrew than the translation that reads, "A man (who hath) friends must show himself friendly." The translation easiest to understand is; "He that maketh many friends (doeth it) to his own destruction." Why is it unwise to have many friends? If a person has many friends and numerous ones of those friends were chosen indiscriminately – he may find himself in trouble ("be broken into pieces"). It is better to have one or two good friends ("one who loves") than many false, unreliable friends. The significance of friends is found in their quality, not quantity. Christians have often applied the second part of this verse to Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners (cf. John 15:12-15; Heb. 2:11, 14-18). While that is appropriate, the proverb's point is that in contrast to false friends, some friends can be more faithful than our closest blood relatives. Such a friend is a true treasure. The good Samaritan was one (Luke 10:29-37), and Abraham's servant also proved to be such a friend (Gen. 24).

**Prov. 24:1-2** – This is the 19<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. Previous proverbs have cited the ruinous end of evil companions as motivation to avoid their company (Prov. 23:20-21). Here, it is their essential character ("their minds devise violence") that is the basis for the same advice to avoid their

company (Prov. 3:31; 23:17; 24:19). One's peer group can be the greatest threat to one's moral life. The reason for this warning is the evil one's desire for violence and their talk about the trouble they will bring on others. It is challenging when a great deal of modern entertainment—whether short story, novel, or film—is based on the celebration of the wickedness and violence. Such entertainment banks on the fact that we, as natural man, have a perverse attraction, even affection, for those who act out sin and wickedness that we would not normally do.

**Prov. 27:8-10** – This proverb has 2 interpretations. 27:8 - The primary interpretation is that this proverb speaks out against a person abandoning his/her responsibilities at home by leaving (wandering) the home (nest) too early – so early that they are not mature enough to take care of themselves (i.e. the prodigal son – Luke 15:11-32). "Wanders" can mean "flees." The secondary interpretation is that someone had to leave his/her home because of some crisis. The intent of the proverb seems to be to encourage people to protect and be grateful for their homes. The Prodigal Son had not learned to do this when he left home, but later he came to appreciate his father's house (Luke 15:11-24). Such men as the prodigal son are out of place when they wander; they are out of place and in danger – the wise advice is to stay home until one is mature enough to leave home. This proverb does not fault a man for leaving "his home"; but implies that there should be good reasons to do so.

27:9 - Loving, solicitous counsel on the part of a true friend is as refreshing and stimulating to the soul as oil and perfume are to the body. A friend's earnest counsel may not be sweet but it is genuine – it demonstrates that one person cares for the other person. While it is good to have friends for the occasional party, it is better to have a friend who is willing and able to give good advice.

27:10 – There are genuine benefits of one remaining close to family, but a person should not hesitate to turn to a true friend when in need. The first statement makes the point of the proverb: friends are important allies that we should retain if possible (v. 10a). The second statement is not as clear but the thought seems to be, "When you experience a crisis, do not go all the way to your blood brother's (relative's) house if he lives far from you." The third statement gives the reason for the second. A friend nearby who is not a blood relative can be of more help than a close relation who lives farther away. A friend nearby should be more advantageous than a brother who lives miles away. Family ties may be less reliable than those of genuine friendship – especially if a great distance is between family relations. Jesus' disciples were of more help to Him than His physical half-brothers, because they traveled with Him and supported Him (cf. Matt. 12:46-50).

**Prov. 29:24** - The bad thing about being a thief's "partner," is that when the thief gets caught, and the authorities haul his partner into court, the accomplice finds himself in a "no win" situation. Companions of criminals cannot avoid getting mixed up in their crimes; associating with the wicked is self-destructive. Once a criminal is caught, the companion is usually called to testify of what they know in court. If he defends his partner, he shares his guilt, but if he says nothing his accusers assume that he shares his guilt. The companion of a criminal usually cannot testify against the criminal who is caught because that action will cause consequences – so by his lack of testimony he brings the full force of the law against him.

## Various Concerns, Observations, and Sayings

### Various Concerns

#### Caution

**Prov. 22:3 (27:12)** – This proverb is stated twice. This is a proverb of contrast; a contrast between the “prudent” (shrewd) and the “simple” (naïve, untaught). Prudence is demonstrated when one becomes aware of evil/danger and then takes action to avoid it. Foolishness is demonstrated when one becomes aware of evil/danger but makes no effort to avoid it – and they suffer from that decision. The shrewd (“prudent”) person can anticipate trouble and protects himself. The gullible (“naïve”) person, in contrast, fails to do so and gets into trouble. The punishment here is literally “a fine”, which implies financial consequences for remaining “simple.” One application of this proverb is: evacuating in the path of an oncoming tornado or hurricane, rather than staying put and trying to ride it out (Exod. 9:20-21). Another application is: believing in the gospel message versus ignoring it, in view of future judgment. This proverb applies to hiding oneself from moral evil as well as from physical danger (cf. Prov. 14:15, 18; 27:12).

**Prov. 22:5** - "Thorns" are painful, and "snares" entrap. The "perverse" person is one who is crooked, who does not take a straight course, following God's will, through life. The conduct of the wicked keeps them from getting ahead – they are slowed down or stopped by the “thorns” and “snares” of their lifestyle and choices. Such a person can expect many painful entrapments, in contrast to the godly that walk carefully in God's path. A wise person guards their lifestyle and choices because they are aware of the consequences of the “thorns” and “snares” – they are cautious and avoid the path of the wicked.

#### Reputation

**Prov. 22:1** Having a good name based on an honorable reputation demonstrated by good character is to be valued above wealth. In our modern pleasure-seeking culture, character and reputation have a way of being ignored if not actually denigrated. True value must be seen not in what one has but in what he or she truly is. A good name is an asset whose currency is unaffected by the culture of emphasis of the material world. "Favor" in the eyes of others is probably the meaning of the second line. Favor is respect from people and grace from God, which is a benefit of wisdom. Riches are of little value if in gaining them one ruins their character.

**Prov. 25:8-10** - This proverb advises us to settle disputes privately whenever possible (cf. Luke 12:57-59; 14:31-33). It is not wise to drag someone hastily into court to argue; it is risky business to accuse others publicly or in court as your integrity is at stake. It is better off for individual's to talk it over than for one person to expose himself to public shame in court where everything will be told. We should be cautious about publicly sharing information, because this may lead to embarrassment. We should not divulge secrets to clear ourselves in arguments or we may ruin a friendship. The plaintiff should debate his case with his neighbor out of court. Then the point of disagreement will not become public knowledge (v. 9) and give the plaintiff a bad reputation (v. 10; cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-8) or an irretrievable loss of reputation. To run to the law or to the neighbors is usually to run away from the duty of personal relationship; the result may be the loss of a friend and an irretrievable loss of reputation. We are not to perpetuate a grievance by talking about it with others (see principles outlined in Matt. 18:15-20). There is no success which to be achieved at the price of your own integrity or someone else's hurt. Frivolous litigation and divulging confidences will ruin one's reputation.

## Courage

**Prov. 3:25-26** – These proverbs encourage those who seek to walk in wisdom not to live in fear of the ruin that will come on the wicked, but to trust that the Lord will keep them safe through the just and equitable lifestyle He requires of the righteous. Living in God's wisdom provides the basis for the believer's mind and removes fear; the Lord will protect those who live in wisdom. We are to take hold of what God has revealed to us in His Word and have it control our heart and life.

**Prov. 14:32** - The evil "wrongdoing" that the wicked do eventually catches up with them and brings them down. The evil lifestyle of the wicked will be disastrous for them in the end because they have no legitimate hope in the Lord – they will reap the reward of their life, eternal death. But the righteous have nothing to fear when they die, because they trust in God who is "their refuge." Hope in death is the theme in the Word of God for the righteous.

**Prov. 22:13** – Lazy people rationalize their laziness by appealing to unlikely possibilities (cf. Prov. 12:27; 15:19; 19:24; 21:25; 26:13). This proverb shows how far a sluggard (lazy person) will go to avoid work. The extreme excuses made by a lazy person to avoid work can be ridiculous. It is highly unlikely that a lion would be roaming the streets of a city, let alone the possibility of a lion attacking him....resulting in his death; this is a preposterous excuse. What will actually cause the lazy person to die is the reality of his poverty that is a result of his lack of work. Here, the lazy person talks of a wandering lion but does not consider his real danger from the devil and from his own laziness, which will kill him.

**Prov. 24:10** – This is the 24<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 sayings in Proverbs. This is an observation that is an exhortation for one to show oneself to be strong and courageous in time of adversity. The day of distress is any day or period of "time" when "trouble" comes. If a person does not persevere (is "slack"), but quits under the pressure of trouble, he shows that he does not have "strength" of character, which is a fruit of possessing wisdom (cf. Prov. 24:5a). We never know our true strength until we find ourselves in situations that demand much from us; to avoid losing strength – act! Weak people plead adverse conditions so they can justify quitting. It has been said that one can tell the measure of a man by the level of adversity that will stop him.

**Prov. 26:13** - "The sluggard" (lazy man) is a procrastinator (cf. Prov. 13:4; 15:19; 19:15; 20:4; 21:25-26; 22:13; 24:30-34). Even if there are no real difficulties or reasons to delay, he will imagine them so that he can avoid going to work or taking action. Lazy people will use a remote possibility of danger as an excuse for not working or taking action. When irrational fears disable a person, he or she may be a lazy and they are trying to justify his or her inaction.

**Prov. 28:1** - Wicked behavior tends to produce paranoia; a guilty conscience imagines accusers everywhere (c.f. Num. 32:23, Psa. 53:5). God gives irrational terror to the wicked and courage to the righteous. Righteous behavior tends to produce courage; a clear conscience creates boldness to face everyone. The righteous are as bold (self-confident) as a young lion. God gives them courage because they have no fear of reprisal from wrong doing. It has been said – "Sin makes men cowards."

## Hope

**Prov. 13:12** - When we "hope" for something for a long time, and it never comes to pass, the normal human response is to feel disappointed and depressed ("heart sick"). Hope that is not fulfilled often becomes the source of bitterness....and the person seeks someone to blame. But when we hope for something and then get it, we feel rejuvenated and invigorated, like a "tree" full "of life." This is another psychological observation about life.

**Prov. 13:19** - Even though it is pleasant (satisfying) to hope patiently a long time for something better, and then finally see it happen, a fool will not do so, because he would rather continue practicing evil. Fools characteristically do not hope for higher things. They only want to continue in evil because they have no hope. The fool's relentless pursuit of evil and hatred of good does not ever let the fool taste the sweet blessings of righteous hope and obedience. It has been said, "In spite of the sweetness of good desires accomplished, fools will not forsake evil to attain it." The desires of the righteous will be fulfilled because they fear the Lord and turn from evil.

**Prov. 23:17-18** – This is the 13<sup>th</sup> saying of the 30 saying in Proverbs. Envyng sinners is senseless because they have no hope. The long view—even beyond death—is essential in order to avoid envying the wicked, which frequently prosper in this life. However, "future" does not necessarily imply life after death. It can simply mean life further down the road, when one's mistakes will catch up with him. We should always be zealous for the fear of the Lord; looking up (v. 17) and looking ahead (v. 18) can help us avoid envying sinners. The immediate pleasure of sin cannot be compared with the ultimate hope associated with the fear of the Lord. Those who treasure the Lord have hope for eternity. Job did not "envy" sinners, but looked forward to a time in the future— when his trials would be over and God would reward him (Job 19:25-26).

### **Joy and Grief**

**Prov. 14:10** - This proverb should help us to realize that it is natural for everyone to harbor deep sorrow (the heart's "own bitterness") and deep "joy." One's inner pain and joy cannot be fully experienced by anyone else. This psychological observation recognizes that ultimately there are certain feelings, both joyous and sorrowful, that cannot be communicated; no matter how much sympathy and understanding may be present. It does not deny that one can identify to some extent with another's sorrows and joys, but it does imply that such sensitivity has its limits. Every heart has its secret of joy or sorrow that no other ever shares. Hidden deep down from the sight of those closest to you are grief's too deep to explain or joys too great for words. While it is good to try to empathize, God alone knows our hearts fully.

**Prov. 14:13** - Ironically, a person may laugh but be hurting inside. Likewise, a person may think he is having a good time, but his "joy" (sensual, worldly joy) may bring him grief eventually ("the end of joy," both its ending in grief, and its ending in duration). Appearances are often deceiving. The words "end of mirth / end of joy" refer either to the fluctuating nature of human emotion or to the idea that joy is seldom pure, untainted by any grief.

**Prov. 15:13** - A person's "heart" condition affects both his material and immaterial parts, seen in the "joyful heart"/"cheerful face" connection in this verse. Inner joy shows on a person's face; just as inner grief shows in a person's morale. Happiness and depression are issues of the heart. What a person is inwardly is expressed through his emotional state; some people hold up well under difficult circumstances because of the inner strength. One's emotional state reflects the condition of the inner heart. Here the "heart" has its typical biblical metaphorical signification as the wellspring of human personality.

**Prov. 17:22** - Joy in the heart is "medicine" to the body; a joyful heart is a good cure. Conversely, no joy has a negative effect on one's physical health; a sad heart produces a broken spirit. One's inner life affects a person's physical and emotional well being. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for "medicine" only occurs here in the entire O.T., noting spiritual and physical health is inter-related. Modern science

has demonstrated the truth of this proverb; one's mental disposition can affect a person's physical health. The writer of Psalm 116 contrasted his different mental states between when he was occupied with himself and with the Lord. The difference between exhilaration and depression depends more on a person's spiritual resources than on his circumstances (cf. Acts 16:25).

**Prov. 18:14** - The human "spirit," aided by God's Spirit, can endure "sickness," including the soul sickness of shame (v. 13). A person's spirit, if it is hopeful and good, can endure adversity and sickness but if the spirit is despondent, even when there is nothing physically wrong, life itself become difficult to bear. When a person is crushed inwardly, their inner strength is gone and medicine can hardly sustain him. A "broken spirit" suggests depression. If the spirit is broken down then within the sphere of a person's personality there is no other sustaining power that can supply its place. This is one reason believers are exhorted to "Rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 3:1; 4:4).

**Prov. 25:20** – Trying to perk up a person who is discouraged or depressed by singing songs is cruel and useless. Taking away someone's garment in cold weather would add to his or her discomfort. Similarly, pouring acidic vinegar on alkali bicarbonate of soda causes a violent, negative reaction; and it neutralizes both of them and makes them worthless. It is as wrong to disturb "a troubled heart" in need of quiet and comfort, by trying to cheer it up with intrusive, unwanted songs. Songs can be therapeutic, but when they are insensitively sung, they can cause pain and damage the spirit (cf. Eccles. 3:4). Being insensitive and unsympathetic does much damage and harm.

**Prov. 27:11** - A "wise son" brings great pleasure to his father, and he also equips him to defend himself against the attacks of critics. The criticism may concern the son's behavior or the father's; a parent may be publicly criticized if they cannot control their own children. In either case, the behavior of a wise son can defuse the criticism and bring honor rather than shame on the parent. Having a son who is wise means the father can answer critics who may accuse him of being an incompetent father. The son who leads a life of wisdom is evidence of being raised properly (biblically). A wise son accredits his father and also aides himself in times of difficulty with appropriate answers. This proverb encourages the cultivation of wisdom in the child and diligence in the parent. It has been said, "The teacher is held responsible for the faults of the pupil."

**Prov. 29:6** – An evil person is usually caught in his own self-designed trap. The literal translation states, "In the rebellion of a man of evil is a snare." Overstepping designated bounds (rules) can also "ensnare" a person. A righteous person avoids becoming entangled in evil for this reason; the righteous rejoice in security. The righteous person, living carefree and happy, is able to rejoice, rather than bemoaning his fate for transgressing. It has been said, "To set foot on a sinful act is to trigger your own captivity."

### **Good News**

**Prov. 15:30** - Happy people and the "good news" they bring, both have a heartwarming effect. Good news uplifts people. A positive person's attitude and communication, whether non-verbal (a cheerful look) or verbal (good news), is always helpful and uplifting for others. "Bright eyes" in this proverb characterize one who brings "good news," so the eyes can be thought of as bringing gladness to the heart of the hearer. Healthy bones (lit. "fat . . . bones") represented health and prosperity to the Jews (cf. Prov. 17:22; 25:25; Gen. 45:27-28; Isa. 52:7-8); so the idea in the second line is that good news promotes health and happiness; it refreshes and strengthens a person.

**Prov. 25:25** – The impact of receiving good news from a friend or relative who lives far away is like a refreshing drink of water to the thirsty, hot, tired person. This is especially true for families who have

family members involved in war. The intent of the proverb is to encourage people to share good news, rather than bad news, since it is invigorating. While this proverb is true of any "good news," it is even truer when we think of the gospel message as good news. The Samaritan woman found the good news that Jesus brought to her revitalizing and worth sharing with her thirsty neighbors (John 4:6-29).

### Curiosity

**Prov. 27:20** - The grave and the place of destruction are personified as having an appetite; they are insatiable, never having enough. "Sheol" (hell) is a poetic word for the grave. "Abaddon" (destruction) rhetorically intensifies the grave as the place of destruction. The grave (death and destruction) always wants another live person dead. The "eyes" of man represent human covetousness, since they look out farther and farther, wanting more and more; men's eyes increase the desire of lust, envy, and greed. But the sinful heart of man will not enable the eyes of man to be "satisfied"; both heart and eyes ceaselessly want more. We are to be content (1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5; cf. Phil. 4:11); for even when we have an abundance, we want more. Does life consist or exist of possessions (Luke 12:15)? No, it consists of relationships, especially our relationship with Christ.

### Sayings of Agur

**Prov. 30:1** - Scripture does not refer to either "Agur" ("The Gatherer," "Collector," or "Industrious in Collecting") or his father (or ancestor) "Jakeh" ("The Obedient" or "Pious") elsewhere. The identity of Agur is unknown. There is traditional thought that he was possibly a student of wisdom at the time of Solomon, or perhaps a court counselor for Solomon. He seems to be humble (30:2-4), observant and inquisitive (30:5-33) with a keen theological mind (30:5-6) and a hatred for arrogance (30:7-9). Agur appears to be the son of Jakeh, who is also unknown. Agur is addressing two individuals, Ithiel and Ucal, who may be his two sons or his two students; again their identity is unknown. The ESV rendering of the Masoretic text for 30:1 suggests that Agur begins his address to Ithiel and Ucal with the statement – "I am weary, God; I am weary, God and worn out."

**Prov. 30:2-4** – In calling himself the most ignorant of men, Agur may have been writing in irony, or in true analysis. If it is irony, he is contrasting himself with someone who arrogantly is claiming to be wise. If truthfully, his statement may be a sincere response to his reflections outlined in verse 4. "Ignorant/stupid" is the translation of the Hebrew word that means "brutish or dull-minded." Agur is confessing his own limited understanding, while at the same time making it clear that those he addressed knew no more than he did. In view of the context (Prov. 30:2, 4), he probably meant that he had not reached a high level of wisdom. "Wisdom" in Proverbs means understanding as well as godliness. Agur humbly regarded his own discernment as limited, but he did not claim to be a fool. Agur sensed his lack of wisdom because he did not know the infinite God; as knowing God is the basis of true wisdom. Agur recognized the reality that apart from divine revelation, there is no true wisdom. Agur then asks a series of rhetorical questions meant to indicate the limitation of human perception and achievement; these questions point to things that only God can do. "What is His name?" implies, "Do you fully understand Him?" In the ancient world, knowledge of a god's name implied understanding of his characteristics, power over him, and closeness to him. The question about His Son's name is better understood, "Has He imparted His nature or attributes to any other who may in any sense be called His Son?" "Tell me if you know" reflects Agur's desire to know the nature of God.

**Prov. 30:5-6** - The proverbs in verses 5 and 6 show how God may be known through God's Word, which is flawless. Agur treasured the revelation that God had given. The only Person who meets Agur's qualifications in verse 5 is God (cf. Job 38—41; Prov. 8:24-29). He is the only One with perfect understanding. "Tested" means "smelted," purified (cf. Ps. 12:6). It was trustworthy; it is proven to be

true. Agur correctly regarded the aim of revelation to be the promotion of trust in God, not just knowledge (Prov. 30:5b). God's words are a proven foundation for one's life. The proverb's emphasis on every "word" underscores the truthfulness, trustworthiness, and reliability of the Bible, down to every detail. This passage supports the doctrine for the "plenary" (full, complete) inspiration of Scripture – extended to every word. Agur warned against adding to God's revelation because that is a serious offense (Prov. 30: 6; cf. Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18). Human wisdom is limited. Wise people recognize their ignorance, but they also recognize that all truth resides in the Word of God – and no one should think that they are able to enhance the wisdom that God has given. There are two great facts enunciated in these verses. The first is the perfection, and the second, the all-sufficiency of the words, or sayings of God. The warning not to add to His words may refer to the danger of adding human speculation to divine revelation. God will rebuke and judge those who think they can know more of God than what He has revealed about Himself.

**Prov. 30:7-9** – This is the only prayer recorded in Proverbs. Agur asked God not to lead him into temptation (Matt. 6:13; cf. 1 Chron. 4:10). He had more concern for his purity before God than about his place among people (cf. Phil. 4:11-12). Poverty and wealth both bring with them certain temptations. Abundance tempts us to feel unrealistically self-sufficient (cf. Deut. 8:11-14; John 15:5). Agur's prayer is for "two things"; strength in two areas of known weakness. One – he asked the Lord for specific help to protect him from lies from others and lying to others. Two – he asked the Lord for specific help in providing for his daily needs. Need tempts us to stop trusting God and to resort to acts that harm others. Wealth can cause us to forget the Lord – and we end up trusting in our wealth instead of God. Poverty can cause us to steal and thus dishonor God's character. The prayer of a true wisdom seeker – he seeks honesty in heart and sufficiency in the Lord.

**Prov. 30:10** - It is unwise to meddle in the domestic (and other) affairs of other people. This proverb warns against someone speaking slander – specifically against a servant to the servant's master. "He" refers to a master. The slave might never discover that someone had slandered him, but it is more likely that the master would investigate the charge and discover it false. This is not to be done because the servant is likely to utter a curse against the slanderer for telling a lie. Here the slanderer would be found guilty – indicating you reap what you sow – and God hears and judges righteously.

**Prov. 30:11-14** - Agur sketched four verbal pictures and placed them side by side in these verses to illustrate the folly of arrogance. Each thing listed begins with dor ("generation") meaning a class or group of people. There is a generation (there are these) points to the fact that certain sins can uniquely permeate a whole society or time period. The numerical sequence creates a cumulative effect, namely, a feeling of growing intensity of the sins being written about – disrespect, hypocrisy, arrogance, and oppression. In verse 11, there is a generation (there is a people) who show no respect to their parents. In verse 12, there is a generation (there is a people) who are immoral but refuse to admit it – a generation of hypocrites. In verse 13, there is a generation (there is a people) who are arrogant, haughty in heart and spirit. In verse 14, there is a generation (there is a people) who oppress the poor, taking what they can from them. We observe this occurring today.

**Prov. 30:15-16** – This proverb warns against greediness; taking without contributing. The blood-sucking leech has two suckers at each end of its body with which it draws blood until bloated. These are the 'daughters' named 'Give! Give!'; they draw their life from the life blood of others. Another interpretation of the "leech" mentioned here is that it refers to a horse-leech, which was described as a vampire (a fabulous, fictional creature), that was literally insatiable for the blood of others. Leeches graphically depict the attitude of greed with its tenacious insistence on getting and having more – never

being satisfied. Such greediness is dangerous. Four things are personified as never being satisfied. One – the grave always wants more of the dead. Two – the barren womb always longs to give birth to a child. Three – the land always wants water. Four – the fire always wants fuel to consume. These 4 things are insatiable. Greed will always cause a person to want more – always causing people to be "crying out" for more, and never saying, "That is enough."

**Prov. 30:17** – This proverb is a curse. Disrespect (meaning “to hold in contempt” or “to ridicule”) for one’s parents is as bad as arrogance and greed. Agur’s graphic descriptions visualize the terrible consequences of this folly. We should obey our parents as long as we live under their authority, and we should honor them all our lives. We should do so simply because they have given us physical life, if for no other reason. This proverb warns that severe punishment awaits those who disrespect their parents, such as a violent death and or a lack of burial. A child who does not respect their parents or their authority will ultimately be destroyed. Why, because a sovereign God selected them to give you life and be your parent. To rebel against that is too rebel against God.

**Prov. 30:18-20** – There are four ways which are observed that contrast arrogance to humility. These four "ways" have several things in common that make each of them remarkable. All are mysterious (inexplicable), non-traceable, effective in their element, aggressive, and seemingly go where there are no paths yet leave no evidence of their going behind. One point of these four observations, in view of phenomena observed, is that arrogance is absurd and humility is reasonable. Another point appears to be that these four analogies demonstrate concealed actions and thereby illustrate hypocrisy – where one thing is observed but yet it is not traceable. Another point seems to be that these things occur effortlessly and with little understanding on how they happen, yet they progress steadily toward a goal and final outcome. "The way of a man with a maid" refers to the process by which a woman comes to love a man; and it is interpreted to be a chaste relationship while the “way of the adulterous woman” is interpreted to be an immoral relationship. The woman in verse 19 triggers this comment about how some women can commit adultery as easily as, and without any more remorse than, they can wipe a fragment of food away from their mouths. The illustration is that of a woman who washes herself after illicit sex – and since there is no evidence of a sexual encounter there are no moral ramifications to her behavior. While the proverb speaks to some woman, the same could be said of some men.

**Prov. 30:21-23** - These are four pictures of arrogant folly that picture upside-down social situations. The statements that “the earth is perturbed/trembles” and the earth “cannot bear up” are figures of speech known as “metonymy”, where the earth represents the people who are on it. These proverbs indicate that there is social turmoil when inexperienced, unqualified people are placed in positions of power. The proverb indicates that society is unsettled when a person is promoted to a position of power above their level of competence. One writer saw Adolph Hitler as an example of the kind of servant who became a king that the proverb is addressing. It is not appropriate for an unprepared servant to become a king. It is not appropriate for a fool (one who lacks spiritual sensitivity and perception) to be full of food because he will not understand the needs of others. It is not appropriate for an unloved woman to be married because she brings grief to the marriage. It is not appropriate for a maid servant to become a mistress if she does not know how to manage others. Harmony in society is best accomplished when people know and understand their roles and do not assume positions that they are not capable of handling.

**Prov. 30:24-28** – These are four pictures which demonstrate humble wisdom is superior to arrogant strength. In contrast to the arrogant, here are four examples of humble creatures functioning as God created them to, each remarkably effective and successful. The basic contrast here is between humility

and arrogance. Wisdom, as exhibited by labor, diligence, organization, planning, and resourcefulness, is better than strength. Ants make provision for the future through labor. Rock badgers (animals the size of rabbits) are not good defenders so they diligently seek our places of safety and refuge. Locusts have no organized leader yet they advance in amazing order like waves, cooperating with each other as they devastate crops. Spiders (or small lizards) are small, humble creature yet they can go anywhere they need to and survive even the king's palace. In humility their physical limitations are compensated for by wise actions.

**Prov. 30:29-31** - Agur produces "four" illustrations of "stately" or noble behavior to keep us from concluding that little is always better than big. In contrast with the lowly creatures are those that appear noble in their bearing and walk. The 3 animals and the king picture wise, stately, and orderly deportment. Each offers a glimpse of God's power, wisdom and nobility; and illustrates the dignity and confidence of those who walk wisely. The king is the main point within these proverbs. The king's majesty is not in himself but in his army. The lion walks about freely because of his strength. The rooster (greyhound) and goat walk about with natural arrogance. The king demonstrates all of these characteristics when he walks with his conquering army. Now these stately things demonstrate that a proper bearing in life comes neither from exalting nor from depreciating oneself. It comes from functioning as God created one to function (i.e., to be oneself, sincere).

**Prov. 30:32-33** - These verses call for personal application of the preceding proverbs. Peaceable behavior manifests humility; and the warning is against taking any action that would only lead to further conflict. The intent of this advice is to strive for peace and harmony through humility and righteousness. A person who is prideful is a fool (one who is spiritually imperceptive and insensitive). A foolish person exalts himself and his plans are evil – they cause problems. The foolish person is exhorted to "stop your scheming and talking" – be quiet! The idea is if you are in the middle of making trouble and suddenly realize your foolishness, stop right then before things get worse. If they are not quiet, they will be embroiled in constant conflict. "Churning, twisting (wringing), stirring up (forcing, pressing) is only used here in the O.T. Pride and anger always work against humility. Pride and anger always produces conflict. The challenge is to become quiet and still through humility, to allow peace to rule.

### **Sayings of King Lemuel**

Some scholars have suggested that "Lemuel" (lit. "Devoted to God") may have been a pen name for Solomon. According to Jewish legend, Lemuel was Solomon and his mother was Bathsheba. There is no factual basis for this tradition; and there is no evidence for this tradition. Yet this is the only reference to a king by name in Proverbs, an unusual feature in wisdom literature. Proverbs generally contains the counsel of fathers to the sons who were in line to succeed them. We have noted that both parents normally shared the training of these young men. In chapter 31, we have King Lemuel's recollections of the instruction he had received from his mother earlier in life. Perhaps his father had died, or was unable to instruct him, or gave him other teaching not recorded here.

### **The Wise King (Leader)**

**Prov. 31:1-3** - The unusual address, "What, O my son?" is "affectionately reproachful." Lemuel's "mother" was getting his attention, and strongly appealed to him to give heed to her words, for two reasons: First, she had borne him in her "womb," and secondly, Lemuel had some connection to certain "vows" she had made to God. Perhaps she had dedicated him to the Lord? The question, which is at the same time a call, is like a deep sigh from the heart of the mother concerned for the welfare of her son, who would say to him what is beneficial, and say it in words which strike and remain fixed in her son's mind. She had doubtless been much in prayer for her child both before and after his birth. She wanted

him to know that he was special to her. Her counsel was that it is not wise for a king to make himself dependent on "women". She warned him that being an adulterer has a debilitating effect on one's mind and body. The use of the plural, "women", indicate multiple mistresses and relationships. Such investment of time and energy by a ruler reduces his ability to focus on ruling well and keeping his house in order.

**Prov. 31:4-7** - Her counsel was not only was it not wise for a king to make himself dependent on "women" , it was not wise to become addicted to "wine". Obsession with wine (alcohol) has the same effect as obsession with women. A man who is a leader must first be master of himself. Intoxicating drink can weaken reason and sound judgment; it can loosen convictions and pervert the heart. Leaders always need to have a clear, steady mind and keen judgment available to them at all times. The danger of drunkenness is its tendency to cloud memory and judgment – which can result in an unjust or bad decision being made. The power of alcohol is mentioned – it causes those in pain to not notice their pain; to forget deep emotional stress by providing a temporary escape from their circumstances. While a leader may give alcohol to those in great pain to temporarily escape their pain – a leader is not to do so.

**Prov. 31:8-9** - It is the responsibility of the king (a leader) to champion the rights of the poor and the needy; those who are left desolate by the cruelties of life. A king should uphold justice, especially for "the afflicted" (the poor, the weak, the sick and disabled); those whom other people might take advantage of.

### **The Excellent Woman – A Hebrew Acrostic of Womanly Excellence**

There is much in Proverbs about unwise women. Solomon personified both wisdom and folly as women throughout Proverbs. Wherever a writer personified wisdom in Proverbs it is always clear to the reader that he was using personification as a literary device. That is not the case here. Lemuel's mother seems to have been describing the eminently wise woman, not just Wisdom as a woman. The woman in view seems to be a role model who epitomizes wisdom.

The form of this discourse is an acrostic poem. Each of the 22 verses in the Hebrew Bible begins with the succeeding consonant of the Hebrew alphabet (cf. Ps. 34; Lam. 2; 3; 4). Such a device not only made for more interesting and beautiful reading, but also aided the Hebrew reader in memorizing this passage. Jewish husbands and children traditionally recited this poem at the Sabbath table on Friday evenings. Such a device also was used to show that this woman's character runs the whole range of excellence. The woman in view in this passage is probably no single historic individual. This seems clear from the fact that she is described impersonally in verse 10 as "an excellent wife," rather than as Lemuel's mother or some other specific lady. Furthermore, throughout Proverbs the writers described people generally. They did not use particular individuals as examples, positively or negatively. The woman being written about does the things that the wife of a prince or courtier in Biblical times would do. The woman presented is a wealthy aristocrat who runs a household estate with servants and conducts business affairs—real estate, vineyards, and merchandise—domestic affairs, and charity.

Lemuel said nothing of her intellectual interests or pursuits because those things were not significant for his purpose, which was to stress her wisdom. He did not mention her relationship to God or to her husband. The absence of her husband's involvement in domestic matters fits her station in life as an aristocrat. He would have been busy with public affairs of the day. The qualities and characteristics that are listed in Prov. 31:10-31 appear to create a guide to follow when a man considers marriage. They

define the standard of godly wisdom for women. However, this standard is not within every woman's reach, since it assumes certain personal abilities and resources that are not available to all. It is idealistic. The acrostic poem presents the height of a woman's excellence. Spiritual and practical wisdom plus moral virtues mark the character of this woman; which apply to women today. The principles brought forth do apply today. This lofty portrait of excellence sets a high standard for godly women. This is an ideal, a specific example of mature virtue and wisdom in a woman who allowed herself to be molded by wisdom and instruction. It is not expected that any one woman will reflect every virtue in every respect. Within the sphere of the household we see that the wife has opportunity for great influence and achievement, not only succeeding herself but enabling her husband to succeed as well. These character traits also advocate characteristics that women can demonstrate in many different contexts in life.

**Prov. 31:10** - The Hebrew word translated "excellent/virtuous" means noble, virtuous, capable, and fine. It denotes strength, wealth, ability, valor, and dependability – having practical competence, physical strength, and financial wealth. A good wife is not easy to find, but, when found, she is of inestimable value. Not every man finds a "virtuous" woman; in fact she is found by comparatively few men. A man who finds a virtuous woman should consider her a precious possession more valuable than all earthly things. The man who finds such a wife has a rare fortune; he has received a rare gift from God (Prov. 12:4, 18:22, 19:14).

**Prov. 31:11** - The excellent wife keeps the family possessions together, and increases them by her labor and prudent management. Her thrift and industry add to the family wealth. His confidence in her is complete. He does not keep jealous guard over her or keep his valuables locked up so she cannot get to them. She demonstrates impeccable loyalty to her husband. He lacks nothing of value. She will not bring her husband to ruin by overspending.

**Prov. 31:12** - Since "she does (brings) him good," and "not evil (harm), all . . . her life," she is not contentious. She supports and encourages him; and is faithful in helping. The diligence of the excellent wife benefits her husband and her household. She is an asset, not a liability, to her husband. Good comes to him that is directly attributed to her. (Prov. 27:15).

**Prov. 31:13-15** - "Wool and flax" reflects the biblical economy of the day. She is industrious and works with eager hands; meaning she delights in her work. "In delight" reveals her positive motivation – being eager and positive. Rather than using whatever is handy, she diligently and wisely shops for what is the best that she can afford. She goes out of the way to secure the best food for her family; using diligence, strength and cunning to secure food for the family. She puts the needs of others in her household ahead of her own comfort and convenience. She is self-sacrificing. The excellent woman provides for her household and servants. Her diligence and planning enables everyone in her household to be productive throughout the day. She does not wait for someone to wait on and serve her.

**Prov. 31:16-18** – The excellent woman is thrifty, and she augments her husband's income. She is engaged in business – unusual for biblical times and economy. She is industrious and she approaches her work with determination, with readiness, and with strength. She is financially independent to consider buying a field (indicating wise judgment) and then buying it (indicating control of significant amounts of money). She has a business mind and works diligently to use the gift that God has given her. She has a legitimate sense of self-respect, and she works hard, with the result that she is prosperous (v. Prov. 31:18; Prov. 13:9; 20:20; 24:20).

Today, supplementing her family's income may be a possibility for her. However, husband and wife should agree that this is best for the family. She should make sure her motives and priorities are in order before committing herself to such a job. Is the income essential to meet needs or wants? Is she doing the work to avoid her other higher priority responsibilities? Is she hoping that her job or career, rather than her relationship with God and her family members, will satisfy her needs?

**Prov. 31:19-22** - The "distaff" was the rod that held the raw wool while spinning. The "spindle" was the stick the spinner twirled between her fingers that took up the spun wool. The emphasis on this distinction is the effective and efficient skill she demonstrated in providing for her family and herself. The excellent ranges of skills are demonstrated in manual labor, commercial venture, administrative management, and interpersonal communication. She is generous rather than selfish. The hands that grasp in labor to produce also open wide to provide. She sells some things for profit but also gives to those in need. She provides security for her family by providing them with clothing that is both warm and attractive. She also tends to her own appearance. She dresses in quality garments that reflect appropriately on her and her family. The effort she makes to honor others is rewarded to her.

**Prov. 31:23-24** - The excellent woman helps her husband advance and succeed. She is a credit and an ornament to him. She enhances her husband's standing among the legal and judicial leaders of the government. Though she is aggressive and independent, she functions in a way that brings her under the leadership of her husband. She respects him and builds him up. She contributes to his position and success by the way she has provided for him. His reputation begins at home and is carried out to the community from there. She is both thrifty and industrious. The merchants being referred to are commercial traders – business leaders. She ran a productive and successful commercial enterprise.

**Prov. 31:25-27** - "Strength and dignity" are the outstanding qualities that people see when they observe her, because she was dressed in the high-quality clothes she had fashioned with her own hands. She is strong – not weak; she fears the Lord. She has strength like the young and honor like the old. Her qualities were supported by her public appearance. She is also optimistic about the future because she has prepared for it. She faced the future with confidence; she is not fearful or worried about the future. She is secure. She "is able to speak of (opens her mouth in) wisdom" because she has learned it. The "virtuous woman" is a kind person, because she wisely realizes the importance of that virtue. Moreover, she manages her home well. She gives her household high priority. She is diligent in caring for her home and her children – all which are in her household. She is a skilled manager of the affairs of her household. She rejects idleness. The "bread of idleness" literally means – "eyes looking everywhere" – a description used in the proverbs of a lazy man (Prov. 6:6-9).

**Prov. 31:28-29** - "Her husband" and "children," those who know her best, appreciate and praise her for her many excellent qualities. The excellent woman cares for others, and as a result others care for her. In a loving family, the members of the family recognize the value of each other to the family unit. Here, the excellent woman is shown great respect – and she has earned this praise from the family. Her husband provides the greatest praise – he tells others that she is the greatest of all women – a praise that has been earned.

**Prov. 31:30-31** – The key to her greatness is godly character – she fears the Lord. She may be physically charming and beautiful, but these qualities do not last. Charm can be misleading because it promises a lifetime of happiness but cannot deliver, and physical beauty is only temporary. But the fear of the LORD is the indispensable core of the excellent woman. Because this woman excels in her fear of the Lord – she is the model of the character traits and wisdom taught throughout Proverbs. This quality is more

important than great skill and talent. This quality is foundational to the wise and right use of all the gifts and skills she possesses and exercises – all gifts from God. Such a woman deserves to share in the fruits of her labors and to receive public recognition for her greatness. The excellent character and work of the excellent woman calls for public honor. It has been said, “The excellent woman’s best praise is her works themselves.” A wise woman will enjoy many benefits. Her husband, assuming he is of normal intelligence, will value, bless, and praise her. He will also cherish and honor her (Eph. 5:28-29; 1 Pet. 3:7b), unless he is a fool.

The reference to "the fear of the LORD" in Prov. 31:30 recalls Prov. 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." Thus these two references frame the entire book. The “Fear of the LORD” is found 14 times in Proverbs.

1. 1:7 - the beginning of knowledge;
2. 1:29 - brings answered prayer;
3. 2:5 - equated with knowledge;
4. 8:13 – is to hate evil;
5. 9:10 - the beginning of wisdom;
6. 10:27 – will prolongs days;
7. 14:26 - gives strong confidence;
8. 14:27 - is a fountain of life;
9. 15:16 – is better than great treasure with trouble;
10. 15:33 – is the instruction of wisdom;
11. 19:23 - leads to life;
12. 16:6 - leads one from evil;
13. 22:4 - brings riches, honor and life;
14. 23:17-18 - rewards hope

**By fearing the LORD, all men can live wisely and righteously – and that is the message of Proverbs!**

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## Sources Referenced

**All Sources identified below were used to create this compilation of notes, which were used for a Bible Study.**

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