

PROVERBS 22:17-23:24

Proverbs 22

¹⁷ Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge, ¹⁸ for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. ¹⁹ That your trust may be in the Lord, I have made them known to you today, even to you. ²⁰ Have I not written for you thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge, ²¹ to make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?

For the sake of time I want to focus in on verse 19 — *That your trust may be in the Lord, I have made them known to you today, even to you.*

Trust in God requires humility of heart. You have to be willing to say — *I'm will bow my will before God's wisdom.* Here's what that looks like: When God speaks I may not quite understand it. But here's the position I take: **He** is infinitely wise **wise** — **I'm not**. So I will submit my will to His wisdom. I'll trust Him.

Faith and obedience go hand in hand. The person who says, *I trust in the Lord*; the person who says, *I believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible word of God*, and then knowingly disobeys the Word of God, is deluded. Every act of disobedience is an act of unbelief!

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME — It's not a sin, nor is it a lack of faith, to have questions about the Bible; to not understand everything that God says in His Word. It's not un-natural to have a response of deep opposition to the truth of God's Word (sexual sin, unequally yoked, love your enemy, forgive). In fact, it's the most natural thing in man to push back against the work of the Holy Spirit bring the truth of God's Word to bear on our lives (Galatians 5:17). But faith is absolutely against the grain of everything natural.

Faith says YES to the wisdom of God. Even though you may not understand it; even though every emotion and every fiber of your being

pushes back against what God has said; even if the whole course of our culture is going against what God said, you bow down to it. FAITH leads us to worship God — to bow to His infinite and perfect wisdom.

²² Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, ²³ for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.

This proverb is about social justice

poor = “feeble, weak, helpless

at the gate = the city gate is where legal cases were heard.

The feeble, the weak, the helpless are easy prey for people who can get their way in court by bribery and false accusations.

But the Lord has such a heart for the marginalized. We ought to stand with the Lord. Keller put it like this: *“If you don't love the poor, you don't know what God's done for you.”*

²⁴ Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, ²⁵ lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

We were made for community. The entrance of sin into the world ruined the very thing we were made for. We need to be very mindful of the fact that relationships and friendships are comprised of broken people.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”

In other words, we are formed by the company we keep. Because of that we need to understand the kinds of relationships that can leave us broken instead of better.

This proverb is not endorsing isolationism. It challenges us to be very strategic in the way we can be agents of the Gospel — instruments of

change in the lives of men and women whose lives are marked by anger and wrath.

You and I should look for the opportunities to be a Jesus influence in their lives. You and I should want them to be formed by their relationship with us. You and I should want them to see the richness and liberty and peace that Jesus can give. As Keller puts it — *share your faith in such a way that people will wish that it is true* — so that they begin moving towards Jesus. But such persons should never be forming our behavior — causing us to look like them — full of anger and wrath.

²⁶ Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts.

²⁷ If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you?

Here we see the responsibility of the person co-signing for another person's debt. He must consider the possibility of default. If you're going to co-sign for another person's financial liability you need to know that if the borrower defaults they're coming for your valuable possessions.

²⁸ Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set.

A **landmark** refers to a stone or pile of stones marking the boundary line between the land belonging to two individuals or clans¹

Property was a big thing in the Old Testament. God made laws for the preservation of property. If you ever had to sell your property to pay a debt God made a provision in the law for that property to be redeemed. Because property was a big deal, God even made a law about moving property lines.

Deuteronomy 19:14 “You shall not move your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set, in the inheritance that you will hold in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

¹ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (2000). *A handbook on Proverbs* (p. 483). New York: United Bible Societies.

God had to give that law because he understood the heart of man. In fact the law of **Deuteronomy 19:14** is an extension of the 8th commandment.

Exodus 20:17 *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

At the core of the proverb are matters of discontentment, covetousness and theft!

As I was looking at this I couldn't help but see the spiritual implications pictured here. ¹ We are God’s purchased possession. Our lives are His property (Eph. 1:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). God has established spiritual boundaries for us in His Word. We need to respect those boundaries, guard those boundaries, never disregard them or move them to fit our own desires or the changing moral landscape of fallen culture. ² Our lives are His property. But sometimes we want to move the property lines. Sometimes we want to withhold some of the real estate of our heart — “Lord, you can have all of my heart, but not this one thing — not this bitterness that I’m holding on to; not this resentment; not this unforgiveness.” ³ Sometimes we want to withhold some real estate in our lives, move the property lines of our time, our talents and our treasures, keeping more for ourselves and leaving less for God. ⁴ We can be dissatisfied with the size and shape and quality of the life God created us for and redeemed us to. God says, *This is the life I have for you. This is the spouse I have for you. This is the car, the home I have for you. These are the abilities I have for you. These are the looks I have for you (nose, ears, physique, hair – or lack of).* We can say: *God, I know my life is yours by creation and by redemption; but you got it wrong.* So we begin to resize and reshape our life.

Let’s respect the landmark established by our all-wise, all-loving heavenly Father! Let’s be the best stewards of the real estate of our redeemed life so our Redeemer becomes famous!

²⁹ Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.

Every human skill is endowed by God to be used for God and for His glory. Fallen man uses his God given skills for self-promotion. Those skills will get him an audience with the king (or the president, or Jay Leno or David Letterman). Fallen man will make those skills an ultimate thing — seek to derive life from that ability; make that skill their identity (I am what I do).

The Christian sees those skills in a different light. He knows they are God given and as a result is humbled by the gift. He sees himself as a steward of that skill and as a result works hard to develop and perfect it. He sees that God-given skill as a part of the economy of God to get the Gospel before people who are influential in culture. He understands that the skill is not the end — it is his passport that gains him access into culture as an ambassador representing his creator and redeemer!

Proverbs 23

¹ When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, ² and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. ³ Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

FIRST — God is directing us.

A general take on this — He tells us that we need to be aware of our social context; know where we are; know who we're with. That information has a direct bearing on our behavior. Easy example: When men are in a casual social setting with other men, there are certain — shall we say — freedoms — that would not be in play in the company of women or in more structured social settings or a business meeting.

There is a specific context that requires specific conduct.

When you sit down to eat with a ruler

The implication is that you've been invited to the table of a **ruler** — someone who is in a position of authority and influence. As we learned time and again in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit brought Gospel influence to bear upon places of influence and people of influence, accelerating and expanding the advance of the Gospel. By the way — in

today's Bible Bus reading we saw an awesome Old Testament example of this in the life of Daniel

***Daniel 11:1** And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him.*

Many students of the Bible believe that the magi came from the East following the star to Bethlehem because of Daniel's influence upon the highly educated in Babylon centuries earlier.

There are people in our family, social, business or academic settings who are "rulers." They are influential in those circles and by God's grace we can be salt and light, and by our words and actions bring the Gospel to bear on the lives of men and women who influence their world in a far greater way than we ever could.

By way of the instructions in these opening verses God is directing us how to best live on mission. The point of this proverb is to guard your witness.

When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you,

The Pulpit Commentary is helpful here — *But the latter words may also be rendered, "him that is," or, "who is before thee." And this gives a very appropriate sense. The guest is enjoined to fix his attention, not on the delicate food, but on the host.*²

The idea is to be a humble, gracious guest, who is others centered, who looks for ways to be a blessing to the host rather than being preoccupied with the volume and quality of the food and beverages.

When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you,² and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.

² Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *Proverbs* (p. 440). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

Verse 2 is a Middle Eastern figure of speech for putting restraint on the appetite.³

So there you are — invited to sit down with people of influence. Don't ruin an opportunity for the advance of the Gospel by eating like a pig!

NLT — If you are a big eater, put a knife to your throat;

QUOTE: Bible Knowledge Commentary — Humorously the guest is advised to **put a knife to his throat** (rather than to his food)!⁴

QUOTE: William Wordsworth (1770 – 23 April 1850) — “*Stab thy gluttony,*”

The proverb ends with this insight

³ Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

It's possible that the host is setting the table just to see how the Christian guest will respond — to expose the Christian as a self-centered person who is in bondage to the idol of his own appetite.

⁴ Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. ⁵ When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

Do not toil = “don't weary yourself,” that is, by hard continuous effort. “Do not wear yourself out” (NIV, NJB, Scott) and “Do not slave” (REB) express this well⁵

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴ Buzzell, S. S. (1985). Proverbs. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (2000). *A handbook on Proverbs* (p. 487). New York: United Bible Societies.

This Proverb is not informing us and directing us to avoid hard work. Remember — The Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. The Holy Spirit has been consistently warning against laziness because it is a form of idolatry. It is self-indulgence with no regard for the glory of God and the good of others.

The point of the proverb about the object of your exhausting labor! We are all giving ourselves to something. The Holy Spirit is challenging us about the thing we are going to exhaust ourselves for. Who or what are you toiling for?

Idolatry is making a good thing an ultimate thing; a good thing a god thing. Some people make wealth their ultimate thing. They derive their identity from acquiring it and from all that it can give to them. They make it the thing from which they hope to derive life.

The Bible has some powerful things to say about serving created things; making them ultimate things in the place of God. It is an absolute truth that idols always lie. In Matthew 13:22 Jesus said that riches are deceitful. They promise what they can't deliver. Instead of your idol serving you, you end up serving your idol.

Isaiah 46:6-7 Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.

Without fail, idols always fail.

1 Timothy 6:17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Right here we're told that they seem to fly away! THAT would be uncertainty. People who have exhausted themselves in serving wealth have seen their fortunes fly away!

HERE'S THE POINT — Exhaust yourself for the glory and honor of the One, True and Living God who made you, carries you and saves you!

Isaiah 46:3-4 “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne (carried) by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴ even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

HERE'S THE POINT — Serve Jesus who loves you and washed you from your sins with His blood!

HERE'S THE POINT — Labor for things that last forever

John 6:27-29 **Do not labor** for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸Then they said to him, “**What must we do**, to be doing the works of God?”

What must we be laboring for, exhausting ourselves in?

²⁹Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

QUOTE: Spurgeon — *It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus.*

If Jesus has truly become our ultimate thing — the One from whom we derive life; the One from whom we derive our very existence, we will begin to exhaust ourselves for Him; exhaust ourselves for the cause of His Kingdom; exhaust ourselves to make His name known and to make His name great!

Here's the amazing thing! When we are exhausting ourselves for Jesus, Jesus says that we are accumulating treasures in heaven.

Matthew 6:19-20 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but

lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

If you exhaust yourself in the pursuit of earthly wealth, it is subject to every broken influence in this fallen world. Even if you manage to preserve it all until you die, you still lose it all. That wealth can't follow you into heaven.

If you are serving wealth, people don't matter; truth doesn't matter. Life is all about you and what you can get for you. Your kindness to others is only a function of your greed.

By contrast, if you're serving Jesus you will be the best, hardest working, most gracious, kind and loving person in your home, your workplace, your classroom or on your team.

Exhaust yourself for Jesus! He is the only One worthy of our life! Only what we do for Jesus will last!

⁶ Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, ⁷ for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you. ⁸ You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words.

The stingy man is in reality a greedy man.

Proverbs 28:22 *A stingy man hastens after wealth*

He might have little, or he might have much, but it is never enough! That's why he is stingy! Generosity is attack on his idol. So when that person invites you to his or her house they want you to think that they love you and want to enjoy time together; they want you to think they're generous. But in reality, they agonize over every bite of their food that you eat!

⁷ for he is like one who is inwardly calculating.

In other words, they watch every bite you take, and calculate the value of it. Their heart isn't with you — their heart is with their money. Instead of enjoying your company he's keeping a running tab!

Greed keeps track of what is spent on others. But when you are set free from serving your possessions you can be truly generous. Grace never keeps track of what has been given. It only desires others to receive.

⁹ Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.

Proverbs has defined the “fool” as the self-informed, self-defined, self-directed man. In today’s Bible Bus reading we read ***Proverbs 28:26 - Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool.*** Good sense is rooted in God’s Word. The person who has rejected all dependence upon God and God’s word doesn't think of himself as foolish. He will ***despise the good sense of your words*** that have their roots in God’s Word and God’s Wisdom.

There’s a great diagnostic tool for us here. Check the response of your heart when someone is speaking to you clearly from the Scriptures. I’m not talking about hearing someone who is twisting the scriptures to make their point or manipulate you.

CLOSE

"For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man." (Stott)

Only on the cross do you have a totally holy God and a totally loving God.