

Wisdom Literature

Proverbs

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Outline of Proverbs

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The Book of Proverbs

I. The Author

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

Bruce K. Waltke has noted that “No attribution of authorship within the Old Testament has been proved spurious [questionable].” This naturally brings up the question of the authorship of *Ecclesiastes*—attributed to Solomon—to which he responds, “Although many allege that *The Sayings of Qoheleth* claims Solomonic authorship, in truth the late editor of that work credits *Qoheleth's* words to a **Solomon-like figure, not to Solomon himself**, in what appears to be a studied attempt to avoid the morally questionable practice of pseudonymity [using an assumed name of a well-known person]” (Waltke, p. 35; emphasis and words in brackets mine). Thus, Waltke and Tremper Longman III are agreed on the non-Solomonic authorship of *Ecclesiastes*, something discussed in detail in your notes on *Ecclesiastes*.

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

II. Structure of Proverbs

A casual reader of *Proverbs* may wonder why we must bother with the structure of the book when it appears on the surface to have little, if any, real structure. Waltke believes otherwise, and has gone to some length in demonstrating this structure in its seven collections (*Proverbs*, pp. 9-28). But before we summarize Waltke's conclusions, we should take another look at the book ourselves and notice the obvious differences throughout the book.

A. Different Divisions in the book of Proverbs

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

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

3. It is clear that the early chapters of *Proverbs* ***do not*** consist of short, pithy (concise and to the point) statements about wisdom; but rather consist of ***longer sections inviting the reader, “My son”, to receive the wisdom offered in the book*** (cf. 1: 8-19; 2: 1-15; 3: 1-35; 4: 1-27). All of

these extended sections are addressed to “My son”, and while the addresses to “my son” continue throughout the book (Prov. 19: 27; 23: 15, 19, 26; 24: 13, 21; 27: 11; 31: 2), the extended invitations to wisdom are replaced by short proverbs.

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

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

B. Summary of Waltke on the Structure of Proverbs

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

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

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

Collection I (1: 1—9: 18) sets the context for the entirety of the book and is made up of extended *poems in praise of wisdom* which serve to *motivate* the reader to receive the wisdom offered in all seven collections (Waltke, p. 10).

Waltke offers the following *chiastic* arrangement (which he labels, *concentric*) for Collection I (Proverbs, I. p. 12).

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

By way of contrast, **Collection II** (10: 1—22: 16) consists of *aphorisms* (short, one-verse statements of truth) which are divided into two parts called *versets*—two halves of a single verse (Waltke, p. 14).

Collection III (22: 17—24: 22) is set apart from Collection II not only by the heading, “the words of the wise” (22: 17) but also by the *change* from one verse aphorisms to “*more extended, flowing sayings*” which may cover two or more verses (Waltke, p. 14). Compare the following: Prov. 10: 2 of Collection II, “Ill-gotten gains do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.” This short, pithy saying from Collection II consists of a single *aphorism*—a one verse statement of truth—divided into two *versets*. (Another feature of this verse is *antithetic*

parallelism in which two opposing statements are made which serve to clarify a single thought.) Prov. 22: 22-23 from Collection III, “Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their case, and take the life of those who rob them.” Notice that this selection consists of two verses, not one, and flows more smoothly than the short aphorism from Collection I. Furthermore, as Waltke has noted, the sayings of Collection III take the form of *admonitions or imperatives* (commands) followed by the *motivations* for obeying the commands (p. 14). “Don’t rob the poor [command], for if you do, the Lord will do worse to you! [motivation for obeying the command]”

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

Collection V consists of two main sections: 25: 2—27: 27 and 28: 1—29: 27. In the first section we find primarily *synthetic or comparative* proverbs with the exception of 25: 2; 27: 6, 7, 12 (Waltke, p. 25). One example is 25: 6, “Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of great men.” The idea contained in the first half of the verse (verset) is *compared* to the idea in the second half, thus completing the meaning of the proverb. Claiming honor in the presence of the king is essentially the same thing as taking your place in the presence of great men. In other words, don’t think too highly of yourself. Another example is 26: 3, “A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools.” A whip for the horse and a bridle for the donkey are *compared* to the rod for the fool. Furthermore, horses and donkeys which must be controlled by external means are compared to unmanageable fools who, having no self-control, must be controlled by external force. The exceptions noted above are *antithetic* proverbs in which the first idea is *contrasted* to the second to complete the idea. The two halves of the verse are often separated by the adversative, “*but*”. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, *but* deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (27: 6). It is better to be rebuked by a friend who truly loves you and has your best interests at heart than to receive the greeting and flattery of an enemy who is only trying to manipulate you.

Collection V also possesses a very large number of similes and a lesser number of metaphors. The simile is an *explicit* comparison between two things of unlike nature but have something in common with one another. The simile generally uses the word “like” or “as”, or one of them is implied if not explicitly stated. One of these two words in the English Bible either occurs or is implied roughly 25 times in Chapters 25-27 (cf. 25: 13; 26: 2). Metaphors do not use “like” or “as” and are *implicit* comparisons between two things of unlike nature but yet have something in common (cf. Waltke, pp. 39-40 for the different literary devices used in *Proverbs*). They are less common in Collection V than similes. Three examples are 27: 17, “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”; 27: 21, “The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is tested by the praise accorded him;” and 27: 23, “Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds,” where flocks and herds are metaphors for the people who are under your care.

The second section of **Collection V** (28: 1—29: 27) consists primarily of *antithetic proverbs* which are defined above. “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (28: 1). “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father” (28: 7) (cf. 28: 10, 28; 29: 2, 7, 15, 23). This section is also characterized by a relatively high number of references to “Yahweh” (the Lord), used five times from chapter 28-29, while “Yahweh” is used only once (25: 22) in chapters 25-26 (Waltke, p. 25).

Collection VI (30: 1-33) are the words of Agur which are primarily distinguished by two characteristics: (1) numerical sayings, and (2) sayings which pertain to the social order. An example of the former is vv. 7-9, “**Two** things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny *You* and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or That I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God.” Another is vv. 18-19, “There are **three** things which are too wonderful for me, **Four** which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the sky, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the middle of the sea, And the way of a man with a maid.” Agur’s words are replete (well-supplied) with the use of *two’s, three’s,*

and four's. Secondly, his work is pre-occupied, it seems, with the *established social order* which should not be upset by aberrations (departures from what is right) of that order. Examples of this social concern are v. 11: “There is a kind of *man* who curses his father And does not bless his mother”, v. 17: “The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it”, and vv. 21-23 which are a combination of numerical sayings and sayings about the social order: “Under *three* things the earth quakes, And under *four*, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.” (See Waltke, pp. 26-27; Vol. 1, *Proverbs*).

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

C. Hebrew Parallelism

The predominant characteristic of Hebrew poetry is not rhyme and meter, as in English poetry, but parallelism. Parallelism is the “cornerstone for meaning, not merely an adornment” (Waltke, p. 41). Consider the following proverb, “Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well.” The first half of the verse, called verset A, is complemented by the second half of the verse, verset B, which in this case presents essentially the same idea in a different way. This is known as *synthetic* or comparative parallelism, as noted above. Metaphor is also used in this verse. Drinking water from your own cistern is a metaphor for enjoying sex with your own wife rather than having sex with the adulteress. I will be pointing out other figures of speech as we go along.

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

pomp and arrogance of the rich man and will understand that he is only a rich fool (cf. Lk. 12: 16-21).

Thus, by understanding the use of parallelism we have an important key to the interpretation of *Proverbs*. There are other important keys to understanding them which will be pointed out as we go along (cf. Waltke, “Forms of Proverbs”, pp. 38-63, *Proverbs*).

Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

I. Collection I (1: 1-9: 18)

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

1. Title (1: 1)

2. Preamble (1: 2-7)

Although Solomon did not write the whole book, the editor of *Proverbs* ascribed its authorship to Solomon since he was its most distinguished contributor (Waltke, pp. 173-174). This ascription differs markedly from that of *Ecclesiastes* which does not specifically mention Solomon but only a Solomon-like figure named Qohelet (cf. notes on *Ecclesiastes*). As mentioned earlier, the purpose statement is found in the Preamble which consists in a series of infinitives beginning with “to” with the meaning, “in order to”: “To [in order to] know wisdom...to [in order to] discern...” etc.

“To know wisdom” should be understood within the framework of Hebrew culture, not the Graeco-Roman view of *knowledge for its own sake*, or theoretical knowledge. For the Hebrew, knowledge was not merely *head-knowledge, but heart-knowledge*, the ability to apply knowledge to the practical experiences and problems of life without which true knowledge was lacking. Thus, one was not only to know wisdom but to understand it (v. 2b, 6). One of the things which characterizes the whole of *Proverbs* is its practical orientation to life and the emphasis on *individual* righteousness rather than the *national* righteousness of the whole nation (cf. Waltke, p. 65). There are in *Proverbs*, therefore, subtle variations of righteousness which are

not present in the *more formal declarations* of the Law of God in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Thus the *Proverbs* serve to round out the Hebrew's instruction in the Law of God.

Wisdom, furthermore, requires the humility to receive it (v. 3). The attainment of wisdom is not an individualistic, autonomous (self-governing) *achievement*, but a humble *reception* of practical knowledge which others can offer us *if* we yield ourselves to their instruction. The whole book is addressed to the “son” who must humble himself under the authority of his father and mother. We are instructed to not lean on our own understanding if we wish to be wise (3: 5; cited by Waltke, p. 177). The assumption throughout is that there is a certain amount of naiveté or gullibility which is characteristic of youth who often give themselves too much credit for being wise. “Prudence” (v. 4) is “cunning” used in a positive way to get around in life (cf. Waltke, p. 95). I would call it “walking-around-sense” or “sanctified common sense”. While young people are often over-confident in their ability to perceive the best course of action, older people have been “around the block” enough times to have their self-confidence shattered many times. Wisdom, to them, is not as easily obtained as they once thought when they were young.

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

The book's “theological and epistemological foundation” is found in v. 7—“*the fear of the Lord*” (Waltke, pp. 180-181). Epistemology is the study of the “origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge” (Webster's New World Dictionary). Said another way: How do we know what we know? And how much can we know? These are not idle questions especially today within the context of modern philosophical skepticism which doubts even the reliability of sensory experience and the possibility of knowing anything, even the meaning of words. But in ancient thought, too, there were serious doubts about the reliability of absolute truth. The fear of the Lord, which includes submission to His word and to the interpretation of creation in His word, brings us to a studied confidence that true knowledge can and should be acquired. God

has not created the world to deceive us but to evoke the praise of His glory. The fear of the Lord includes *obedience to His Law* as well as the proper *emotional response of love and awe*. While most men “fear God” in the sense of dreading His judgments upon their behavior (Rom. 2: 15-16), the fear of the “Lord” (Yahweh) acknowledges that He should also be trusted and worshipped. The love of the Lord and the fear of the Lord are synonymous and should never be opposed to one another in the consciousness of the believer (cf. Waltke, pp. 100-101, where he compares the fear of “God” in Ex. 1: 17 and Gen. 20: 10-11 with the fear of “the Lord” in Deut. 5: 29; 6: 2 and 6: 5).

As people in general are motivated to obey their consciences out of fear of God, so saints respond to the moral imperative of Scripture apart from either legal or ecclesiastical sanctions. For them the fear of the Lord is just as real as their love for him (see 14: 27). Both psyches are rooted in their faith: they believe his promises and love him; they believe his threats and fear him. In sum, C. Bridges says: “[The fear of the Lord is] that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law (Waltke, p. 101).

B. Prologue and Epilogue (1: 8—9: 18)

1. Prologue (1: 8—8: 36)

The prologue gives the reader the context from which all the other collections in *Proverbs* must be interpreted (Waltke, I. pp. 10, 181; review the summaries of the different collections given above and review the outline). In the prologue we find *two world-views* contrasted in three different ways: wisdom and folly, good and pseudo-good (or the pretense of the “good life”), and life and death. ***Wisdom is praised throughout these nine chapters as the means of motivating the son to choose the way of wisdom, good, and life and to reject the seduction of folly, the pretense of the “good life”, and death.*** Just as the father teaches his son at home, lady wisdom (wisdom personified) teaches the gullible youth in the public streets. The alternative world-view is presented in the seductions of the gang (“sinners who entice you”, 1: 10-19) who tempt the son with “easy money” and the adulterous woman who tempts the son with “easy sex” (2: 16-22; Waltke, p. 182). Thus, the father is set in apposition (side by side with) to the gang, and lady wisdom is placed in apposition to the adulterous woman.

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

Although the male image dominates *Proverbs* up to chapter 31, the importance of the female cannot be discounted. The instructions of both father and mother are here treated equally (v. 8), an equality which must be assumed throughout the book whenever the father speaks. References to the mother (1: 8; 4: 3; 6: 20; 10: 1; 15: 20; 19: 26; 20: 20; 23: 22, 25; 28: 24; 29: 15; 30: 11; 30: 17), and to a virtuous wife in the latter part of Prov. 31 indicate that women have an important pedagogical (teaching) role alongside the men (Waltke, p. 117).

Youth are vulnerable to peer pressure, a universal trait in all cultures and in all times. Everyone is looking for some form of community. God has sovereignly created the family unit as the basic societal community with father and mother for the proper transmission of moral values and the socialization of children. The alternative community and transmitter of values is the community of one's peers who lack experience and wisdom, a community which may malfunction as a gang (Waltke, p. 189). (What does this have to say for the common practice of sending children to boarding schools where their peers are the primary socializing influence?) Likewise, the lure of easy money transcends all times and all cultures. Why work when you can steal? The father uses graphic language only to highlight the real intentions of the gang which may be more cleverly concealed than the father's description depicts (Waltke, p. 191). He only does so to make his warnings more emphatic and to reveal the ultimate intentions of the gang. Likewise, I don't think we should limit such warnings to violent behavior as if only this extreme behavior were in view. The father warns the son of any peer group which operates outside the acceptable boundaries of the law of God—behavior which may logically lead to violence. Such people will fall into their own traps (v. 17) and ambush their own lives (v. 18).

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

As the father appeals to the son at *home*, so Lady Wisdom cries out in the *streets*. In her audience are various kinds of people who have rejected wisdom in one degree or another. There

are those who are *gullible* or simple who are easily influenced by people more hardened in their resistance to wisdom, the scoffer and the fool who delight themselves in hating everything good and pure. The gullible man has little spiritual weight or substance and is easily influenced by others. He is not interested in serious conversations about ultimate issues: life and death, heaven and hell, right and wrong, and quickly changes the subject when these subjects are mentioned. The *scoffer* goes to the next level. While the simple person is somewhat passive in the hands of evil, the scoffer is active in his opposition against good. He goes out of his way to scorn or ridicule people who are conscientious about doing the right thing. He ridicules people who contemplate the meaning of life, moral purity, the existence of God, and God's purpose for their lives. The scoffer says to such people, "Lighten up! Don't be so serious all the time! Go out and have some fun and live life to the fullest. Go party, get drunk, have sex and enjoy yourselves! God and morality will wait until we are old and can't do anything else. But now we are young and should not let life will pass us by!"

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

Wisdom is shouting in the streets to all people. You see her all the time even though you may not recognize her. Wherever the truth of God is being spoken or practiced, Lady Wisdom is there. She is in the church on Sunday morning; she is in the secondary school on Monday morning. She is in on the streets of Kampala on Friday night personified in believers who know how to behave themselves after dark, who fear God and keep His commandments (v. 29). She is

personified by people who live godly lives in the midst of a perverse and wicked generation who think all day long of ways they can lie and cheat their way through life.

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

Trouble will come upon the gullible, the scoffer, and the fool like a “storm”, like a “whirlwind” (v. 27). Other than flash flooding, serious weather patterns are rare in Uganda. God has richly blessed this country with mild weather. But in Mississippi, where I come from, we have tornadoes and hurricanes, storms you are not familiar with. A tornado can have winds up to 200 miles an hour, the kind that will literally carry you away. Such wind causes houses to explode. They can pick up an oil tanker truck and throw it hundreds of meters away. Winds that strong can take a soda straw and force it through an electrical pole. They can extend a mile wide, and they destroy everything in their path. This is the kind of storm v. 27 is talking about—a storm that can sweep one’s whole life away and leave him nothing but ruin and destruction. Anguish, distress, fear and weeping will come upon him all at once.

In this hour of utter despair and darkness fools will call upon the Lord for deliverance, but they will be met with stone cold silence. The Hebrew parallelism heightens the intensity of their abandonment. “***They will call on me, but I will not I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me***” (v. 28). At one time Wisdom was fully accessible and available, calling out to them in the streets and in the public places, but when the fool is pinned down under an overturned matatu and bleeding to death, Wisdom will not rescue him. When his body is wasting away with AIDS, she will be silent. When the village mob is beating him senseless for stealing, Wisdom will not turn them away. When he is a lonely old man whose wife left him for repeated infidelity, Wisdom will not comfort him. The fool is now getting from Wisdom the *same* treatment she received from him. For a long time he spurned her calls to repentance and laughed at her reproofs. She is now laughing at him, and finally abandoning him to his just fate. He was warned that this day would come, and now it is here (vv. 29-30).

Verse 28 is not talking about *genuine repentance*. When the scoffing fool cries out to God for help and seeks the Lord, he is only asking Him to help him out of a bad situation. He is suffering the consequences of his own actions, and he desperately wants deliverance from his suffering; but he is not asking for deliverance from the sinful condition of his heart which caused the suffering. We must not apply this passage to the *sincere penitent* who genuinely cries for mercy. Jesus did not laugh at the dying thief on the cross who confessed the justice of his fate and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom” (Lk. 23: 40-42).

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

very thing you wanted most in life. Hell is filled with the broken lives of people who got what they wanted. But the fool has not loved the very thing he should have loved—the wisdom and knowledge of God.

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

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

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

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

It is not as though Wisdom will magically swoop down from the sky whenever the son is in trouble, but Wisdom will give him the *discretion* needed to avoid ruinous situations and harmful people. The wise son will not enter business deals with liars and cheats because he will have discernment about a man's character (v. 12). He will not lose his money on get-rich-quick

schemes or frivolous living. He will not become involved with the adulterous or loose woman who will one day abandon him as easily as she abandoned her previous husband (vv. 16-17). Avoiding the companionship of scoffers and fools who can only get him into trouble, he “will walk in the way of good men, and keep to the paths of the righteous” (v. 20). It is his *own* discretion—produced by wisdom—which will guard him, and his *own* understanding which will watch over him (v. 11).

But such promises do not belong to the half-hearted seeker. The search for wisdom is likened to a mining operation in which wisdom lies buried deep beneath the surface (v. 4). Gold and precious gems are not lying along the way-side waiting to be picked up by the casual stroller. If they were so common, they would be worthless since they would be possessed by all. Rather, they are rarely found and only by those who spend considerable time and energy pursuing them. So it is with wisdom; she must be sought diligently, and she will only be sought in such a manner by those who value her as hidden treasure. The Lord desires us to have wisdom, but he will not lavish his gifts upon those who despise them. Our actions will prove our true desires. Just as we will spend our money on the things we value most, we will also spend our time seeking what is truly important. At the end of the search, however, it is not our own efforts which must be praised for finding wisdom, but God’s grace, “For the Lord gives wisdom: from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (v. 6; Waltke, p. 223).

Lasting permanence in the land is promised to those who are upright and blameless—that is, those whose lives have been influenced by wisdom (v. 21). The land was an important sacrament (something sacred) to the OT Israelite, the inheritance from the fathers who were originally given the land as part of the promise made to Abraham. To give it up or sell it without necessity was a sacrilege (a violation of something sacred) as the story of Naboth shows (1 Kings 21: 3). Loss of the land due to poverty was devastating, and provision was made through the Jubilee Year and the kinsman redeemer to restore lost land to the original owners (Lev. 25: 10, 25). Thus, the father promises his son lasting permanence on the land as the reward for pursuing wisdom with all his heart. Contrasted with this is the uprooting of the wicked who do not have lasting permanence but will be cut off from the land (cf. Ps. 37: 9-11 which presents the identical picture).

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

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

But there is an additional reward added to this one. Even if an obedient person falls into the exceptional category and dies early in life—and this happens often enough to elicit Qohelet's complaint—his years on earth are adorned with peace and contentment. Better to have a short life filled with peace than a long one riddled with discontent and strife (cf. the “better-than” passages of *Proverbs*: 15: 16, 17; 16: 8, 19, 32; 17: 1; 21: 9, 19; 25: 24). Jim Eliot, the famous

young missionary who was murdered in an attempt to evangelize the unreached Indian tribes of Peru, once recorded in his prayer journal, “Lord, I don’t ask for a long life but a full one.” God took him to heaven at 27 years of age; He granted Eliot’s wish.

Kindness and truth (v. 3) are metonymies—associated terms which represent the whole of the father’s teaching and commandments (Waltke, p. 241). To be effective in the son’s life, the father’s commandments must be his constant companions, adornments around his neck and written on his heart through constant reflection and contemplation (cf. Deut. 6: 6-9). If only occasionally remembered, the commandments will not shape his thinking and behavior. They must become habitual or second-nature to be useful. Once the commandments have shaped his conscience and behavior, the obedient son will discover that his transformed life is rewarded with favor from God and man. God loves his chosen people no matter what their behavior, even Abram who lies about his wife Sarai (Gen. 12: 10-20) and Jacob who steals his brother Esau’s birthright. But it is poor theology which ignores or marginalizes (sets aside) the blessings of God for obedience. If we lump all believers together into the same group, those who are careless about obedience with those who conscientiously listen to instruction and make a serious attempt to pattern their lives after Biblical teaching, we eliminate the incentives for godly living. While it is true that there is nothing we can do to make God love us any more than He loves us already in Christ, it does not follow that we can do nothing to make God more pleased with us. God is displeased with us when we ignore His teachings; He is pleased with us when we follow them. This is not legalism, but the law of sowing and reaping found throughout *Proverbs* and in the NT (Gal. 6: 7-8; Matt. 5: 3-12).

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

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

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

Elvis Presley was an American idol of the late 1960's whose name is still a house-hold word in America and throughout the world. One of his most popular songs (written, I think, by Frank Sinatra) was “I Did It My Way”. Elvis died of consistent drug abuse in his early forties, but he did it *his* way. “There is a *way* which seems right to a man, But its end is the *way of death*” (Prov. 14: 12), but “In the *way* of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no *death*” (Prov. 12: 28). In *all* our ways we are to acknowledge that God's way is better than our way (v. 6a). The word “all” indicates that Biblical wisdom is not limited to church and personal quiet times but encompasses all of life. The Apostle Paul said, “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking *every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10: 5). This is God's world and not man's, and if we succeed in relating to this world in a meaningful and successful way, we must acknowledge that

all the laws of the universe must bow to the sovereign will of God who created the world in wisdom (Ps. 104: 24). Thus, we go astray in our thinking if we fail to yield to God’s wisdom in economics, science, and politics as if these areas exist exclusively on man’s “turf” under his dominion. God desires His people to be *pious*, to live godly lives, but not *pietistic*—the error of thinking that a Christian is only as good as his devotional life. The result of this acknowledgment will be straight paths (v. 6b). The idea here may be that a straight path will get the person to the appropriate destination in the shortest amount of time and with the least amount of danger, as opposed to a crooked one with many blind bends and curves in the road where thieves and robbers may be lurking. Or it could be an allusion to the self-conscious focus of the righteous person who steadfastly sets his face to please God rather than diverting his attention to many worthless paths which lead him in all directions.

The ethical dimension of wisdom is always in the forefront. When all is said and done, the meaning of wisdom is: “Fear the Lord and turn away from evil” (v. 7). Without moral practice, wisdom is only a theory, and if only a theory, a delusion. Without love for God and love for one’s fellow man, “all knowledge” renders a man only a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”, “nothing” really (1 Cor. 13: 1-2).

Again, there is a physical dimension to wisdom. Not only does it give long life as a general promise, but physical health while one lives. There are exceptions, of course. Some of the godliest people who ever lived have been sickly (David Brainerd, John Calvin, to name only two), and poor health is not necessarily or even generally to be interpreted as a curse. But we should not gloss over the promise by focusing on the exceptions. Godly practice avoids the excesses which often ruin the health: drunkenness, over-eating, continual strife in the home and in other relationships which causes high blood pressure and heart disease. Depression causes sleeplessness, and anxiety causes all sorts of medical problems. The “refreshment to the bones” is a *synecdoche*, a part representing the whole (Waltke, p. 40); in this case, the bones representing the whole body. When David had sinned against the Lord by taking Bathsheba, he registers (makes note) his spiritual and emotional sorrow in his physical pain—“bones which Thou hast broken” (Ps. 51: 8; 32: 1-5). In another Psalm, the fierce opposition from others so demoralizes him that he is physically exhausted: “I am poured out like water, And all my *bones*

are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me” (22: 14). A person’s physical well-being is closely connected to his spiritual and emotional well-being. The old American proverb, “laughter is the best medicine”, now has modern medical support. Generally speaking, if you want to be happy, be holy. Even if righteousness will not spare you from a multitude of sorrows and bad health, it will surely help you to endure them with some measure of joy.

The connection between vv. 8 and 9 seems a bit awkward but perhaps Solomon expected the reader to make an obvious deduction. True righteousness will affect the way a person views his money. We have a saying in America, “The last thing converted is the pocket book.” A person may be converted to Christ and come to the realization that he belongs to God, but it may take years for him to recognize that his money also belongs to God. Some professing Christians never seem to come to this conclusion, but for Solomon (at least at one point in his life) God’s honor (literally “weight”; Waltke, p. 247) is registered in the believer by his willingness to part with his money for the glory of God. The “first” of the produce is representative of the best and the whole of the harvest, and it was gathered up and given to the Lord before the rest of the crops were gathered. Thus, the tithing of the crops represented trust and confidence in the Lord’s continued provisions (Ex. 23: 16, 19). According to *Proverbs*, such confidence is not unfounded, for if we honor God with our money, there will be plenty left over for our needs and the needs of others (vv. 9-10). It should be noted that material prosperity is represented not in gold and silver but in barns filled with grain and wine presses filled with wine, commodities which have practical usefulness. As Matthew Henry notes,

He does not say thy *bags*, but thy *barns*, not thy *wardrobe* replenished, but thy *presses*; God shall bless thee with an increase of that which is for *use*, not for *show* or ornament; for spending and laying *out*, not for hoarding and laying *up*. They that do good with what they have shall have more to do good with (cited by Waltke, p. 247; emphasis mine).

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

The father realistically anticipates *the possibility of the son’s rejection* and deals with it accordingly in vv. 11-12. Just as obedience to the father’s will is accompanied by blessings, so disobedience is accompanied by discipline. Notice that the true son is not the object of the

Lord's curse, but His benevolent correction. It is, rather, **lack** of discipline that is a sign of rejection and abandonment by the Lord whose neglect would prove lack of love. The son's attitude toward the Lord's discipline is an accurate measure of his spiritual condition. Not only his actions, but his mental attitude must be governed and submitted to the Lord's will. We are therefore commanded to monitor our feelings and adjust our attitudes as needed (Waltke, p. 247). This can most easily be accomplished when we remember the motives behind the discipline—love not hate.

C. S. Lewis illustrates the truth by noting that an artist may not take much trouble over a picture drawn to amuse a child, but he takes endless effort over his great work of art that he loves. Lewis argues that were his *magnum opus* [masterpiece] sentient [capable of feeling], as “the artist rubbed and scraped off and recommenced for the tenth time” it would cry out in pain. He drew the conclusion that when we complain of our sufferings we are not asking for more love, but for less....C. S. Lewis says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains” (Waltke, pp. 249-250; citing C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp. 30-33, and Aitken's citation of Lewis in *Proverbs*, p. 44; words in brackets mine).

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

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

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

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

They [the *Proverbs*] concentrate or distill truth and so by their nature cannot express the *whole truth* about a topic. “Dedicate a youth according to what his way dictates, and even when he is old he will not depart from it (22: 6) expresses the truth or promise that parental rearing affects a youth’s behavior for his entire life, but it does not express the whole biblical truth about child pedagogy. Rather, it is a single component of truth that must be fit together with other elements of truth in order to approximate the more comprehensive confused

pattern of real life. *The book assumes the youth's responsibility to accept the sage's teaching (see 1: 4) and threatens apostates with death* (e.g., 1: 20-33; 2: 12-15; passim [in various parts of the book]; cf. Ezek. 18: 20), *assuming some parental failure*. Were parental training the whole truth about the child's rearing, *why is the book addressed to youth instead to parents?* A lack of recognition of the genre characteristic of terseness and its function to assert truth baldly has led to many errors in interpreting Proverbs (Waltke, pp. 38-39; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

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

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

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

a house but not a home, and can give a woman jewelry but not the love she really wants” (p. 257).

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

In Prov. 30: 8-9, Agur specifically requests of the Lord to give him neither poverty nor riches, lest his poverty tempt him to steal or lest his riches tempt him to forget about the Lord. Agur recognized something very important about riches—though they are not sinful in themselves, and can be positive blessings, they are, nevertheless, dangerous. Depending upon our response to them, they can be for cursing or blessing. If they are used positively for the good of others and the promotion of the kingdom of God, they are blessings. Our Lord Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20: 35). One cannot *give* what he does not *have*; thus, to receive the blessing of giving, one must have previously received the gift which is to be given away. If riches are hoarded and sought for their own sake, they become a millstone around our necks which will sink us to the bottom of the ocean. “But those who want to get rich,” Paul warns, “fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim. 6: 9-10). But Paul follows this warning not with a blanket condemnation of either riches or those who are rich, but an exhortation, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us

with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (vv. 16-19). Money, therefore, is a “mixed bag” for blessing or cursing depending on the recipient.

The promise of long life in v. 16 is a repetition of 3: 2a, and the promise of peace in v. 17 is a repetition of 3: 2b. Long life, peace, and wealth are presented to us in *Proverbs* as positive blessings, while in Qohelet’s speech death is considered better than life (4: 2) and wealth was meaningless. Peace was out of the question except for Qohelet’s fleeting moments of *carpe diem* (“seize the day!”) advising us to grab whatever happiness we could, whenever we could (cf. your notes on *Ecclesiastes*). Wealth and long life are nothing without the Lord’s *peace*, and throughout the book we are given the “better-than” proverbs about the superiority of having integrity, a good name, and peace—particularly peace in the home—rather than money in the *absence* of these things (15: 16-17; 16: 8, 19; 17: 1; 22: 1). The old hymn is true, “I’d rather have Jesus than silver and gold”, but if the Lord is pleased to give us Jesus *and* silver and gold, then we should be grateful, “generous, and ready to share”!

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

Thirdly, *wisdom is valuable to the son* (vv. 21-26). The predominant idea in this section is security and freedom from fear. Great confidence comes from knowing that we are in the right, that our motives and actions are pleasing to God. Proverbs 29: 25 says, “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.” Men will do all sorts of evil and mistaken things because they are afraid of other men—either fearing their opposition, or wishing to be esteemed by them. Wishing to please men, they will forego the pleasure of God. Genuine security rests in the wisdom of God, and there can be no haven without it.

The last part of the chapter is a departure from the praise of wisdom to the practical use of wisdom. In vv. 27-30, the son is instructed to deal kindly with his neighbor. If his neighbor is in need, he should make a conscientious effort to meet that need without unnecessary delay. Deferment (delay) of kindness is often used as an excuse not to show kindness, perhaps in hopes that the need will go away or the needy person will go away and not bother us any more. Sometimes needs are urgent and can't wait, like the need of the distressed traveler in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Waltke, p. 268).

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

Solomon then turns the son's attention from the neighbor to the violent man who apparently amassed much wealth through violent means. He is not to be envied for his wealth (vv. 30-32). This verse is an acknowledgment that sometimes the wicked do prosper, but their prosperity does not come with the Lord's blessings.

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

Lecture five basically consists of the retelling of the father's heritage of wisdom from his father, the son's grandfather. Just as the father wishes to teach wisdom to his son, so his father before him taught him the same tradition of wisdom. Many of the previous themes of *Proverbs* appear in this retelling of the family heritage. The grandfather, David, commanded Solomon to accept his teachings (v. 10; cf. 2: 1; 3: 1); to "keep the commandments and live" (v. 4; cf. 3: 1-2), to acquire wisdom (v. 7; cf. 3: 13); and to be adorned with wisdom (v. 9; cf. 3: 3). It is clear

from the comparisons in this chapter with the teachings of Solomon in the previous three chapters that he is repeating the wisdom taught him by his own father. There is no difference in substance. In this way Solomon wishes to teach his son that his wisdom is nothing new, but the established tradition which he received from his own father, and that his son should not attempt to innovate (believe something different) by digressing from the established traditions.

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

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

Ecclesiastes, as Tremper Longman III has shown, is itself no proof of Solomon’s repentance since it begs the question of Solomonic authorship (cf. your notes on *Ecclesiastes*).

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

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

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

Again, similar themes emerge: to be truthful (v. 24; cf. 3: 3); to watch his steps and follow the correct path (vv. 25-27; cf. 1: 15; 2: 20); and to guard his heart (v. 23; cf. 2: 2, 10; 3: 1, 3, 5). The motivation for obedience is also similar: health to the whole body (v. 22; cf. 3: 8).

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

As usual, the lecture is set apart from the previous lecture by the heading, “My son”. Solomon is now back to the subject of the adulteress. He is addressing his son and not his daughter, and everything said in the book is from a man’s perspective until we get to Lemuel’s speech in chapter 31, and even then his mother addresses her son. Thus, we do not have warnings in *Proverbs* against a faithless husband though such warnings should certainly be implied from the text. Furthermore, it is acknowledged in *Proverbs* that males are more prone to be test the limits of tradition and authority than their female counterparts (Waltke, p. 117). The science of male hormones was not known then, but it was surely observed and taken into account. Men are sexually aroused more easily than women, and their appetite for sex is less easily satisfied. (The business of prostitution is a multibillion dollar industry world-wide, but none of it, to my knowledge, is driven by *male* prostitution.) This is not a fault of men, but only the way men are

“wired”. But because of the way men are put together by their Maker, they must be careful not to allow their hormones to eclipse (darken or obscure) their better judgment.

The lips of the adulteress are contrasted with the lips of the wise which reserve knowledge (vv. 2-3). The adulteress is the smooth-talking, smooth-walking, eye-flashing woman who knows how to seduce with her speech (2: 16; 7: 12-20). Her seductions drip from her lips like honey from the honey comb, but she is not what she seems to be. The words of her mouth are not sweet after all, but like wormwood, a bitter plant; and her seductions will cut you to pieces like a two-edged sword (v. 4). Her paths are the way to Sheol, the realm of the dead (v. 5; cf. 2: 18). She is a very unstable person—a married woman (cf. 6: 24, 29, 34)—who doesn’t know *who* she wants, *what* she wants or *where* she is going (v. 6). If the son is wise, he will conscientiously steer a wide path far away from her house (v. 8). Verses 9 and 10 may refer to giving the adulterous the best of one’s youthful years and youthful strength, or it could refer to the offspring produced by the adulterous relationship, called “strangers”. At the risk of being speculative, could this be a reference to black-mailing the adulterous man who must now support his mistress and his illegitimate children or else suffer the wrath of his wife and/or the adulteress’ husband? At any rate, sin makes life complicated, none more than the sin of adultery. The consuming of the young man’s body and flesh may also refer to financial destitution (v. 11), but in light of the physical diseases which result from sexual promiscuity, this could be a reference to wasting disease. Against this interpretation is the fact that the woman in question is not a paid prostitute, but another man’s wife who seeks other lovers.

The penalty of not avoiding such a woman is registered in vv. 12-14. Not only is there financial loss and possible physical sickness, but there is public humiliation “in the midst of the assembly and congregation” (v. 14), a phrase which Waltke (p. 316) interprets not as a religious assembly but a “legal assembly at a public court hearing (also 26:26)....including the leaders of the people sitting in the gate of the city...(Jer. 26: 9-10).” Adultery was punishable by death in the Mosaic economy (Lev. 20: 10), but this penalty may have been discontinued by the late date in which *Proverbs* was written. But at the very least some kind of fine was attached to it and the guilty party and his family would suffer public humiliation.

Rather than searching for “companionship” and sexual enjoyment elsewhere, the son is encouraged to find these things within the moral, covenantal boundaries of marriage: “Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well” (v. 15), a metaphor for sexual satisfaction within the marriage covenant. His fill of sexual pleasure should be private, drawn like water from his own private cistern, not something he “disperses” or spreads around publicly on the city streets with every adulteress or prostitute who comes around (v. 16)—like public wells and fountains meant for everyone to use. Solomon presents adultery in the worst possible light while presenting marital love in the best possible light. (Too bad Solomon was not satisfied with one woman.) The son should rejoice in the wife of his youth, allowing himself to become “intoxicated” (v. 19) with her love, drinking his fill of sexual enjoyment from the breasts of his wife. “The father admonishes that inhibitions be left behind in the marriage bed” (Waltke, p. 322).

It is true that God made men with the fires of intense sexual drive in their members. What better way to populate the earth? Yet he did not do so without giving them the proper channels for satisfying those drives. God could have made man and woman with the capability of procreating without sexual intimacy and without much enjoyment. Female fish lay their eggs in the water while the male fish come along later and spread their sperm on top of the eggs. We can only speculate how much enjoyment fish get from this method of procreation. But it is not so with men and women. Sex is fun, and it’s fun because God made it that way on purpose. He, therefore, invites us to enjoy as much of it as we can to the point of intoxication, but only within the proper boundaries of marriage. Because we are made in His image and have the work of the law written on our hearts, this is the only meaningful and lasting way we can enjoy it, whether we are believers or unbelievers. Many people falsely conclude that sex is no longer **fun** when it becomes **legal**—the forbidden fruit fallacy. A whole book, *The Song of Solomon*, has been written to dispel this myth, but it is also disputed here. Sex is **more** fun when it’s legal and confined to the marriage bed, for then you can enjoy it with a clear conscience before God and with the confidence that you and your lover are truly committed to one another and not simply to the selfish enjoyment of sex.

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

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

This is not likely a blanket condemnation of becoming surety for anyone, as some have interpreted it. Some people have proven themselves to be good credit risks, but they do not have a long credit history and thus need someone to vouch for them. Furthermore, Ex. 22: 25 forbids lending to the poor with interest, but it does not forbid making loans to the poor, loans which would necessarily be very risky with a high probability of nonpayment. Lending to the poor and, therefore, exposing oneself to the possibility of never being repaid is a generous act which receives the Lord's approval (14: 21). The wisdom of this proverb consists of choosing your credit risks wisely, not becoming surety for someone who has an unknown reputation or a poor reputation for repaying his debts. It is a warning against being gullible or naive in our financial transactions. If the son has entered into such an unwise arrangement, he should go immediately and get out of it.

The second type of inferior man is the sluggard who refuses to work, one who prefers habitual rest to making a living (vv. 6-11). Poverty will one day overtake him like an armed thief in the night, for it is the sleeping man who is most vulnerable (most susceptible) to being overtaken by a thief. He lacks the diligence (carefulness) and the vigilance (watchfulness) to take the ordinary precautions to retain his wealth for purchasing the necessities of life. Americans may have more trouble understanding this verse since there are many government programs subsidizing the laziness of those who prefer not to work. These programs are a constant source of irritation to

the working man, and through legislative means some of them were phased out when politicians discovered that welfare destroys a person's incentive (sense of necessity) to work. Why work when the taxpayer will fund your sloth? This startling discovery is not exactly rocket science, but it took our politicians many decades to figure it out, and some still haven't caught on. Africans do not have the luxury of welfare money, and many hard-working Africans live from day to day making just enough to feed their families.

The *Proverbs* which condemn the poverty of the lazy man (e.g. 6: 9-10; 10: 4) are *never* addressed to the poor who suffer poverty for no fault of their own. The retributive theology of Job's three friends—if applied consistently—would have to condemn *everyone* who was poor *regardless* of the reasons. According to a rigid doctrine of retributive theology, God blesses the righteous with prosperity and curses the wicked with poverty—no exceptions. *Proverbs*, however, distinguishes between the poverty of the sluggard and the poverty of the working man who may be poor because of political oppression or the oppression of other powerful people (13: 23), or from other causes like plagues or famines (Waltke, p. 340). We could also include poverty which is due to an unfavorable economic climate caused by unwise government policies which discourage capital investment in businesses. The poor man who walks in his integrity is far superior to the rich man or the perverse man who makes his money dishonestly (19: 1; 28: 6). Being poor is not a sin, but being poor because you are *lazy* is a sin.

The *third type of inferior man is the swindler or the con man* (vv. 12-16). To your face he will tell you whatever lies are necessary to win your confidence, but behind your back he is signaling—winking his eyes, pointing fingers, or making signs with his feet—to his co-conspirators who are cooperating with him to con you out of your money or possessions. He is the kind of guy about whom people say, “Yea, I know him. Better watch your back while he's around!” But as usual, *Proverbs* assures us that such a man will one day receive the just consequences of his deceptions (v. 15).

The description of the con man naturally leads Solomon into a catalog list of six things which the Lord hates, plus one more making seven which are an abomination to him (vv. 16-19). Among such hated things are pride, lying, murder, scheming to harm others, lack of hesitation in the

participation of evil behavior, bearing false witness, and spreading strife or ill feelings among brothers. Notice that all of these involve the improper use of the body (Waltke, pp. 345-346)—the proud eyes, the lying tongue, the hands which murder, the heart which plans evil against others, the feet which run to evil without any sense of hesitation, bearing false witness with your tongue, and spreading strife and ill-feelings with a slanderous tongue. No wonder James singles out the tongue as the deadliest of all body parts (James 3). Note also that lying is mentioned *twice* in two different contexts—lying in general (v. 17), and lying as a witness (v. 19). These are not things which *annoy* the Lord; they are things which the Lord *hates*.

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

Solomon introduces another lecture with the characteristic, “My son”. The commandment of the father and the teaching of the mother (v. 20) which is a lamp and a light (v. 23) pertain specifically to the “evil woman” or the adulteress who is married to another. We have already been introduced to the adulterous woman in chapters 2 and 5, but apparently she is dangerous enough (along with the adulterous man who is not mentioned in *Proverbs*) to merit additional warnings from the father and the mother (cf. 7: 1-27 where she is again the object of severe warnings).

Along with the smooth tongue, the adulteress also uses good looks (v. 25a) and seductive eyes (v. 25b) to catch her prey. It is an amazing thing just how well a person can communicate with his eyes alone. This is especially true of women whose eyes are far more beautiful than men’s. A long seductive glance—the “Come on, I’m willing” look—can often subdue a simple man more than the repeated blows of a fist, weakening his resolve and “reducing him to a loaf of bread” (v. 26a). Solomon paints the picture of the seduced man in the worst possible light, as a “sucker” (a gullible person) who will believe anything she says, including her lies about his good looks.

But you can’t play with fire and not be burned (v. 27), and you can’t walk over hot coals without scorching your feet (v. 28). Neither can you walk to her house and play with an adulterous woman without suffering the consequences (v. 29). Those deadly consequences are noted in vv.

30-35, the fierce, unquenchable anger of an enraged husband who finds out you've been sleeping with his wife. A thief who steals to satisfy an empty stomach will not be despised; nevertheless, he will be treated without mercy when caught, paying sevenfold (v. 31). (The actual penalty for theft was normally double up to five-fold [cf. Ex. 22: 7, 9; 22: 1; Lk. 19: 8] but *Proverbs* is emphasizing the full extent of compensation which he will now apply to the adulterer. Waltke, p. 358). But while the thief will not be despised for satisfying his nutritional hunger, the one who satisfies his sexual hunger with another man's wife will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law—possibly the death sentence (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22: 22; cited in Waltke, p. 360). Even though a pagan court may be inclined to disgrace the adulterer with beating and loss of property (vv. 31-33; Waltke, pp. 359, 361)), the enraged husband will not be satisfied with such half-measures, but will demand the death penalty (v. 35).

A *ransom* could be paid to someone whose loved-one had been killed by a goring ox which had the reputation for being dangerous (Ex. 21: 30, where the same word for “ransom” is used; cited by Waltke, p. 361). The *owner* of the ox was liable to execution in this situation (according to the lex talionis—“life for life”) but the person bereaved of his loved-one could demand a ransom of any price as a substitute for the owner's death (v. 31). However, in the case of the wronged husband, a ransom price for the adulterer's life will not be accepted, nor will he accept any gifts or bribes (cf. Ex. 23: 8 where the same word for “gift” is used for “bribe”; cf. Waltke, p. 361). In other words, the adulterer will not be able to use either *legal* or *illegal* means to pacify the husband's wrath. “The cuckold [husband of an adulteress] will exact his full pound of flesh through the court, for in fact he will accept no financial compensation” (Waltke, p. 360).

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

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

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

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

The story of chapter 7 is plain enough and needs little explanation. It is the story of a stupid, gullible man who is seduced by another man’s wife. In addition to beauty and seductive speech, this woman is also the wife of a wealthy merchant who goes off on a journey with a bag of money (vv. 19-20; Waltke, p. 379). She could be lying about how long he will be away—and probably is—but the luxurious setting for their one night stand reveals a woman of means—a house with furniture (a couch or bed, something not affordable to the average oriental), and the expensive accessories of colored linens imported from Egypt, myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon (vv. 16-17; Waltke, p. 379). A rich whore is more tempting than a poor one, all else being equal.

While being deceptive about the safety of this sexual marathon, she is very forthright and honest about her commitment. This is just for pleasure—nothing serious—and she has no intention of leaving her wealthy husband and all the “perks” (material advantages) for a momentary fling with her “throw-away” lover. The husband is coming home eventually, after all, and when he

does the affair will be over until he makes another journey. And the next time, her partner will most likely be someone else, so don't get too comfortable in bed.

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

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

The seducing adulteress meets the naive young man on a secluded street in the middle of the night (7: 8-9), but *Lady Wisdom* calls out in the most strategic and important places during the daytime—the city heights, the busiest intersections, and at the city gates where she is sure to be heard (vv. 2-3). Unlike the adulterous woman, she has nothing to hide. Clearly, the adulteress' seduction is set in apposition (side by side) with Lady Wisdom's appeal; and while the adulteress seduces with lies and deception, Lady Wisdom speaks “noble things” (v. 6a). When she opens her mouth, “right things” come out (v. 6b); truth prevails (v. 7a); and wickedness finds no expression (v. 7b). No deception here, but only straightforward truth (v. 9). The value of wisdom is repeated in vv. 10-11, far above jewels, silver and gold—far more valuable than the sexual pleasures of a one night stand. Thus, Lady Wisdom is competing with the adulteress for the love of men; and to gain their love, she is praising her own virtues and rewards (Waltke, p. 392).

The “fear of the Lord” is defined in v. 13—“to hate evil” with all of its manifestations: pride arrogance, the evil way, the perverted mouth, all of which characterize the adulteress of chapter 7. Anyone who fears God must also hate evil, and anyone indifferent to evil is a stranger to grace and devoid of wisdom. There can be no neutrality when it comes to wisdom. There are many who hold to some form of moral code who are indifferent to the moral defects of others who hold to a different moral code. “Live and let live” is their motto. “Live your own life, and I'll live mine without bothering each other. We should not force our morality on others who think differently. After all, there are no moral absolutes to which everyone must be conformed.”

Wisdom thinks otherwise. Justice and righteousness can only prevail by *absolute wisdom*, not by the *absolute rule* of the autocrat (dictator) (vv. 15-16). The same wisdom by which princes and nobles have “judged rightly” (v. 16) is offered to the common man on the street (Waltke, p. 402) to the end that he may discipline *himself* and rule his own *passions*, quite the contrary of the naive fool who has yielded himself to the adulteress and his own selfish lusts. Thus, the wisdom which rules whole nations is offered to all. The only alternative is the folly of autonomous self which leads only to ruin.

Autonomy (self-rule) which leads to anarchy has a short history in comparison to Lady Wisdom. Men were created *at* the beginning of the world, but wisdom existed *before* the creation (vv. 22-31). Wisdom is presented here as an *attribute* of God through which He created the world, not as *God* Himself. It is also not equated with Jesus Christ, but is a type of Christ in which the antitype (Christ) is superior to the type (Waltke, p. 131). The Lord “possessed” wisdom before the creation, “before His works of old” (v. 22), but *Proverbs* does not say that the Lord *was* wisdom. John’s Gospel equates Christ with the *logos* who was *with* God before the world was made and who *was* God; but in *Proverbs* wisdom is “brought forth” or “born” (v. 24). The Arians of the fourth century used this passage as a primary text to support the heresy that Christ was not eternally begotten of the Father but came into existence at His birth (Waltke, p. 127). But the *logos* of John 1 is not brought forth by God but *is* God. Furthermore, while Wisdom is witness to the creation (v. 27), the *logos* is the Creator (Jn. 1: 3; for a thorough discussion of this subject, see Waltke, pp. 127-133, from which this comparison is taken).

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

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

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

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

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

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

As stated in the introduction, **Collection I** (1: 1—9: 18) sets the context for the entirety of the book and is made up of *poems in praise of wisdom* which serve to *motivate* the reader to receive the wisdom offered in all seven collections. By way of contrast, **Collection II** (10: 1—22: 16) consists of *aphorisms* (short, one-verse statements of truth) which are divided into two parts called *versets*—two halves of a single verse (Waltke, pp. 10, 14). The versets form two parts of a parallelism in which two things are either compared with one another or contrasted to one

another, making a *synonymous* or *comparative* parallel or an *antithetic* parallel. In the *synthetic* parallel the thought of verset A is expanded in verset B, not simply repeated. In an antithetic parallel, the thought of verset B is the opposite of verset A; nevertheless, it helps explain Verset A and vice versa (cf. Waltke, p. 44). Most the parallelism of *Collection I* has been synthetic or comparative. We will encounter many antithetic parallelisms in *Collection II*.

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

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

By knowing the poetics biblical narrators and poets of all sorts, including sages, used to give their compositions coherence and unity, the interpreter can discern *unstated and often implicit, not explicit, connections between the verses*....new insights into the poetics of biblical authors have opened new windows enabling the interpreter to see hitherto *invisible connections* between the proverbs or sayings (Waltke, pp. 45-47).

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

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

The poetics of most units are not as transparent as this textbook example [26: 1-12, “The Mirror of Fools”], but there are sufficient instances of poetic transparency in many units to prejudice viewing the editors of Proverbs as authors, not merely collectors. In other words, it is *more probable* than *improbable* that the ancient Hebrew editor logically arranged all proverbs to protect and enrich them, though that logic is *not transparent to the modern reader* (Waltke, pp. 46-47, 50; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

Many questions arise. How did Solomon write this section of *Proverbs*? Did he sit down for extended periods of time to compose several proverbs together, or did he keep his writing tablet close at hand to capture whatever singular, individual thoughts came to him at the existential moment (the experience of the moment) without attempting to arrange them in any logical order? (Jonathan Edwards cultivated such a habit but ordered his thoughts later.) It is clear that Solomon was a keen observer of human nature who also had the luxury of long hours of contemplation—and not at the end of a hard day’s labor from 8 to 6 o’clock. It is quite likely that he made many mental notes of observable events and situations which came to him on the spur of the moment, writing them down as soon as he could. While Waltke believes that it is “more probable” (he does not say “certain”) that the final editor (cf. p. 36) arranged these proverbs logically, the diversity of topics from one verse to another prejudices my opinion in the opposite direction.

Also, could it be that the various topics (e.g. poverty and wealth; the power of the tongue, etc.) are scattered throughout the book in order to avoid a stifling monotony (sameness) which would discourage careful and enjoyable reading? As it is, many of the same ideas about wealth and poverty, humility, lying, etc, reoccur in many places, and the repetition of those same ideas enhance the learning process. Repetition is the best teacher as long as it can be done in an interesting way. This begs the question of whether the reader should feel *obligated* to read the *Proverbs* in Collections II, III, IV, and V in the order in which they come down to us in the Bible. Would we mess things up if we examined these proverbs *topically*? Even if Solomon and the other editors did not have a logical arrangement in mind, perhaps the Holy Spirit *did*.

However, the Holy Spirit did not inspire the Bible mechanically but through the human medium, and when there is no evidence for the human author's logical arrangement of ideas other than a scholar's outline, there is no compelling reason to presuppose (assume) it. At any rate, I cannot teach from an outline which I cannot discern for myself.

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

A. Anger and Self-Control

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

14: 18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger calms a dispute.

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

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

The link between physical and psychological health. Hatred will shorten your life.

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

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

James 3—the most difficult thing to tame is the tongue. “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise. (Proverbs 10:19 NASB) If we are determined to make our point and win a battle with words, we are likely to lose the war.

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

Not a blanket recommendation to sweep every offense under the rug and forget it (see Matt. 18: 15-20 and my commentary in *Synoptic Gospels*). However, love covers a multitude of sins (Prov. 10: 12; 1 Pet. 4: 8). Often it is best just to overlook the offense and move on as long as this offense is not regularly repeated, in which case the offending brother must be admonished for his own good. But this is just the issue: Will my response be for my brother's good, or am I just making sure I win the argument?

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

A hothead is usually a repetitive offender whose mouth is always getting him in trouble. Therefore, bailing him out of trouble is usually a waste of time. “Whereas the son is corrected by parental discipline, the hothead must be corrected by allowing the consequences of his own foibles [mistakes] to punish him. The wise father does not interfere in the operation of the cause-consequence of the divinely established penal and remedial moral order. Ironically, the person who ‘rescues’ the hothead becomes caught in the unhealthy dynamics of his way” (Waltke, II, p. 113). Those of you who have attempted to help hotheads can identify with Waltke's description of the situation. People like this will consume more time and energy than we can imagine with very little positive results to show for all our effort. It's better to let the hothead sit

it out in jail, for such people will only learn life's lessons the hard way—if at all. Counseling with such a person seldom produces long-term results. (But this should not be interpreted as giving up all hope of restoration.)

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

And much of the time, fools will quarrel about things they know little or nothing about.

“Paradoxically, the way to honor is to abstain from defending one's honor. Contrast Gideon's humility, when he was contended against, which healed society (Judg. 8: 1-3) with his revenge when he was the contender (Judg 8: 7-21), showing how complex in fact an individual can be. The wise are more concerned to bring peace than to be right, but the fool cannot restrain himself and at the first opportunity explodes and shows his teeth. This demeanor to forgo defending one's pride when insulted demands that one be humble and submissive (cf. 10: 12; 12: 16; 14: 29; 15: 18; 17: 27, 28; 19: 11; 29: 11; cf. Jas. 3: 13-18)” (Waltke, II., p. 129).

B. The Better-Than Proverbs

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

A (negative situation—e.g. “lightly esteemed”) + B (positive—e.g. “has a servant”) than C (positive—“he who honors himself”) + D (negative—“lacks bread”) or (- + + -)
(Waltke, I., p. 525).

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

The NIV reads, “Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.” The person who can afford a servant does not care about being esteemed by others or having social status which comes from flaunting his wealth. He is wise in that he does not live above his means (Waltke, I. p. 125). On the other hand is the one who shows off before his friends and relatives by living at a level far above his means—what we call in the US, “keeping up with the Joneses”, or keeping up with the next door neighbor. If your neighbor has

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

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

It is “better”, partly, because the one who fears the Lord is granted the gift of *contentment*. He *enjoys* what little he has more than the wicked whose life is often filled with strife and hatred. This is one of many proverbs which acknowledge that often in this life the wicked are more affluent and prosperous than the righteous. Therefore, *Proverbs* cannot be accused of the rigid doctrine of retribution formulated by Job’s three friends, a doctrine which allows no exceptions.

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

This is true for the reason given above, but Solomon was also ahead of his time nutritionally speaking. Too much red meat (the oxen variety) has been linked to heart disease while green vegetables have many vitamins and anti-oxidants which prolong life. Ironically, good nutrition is not reserved only to the rich.

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

Sometimes great income is made by walking over people—cheating them out of their money, ideas, or jobs. But income of such kind will provide no long-term profit and will not deliver a person on the day of judgment (10: 2)—as the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12: 16-21) and Lazarus (Lk. 16) prove. Throughout *Proverbs*, wisdom, which includes righteousness, is valued more than silver and gold (cf. 16: 16)

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

Silver and gold will not help a man understand the meaning and purpose of life. For many rich people, the meaning and purpose of life amounts to nothing more than the acquisition of more silver and gold (once again, the rich fool of Lk. 12).

16: 19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.

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

Joab, David's general, was just such a person. He was a superb army commanding chief and proved himself to David many times—possibly the reason David could not see fit to have him executed after Joab's uncontrolled vengeance led him to murder Abner (2 Sam. 3: 27). Joab could conquer a city, but he could not rule his own spirit. In this proverb the battle inside a person's soul is compared to the battle outside the person. Compared to the internal battles, the one outside is little in comparison (Waltke, II. p. 37).

The biblical historian who wrote *2 Samuel* illustrates the principle of Prov. 16: 32 vividly. Like Joab, David was also a man who allowed his passions to rule his spirit rather than the other way around. When we examine the structure of 2 Sam. 10—12, we find that this section begins and ends with Israel fighting Ammon. The details of David's adultery and murder are found between the two accounts of the war. Ralph Davis (*2 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, p. 123) depicts the structure in the following way:

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

Submitting to God, 12: 15b-23

Marital relations with Bathsheba—birth, 12: 24-25

Joab summons David against Ammon, 12: 26-31

Commenting on the text, Davis says,

Yet coming back to the Ammonites after reading all of 11: 2—12: 25 does strike the reader as anti-climactic. Perhaps that is intended. After the writer has walked you through the sin and shame and severity of the whole story, perhaps he wants you to think that the Ammonites really don't matter that much. Comparatively. Of far more weight is the obedience and holiness of Yahweh's anointed. The conflict with Ammon was won, but the *real battle* was lost. It reminds one of Robert Murray McCheyne's reflection on his role as pastor: "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness" (p. 132; emphasis mine).

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

Once again, great wealth with its common companion, strife, is contrasted with the quiet contentment of the righteous man who is poor. Contentment, therefore, cannot be purchased, but is the property of God who alone can grant it to anyone He wishes, including the poor. The proverb does not mean that the wealthy cannot also be content. What is meant is that so often those who seem to have every reason to be content are filled with strife.

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

The formula for this better—than proverb is *negative (a poor man) + positive (walks in integrity) + negative (perverse in speech) + negative (is a fool)*.

Here is another proverb dispelling the health and wealth gospel (which is not another gospel; Gal. 1: 7) since it teaches that a poor man can be a man of integrity, not one who is poor because he lacks the faith to acquire wealth.

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

This is what Waltke calls an “imprecise antithetical parallel” (II. p. 115) in which the parallel is not immediately understandable. In this case, a man in need of kindness had counted on someone who had promised help but had not carried through. The one who had promised help is the liar. Therefore, it would be better to be a poor man from whom no one expected any help, than to be a wealthy man who could not be counted on to make good on his promises (Waltke, II. p. 115). Or, the thought could be that it would be better to give away your income to the point of poverty than to be a man of no integrity who makes promises of help he has no intention of keeping.

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

The corner of a roof is not the dark attic of a house built with rafters and a sloping roof. The roof Solomon had in mind was a flat roof with a guest room built on one corner (cf. 2 Ki. 4: 10). Therefore, it is better for the husband to live in the small guest room on top of the house than to live in the main part of the house with a contentious, argumentative woman who could never be pleased (cf. Prov. 25: 24). Another possibility is offered by Waltke (II p. 175), who envisions the poor husband living on the corner of the roof *without* a guest room and, thus, exposed to the weather. This situation would be compared with Prov. 21: 19, below. At any rate, the peace and solitude of living *alone* is considered preferable to living in community—if one can call it community—with a contentious wife. The irony is that the wife, who is called to help her husband (Gen. 2: 18), is acting as the head of the home in the main part of the house while the rightful head is cowering in the corner of the roof attempting to get some peace and quiet (Waltke). Single men, beware! Choose wisely!

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

nevertheless, understandable since men seek the companionship of women who will submit to their leadership.

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

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

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

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

Wealth measured in silver and gold are presented in a positive light; otherwise, the comparison with a good name breaks down and becomes meaningless. But however valuable, gold and silver do not favorably compare to the value of a good name. Wealth can be a fleeting thing and easily lost, but a good name endures forever (Prov. 23: 4-5; 10: 7; cf. Waltke, II p. 199). My grandfather, Grady Barnhill, was such a man. He had little material wealth at the end of his life, but you couldn't find anyone in Winston County, Mississippi who would give you a negative account of the man.

C. Discipline and Reproof

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

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

commands which he has heard. Jesus’ parable of the wise man who built his house on rock is comparable with this proverb—“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and *acts on them*, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24 NASB). The fool, on the other hand, may have heard wise counsel but was only thinking of his next foolish rebuttal (argument) while hearing it; thus, “Everyone who *hears* these words of Mine and *does not act on them*, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.²⁷ “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. (Matthew 7:26-27 NASB)

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

Waltke renders the verse, “Whoever keeps instruction”, thus, agreeing with the KJV and NKJV. To “keep” means to retain in the memory and to practice (I. p. 465), not occasionally, but as a way of life. The son who does this (see context in 10: 1, 5) is on the path to a successful life which values the cumulative wisdom obtained by others who have more experience. On the other hand, the son who ignores instruction will veer off course in many foolish and harmful directions which could have been avoided had he been humble enough to question his own understanding (3: 1-5).

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

Discipline and reproof are synonymously parallel to one another. **Reproof** has a negative connotation (meaning) which implies something not pleasant. Contrary to much popular child psychology, discipline in the Bible is not limited to positive reinforcement of good behavior but extends to negative treatment of poor behavior. Both are needed. The essential ingredient of both positive and negative discipline is love. Through the loving discipline of the parent—or another wise counselor—the person disciplined is hopefully taught to love (value) even unpleasant reproof because he knows it is good for him. Solomon is attempting to stir up his son’s *earnest desire* for any instruction which will lead to wisdom and true success in life. In order for discipline to take hold of the son’s life, he must have the proper motivation—not simply to avoid pain, but **love the knowledge** that will ensure a good life. At the beginning of

Proverbs wisdom (or knowledge) is personified as a woman whom the son should pursue as a lover (2: 4-5).

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

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

The **scoffer** is the **mocker** who goes beyond the point of not listening to his father, but proceeds to the point of ridiculing his counsel. Agur has strong words for such a person who upsets the moral and social order and threatens to unravel an orderly community by scoffing at parental authority, “The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it (Proverbs 30:17 NASB)—a sign of the covenant curse upon the rebellious son stoned to death for persistent disobedience (Deut. 21: 18-21). Upon being stoned to death, the body was hanged on a tree as a sign of the curse, thus exposed to birds which would rest on the shoulders and pluck out the eyes (cf. 2 Sam. 21: 10). Obviously, the context of Deut. 21: 18-21 does not allow an interpretation which would include small children or even young adolescents.

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

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

son will often pursue a *lifestyle* resulting in shame and poverty—possibly through excessive drinking, illicit sex, laziness and unwillingness to work. It is ironic that the son who refuses to be disciplined by his father will instead be disciplined by poverty and shame (Waltke, I p. 568).

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

There are different methods of discipline which can be effective, but the rod mentioned here is a physical rod which cannot be spiritualized out of existence by modern psychology—even the evangelical variety which has become far more secularized than it cares to admit. There is nothing unloving about *controlled* corporal (to the body) punishment. It becomes abusive when done without the proper motivation of love and correction and when it crosses the line between being disciplinary and physically harmful. Quite the contrary to popular opinion today—and apparently much popular opinion even in Solomon’s day—the one who withholds discipline is the unloving father who may one day see his son disciplined by other authorities who have no love for his son at all. Thus, the overly lenient father actually hates his son, even unconsciously desiring his death which may result from reckless and criminal behavior (see 19: 18 and 15: 10 below).

Obviously, the need for corporal punishment should be seldom and temporary. If a son has not been disciplined corporally during the early years, it will not be effective when he becomes older. To be effective, punishment must produce discomfort. For an older male, only abusive strokes of the rod would be effective in producing the pain necessary for correction; and, thus, would be self-defeating, humiliating, and provocative (Eph. 6: 4). I don’t remember spanking my children past the age of five, six, or seven; but by the time they were this age, they did not require the physical rod to render the proper obedience. They had learned a few things. Other forms of punishment were used after young childhood and into their teen years which corrected the behavior without physical contact—withholding privileges, correction, rebuke, etc.

Massive elephants can be held in place with a simple stake in the ground only because they were held in place with the same method as baby elephants. The baby elephants tested the stake but could not budge (dislodge) it. The big ones remember the restraint without testing it. While

older children are more intelligent than elephants—at least most of the time—they remember that Dad does not budge easily and will not tolerate insubordination, either his or the mother’s. Compare this situation with older males—large “elephants”—who have never been restrained in childhood. What will it take to restrain them now—a fistfight, a gun? Such children grow up to be dangerous adolescents and more dangerous adults.

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

See the comments above which include this reference. However, the reference to death in this *Proverb* (as in 19: 10) goes beyond physical (or clinical) death and includes eternal death. Failure in the matter of temporal punishment on earth leads to the everlasting punishment of the son in hell. **The way** in the first half of the verse also has eschatological (end-time) implications. It is the way of *life* versus (as opposed to) the way of *death* (16: 25). Prov. 12: 28 reads, “In the way of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no death” (Proverbs 12:28 NASB). **No death** cannot be a reference to physical death since everyone who is born must die physically (excepting only believers who are alive at the return of Christ, plus Enoch and Elijah). There is, therefore, a connection between righteousness and eternal life and unrighteousness and eternal death (cf. Waltke, I. p. 622). If a person hates reproof—one of the means of obtaining righteousness—he also hates the way which leads to eternal life (5: 23).

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

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

saving knowledge (15: 7). Arrogantly shunning their knowledge, however, the mocker remains on the dark way of death...not the right way of life...(I. p. 623).

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

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

This proverb shares a similar meaning with 15: 12. Contrary to the scoffer who shuns the community of those who would correct and reprove him, the one who listens to reproof seeks the company of wise people. To carry the idea further, he **will dwell among the wise** who will welcome him into their company in the future. By implication, the scoffer who shuns the company of the wise will have only selfish fools like himself to dwell with—not an ideal neighborhood.

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

Since the fool will lack the necessary skills to survive, neglecting discipline is a form of suicide (cf. Waltke, II. p. 8).

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

In context with 19: 19, this proverb teaches that a fool scarcely learns anything, even if his “lessons” are hard. He has become so hardened and insensitive to reproof that he scarcely notices it, and even body blows and near-death experiences are easily forgotten (but 100 blows is *hyperbole*). The one who has understanding, however, is sensitive even to mild rebukes. His

conscience is alert to any infraction or violation of God’s law and to any harm done to others, and his ultimate goal in life is to be pleasing to the One who saved him. Says Charles Bridges on this text, “A word was enough for David....A look entered more in Peter’s heart...than a hundred stripes into Pharaoh...Ahaz...Israel” (quoted by Waltke, II, p. 52).

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

See commentary on 13: 24 above. Death can be taken both physically and spiritually. While most proverbs are directed to offspring, this one is directed to parents (Waltke, II; p. 111). Parents, particularly fathers, who neglect the discipline of their children unwittingly (unintentionally) participate in killing them both physically and eternally. **While there is hope** implies that there will come a time when there is **no hope**—or very little hope—of reforming his moral character. Time is moving on quickly, and the time to discipline cannot be postponed to a later time when his character is less pliable (less subject to influence).

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

The NIV reads, “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and **in the end** you will be wise.” The **end** implies the finality of one’s life. Waltke translates the second part of the verse similarly, “You may be accounted among the wise in your final destiny.” Commenting, he says, “The proverb motivates the son to internalize the teaching with the certain hope that he will enjoy all the benefits of being wise in a future that outlasts death itself (II p. 114). The Hebrew word for **end** is *acharith* used in Prov. 5: 11; 14: 12; 20: 21; 24: 20 (translated “future”) (all verses cited in Waltke, II, p. 114). In the introduction to his commentary on *Proverbs*, Section VII, “Theology”, (5) “The Wise and Their Rewards: Life”, Waltke makes the following observation about life and death presented in the book:

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

Sometimes [*hayyim*] refers to clinical life...[27: 12; 31: 12; 3: 2; other verses also are cited by Waltke].

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

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

Solomon never describes the clinically alive wicked as in the realm of light and life; rather, they are in the realm of darkness and death, a state of being already dead because they have no relationship with the living God. The texts predicting death represent that present state terminating with a tragic, final end, not necessarily a premature death. The lascivious regrets his incorrigibility [lack of correction] “when his flesh and body are spent” (5: 11). The pursuit of Wisdom and the practice of righteousness save the wise from the realm and destiny of death, but nothing can deliver the wicked (1: 4, 19; 10: 2; 13: 14; 14: 27; 15: 24). Their clinical death is a land of no return, without a second chance (1: 20-33; 2: 19, 22...). ***If death is the final end of the wicked, we should assume that life is the final end of the righteous*** (cf. Matt. 25: 46).

Other texts teach more explicitly that this abundant life outlasts clinical death. In Prov. 12: 28 the righteous are rewarded with “immortality”Prov. 14: 32 says, “Even in death the righteous seek a refuge in God,” and 23: 17 asserts that their future hope will not be disappointed; in contrast, the wicked have no future hope (11: 7a; 12: 28; 24: 19-20) (I, pp. 104-107; bold italic emphasis mine; words inserted within brackets mine, but all references his).

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

The blows upon the scoffer become the educational tool for the naïve who may not learn discipline any other way (cf. Deut. 13: 7-11; 17: 12-13; both references cited in Waltke, p. 122). When he sees the scoffer punished, it is a tangible lesson that such behavior should be avoided.

The same principle applies when convicted criminals get jail time. The naïve or gullible who are prone to follow the wrong crowd learn to behave acceptably in order to avoid punishment. But for man of understanding, severe punishments are not necessary to deter him from poor behavior. All he needs is simple reproof and an explanation of why his behavior needs correction. The proverb is parallel to 17: 10 except for the fact that the naïve do not need to suffer the blows themselves to make a behavioral correction. They watch the scoffer and the fool take the blows and learn their lessons more easily.

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

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

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

This verse describes “the doctrine of ‘original folly’” (Waltke, II, p. 215, quoting Whybray). Children are innately sinful, and both physical punishment and reproof are essential in purging the child of a long list of foolish tendencies.

D. Drunkenness

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

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

Wine is a blessing: “**He causes** the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,¹⁵ And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make *his* face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart. (Psalm 104:14-15 NASB). However, like any other blessing—including money, food, and sex—wine must be used wisely; otherwise, the blessing becomes a curse.

E. Friendship

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

The proverb is not speaking about an illegal cover-up in which a serious offense should be prosecuted. **He who conceals a transgression** is contrasted with **he who repeats a matter** (or, “he who gossips”). The one who **seeks love** or friendship is the person who attempts to cover the friend’s moral failure through further friendship rather than broadcasting the moral failure to others—an act which further alienates the transgressor from others (Waltke, II, p. 50).

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

The “fair weather friend” is the person who seeks the friendship of another only when times are good, but when trouble comes, he is difficult to find. The true friend loves in good times and in bad—during prosperity or poverty, sickness or health. His friendship is based on love, not a mercenary spirit which seeks its own advantage—“what can I get out of this friendship—money, social prestige, a good job?” A true friend can be closer than a brother (18: 24) because the love of God’s people is more reliable than filial, biological kinship. “The proverb supports eyeball-to- eyeball charity, not impersonal and institutionalized agencies.” The **brother ...born for adversity** [trouble] is a biological brother. While the friend loves at all times, a relative serves as a safety net in difficult times, perhaps due to a sense of obligation (cf. Waltke, II, p. 57).

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

The **number** of friends a man has is inconsequential (unimportant). The real question is: What **kind** of friends are they? The proverb envisions a man who is very out-going and popular with people, but his friendships are shallow and **unreliable**. When difficulty comes, his so-called friendships evaporate like a fog, and he is left alone to face the trial (**comes to ruin**). But the man who cultivates deep, enduring friendships based on mutual love **will not need many** friends since the ones—or one—he has will stick by him during any adversity. If you can find even one

or two people who will stick by you regardless of the circumstances, you have something of great value. Most people have no such friend.

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

An invitation to seek true friendship and to be a true friend (Waltke, II, p. 132).

F. Generosity and Greed

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

A proverb about retributive justice.

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

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

The bottom line is that we cannot out-give the Lord. He will be no man’s debtor and will repay every act of kindness in one way or another. We should not interpret the proverb as “Give more. Get more.” Our motivation should not be material gain. Our giving is out of love for God and

our fellow man, especially believers (Gal. 6: 10). Yet, it should not be surprising to us when God sends those special blessings our way after we have sacrificed for the sake of others, always remembering that His kindness to us is not obligated by our sacrifice, but due to his kindness and grace—the grace which is the foundation of our sacrifice for others.

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

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

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

It always angers me when bus companies in Uganda raise their prices during Christmas and Easter when they know people will be traveling to see their relatives. People must spend half a month's wages just to travel back and forth a few hundred kilometers.

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

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

This is a proverb pair about the social liability of being poor and the social benefits of being rich. It presents us with the “unvarnished truth about human nature” (Walke, I, p. 598). Everyone “loves” a rich man, and everyone desires to be his “friend”. Rich people, in fact, have lots of friends who at least pretend to love him, but compare this with the proverbs above on true friendship. What will happen to these friendships if the money dries up or if he becomes a

liability to them? The poor man, on the other hand, is often shunned as a liability that none can afford. He is “high maintenance” and very inconvenient to have around.

However inconvenient, he is made in the image of God; and the one who despises his poor neighbor sins against him and against God. On the other hand, the one who is gracious to him receives the joy of giving and makes a “loan” to the Lord (19: 17; Solomon with a touch of humor (?), but see explanation below).

The best commentary comes from Paul’s quotation of Jesus in Acts 20: 35, “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (NASB) Paul picks up on this statement in 1 Tim. 6: 17-19: “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (NASB) This is not a promise of eternal life based on works of generosity or philanthropy. Rather, it is a promise of *realizing in the present the eschatological life of the future*. “Life indeed” is exclusively life in the Son, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself even to the point of death that others may live. We do not experience life by clinging to it or by clinging to our material goods, but by giving as freely and generously as we can. To quote a modern song-writer, Michael Card, “It’s hard to imagine the freedom we find in the things we leave behind.” If we are generous with people, we will never be *owned by our money* (another line from Card).

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

They honor God because they honor the poor man made in His image. “The creation of human kind functions as the philosophical basis for social ethics...The antithetical predicate *is one who honors God*...classifies the benefactor as one who gives God social weight. The poor and needy have an exalted status together with all humanity by reason of their Creator...whose honor is inseparably connected with his workmanship....The one who humiliates God will not go

unpunished, and the person who gives him honor will not go unrewarded.... (Waltke, I, p. 607; words in bold italics his). The prophetic literature is filled with God's condemnation of those who oppressed the poor, Amos' prophecy being the most memorable example.

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

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

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

God assumes the indebtedness of the poor (Waltke, II, p. 111) for two reasons: first, He is their Maker in whose image they are made, and second, the poor in question here are poor through no fault of their own, which means that God is working out His providential purposes for their poverty with relationship to others who are responsible for their care. God's attributes of grace, mercy, and generosity are exhibited through others who are gracious to the poor. Without poverty, these attributes would remain partially hidden. The poor who know the Lord should be content knowing that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the will and intimate knowledge of the heavenly father (Matt. 10: 29) and that God will provide in due time. Those who are well-endowed should be content with modest lifestyles for the purpose of sharing what they have, thus fulfilling the purpose of imitating the generosity of God—the sole purpose of their wealth.

21: 13 He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered. God will reward those who are gracious for exhibiting His generosity and mercy and for honoring His fellow image-bearers, the poor (19: 17), but He will shut His ears to those who are stingy and hard-hearted. Those who demonstrate mercy will receive mercy, but those who are

not merciful will not receive mercy (cf. Matt. 18: 23-35 and commentary in *Synoptic* Gospels). This is not works salvation, but the recognition that a man who is hard-hearted has not actually received the mercy of forgiveness which, in turn, renders him merciful. The heart is spiritually connected with the ear, for “when the heart is hard, the ear is deaf” (Waltke, II, p. 178). Once again, we have the law of sowing and reaping. When we sow abundantly, we will also reap abundantly; but when we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly (2 Cor. 9: 6).

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

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

This proverb pair shows the connection between laziness and lack of generosity. Those who are generous not only satisfy their own needs, but work hard enough to have something left over to supply the needs of others (“He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.” Eph. 4:28, NASB) Those who are lazy always have their hand out to receive, but the hand is too idle to produce anything to give (cf. Prov. 30: 15). The appetite for food keeps *normal* people alive, causing them to work to satisfy it; but the appetite (**desire**) of the sluggard actually kills him since he refuses to work (Waltke, II, p. 188).

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

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

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

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

The oppression of the rich toward his poor neighbor consisted in lending to him at interest, particularly excessive interest, which prevented him from successfully paying off his loan, thereafter becoming the lender's slave for default on the loan (Amos 2: 6). If most of the interest is amortized early in the loan history, the usual practice today, then almost nothing of the principle (the original loan amount) is paid until the end of the loan period. The early payments are almost exclusively interest payments. For example, today when a person takes out a loan at 9% for a loan period of 30 years for a house costing \$100,000, the real cost of the house after 30 years will be \$289,667. But if the interest rate is 18%, the same house will cost \$542,552, almost twice as much. A small loan of \$5000 or 10 million Ush, at 9% will cost \$7600 or 15.2 million Ush over loan period of 10 years, and the same loan at 18% will cost \$10,812 or 21.6 million Ush over a 10 year period. Almost all of the initial monthly payments are pure interest, reducing the actual loan only a very small amount. For example, on a ten year loan for \$5000 at 18% interest, the remaining balance on the loan after 5 years is still \$3500. This means the after half the period of the loan, you still owe 70% of the loan. The reason for this is that you are paying most of the interest early in the loan. The proverb is a timeless lesson to would-be borrowers who wish to purchase depreciating consumer items (cars, jewelry, clothing, etc.) with borrowed money. Every day the borrower works, he is actually working not so much for himself, but for his lender. He has voluntarily made himself the lender's slave.

I don't know whether this was the actual practice in ancient Palestine, but the interest rates were probably *worse* considering the fact that loans to the poor were high-risk loans. The result was that it was *very difficult for them to get out of debt*. For this reason, the Law forbade charging interest to the poor (Ex. 22: 25). The command not to act as a **creditor** indicated that the loan was not for the purpose of buying real estate or financing a business, but to buy food, clothing or to rent shelter. For these necessities, no interest could be legally charged—but was usually charged anyway by Jews insensitive to the Law. In the parable of the talents, Jesus implicitly condoned (approved) the charging of interest for commercial purposes (Matt. 25: 27). If the servant should have put the talent in the bank to earn interest, the bank must charge greater interest to be able to pay interest to its depositors. Otherwise, the bank makes no profit and cannot stay in business. But Jesus was not talking about charging interest to poor people; He

was mentioning the legitimate practice of charging interest for investment and commercial purposes.

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

Verse 8 shows that God frowns upon the heartlessness of lenders who have no mercy on poor borrowers. They will receive no long-term benefits from their greed. With the Lord, “business” is not “just business”, and if the entrepreneur demands a return on *his* investment, the Lord also demands a return on the prosperity He has lavished upon the entrepreneur. Responsibility always comes with prosperity. The “crop” being sown by the greedy lender is the oppression of the poor (Waltke, II. p. 206), and is nothing short of **iniquity**. Nevertheless, the law of retribution is always in place forcing the oppressor to **reap** the trouble (vanity or meaninglessness) he has **sown**. The **rod of his fury** toward the poor borrower will **perish**. One day, the **righteous** poor who loves the Lord will be sitting at the side of Abraham in heaven while the rich lender will be begging for him to touch the tip of his tongue with a cool drop of water (Lk. 16). If the man who is generous to the poor “lends” to the Lord (19: 17), then the one who oppresses the poor insults the Lord and robs Him.

The proverb is close kin to Prov. 11: 24, “There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results* only in want.” If

bankers only believed the Bible, they would realize that their profits would increase if they were more generous in their lending habits.

The generous man of v. 9 is not the wealthy individual who gives *silver and gold* out of his excess, but the working man who shares his *food* (Walke, II, p. 210). He serves as a stark contrast to the greedy lender and the rich fool in Lk. 12: 16-21, a parable spoken against covetousness (v. 15). Having received a bountiful harvest and used up the space in his existing barns, he decides to build bigger barns for storing the excess grain, thus supplying him for years to come. In other words, he wants to retire from work, and the surplus he received would enable him to do so in style—to kick back with plenty of vintage wine, play golf, and visit the Bermuda Islands. It never seemed to occur to him that the excess grain could be used as gifts to poor people—the majority population in ancient Palestine—who had little to eat on a daily basis. It is also possible that the parable alludes to the practice of storing up the grain to save it for hard times when the productivity was low so that it could then be sold at an exorbitant (excessive) price to the starving masses (cf. Prov. 11: 26 and commentary above). Rather than being blessed for his avaricious (greedy) plan, God takes the man’s life that very night. Rather than *retire*, he simply *expired*. The conclusion: “So is the man who stores up treasure *for himself*, and is not rich *toward God*” (Lk. 12:21, emphasis mine).

G. God’s Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

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

Proverbs 16 gives much consideration to the sovereignty of God interacting—and overruling—human activity. The parallel in v. 1 is not immediately apparent, but the meaning seems to be that while a man answers in a certain way according to a well-thought plan and prepared speech, the words which actually come out of his mouth reflect more upon the pre-determined will of God who governs man’s plan, even his words. Man may have the “first word”, but God will have the “last word” (Waltke, II, p. 9). But while Waltke restricts such answers to good and effective answers from man, I would not be so restrictive. Even man’s *evil* tongue and *ineffective* arguments are under the sovereign control of God. He is never the author of evil, but

He uses evil for His sovereign and good purposes (16: 4). Otherwise, man's abusive tongue and evil plans lie outside of God's providence and are solely under man's control.

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

To use a biblical example, Cain planned and carried out the murder of his brother Abel, yet God ordained this event without implicating Himself (becoming guilty) in the murder. If this is the case in the planning of murder, it must be so also in the planning and execution of speech (see *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, "Of Providence", V. 4.).

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

Man is brilliant in his ability to rationalize (justify or excuse) his own behavior. As far as he is concerned, he always has a good reason for what he does. However, even if his actions may be externally good, his motivation may be thoroughly evil. For a deed to qualify as a good deed in the Lord's eyes, the activity must be in accordance with the law of God and the motive pure. Paul says, "And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned [as a martyr], but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3 NASB; explanation in brackets mine).

There will be many things that we have done in our lifetimes which we have judged to be exemplary (good examples). But when "we all" appear before the throne of Christ (2 Cor. 5: 10), some of those things will not look so good when our selfish motives for doing them are exposed. On the other hand, we have done other things which have been judged evil by others

who wrongfully judged our motives. Although the activity may have looked mistaken, our motives justified the action. For example, the corporal discipline of a child may look harsh to many people, but the motive behind is love for the child. Allowing an incorrigible (unable to be corrected) son to languish a few months in jail may also appear harsh, but the motive is a desire for his reformation. If, through carelessness, a small boy breaks a window with a football, the father may force him to work to pay for the broken window. The motive behind the decision is love, for the father wishes to teach the young boy responsibility which will carry him successfully through life.

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

This is a general promise of success for those with pure—or at least, mostly pure—motives (cf. v. 2 for context; Waltke, II. p.11). It does not guarantee that every business venture of the righteous will make a handsome profit—mine surely didn't—but that his **plans** of living for the Lord will be fulfilled. As a freshman and sophomore in college, I believed the Lord was calling me into medicine. Quite obviously, I never became a medical doctor—like my best friend. But my **plan** was to *help people* with medical care. Providentially, my plan to help others was fulfilled another way—helping others understand the Bible. (But this plan was coordinated with many detours providentially arranged for my informal “education”—18 years of manual labor.) There is a sense in which the believer who has **committed** his **works**—his life—to the Lord cannot fail to succeed in his plan. Even if he may sometimes wonder why he is in a certain place and why he is doing what he is doing—like Moses in the wilderness tending sheep rather than delivering Israel—God will use him and glorify Himself through him. “Secular man, who feels so self-confident [see James 4: 13-15] paradoxically is plagued with fear. His **plans will be established** because they are God's plans to glorify Himself through his life. “Secular man, who feels so self-confident, paradoxically is plagued with fear. Pious people, who know God's sovereignty and their limitations, live in prayer and peace” (Waltke, II. p.11; reference in brackets mine).

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

Its own purpose refers to God’s purpose (cf. NIV, “his own ends”). The best commentary on this verse is Rom. 9, particularly v. 17, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up *for this very purpose*, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Romans 9:17 NIV; emphasis mine). God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he would not let the Israelites go, giving Him the opportunity to display His saving power before His people, power which would become known to the Canaanites (Josh. 2: 9-11).

The proverb connects with the previous three proverbs. Even man’s planned response is from the Lord. Pharaoh hardened his own heart while the Lord hardened it even further. His unwillingness to let the people go was ordained according to God’s purpose to display His wonders to a people who would need constant reminders of His power and faithfulness.

In context with v. 3, the wicked do not commit their works to the Lord; consequently, their selfish purposes are not permanently established (Waltke, II. p. 12). Instead, they must yield *involuntarily* to the purposes God has ordained for them culminating (climaxing) eschatologically in **the day of evil**, the day of judgment. The righteous have the privilege of participating voluntarily in the purposes of God—committing their way to Him—while the wicked must endure these purposes contrary to their own planning (Waltke, II. p. 9).

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

In context with the previous verses, the **proud** man is the man who does not commit his way to the Lord (v. 3), whose ways are clean in his own eyes and whose motives are impure (v. 2). He is proud because he believes everything is the result of self-initiative and self-effort divorced from God’s mercy and grace. **He will not be unpunished**, but is reserved **for the day of evil**. Pride is the antithesis of faith, and for this reason is repugnant (abominable) to God.

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

The idea presented here is not self-atonement through works, but the necessary connection between sacrificial offerings and heart obedience to the Law (1 Sam. 15: 22). Without **the fear of the Lord** which keeps a person **away from evil**, no amount of animal sacrifice will cover his sin. The fear of the Lord includes not only refraining from evil but doing good to others—**lovingkindness and truth** applied to one's fellow man (Prov. 3: 3; Waltke, II. pp. 13-14, including the above references).

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

This proverb continues with the theme of the two ways: the way of commitment vs. independence and pride, the way of pure motives vs. self-justification and rationalization; and now, the way which is pleasing to the Lord. As it stands, the proverb seems to contradict Jesus' promise of certain tribulation and persecution even from one's own household (Matt. 10: 36; Jn. 16: 33). The idea seems to be that **when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord**, the Lord *restrains* his enemies even if He does not *remove* them (cf. Ps. 23: 5). Furthermore, the man whose ways are pleasing to the Lord does not invite unnecessary ill-treatment which does not qualify as persecution for the sake of righteousness (1 Pet. 2: 20). Sometimes we deserve out ill-treatment, but when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he is not generally provoking his enemies to personal attack. The proverb has to be balanced with other teaching. The man who seeks peace at any price because he refuses to take a stand against evil is not the man described in this proverb. Because he stands firm in his commitment to God's way, God, not the man himself, will make his enemies be at peace.

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

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

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

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

This is closely parallel with v. 1. In v. 1, although men plan what to say, the answer is ultimately the result of God's ordination. In the same way, men make plans, but the execution of those plans is entirely subject to the will of God who either permits, prevents, or modifies their execution to coincide with His decrees. In the case of the wicked, the proverb is a *warning* that they are not in ultimate control of their destinies. There is an invisible hand directing, overruling, or sustaining their decisions and actions at every turn. In the case of believers, the proverb is a statement of *comfort*, that although we will make painful, time-consuming detours away from God's perceptive, moral pathway, the guiding arm of providence is not too short to "cause all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). Even our sinful mistakes do not fall outside the domain of God's decreed will for His people, and He has ordained these mistakes to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8: 29).

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

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

The land of Israel was distributed to the tribes by lot (Num. 26: 55-56; 33: 54; Josh. 14: 2). The sin of Achan was determined by casting the lot (Josh. 7). Therefore, even the throwing of the lot is determined by the Lord. The pagan practice was also under His control (Jonah 1: 7) and the practice of gambling with dice today would be no exception. If something as uniquely "random" is determined by God's sovereignty, then everything else is included under His providence.

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

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

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

The first of these proverbs contrast the poor man of integrity with a man who lies (the ESV translates the phrase, “crooked in speech”. Since the man crooked in speech is paired with the poor man, his crooked speech is employed to defraud people of their money in some way or another. The **also** in v. 2 indicates a connection with v. 1, a connection which is not immediately apparent. The idea seems to be that the man who is crooked in speech to gain money hastens quickly to do so. In v. 3, after he has ruined his life with greed and foolish living, and having failed to accomplish his goal of getting rich, he lashes out against the providence of God who did not establish him in his greedy lifestyle. “Instead of repenting of the sins prompted the Lord to ruin him, the earthbound creature is so convinced that his sinful way of life is right that he storms against the Lord, holding him accountable for not granting what he thought, planned and willed” (Waltke, II. pp. 99-100).

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

This proverb is closely parallel with 16: 9. No matter how careful men are in planning their lives, the Lord’s eternal plan ordained from eternity will carry the day and be established.

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

Since God providentially controls all of man’s actions, it is not surprising that man cannot fully comprehend what happens to him in this life—**his way**. Life is full of mystery. Things happen to man beyond his control which force him to act and react in certain ways—**his steps**—without fully understanding the significance of what he is doing and how his actions will lead to further actions which will affect him the rest of his life.

I taught in a “Christian high school” (in name only) for one miserable year. The experience contributed to our decision to home school our children rather than pay dearly for an education mixed with nominal (name-only) Christianity which could leave them worse off. The experience

also contributed to my decision 20 years later to leave the US—which is over-supplied with Christian teachers—and come to Africa. I had absolutely no idea what God was accomplishing with that one miserable year of teaching. My steps were ordained by the Lord. How was I supposed to understand the full significance of what I was doing?

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

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

Given the autocratic tyranny of many kings and presidents, we may be tempted to grant kings immunity from God's sovereign rule lest we implicate (involve in guilt) God in their crimes against humanity. Yet, God's sovereignty ensures that He remains guiltless even in the sovereign control of man's wicked rule. This was so in Pharaoh's life. Pharaoh believed that it was *his decision alone* which kept the Israelites hostage to Egyptian slavery, but all the while the Lord was hardening his heart so that he would not let His people go in order to show His power (Ex. 4: 21; 7: 3; Rom. 9: 17). The Lord then judged Pharaoh for not letting the people go, simply because he was morally responsible for his act in spite of God's sovereign rule over his life. Men do not sin because they wish to cooperate with God's sovereign decrees. They sin because they are sinners.

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

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul says, "For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? (Romans 11:34 NASB)

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

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

Human armies can plan their strategy for battle and ready their armies, but the Lord decides the victory regardless of preparations. In context with v. 30, it implies that no amount of strategy or equipment will overcome the sovereign decree of God. The Mosaic Law specifically forbade the multiplication of horses for the simple reason that Israel's kings would be tempted to trust in their military machinery instead of Yahweh (Deut. 17: 15-16; Ps. 20: 7). War horses could cover as much as 100 kilometers per day and were employed by Solomon as one of the primary weapons of war (Waltke, II. p. 192; cf. 1 Ki. 10: 26-29, cited in Waltke). But in the end, Israel's and Judah's horses and chariots failed to deliver them from God's wrath. They had broken the covenant and brought down on their own heads the curse of the covenant. They could not run from God's wrath even on fast chariots.

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

Therefore, in this proverb war horses are a synecdoche (a part for the whole) for any implements of war. The sophisticated war machinery of the US—or any other country—will not save it from the judgment of God.

H. Heart and Motives

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

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

Like Isaiah who prophesied 200 years later, Solomon recognized that mere ritual sacrifice was not enough (cf. Isa. 1: 11-18). The antithesis (contrast) to hypocritical sacrifice is the prayer of truly righteous people who mean what they say.

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

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

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

One's countenance (the look on a person's face) gives expression to the state of his heart, whether joyful or sad. When his heart is sad, he falls into depression which is easily noticed by others.

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

The source of joy (v. 13) is the knowledge of God (Waltke, I. p. 625). While the wise seek this knowledge and are able to maintain their joy amidst the difficult circumstances of life (v. 15), fools feed on their own worthless opinions or the worthless opinions of other fools.

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

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

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

In v. 15, although the righteous experience many bad days of affliction, they are able to overcome them through the knowledge of God which gives them joy in the midst of suffering. Thus, the **afflicted** and a **cheerful heart** are the same person. His joy in life is not determined by outward circumstances, and he enjoys the little that he has more than the unbelieving wealthy (v. 16). The same idea is presented in v. 17. Money cannot buy peace of heart. While the unbelieving wealthy are eating a sumptuous feast, the hatred mixed with their food gives them they bad case of indigestion. On the other hand, a man who has peace with God and others will enjoy his meager plate of vegetables far more.

15: 28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

See also 16: 23. The righteous man examines his own heart and seeks the Lord's wisdom before he rashly answers a difficult question or provides counsel. Otherwise, he may condemn himself in what he says (Remember David's rash words, "...the man who did this deserves to die!" 2 Sam. 12: 5).

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

See under *G. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*

16: 23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth And adds persuasiveness to his lips.

17: 3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts.

Silver and gold were refined at high temperatures to remove impurities—silver at 961 degrees Celsius and gold at 1063 degrees Celsius (Waltke, II. p. 40). That's hot! But although humans can test the purity of precious metals, only God can test the purity of the heart. (Waltke). Even the person himself cannot know the depth of depravity in his own heart, much less examine that of another (Jer. 17:9).

17: 22 A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.

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

See under *G. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*

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

See under *G. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*

21: 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!

The scene envisioned here is *not* that of Prov. 15: 8, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.” Rather, it is that of false piety designed to mislead others (cf. Prov. 7: 14-15; 2 Sam. 15: 7-13; 1 Ki. 21: 9-12; cited in Waltke, II. p. 189).

I. Hope and Desire

Waltke entitles Prov. 13: 12-19, “Fulfillment through Wisdom versus Frustration through Folly”. The verses have a connection with one another which is immediately apparent (except for v. 17).

13: 12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

13: 13 The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.

13: 14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, To turn aside from the snares of death.

The desires of the wicked—**the one who despises the word** (v. 13)—will not be ultimately fulfilled, leading to despair and sickness of heart. The righteous, on the other hand, will have every godly desire met—**rewarded**. This does not imply that the righteous will receive everything they ever wanted in this life since some of the things they wanted were either not

needed or not spiritually healthy. (I, for one, am glad that God did not give me *some* of the things I wanted.) Yet, the *ultimate* desire of the righteous is the presence and fellowship of God—“Whom have I in heaven *but You*? And *besides You, I desire nothing on earth*. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and *my portion* forever” (Psalm 73:25-26 NASB; emphasis mine). Everything else that we desire on earth or in heaven should spring from this ultimate desire for fellowship with God and His people. David said, “Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4 NASB). The reason this promise is fulfilled for the righteous is that our desire for God moderates and influences every other desire, and as God sanctifies us and conforms us into the image of His Son, our desires even in this life will be more and more conformed to God’s desires for us. In heaven, we will find that every desire we *should have had* in this life is abundantly fulfilled in the inheritance we have in Christ.

In contrast to the one who fears the commandments of God and receives the ultimate reward—**the tree of life**—the one who despises the word of God will pay the **debt**—namely, his life. This interpretation is supported by the context with v. 14. **The teaching of the wise** corresponds to **the word** which is **despised** by the wicked (v. 13) (Waltke, I. pp. 564-565). On the other hand, **the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded** with **the fountain of life** (v. 14) and **the tree of life** (v. 12) and will avoid **the snares of death** which capture the wicked. Avoiding **the snares of death** directs our attention forward to eternal life which is the primary emphasis of *Proverbs*.

13: 15 Good understanding produces favor, But the way of the treacherous is hard.

13: 16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly.

The **favor** produced is primarily favor with God, but we also know that even unbelievers—who are endowed with a certain degree of common grace—recognize and appreciate a man of honor. “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God *and men*” (Luke 2:52 NASB; emphasis mine). This is to be expected since sin has alienated man both from God and from other men. A man who is treacherous cannot be trusted even by those who are likewise treacherous. “There is no honor among thieves”, meaning, thieves cannot even trust each other.

Good understanding, in context with vv. 13-14, comes from **the word** and **the teaching of the wise**. **The way of the treacherous is hard** because it leads to lack of favor with God and dishonor among men, but it is ultimately hard because it leads to eternal death (v. 14).

In v. 16, the sensible man **acts with knowledge** which leads to caution. Waltke translates the phrase, “takes cover” with the idea of protecting himself. The fool, on the other hand, is like a peddler displaying his merchandise before the eyes of men, throwing caution to the wind (Waltke, I. p. 566).

13: 17 A wicked messenger falls into adversity, But a faithful envoy *brings* healing.

Messengers (envoys) had a very important function in the ancient world and were given a very high social status. They spoke in the name of the person represented, giving them tremendous responsibility and potential for good or evil. He could either bring **healing** by honestly and diplomatically delivering his message, or he could bring dishonor—or even war—through lying or improper conduct, eventually being overcome by the **adversity** or difficulty that he himself caused. (But is difficult to see how this verse fits the context of vv. 12-16.)

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

As **the way of the treacherous is hard** (v. 15), **poverty and shame** will attend the life of **him who neglects discipline**. Ironically, those who reject discipline will be disciplined by poverty and shame (Waltke, I. p. 568). (See also under *C. Discipline and reproof*)

13: 19 Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.

Verse 19 forms an *inclusio* with v. 12 and has generally the same meaning. The righteous have their desires fulfilled because they pay attention to the teaching which is the fountain of life. Fools, on the other hand, refuse to depart from their evil—**the snares of death**. “Only fools

prefer death to life (v. 14), destruction to favor (v. 15)...perdition to healing (v. 17), and disgraceful poverty to social dignity (v. 18). Their nature to despise the wise person's inspired word alienates them from a relationship with the Lord of life, the only relationship that is truly gratifying and life-sustaining (Pss. 17: 15; 42: 1). If they changed their attitude toward God, they would turn from their morally repulsive behavior toward humanity (3: 7; 16: 6). Without regeneration 'the very idea that he should behave in any other way is unthinkable to him, quite abhorrent in fact (13: 19); for he thinks it would spoil his fun (10: 23)' (cf. 15: 21)" (Waltke, I. p. 569; words in single quotes taken from Aitken, *Proverbs*, p. 100).

J. Humility and Pride

11: 2 When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.

Paradoxically (ironically) the man who is prideful (who honors himself) comes to *dishonor* because he takes credit which is due to another—to God. Whatever we have—money, intelligence, talent, education, high social position, a good name—we have as a gift from God. But if we become prideful of what we have, we attribute our success to ourselves rather than God. "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7 NASB) Humility, on the other hand, is wise because the humble man understands the source of all his blessings and abilities. He does not think more highly of himself than he ought to think (Rom. 12: 3). I am reminded of a story of a very wealthy corporate executive who enjoyed attending the men's prayer breakfasts at his church. At the end of the prayers, one could always find him in the kitchen with his sleeves rolled up washing the dishes. He understood where his success came from.

The proverb could be paired with 11: 1, "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight" (NASB). If so, the idea could be that pride causes someone to falsify measurements and steal from others. By doing so, he is able to afford the life-style of the wealthy and be honored by men who defer to the wealthy. But his pride drives him into a life of greedy *dishonor* through theft and fraud.

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

(See *B. The Better—Than Proverbs*)

13: 7 There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; *Another* pretends to be poor, but has great wealth.

This is not the same as Prov. 12: 9, “Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant Than he who honors himself and lacks bread.” In that proverb, the one who is lightly esteemed and living within his means is not pretending. In Prov. 13: 7, we are confronted with two liars. The first man attempts to attract the social prestige of the wealthy, the second one attempts to deprive the poor of any help they may have received from him. He doesn’t want people coming to his doorstep for charity, so he hides his wealth (Waltke, I. p. 558). “Second, they defame and defraud the Lord; one pretends to have received the Lord’s blessings, while the other denies his gracious gifts” (Waltke).

13: 10 Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.

Insolence is disrespect, and the second part of the verse indicates that the insolence in view is disrespect for the viewpoint of others. The insolent person respects only his own opinion and has little regard for that of others. He has an inflated opinion of himself which always leads to strife within the community. **Wisdom** is antithetically parallel with **strife**, implying that with wisdom comes *peace within the community*. The wise person does not think too highly of his own opinion but seeks the counsel of others within the community, thus building teamwork and cooperation rather than competition leading to strife (cf. Waltke, I. p. 560).

15: 25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

The proud is a *metonymy* for all those who oppress the poor. (A *metonymy* is a word used for another word which is associated with it; e.g. the White House is a metonymy for the US executive branch of the president of the US). The **house** is a *synecdoche* (a part representing the whole) representing the proud man's entire means of sustaining his life. The **widow** is also a synecdoche representing anyone who is incapable of defending themselves against the oppression of more powerful people. The **boundary** is also a synecdoche for all the property and assets of the widow, her only means of sustaining herself (Waltke, I. p. 635).

The proverb illustrates that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5: 5). Although the widow had no male to protect her, God assumes the role of her husband to avenge any wrongdoing of her oppressor (Waltke, I. p. 636).

- 15: 33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor *comes* humility.
 16: 5 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.
 16: 18 Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.
 16: 19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.
 18: 11 A rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own imagination.
 18: 12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, But humility *goes* before honor.
 21: 4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, The lamp of the wicked, is sin.
 21: 24 "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.
 21: 29 A wicked man displays a bold face, But as for the upright, he makes his way sure.
 22: 4 The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life.

K. Life, Death and the Afterlife

- 10: 27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.
 11: 7 When a wicked man dies, *his* expectation will perish, And the hope of strong men perishes.
 11: 19 He who is steadfast in righteousness *will attain* to life, And he who pursues evil *will bring about* his own death.
 11: 30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls.

- 12: 28 In the way of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no death.
- 13: 9 The light of the righteous rejoices, But the lamp of the wicked goes out.
- 13: 14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, To turn aside from the snares of death.
- 14: 12 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
- 14: 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.
- 14: 32 The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing, But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.
- 15: 10 Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.
- 15: 24 The path of life *leads* upward for the wise That he may keep away from Sheol below.
- 16: 17 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life.
- 19: 18 Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death.
- 19: 23 The fear of the LORD *leads* to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.
- 21: 16 A man who wanders from the way of understanding Will rest in the assembly of the dead.
- 21: 21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty Finds life, righteousness and honor.
- 22: 4 The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life.

L. The Lord; the Fear of the Lord

- 10: 3 The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked.
- 10: 22 It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it.
- 10: 27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.
- 10: 29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, But ruin to the workers of iniquity.
- 11: 1 A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.
- 12: 2 A good man will obtain favor from the LORD, But He will condemn a man who devises evil.
- 12: 22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.
- 14: 2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.

14: 26 In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge.
14: 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.
15: 3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.
15: 8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.
15: 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.
15: 11 Sheol and Abaddon *lie open* before the LORD, How much more the hearts of men!
15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.
15: 25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.
15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.
15: 33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor *comes* humility.
16: 1 The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
16: 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.
16: 3 Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.
16: 4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.
16: 5 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.
16: 6 By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.
16: 7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
16: 8 Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.
16: 9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.
16: 10 A divine decision is in the lips of the king; His mouth should not err in judgment.
16: 11 A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern.
16: 20 He who gives attention to the word will find good, And blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.
17: 15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

18: 10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.
 18: 22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD.
 19: 14 House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD.
 19: 21 Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.
 20: 10 Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the LORD.
 20: 12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The LORD has made both of them.
 20: 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.
 20: 27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, Searching all the innermost parts of his being.
 21: 2 Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.
 21: 3 To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.
 21: 30 There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the LORD.
 21: 31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But victory belongs to the LORD.
 22: 2 The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.
 22: 4 The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life.
 22: 12 The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, But He overthrows the words of the treacherous man.

M. Love and Hatred

10: 12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.
 16: 6 By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.

N. Man's Way

12: 15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.
 14: 12 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
 14: 13 Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, And the end of joy may be grief.
 14: 14 The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways, But a good man will *be satisfied* with his.
 14: 15 The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.

- 14: 16 A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless.
- 14: 17 A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.
- 16: 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.
- 16: 9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.
- 16: 7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
- 16: 17 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life.
- 16: 25 There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
- 19: 1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.
- 20: 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.
- 21: 2 Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.
- 21: 8 The way of a guilty man is crooked, But as for the pure, his conduct is upright.

O. Marriage and Family—the Home

- 10: 1 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.
- 10: 5 He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, *But* he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.
- 11: 29 He who troubles his own house will inherit wind, And the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted.
- 12: 4 An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who shames *him* is like rotteness in his bones.
- 13: 1 A wise son *accepts his* father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
- 13: 22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.
- 13: 24 He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.
- 14: 26 In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge.
- 15: 5 A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is sensible.

15: 20 A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother.
15: 27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.
17: 1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.
17: 2 A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, And will share in the inheritance among brothers.
17: 6 Grandchildren are the crown of old men, And the glory of sons is their fathers.
17: 13 He who returns evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house.
17: 21 He who sires a fool *does so* to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy.
17: 25 A foolish son is a grief to his father And bitterness to her who bore him.
18: 22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD.
19: 13 A foolish son is destruction to his father, And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.
19: 14 House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD.
19: 18 Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death.
19: 26 He who assaults *his father and* drives *his* mother away Is a shameful and disgraceful son.
20: 7 A righteous man who walks in his integrity—How blessed are his sons after him.
20: 20 He who curses his father or his mother, His lamp will go out in time of darkness.
21: 9 It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.
22: 6 Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
22: 15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

P. Observations of Human Nature

13: 12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.
14: 10 The heart knows its own bitterness, And a stranger does not share its joy.
15: 13 A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.
17: 22 A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.
18: 14 The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But *as for* a broken spirit who can bear it?
18: 19 A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.

19: 22 What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.
 20: 5 A plan in the heart of a man is *like* deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out.
 20: 6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?
 20: 9 Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"?
 20: 11 It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself If his conduct is pure and right.
 20: 14 "Bad, bad," says the buyer, But when he goes his way, then he boasts.

Q. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich

10: 2 Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death.
 10: 4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
 10: 15 The rich man's wealth is his fortress, The ruin of the poor is their poverty.
 10: 22 It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it.
 11: 4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.
 11: 16 A gracious woman attains honor, And ruthless men attain riches.
 11: 24 There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results* only in want.
 11: 28 He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the *green* leaf.
 11: 31 If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the sinner!
 13: 7 There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; *Another* pretends to be poor, but has great wealth.
 13: 8 The ransom of a man's life is his wealth, But the poor hears no rebuke.
 13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.
 13: 21 Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.
 13: 22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.
 13: 25 The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, But the stomach of the wicked is in need.
 14: 4 Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, But much revenue *comes* by the strength of the ox.
 14: 11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, But the tent of the upright will flourish.
 14: 20 The poor is hated even by his neighbor, But those who love the rich are many.
 15: 6 Great wealth is *in* the house of the righteous, But trouble is in the income of the wicked.

15: 16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.
15: 17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred.
15: 27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.
16: 8 Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.
16: 19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.
17:1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.
17: 5 He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.
17: 18 A man lacking in sense pledges And becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor.
18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.
19: 1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.
19: 4 Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend.
19: 7 All the brothers of a poor man hate him; How much more do his friends abandon him! He pursues *them with words, but they are gone.*
20: 21 An inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning Will not be blessed in the end.
21: 5 The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty *comes* surely to poverty.
21: 17 He who loves pleasure *will become* a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.
22: 2 The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.
22: 7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower *becomes* the lender's slave.
22: 16 He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself Or who gives to the rich, *will only come to poverty.*

R. The Power of the Tongue

10: 11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
10: 14 Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.
10: 19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

10: 20 The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver, The heart of the wicked is *worth* little.
10: 21 The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.
11: 9 With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.
11: 12 He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.
11: 13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.
12: 18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
12: 25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, But a good word makes it glad.
13: 3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
15: 1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.
15: 4 A soothing tongue is a tree of life, But perversion in it crushes the spirit.
15: 23 A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!
15: 30 Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones.
16: 13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings, And he who speaks right is loved.
16: 21 The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.
16: 24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.
16: 27 A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire.
16: 28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.
17: 9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.
18: 4 The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.
18: 6 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.
18: 7 A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.
18: 20 With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied; He will be satisfied *with* the
18: 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.
product of his lips.

20: 15 There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; But the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing.

21: 23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

22: 10 Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.

22: 11 He who loves purity of heart *And* whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.

22: 14 The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; He who is cursed of the LORD will fall into it.

S. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

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

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

18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

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

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

19: 2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

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

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

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

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

T. Pursuit of Wisdom

15: 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.

19: 8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who keeps understanding will find good.

19: 27 Cease listening, my son, to discipline, *And you will* stray from the words of knowledge.

21: 21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty Finds life, righteousness and honor.

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

U. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

10: 3 The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked.

10: 6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

10: 7 The memory of the righteous is blessed, But the name of the wicked will rot.

10: 9 He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.

10: 13 On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.

10: 16 The wages of the righteous is life, The income of the wicked, punishment.

10: 20 The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver, The heart of the wicked is *worth* little.

10: 24 What the wicked fears will come upon him, But the desire of the righteous will be granted.

10: 25 When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, But the righteous *has* an everlasting foundation.

10: 27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

10: 28 The hope of the righteous is gladness, But the expectation of the wicked perishes.

10: 29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, But ruin to the workers of iniquity.

10: 30 The righteous will never be shaken, But the wicked will not dwell in the land.

11: 3 The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.

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

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

11: 7 When a wicked man dies, *his* expectation will perish, And the hope of strong men perishes.

11: 8 The righteous is delivered from trouble, But the wicked takes his place.

11: 17 The merciful man does himself good, But the cruel man does himself harm.

11: 19 He who is steadfast in righteousness *will attain* to life, And he who pursues evil *will bring about* his own death.

- 11: 20 The perverse in heart are an abomination to the LORD, But the blameless in *their* walk are His delight.
- 11: 21 Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, But the descendants of the righteous will be delivered.
- 11: 23 The desire of the righteous is only good, *But* the expectation of the wicked is wrath.
- 11: 27 He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, But he who seeks evil, evil will come to him.
- 12: 2 A good man will obtain favor from the LORD, But He will condemn a man who devises evil.
- 12: 3 A man will not be established by wickedness, But the root of the righteous will not be moved.
- 12: 5 The thoughts of the righteous are just, *But* the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.
- 12: 6 The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, But the mouth of the upright will deliver them.
- 12: 7 The wicked are overthrown and are no more, But the house of the righteous will stand.
- 12: 8 A man will be praised according to his insight, But one of perverse mind will be despised.
- 12: 10 A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, But *even* the compassion of the wicked is cruel.
- 12: 12 The wicked man desires the booty of evil men, But the root of the righteous yields *fruit*.
- 12: 13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.
- 12: 21 No harm befalls the righteous, But the wicked are filled with trouble.
- 12: 26 The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked leads them astray.
- 13: 3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
- 13: 5 A righteous man hates falsehood, But a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully.
- 13: 9 The light of the righteous rejoices, But the lamp of the wicked goes out.
- 13: 13 The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.
- 13: 21 Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.
- 13: 25 The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, But the stomach of the wicked is in need.

14: 2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.

14: 11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, But the tent of the upright will flourish.

14: 14 The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways, But a good man will *be satisfied* with his.

14: 18 The naive inherit foolishness, But the sensible are crowned with knowledge.

14: 19 The evil will bow down before the good, And the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

14: 22 Will they not go astray who devise evil? But kindness and truth *will be to* those who devise good.

14: 32 The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing, But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.

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

15: 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.

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

15: 21 Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, But a man of understanding walks straight.

15: 29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

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

17: 11 A rebellious man seeks only evil, So a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

18: 3 When a wicked man comes, contempt also comes, And with dishonor *comes* scorn.

19: 5 A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape.

20: 7 A righteous man who walks in his integrity—How blessed are his sons after him.

21: 7 The violence of the wicked will drag them away, Because they refuse to act with justice.

21: 8 The way of a guilty man is crooked, But as for the pure, his conduct is upright.

21: 10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.

21: 12 The righteous one considers the house of the wicked, Turning the wicked to ruin.

21: 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!

21: 29 A wicked man displays a bold face, But as for the upright, he makes his way sure.

22: 3 The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.

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

22: 12 The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, But He overthrows the words of the treacherous man.

V. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

11: 9 With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

11: 10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, And when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting.

11: 11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

11: 12 He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.

11: 13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

11: 14 Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory.

12: 26 The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked leads them astray.

13: 23 Abundant food *is in* the fallow ground of the poor, But it is swept away by injustice.

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

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

14: 28 In a multitude of people is a king's glory, But in the dearth of people is a prince's ruin.

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

14: 34 Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to *any* people.

14: 35 The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely, But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully.

15: 22 Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.

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

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

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

16: 14 The fury of a king is *like* messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it.
16: 15 In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain.
16: 27 A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire.
16: 28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.
16: 29 A man of violence entices his neighbor And leads him in a way that is not good.
17: 2 A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, And will share in the inheritance among brothers.
17: 5 He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.
17: 9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.
17: 14 The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.
17: 15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.
17: 17 A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.
17: 18 A man lacking in sense pledges And becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor.
17: 19 He who loves transgression loves strife; He who raises his door seeks destruction.
17: 23 A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.
17: 26 It is also not good to fine the righteous, *Nor* to strike the noble for *their* uprightness.
18:1 He who separates himself seeks *his own* desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.
18: 5 To show partiality to the wicked is not good, *Nor* to thrust aside the righteous in judgment.
18: 6 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.
18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.
18: 17 The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him.
18: 18 The *cast* lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.
18: 23 The poor man utters supplications, But the rich man answers roughly.
19: 4 Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend.
19: 12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass.
19: 22 What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.

19: 28 A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice, And the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity.

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

20: 16 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for foreigners, hold him in pledge.

20: 18 Prepare plans by consultation, And make war by wise guidance.

20: 19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

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

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

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

21: 10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.

21: 15 The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous, But is terror to the workers of iniquity.

22: 11 He who loves purity of heart *And* whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.

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

W. Speech as a Reflection of Character

10: 6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

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

10: 10 He who winks the eye causes trouble, And a babbling fool will be ruined.

10: 11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

10: 13 On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.

10: 14 Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.

10: 18 He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool.

10: 19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

10: 20 The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver, The heart of the wicked is *worth* little.

10: 21 The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.

10: 31 The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, But the perverted tongue will be cut out.

10: 32 The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.

11: 9 With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

11: 12 He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.

11: 13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

12: 13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.

12: 14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, And the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.

12: 18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

12: 19 Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.

12: 22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.

12: 23 A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly.

13: 2 From the fruit of a man's mouth he enjoys good, But the desire of the treacherous is violence.

13: 3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

14: 3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for *his* back, But the lips of the wise will protect them.

14: 7 Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.

14: 9 Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will.

15: 2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly.

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

15: 26 Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure.

15: 28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

16: 23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth And adds persuasiveness to his lips.

16: 27 A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are like scorching fire.

16: 28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

17: 5 He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

17: 7 Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool, Much less are lying lips to a prince.

17: 20 He who has a crooked mind finds no good, And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.

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

17: 28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent.

18: 2 A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.

18: 4 The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.

18: 6 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.

18: 7 A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.

18: 8 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

18: 13 He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.

18: 20 With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied; He will be satisfied *with* the product of his lips.

18: 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

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

X. Truth and Deception

10: 10 He who winks the eye causes trouble, And a babbling fool will be ruined.

11: 1 A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.

11: 3 The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.

11: 18 The wicked earns deceptive wages, But he who sows righteousness *gets* a true reward.

12: 17 He who speaks truth tells what is right, But a false witness, deceit.

12: 19 Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.

12: 20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.

12: 22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.

13: 5 A righteous man hates falsehood, But a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully.

13: 7 There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; *Another* pretends to be poor, but has great wealth.

13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.

13: 15 Good understanding produces favor, But the way of the treacherous is hard.

13: 17 A wicked messenger falls into adversity, But a faithful envoy *brings* healing.

14: 5 A trustworthy witness will not lie, But a false witness utters lies.

14: 25 A truthful witness saves lives, But he who utters lies is treacherous.

15: 27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.

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

16: 30 He who winks his eyes *does so* to devise perverse things; He who compresses his lips brings evil to pass.

17: 4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips; A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.

17: 7 Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool, Much less are lying lips to a prince.

17: 8 A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner; Wherever he turns, he prospers.

17: 23 A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.

18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.

18: 17 The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him.

18: 18 The *cast* lot puts an end to strife And decides between the mighty ones.

19: 5 A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape.

19: 9 A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will perish.

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

19: 28 A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice, And the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity.

- 20: 6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?
- 20: 10 Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the LORD.
- 20: 14 "Bad, bad," says the buyer, But when he goes his way, then he boasts.
- 20: 17 Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.
- 20: 19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.
- 20: 23 Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, And a false scale is not good.
- 20: 24 Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?
- 20: 25 It is a trap for a man to say rashly, "It is holy!" And after the vows to make inquiry.
- 21: 6 The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue Is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.
- 21: 14 A gift in secret subdues anger, And a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.
- 21: 28 A false witness will perish, But the man who listens *to the truth* will speak forever.

Y. Vengeance

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

Z. Wisdom's Protection

- 11: 15 He who is guarantor for a stranger will surely suffer for it, But he who hates being a guarantor is secure.
- 13: 6 Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless, But wickedness subverts the sinner.
- 14: 3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for *his* back, But the lips of the wise will protect them.
- 15: 25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.
- 18: 10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.
- 19: 16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, *But* he who is careless of conduct will die.
- 19: 23 The fear of the LORD *leads* to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.

20: 16 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for foreigners, hold him in pledge.

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

21: 18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, And the treacherous is in the place of the upright.

21: 23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

22: 5 Thorns *and* snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards himself will be far from them.

22: 10 Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.

AA. Wise Men Contrasted with Fools, the Naive, and Scoffers

10: 13 On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.

10: 14 Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.

10: 21 The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.

10: 23 Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, And *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding.

12: 15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

12: 16 A fool's anger is known at once, But a prudent man conceals dishonor.

13: 16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly.

13: 19 Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.

13: 20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

14: 3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for *his* back, But the lips of the wise will protect them.

14: 6 A scoffer seeks wisdom and *finds* none, But knowledge is easy to one who has understanding.

14: 7 Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.

14: 8 The wisdom of the sensible is to understand his way, But the foolishness of fools is deceit.

14: 9 Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will.

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

14: 24 The crown of the wise is their riches, *But* the folly of fools is foolishness.

14: 33 Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding, But in the hearts of fools it is made known.

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

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

16: 21 The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

16: 22 Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, But the discipline of fools is folly.

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

17: 12 Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, Rather than a fool in his folly.

17: 16 Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, When he has no sense?

17: 21 He who sires a fool *does so* to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy.

17: 24 Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, But the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

17: 28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent.

18: 2 A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.

18: 15 The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

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

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

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

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

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

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

19: 29 Judgments are prepared for scoffers, And blows for the back of fools.

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

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

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

21: 20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up.

21: 22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty And brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

21: 24 "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.

22: 10 Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.

BB. Women—Wise and Foolish

11: 22 As a ring of gold in a swine's snout *So is* a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.

14: 1 The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.

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

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

CC. Work and Sloth

10: 4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

10: 5 He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, *But* he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.

10: 26 Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, So is the lazy one to those who send him.

12: 11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless *things* lacks sense.

12: 14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, And the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.

12: 24 The hand of the diligent will rule, But the slack *hand* will be put to forced labor.

12: 27 A lazy man does not roast his prey, But the precious possession of a man *is* diligence.

13: 4 The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat.

13: 11 Wealth *obtained* by fraud dwindles, But the one who gathers by labor increases *it*.

14: 23 In all labor there is profit, But mere talk *leads* only to poverty.

15: 19 The way of the lazy is as a hedge of thorns, But the path of the upright is a highway.

16: 26 A worker's appetite works for him, For his hunger urges him *on*.

18: 9 He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.

19: 15 Laziness casts into a deep sleep, And an idle man will suffer hunger.

19: 24 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, *But* will not even bring it back to his mouth.

20: 4 The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, So he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

20: 13 Do not love sleep, or you will become poor; Open your eyes, *and* you will be satisfied with food.

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

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

22: 13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside; I will be killed in the streets!"

III. Collection III—The Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22: 17—24: 22)

Collection III is set apart from Collection II by the heading, “the words of the wise” (22: 17) followed by vv. 18-21 which continue the introduction to this section and should be read in context with v. 17. Furthermore, Collection III is set apart from II by the **change** from one verse aphorisms to “**more extended, flowing sayings**” which may cover two or more verses (Waltke, p. 14). Compare the following: Prov. 22: 2 of Collection II, “The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.” This short, pithy saying from Collection II consists of a **single aphorism**—a one verse statement of truth—divided into two **versets**. But now look at Prov. 23: 1-3 from Collection III, “When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you, And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.” Notice that this proverb consists of three verses, not one, and flows more smoothly than the short aphorism from Collection I. The introduction found in 22: 17-21 alerts us to a change of format in Collection III. Furthermore, as Waltke has noted, the sayings of Collection III take the form of **admonitions or imperatives** (commands) followed by the **motivations** for obeying the commands (p. 14). To paraphrase 23: 1-3, “Curb your appetite when dining with the king [command], for the king may be testing you or trying to get information from you [motivation]”

Since many of the proverbs of this section consist of units of two or more verses, they are marked off as separate units divided by spaces.

A. Anger, Self-Control

22: 24 Do not associate with a man *given* to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man,

22: 25 Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself.

B. Commandments followed by Motivations for Obedience

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food

23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;

23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

23: 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?

23: 30 Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine.

23: 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;

23: 32 At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.

23: 33 Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things.

23: 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.

23: 35 "They struck me, *but* I did not become ill; They beat me, *but* I did not know *it*. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

24: 1 Do not be envious of evil men, Nor desire to be with them;

24: 2 For their minds devise violence, And their lips talk of trouble.

24: 13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;

24: 14 Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

24: 15 Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; Do not destroy his resting place;

24: 16 For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.

24: 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;

24: 18 Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

24: 19 Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;

24: 20 For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

22: 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate;

22: 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.

22: 24 Do not associate with a man *given* to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man,

22: 25 Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself. (Proverbs 22:24-25 NAU)

22: 26 Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become guarantors for debts.

22: 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you?

C. Discipline and Reproof

23: 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.

23: 13 Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.

23: 14 You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.

D. Drunkenness

23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;

23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

23: 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?

23: 30 Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine.

23: 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;

23: 32 At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.

23: 33 Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things.

23: 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.

23: 35 "They struck me, *but* I did not become ill; They beat me, *but* I did not know *it*. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

D. Envy

24: 19 Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;

24: 20 For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

E. Generosity and Greed

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.

23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;

23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

F. The Heart and Motives

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;

23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

23: 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.

G. Hope and Desire

23: 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always.

23: 18 Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

24: 13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;

24: 14 Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

H. The Lord; the Fear of the Lord

23: 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always.

24: 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;

24: 18 Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

24: 21 My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change,

24: 22 For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin *that comes* from both of them?

I. Marriage and Family—the Home

23: 13 Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.

23: 14 You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.

23: 22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.

23: 23 By truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.

23: 24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him.

23: 25 Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her rejoice who gave birth to you.

23: 26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.

23: 27 For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.

23: 28 Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men.

24: 3 By wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established;

24: 4 And by knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.

J. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich

22: 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate;
22: 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.
22: 26 Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become guarantors for debts.
22: 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you?
23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.
23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.
23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;
23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.
23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.
23: 10 Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,
23: 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.

K. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,
23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.
23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.
23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;
23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.
23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

24: 21 My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change,

24: 22 For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin *that comes* from both of them?

L. The Pursuit of Wisdom; the Value of Wisdom

22: 17 Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge;

22: 18 For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips.

22: 19 So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you.

22: 20 Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge,

22: 21 To make you know the certainty of the words of truth That you may correctly answer him who sent you?

23: 12 Apply your heart to discipline And your ears to words of knowledge.

23: 15 My son, if your heart is wise, My own heart also will be glad;

23: 16 And my inmost being will rejoice When your lips speak what is right.

23: 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always.

23: 18 Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

23: 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.

23: 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;

23: 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

23: 22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.

23: 23 Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.

23: 26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.

23: 27 For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.

23: 28 Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men.

M. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

24: 15 Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; Do not destroy his resting place;

24: 16 For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.

24: 19 Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;

24: 20 For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

N. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

22: 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate;

22: 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.

23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;

23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

23: 10 Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,

23: 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.

24: 10 If you are slack in the day of distress, Your strength is limited.

24: 11 Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold *them* back.

24: 12 If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts? And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?

O. Truth and Deception

22: 28 Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set.

23: 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,

23: 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of *great* appetite.

23: 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.

23: 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.

23: 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

23: 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;

23: 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you.

23: 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

23: 10 Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless,

23: 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.

23: 23 Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.

P. Vengeance

24: 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;

24: 18 Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

Q. Wise Men Contrasted with Fools, the Naive, and Scoffers

23: 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.

24: 5 A wise man is strong, And a man of knowledge increases power.

24: 6 For by wise guidance you will wage war, And in abundance of counselors there is victory.

24: 7 Wisdom is *too* exalted for a fool, He does not open his mouth in the gate.

24: 8 One who plans to do evil, Men will call a schemer.

24: 9 The devising of folly is sin, And the scoffer is an abomination to men.

R. Women—Wise and Foolish

23: 26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.

23: 27 For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well.

23: 28 Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men.

IV. Collection IV: Further Sayings of the Wise (24: 23-34)

Collection IV is separated from III by 24: 23a, “These also are sayings of the wise.” The end of this collection is determined by 25: 1, “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.” Collection IV is concerned primarily with ***three areas***: ***A. behavior at court***—vv. 23b-25, 28; ***B. speaking and thinking***—v. 26, 29; and ***C. behavior at work***—v. 27, 30-34 (Waltke, p. 24). I will be using the same categories used previously.

A. Work and sloth

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

B. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

24: 24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;
24: 25 But to those who rebuke the *wicked* will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

C. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

24: 24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;
24: 25 But to those who rebuke the *wicked* will be delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

D. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

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

24: 28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, And do not deceive with your lips.

E. Speech as a Reflection of Character

24: 26 He kisses the lips Who gives a right answer.

F. Truth and Deception

24: 28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, And do not deceive with your lips.

G. Vengeance

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

H. Work and Sloth

24: 27 Prepare your work outside And make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house.

24: 30 I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,

24: 31 And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down.

24: 32 When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction.

24: 33 "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest,"

24: 34 Then your poverty will come *as* a robber And your want like an armed man.

V. Collection V: Solomon II (25: 1—29: 27)

Collection V is distinguished from IV by the heading, "These are the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah transcribed." It consists of two main sections: 25: 2—27: 27 and 28: 1—29: 27. In the *first* section we find primarily *synonymous* or *comparative* parallels

with the exception of 25: 2; 27: 6, 7, 12 which are *antithetic* parallels (Waltke, p. 25). This collection also possesses a very large number of *similes* and a lesser number of *metaphors*. Prov. 26: 1-12 is the “Mirror of Fools” (Waltke, pp. 48-50) in which the word “fool” or “fools” occurs in every verse except v. 2 where it is implied.

The *second* section of Collection V (28: 1—29: 27) consists primarily of *antithetic proverbs*. “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, *but* the righteous are bold as a lion” (28: 1). “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, *but* he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father” (28: 7; cf. 28: 10, 28; 29: 2, 7, 15, 23). This section is also characterized by a relatively high number of references to “*Yahweh*” (the Lord), used five times from chapter 28-29, while “*Yahweh*” is used only once (25: 22) in chapters 25-26 (Waltke, p. 25).

For a more thorough description of Collection V, see pp. 3-4 of your notes.

A. Anger and Self-Control

25: 28 *Like* a city that is broken into *and* without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit.

29: 11 A fool always loses his temper, *But* a wise man holds it back.

29: 22 An angry man stirs up strife, *And* a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.

B. The Better-Than Proverbs

25: 24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof *Than* in a house shared with a contentious woman.

27:5 Better is open rebuke *Than* love that is concealed.

27:10 Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, *And* do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near *than* a brother far away.

28:6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity *Than* he who is crooked though he be rich.

C. Discipline and Reproof

- 25: 11 *Like* apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.
- 25: 12 *Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.
- 26: 3 A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, And a rod for the back of fools.
- 26: 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him.
- 26: 5 Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, That he not be wise in his own eyes.
- 27: 22 Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his foolishness will not depart from him.
- 28: 23 He who rebukes a man will afterward find *more* favor Than he who flatters with the tongue.
- 29: 1 A man who hardens *his* neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.
- 29: 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.
- 29: 17 Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.

D. Friendship

- 25: 19 *Like* a bad tooth and an unsteady foot Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.
- 27: 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.
- 27: 9 Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.
- 27: 10 Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, And do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away.
- 27: 14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.
- 27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

E. Generosity and Greed

25: 16 Have you found honey? Eat *only* what you need, That you not have it in excess and vomit it.

27: 20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.

28: 8 He who increases his wealth by interest and usury Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.

28: 27 He who gives to the poor will never want, But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses.

F. Heart and Motives

27: 19 As in water face *reflects* face, So the heart of man *reflects* man.

28: 9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

G. Humility and Pride

25: 14 *Like* clouds and wind without rain Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.

25: 27 It is not good to eat much honey, Nor is it glory to search out one's own glory.

26: 12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

26: 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

27: 1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

27: 2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

27: 4 Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, But who can stand before jealousy?

27: 21 The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, And each *is tested* by the praise accorded him.

28: 11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding sees through him.

28: 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

28: 25 An arrogant man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

29: 23 A man's pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor.

H. The Lord; the Fear of the Lord

28: 5 Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.

28: 14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

28: 25 An arrogant man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.

29: 13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

29: 25 The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.

29: 26 Many seek the ruler's favor, But justice for man *comes* from the LORD.

I. Love and Hatred

25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.

26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.

26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.

26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 5 Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.

J. Marriage and Family—the Home

25: 24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

27: 8 Like a bird that wanders from her nest, So is a man who wanders from his home.
27: 11 Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, That I may reply to him who reproaches me.
27: 15 A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike;
27: 16 He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.
28: 7 He who keeps the law is a discerning son, But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.
28: 24 He who robs his father or his mother And says, "It is not a transgression," Is the companion of a man who destroys.
29: 3 A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes *his* wealth.
29: 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.
29: 17 Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.

K. Observations of Human Nature

25: 2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.
25: 3 As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, So the heart of kings is unsearchable.

25: 17 Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Or he will become weary of you and hate you.
25: 20 *Like* one who takes off a garment on a cold day, *or like* vinegar on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.
25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.
25: 23 The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance.
25: 25 *Like* cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land.
26: 6 He cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.
26: 8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling, So is he who gives honor to a fool.
26: 11 Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.

26: 17 *Like* one who takes a dog by the ears Is he who passes by *and* meddles with strife not belonging to him.

26: 18 Like a madman who throws Firebrands, arrows and death,

26: 19 So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?"

27: 5 Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.

27: 7 A sated man loathes honey, But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet.

27: 14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.

27: 19 As in water face *reflects* face, So the heart of man *reflects* man.

27: 22 Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his foolishness will not depart from him.

29: 19 A slave will not be instructed by words *alone*; For though he understands, there will be no response.

29: 21 He who pampers his slave from childhood Will in the end find him to be a son.

L. Poverty and Riches; the Poor and the Rich

27: 7 A sated man loathes honey, But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 And *there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

28: 3 A poor man who oppresses the lowly Is *like* a driving rain which leaves no food.

28: 6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than he who is crooked though he be rich.

28: 8 He who increases his wealth by interest and usury Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.

28: 11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding sees through him.

28: 15 *Like* a roaring lion and a rushing bear Is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

28: 19 He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty.

28: 20 A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished.

28: 21 To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

28: 22 A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth And does not know that want will come upon him.

29: 7 The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.

29: 14 If a king judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever.

M. The Power of the Tongue

25: 8 Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?

25: 9 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,

25: 10 Or he who hears *it* will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

25: 11 *Like* apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

25: 12 *Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

25: 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

25: 15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.

25: 20 *Like* one who takes off a garment on a cold day, *or like* vinegar on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.

25: 23 The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance.

25: 25 *Like* cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land.

26: 2 Like a sparrow in *its* flitting, like a swallow in *its* flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.

26: 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.

26: 21 *Like* charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.

26: 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

26: 23 *Like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart.

26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.

26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.

26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 9 Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

27: 14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

28: 23 He who rebukes a man will afterward find *more* favor Than he who flatters with the tongue.

29: 5 A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.

N. Proper Social Order; Kings and People in Authority

25: 2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

25: 3 As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, So the heart of kings is unsearchable.

25: 4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith;
25: 5 Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.
25: 6 Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of great men;
25: 7 For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here," Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen.
26: 1 Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool.
26: 8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling, So is he who gives honor to a fool.
27: 18 He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit, And he who cares for his master will be honored.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;
27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.
27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,
27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,
27: 27 And *there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

29: 13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.
29: 19 A slave will not be instructed by words *alone*; For though he understands, there will be no response.
29: 21 He who pampers his slave from childhood Will in the end find him to be a son.

O. The Righteous and the Wicked—Retributive Justice

25: 26 *Like* a trampled spring and a polluted well Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.
26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.
28: 1 The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.
28: 4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them.

28: 9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

28: 10 He who leads the upright astray in an evil way Will himself fall into his own pit, But the blameless will inherit good.

28: 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.

28: 28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; But when they perish, the righteous increase.

29: 6 By transgression an evil man is ensnared, But the righteous sings and rejoices.

29: 7 The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.

29: 16 When the wicked increase, transgression increases; But the righteous will see their fall.

29: 24 He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He hears the oath but tells nothing.

29: 27 An unjust man is abominable to the righteous, And he who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked.

P. The Social and Political Implications of Wisdom, Foolishness, and Injustice

25: 3 As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, So the heart of kings is unsearchable.

25: 4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith;

25: 5 Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.

25: 6 Do not claim honor in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of great men;

25: 7 For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here," Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen.

25: 8 Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?

25: 9 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,

25: 10 Or he who hears *it* will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

25: 15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.

25: 17 Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Or he will become weary of you and hate you.

25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.

25: 26 *Like* a trampled spring and a polluted well Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.

26: 17 *Like* one who takes a dog by the ears Is he who passes by *and* meddles with strife not belonging to him.

26: 18 Like a madman who throws Firebrands, arrows and death,

26: 19 So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?"

26: 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.

26: 21 *Like* charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.

26: 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

26: 23 *Like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart.

26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.

26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.

26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 8 Like a bird that wanders from her nest, So is a man who wanders from his home.

28: 2 By the transgression of a land many are its princes, But by a man of understanding *and* knowledge, so it endures.

28: 3 A poor man who oppresses the lowly Is *like* a driving rain which leaves no food.

28: 4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them.

28: 5 Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.

28: 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.

28: 15 *Like* a roaring lion and a rushing bear Is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

28: 16 A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, *But* he who hates unjust gain will prolong *his* days.

28: 17 A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood Will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him.

28: 18 He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, *But* he who is crooked will fall all at once.

28: 21 To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

28: 28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; *But* when they perish, the righteous increase.

29: 2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, *But* when a wicked man rules, people groan.

29: 4 The king gives stability to the land by justice, *But* a man who takes bribes overthrows it.

29: 7 The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.

29: 8 Scorners set a city aflame, *But* wise men turn away anger.

29: 10 Men of bloodshed hate the blameless, *But* the upright are concerned for his life.

29: 12 If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers *become* wicked.

29: 13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

29: 14 If a king judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever.

29: 18 Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, *But* happy is he who keeps the law.

29: 26 Many seek the ruler's favor, *But* justice for man *comes* from the LORD.

Q. Speech as a Reflection of Character

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

29: 20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

R. Truth and Deception

25: 8 Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?

25: 9 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another,

25: 10 Or he who hears *it* will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

25: 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

25: 18 *Like* a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.

25: 19 *Like* a bad tooth and an unsteady foot Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.

26: 24 He who hates disguises *it* with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.

26: 25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart.

26: 26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26: 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.

26: 28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27: 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

28: 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

28: 21 To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

29: 4 The king gives stability to the land by justice, But a man who takes bribes overthrows it.

29: 5 A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.

29: 12 If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers *become* wicked.

S. Vengeance

25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

25: 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.

T. Wisdom's Protection

25: 4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith;

25: 5 Take away the wicked before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.

26: 6 He cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.

27: 12 A prudent man sees evil *and* hides himself, The naive proceed *and* pay the penalty.

27: 13 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for an adulterous woman hold him in pledge.

27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 And *there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

28: 1 The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.

28: 18 He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, But he who is crooked will fall all at once.

28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

29: 3 A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes *his* wealth.

U. Wise Men Contrasted with Fools, the Naive, and Scoffers

- 26: 1 Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool.
- 26: 2 Like a sparrow in *its* flitting, like a swallow in *its* flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.
- 26: 3 A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, And a rod for the back of fools.
- 26: 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him.
- 26: 5 Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, That he not be wise in his own eyes.
- 26: 6 He cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.
- 26: 7 *Like* the legs *which* are useless to the lame, So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
- 26: 8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling, So is he who gives honor to a fool.
- 26: 9 *Like* a thorn *which* falls into the hand of a drunkard, So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
- 26: 10 *Like* an archer who wounds everyone, So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by.
- 26: 11 Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.
- 26: 12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.
- 27: 3 A stone is heavy and the sand weighty, But the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them.
- 27: 12 A prudent man sees evil *and* hides himself, The naive proceed *and* pay the penalty.
- 27: 13 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; And for an adulterous woman hold him in pledge.
- 27: 17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.
- 27: 22 Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his foolishness will not depart from him.
- 28: 26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.
- 29: 1 A man who hardens *his* neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.
- 29: 8 Scorners set a city aflame, But wise men turn away anger.
- 29: 9 When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest.
- 29: 10 Men of bloodshed hate the blameless, But the upright are concerned for his life.

29: 11 A fool always loses his temper, But a wise man holds it back.

29: 20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

V. Women—Wise and Foolish

25: 24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

27: 15 A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike;

27: 16 He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.

W. Work and Sloth

26: 10 *Like* an archer who wounds everyone, So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by.

26: 13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!"

26: 14 As the door turns on its hinges, So *does* the sluggard on his bed.

26: 15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again.

26: 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

27: 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds;

27: 24 For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.

27: 25 *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,

27: 26 The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field,

27: 27 And *there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

28: 19 He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty.

28: 20 A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished.

VI. Collection VI: The Words of Agur (30: 1-33)

Collection VI are the words of Agur which are primarily distinguished by three characteristics: (1) the epistemological question of knowing, (2) numerical sayings, and (3) sayings which pertain to the social order.

First, Agur presents us with the theoretical question of epistemology—the question which asks, “How do we acquire knowledge?” or to put it another way, “How do we really know what we know?” (vv. 2-9) Agur develops his answer not philosophically in terms of method, but in terms of relationship. We know the truth because we know **Him** (God) who **is** the truth.

An example of the **second** characteristic is vv. 24-28, “**Four** things are small on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise: The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; The shephanim are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; The lizard you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings’ palaces.” Another is vv. 29-31, “There are **three** things which are stately in *their* march, Even **four** which are stately when they walk: The lion *which* is mighty among beasts And does not retreat before any, The strutting rooster, the male goat also, And a king *when his* army is with him.” Agur’s words are replete (well-supplied) with the use of **two’s, three’s, and four’s**.

Thirdly, his work is pre-occupied with the **established social order** which should not be upset by aberrations (departures from what is right) of that order. Examples of this concern for proper social order are v. 11: “There is a kind of *man* who curses his father And does not bless his mother”, v. 17: “The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it”, and vv. 21-23 which is a combination of numerical sayings and sayings about the social order: “Under **three** things the earth quakes, And under **four**, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied

with food, Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress” (See Waltke, pp. 26-27; Vol. 1, *Proverbs*).

We will now pick up Waltke’s outline with a few modifications.

A. Agur’s Biographical Confession (vv. 2-9)

Agur begins in the same way that the book of *Job* ends—in the ***confession that man cannot know wisdom independently of God*** (Job 40: 4; 42: 3, 6; Waltke, p. 470). Left to himself, he is “stupid” and has no “understanding”. He has not “learned wisdom”, nor does he have “knowledge of the Holy One”. Agur makes ***four statements*** which are consistent with the numerical theme of the chapter. Each of these statements is a disclaimer to any wisdom possessed independently of God. But whatever is deficient in his human understanding is sufficiently provided by God in the special revelation of His word (vv. 5-6; Waltke, p. 470). The four statements disclaiming any wisdom are followed by ***four rhetorical questions*** demanding one answer: “God alone.” God alone has ascended into heaven and descended. God alone has gathered the wind in His fists. God alone has wrapped the waters in His garment. God alone has established all the ends of the earth. These four questions are then followed by ***two*** more questions: “What is His name or His son’s name?” The obvious answer to the first question is “God”. This is the name of the One who is implied in the four previous rhetorical questions beginning with “who”.

But what is the name of His ***son***? Older commentators often interpret the “son” as Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity (Bridges, *Proverbs*, pp. 591-592; Matthew Henry, *Proverbs*, pp. 964-965; Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, p. 276). Waltke, a modern interpreter, interprets the “son” as ***Israel*** (p. 471). In the book of *Proverbs*, “son” always refers to the son who is taught by his father or teacher (p. 474); furthermore, the nation of Israel is often identified as God’s son (Ex. 4: 22; Hosea 11: 1; Isa. 63: 16; 64: 8; Jer. 31: 9; Rom. 9: 4). This interpretation would fit better with the context. Agur is arguing in a direct line from the inadequacy of human wisdom to the adequacy of God’s wisdom, and he is encouraging the son, who represents all Israel who is reading his words, to acknowledge the name of the only One who can give wisdom. “What is

His name” is likely a reference back to “Israel’s foundational question” when Moses announced the Lord’s intention to deliver them from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 3: 13). The solution to man’s inadequacy is the bridge which God supplies through His written word which makes men wise.

The answer to these questions, standing between humanity’s inability to know wisdom (vv. 2-3) and the presence of God’s word with his people (vv. 5-6), unravels the paradox [a seeming contradiction] of how inaccessible wisdom becomes accessible to earthlings [human beings]....

Job 28: 12-28 develops the same argument, moving from human inability to obtain wisdom (vv. 12-19) to the Lord’s finding and testing of it (vv. 20-27) to his revealing it to human beings (v. 28). Agur’s four questions in 30: 4a proceed along the same line of reasoning. The first question establishes the *unbridgeable gap* between the earthling and heaven, presumably where wisdom dwells. The last three establish that God must possess wisdom because he *demonstrates* it. In Job 38 the Lord asks Job similar questions to Agur’s and implies the answer, “Not you, Job, but God” (Job 38: 5, 25, 29, 36, 37, 41; 39: 5) (Waltke, pp. 472-473; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

The question Agur asks is not primarily one of method—*how* one can know the truth philosophically—but rather one of relationship—*who* does he know who *is* the truth? “What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know.” Quoting J. Pauls, Waltke remarks,

Agur “radically reshapes the crisis of knowing ...as a crisis of relationship. The preeminent [most important] rhetorical question, ‘No one but Yahweh’ and the dual request for personal names shapes the passage in a radical way, suggesting that the resolution to the epistemological crisis [the difficulty of knowing truth and gaining knowledge] is defined in *relational* rather than *intellectual* categories. True wisdom is *found* in a responsive and receptive relationship with Yahweh, who is wisdom’s sole possessor.” Similarly, Job’s epistemological angst [anxiety or worry] was relieved only when he humbled himself before the transcendent Sovereign. He replaced his prior state of being “without knowledge” with “I know that you can do all things” (Job 42: 2-3) (Waltke, p. 475, emphasis and words in brackets mine).

Verse 5 leaves the reader in no doubt about the solution to man’s crisis (problem) of knowledge. The answer to all the “who” questions is found here. Agur combines Ps. 12: 6 and Ps. 18: 30, “The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.” “As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tried; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.” *Refuge against the crisis of knowing* is found only in Yahweh who is

truth Himself. Here, as in the rest of the Bible, no effort is made to prove or verify the claims of Scripture—including Agur’s words—to be the absolute truth. There is no standard or canon *higher or more authoritative* than Scripture by which it can be judged (cf. “The Doctrine of Scripture” in your notes on Systematic Theology). If human reasoning were necessary to establish the reliability of Scripture, then human reason, not Scripture, becomes the *final determination* of truth. This would, in turn, lead us back to Agur’s initial skepticism in vv. 2-3 (Waltke, p. 476).

Deut. 4: 2 and 12: 32 are quoted in v. 6 as a warning to anyone who would attempt to add to the words of God. That Agur considered his words in Prov. 30 as the *inspired word of God* is made clear from the introduction, “The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the *oracle*” (or “burden”; cf. Isa. 13: 1; Nah. 1: 1; Hab. 1: 1; Mal. 1: 1). Thus, Agur considers his own words as part of the developing canon of the OT scriptures (Waltke, pp. 465, 477).

The formula [of v. 6] emphasizes the authority of Agur’s sayings, reinforces their purity, and safeguards them against an apostate form of human authority by tampering with them. Anyone who alters them by adding to them is not seeking refuge in the Lord but arrogantly conforming the Lord to his own inspiration (cf. 1 Cor. 4: 6). Verset B provides the motivation for recognizing the canonical status of Agur’s sayings. Since a human being cannot know wisdom (vv. 2-3), anyone who adds to them will falsify them. In contrast to an empirical epistemology [a theory of knowledge based on human experience] that is accustomed to proving everything else by human experience, Agur argues it is *our word*, not God’s, that finally must be proven (Waltke, p. 477; emphasis his; words in brackets mine).

Agur’s autobiography continues in vv. 7-9 with a prayer which is also in numerical form, “*Two* things I asked of Thee”. He asks that God deliver him from (1) deception and lies and (2) from poverty or riches. Truth and deception, poverty and riches are burning issues in the book of *Proverbs* with over 120 verses devoted to these two subjects. They are, of course, very much related to one another. Deception and lying can be the consequence of riches or poverty or vice versa (the other way around); riches or poverty may be the consequence of lying and deception. Stealing is the “twin sister” to lying, and poverty may lead a person to deceive others in order to satisfy his basic needs. (I have been swindled a few times both in Africa and in the US by those who were poor.) On the other hand those who are rich may lie in order to maintain their riches

or to amass new fortunes (the World-Com scandal in Mississippi in which corporate executives “cooked the books” in an accounting scheme which cost investors billions of dollars and workers their jobs). Once a person has tasted of riches, he may be inclined to do anything to keep them—including lying and stealing. It is also true that a person’s lying tongue can bring poverty as just retribution.

Proverbs promises riches to those who are wise (3: 16; 8: 18; 22: 4), and it may seem that Agur is in tension with its teaching by requesting that God withhold riches from him. But Agur recognizes that though riches are a blessing from God, they can become a curse if they encourage one to underestimate his need for God. Riches can be used to meet the needs of others (1 Tim. 6: 17-19), but they are nevertheless dangerous to those who lack wisdom (1 Tim. 6: 9).

B. The Seven Numerical Sayings (30: 10-31)

1. First Single-Line Proverb (v. 10)

Verse 10 is not a numerical saying but is a transitional saying looking backward to the numerical sayings of vv. 2-9 and forward to the numerical sayings in the rest of the chapter. (Such a transitional statement in Hebrew poetry is called a *janus*; Waltke, p. 47, Vol. 1). If a person slanders a slave to his master the slave may invoke a curse against him which God will recognize. God offers a special measure of protection to the poor who have little access to public justice (14: 31; 17: 5; 21: 13; 28: 27; 29: 7; Ps. 34: 6; 72: 13; 140: 12). The slave of another is a poor man who has very little recourse (aid) against his more powerful accusers (Waltke, p. 483). If the accusation is false, the assumption in this verse, then the only thing he can do is to cry out to God to avenge him, something God will do in due time (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9: 25-26; 36). Furthermore Agur upholds the proper social order by discouraging an activity—the unjust slander of slaves—which is likely to incite rebellion leading to anarchy (Waltke, p. 483).

2. The First Set of Three Numerical Sayings (vv. 11-16)

a. Four characteristics of a generation

The transition between v. 10 and 11 is found in the reference to a curse. The reference to “generation” (or “kind”) in vv. 11-14 gives the impression that all *four* verses are talking about the *same* generation of people and not four different “kinds” or “generations”. Nevertheless, they do not condemn the entire generation but only individuals within it (Waltke, p. 484). The same generation or kind who curses his father (v. 11) would also be pure in his own eyes yet filthy (v. 12), proud (v. 13), and oppressive toward the needy (v. 14). Agur’s main purpose is to uphold the *acceptable social order* by condemning certain kinds of people or behavior who contribute to the breakdown of that social order. The family is the basis of any society, and if there is no respect for the authority of father and mother, there can be no basis for authority of any kind. The fifth commandment (Ex. 20: 12), “Honor your father and your mother, *that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you*”, is the “first commandment with a promise” (Eph. 6: 2). The promise consists of long life, also promised in Prov. 3: 16, 9: 11, as well as many other proverbs. But honoring parents also includes the promise of *enjoying an orderly and healthy society* (“in the land”) in which everyone knows his proper place in the authority structures. In the *proper social order*, parents are supposed to exercise authority over their children, and to be honored by their children, and not the other way around. The tyranny (oppression) of youth occurs in any family and in any society in which youth get their way by prevailing against their parents. They not only “curse” their parents through disrespect and disobedience, but they fail to “bless” them through positive appreciation and material support in the future (cf. Mk. 7: 10-13). The Mark passage indicates that honoring parents is not limited to people in their teens but applies to offspring of any age with certain qualifications. Those who fail to honor parents in their youth will continue this legacy of dishonor into their adult life and will suffer from it at the hands of their own children (Ex. 20: 5; Deut. 5: 9).

Society cannot prosper being led by young people who lack the practical wisdom which comes from years of submission to the law of God. When such “leadership” prevails, it is a judgment of God against that society (Isa. 3: 1-3). They are wise in their own eyes (3: 7), a problem related to the deficiency of being “pure” in their own eyes (v. 12). In other words, this “kind” of

youth (not all youth) establishes a social order of their own with its own moral code (cf. Waltke, p. 485). Thinking themselves pure because they measure themselves by themselves (2 Cor. 10: 12), that is, by their own moral code, they are actually filthy from the pollution of sin (v. 12; “Yet is not washed from his filthiness”). They are also arrogant (v. 13) and become the greedy oppressors of the poor and needy. Thus, the kind of people who are guilty in one of the areas of vv. 11-14 are generally guilty in all these areas.

b. The Leech and His Two Daughters (v. 15a)

The leech was common in all the still waters of Palestine. It had two sucking organs, one for drawing blood from its victim and the other for attaching itself. Perhaps the two daughters are metaphorical references to the two sucking organs (Waltke, p. 487). Everyone has met the leech. He is the con-artist who cheats another out of his money with credible lies. He is the person who is always running his mouth and getting into other people’s business but never working, expecting others to subsidize his laziness by feeding him (2 Thes. 3: 6-12). He is the person who effectively “steals” from others by failing to provide for his own needs (Eph. 4: 28), for when he refuses to work but continually begs (“give, give”) he is effectively stealing from the productive members of society.

Again, Agur’s warning is meant as a contribution to the proper social order. A properly ordered society is sustained only through the hard work of those who **add** to it with their labor, not by those who **subtract** from society by “mooching” or “leeching” from others. The Biblical writers are never opposed to the legitimate poor who are poor through no fault of their own, but they have much to say in condemnation of the lazy.

c. The Four Things Which Cannot Be Satisfied (vv. 15b-17)

This is the first explicit numerical saying introduced by the words, “There are three things...four...” (Waltke, p. 487). The subject of this numerical saying is given in the words, “that will not be satisfied...that will not say ‘Enough.’”

Sheol and the barren womb are paired together. As Sheol is never satisfied with the number of the dead, the barren womb is never satisfied until it gives birth. Sheol is concerned with the *taking* of human life; the barren womb with *producing* it. Likewise, the earth is never satisfied with enough water for the *production* of crops, while fire is never satisfied with the *destruction* of crops. The two pairs complement one another in that the two concepts of production and destruction—life and death—are common to both pairs. But, as always, there is a moral principle involved which relates to people, not land and fire. As the verses are related to the greedy generation of v. 14, perhaps Agur wishes to say that while life endures, there will always be the wicked who snatch life away from others and the righteous who wish to preserve the lives of others (Waltke, p. 488).

3. Second Single-Line Proverb (30: 17)

This single-line proverb complements what Agur has said in vv. 11-14 and expresses the retributive justice which is due such a person. Notice that the same eye which is haughty and is raised in arrogance against his parents, and which now mocks his father and scorns his mother will be plucked out and eaten. The eye which has coveted the fields of others and *devoured* the poor (v. 14) will now be devoured (Waltke, p. 489). Agur uses the symbol of the covenant curse which every Hebrew reader would have understood (Deut. 28: 26). This may be a good verse to use when preaching to a youth group at church or in secondary school, though in all my years I have never heard any youth leader use it.

4. The Second Set of Four Numerical Sayings (30: 18-31)

a. Four wonderful ways and one immoral way (vv. 18-20)

In this set of numerical sayings, the four “wonderful” ways of animals and humans are contrasted with the degenerate (morally corrupt) way of the adulteress. The eagle soars gracefully and effortlessly through the air defying gravitational forces. The snake, with no hands or legs maneuvers skillfully over a rock. A ship, though heavily laden (loaded down) with cargo and men, sails smoothly and swiftly over the ocean without sinking to the bottom. These are things

which the average person takes for granted, but Agur is a keen observer of nature and the laws governing nature. Natural laws governing the universe are God’s laws which reflect the wonder of his creation. The “mysterious, magnetic attraction of romantic love” is depicted in the husband having the first sexual intercourse with his virgin wife—for there is nothing negative presented in this picture of sexual intercourse (Waltke, p. 492). The natural attraction between man and woman within the bonds of marriage are one of the more wonderful things God has created (cf. commentary on 5: 18-19).

In contrast to the last wonderful way of a husband with his virgin wife stands the immoral way of the adulteress who engages in cheap sex with multiple partners. When she gets through with the sexual act, she boldly proclaims her innocence. The picture presented is that of using sex to satisfy her sexual appetite in the same way she uses food to satisfy her nutritional appetite—casually and with no consideration of any future consequences—just like eating a meal. No big deal! With this example Agur once again condemns any activity which eats away the *foundations of proper social order and decency*. Just as the man who curses his father and mother threatens to *unravel the moral fabric* which is essential for a just and orderly society, the adulteress (and the adulterer; implied) destroys the foundational building block of any successful culture, the marriage relationship—the creational ordinance God ordained from the beginning of humanity. One who despises the sanctity of marital sex despises God.

b. Four things under which the earth quakes (vv. 21-23)

The main subject, once again, is the *proper social order*. Waltke calls this section “Four upside-down social situations” (p. 492). The rapid promotion of disadvantaged people to a higher status in life often leads to pride, chaos, and the oppression of those under their authority. Often the sudden change of environment and the power and privileges afforded them in their new social status is simply more than they can handle. (See my commentary on Ecc. 10: 5-7 which is based on this passage in *Proverbs*.) In this verse, “official” is a better translation than “slave” and fits better with the context. An official was a freeman who was in a more strategic position to usurp the authority of the king by a well-planned coup. Once in power, such a person was most likely to misuse his power and prove to be a “pompous tyrant” over his subjects (Waltke, p. 494).

The “fool” who is satisfied with food is a man who is a scoundrel and an outcast from society. This is what the Hebrew word *nabal* means (cf. 1 Sam. 25: 2-25; especially v. 25). In this case he is also most likely a person who does not work but relies on the generosity of others or who steals for a living. A fool’s vice (evil ways) should not be rewarded (2 Thes. 3: 10) for when he gets more food for his stomach than usual, he is strengthened to continue his evil ways (Waltke, p. 494). I have made this mistake before by giving a small amount of money to someone on the streets of Jackson, MS. He told me he needed something to eat, so I gave him a few dollars. No sooner than I had given him the money, I saw him go to a convenience market to buy some beer. My foolish act thus encouraged him in his wicked deception.

There is nothing negative about previous unwanted women being married later on in life. A variety of circumstances beyond their control may have prevented them from marriage. Leah was “unloved” by Jacob, but God favored her and gave her more children than Rachel (Gen. 29: 31). The Mosaic Law made special provisions for the “unloved” woman in a polygamous marriage (Deut. 21: 15-17). In v. 23, however, the “unloved woman” is not simply someone who is much older when she is finally married but one for whom there was ample (sufficient) personal reasons for being unmarried. The implication here is that this is a woman who is quarrelsome and difficult to get along with. When she finally finds someone who can put up with her, she becomes even more arrogant and asserts her authority over the household servants with cruelty and injustice (Waltke, p. 494; cf. Delitzsch, p. 300).

Admittedly, we have to read between the lines in these proverbs to understand the intent. Agur does not spell it out for us, so to speak, but assumes that the reader has seen these familiar situations for himself first-hand and needs no extended explanation.

The maidservant who supplants her mistress is a situation much easier to understand, like the situation with Hagar who becomes Abram’s wife and bears him a son, Ishmael. By her promotion in status from a simple maid to the wife of a very rich and powerful man, Hagar becomes arrogant and disrespectful toward Sarai (Gen. 16: 4; cf. Gen. 14: 14, which mentions 318 servants who were trained warriors born in Abram’s house, implying more than a 1000

servants overall; Leupold, *Genesis*, p. 458). The social order is once more overthrown leading to a confusing and chaotic situation.

The modern reader may be confused over Agur's preoccupation with the proper social order. We live in the days of democratic government in which anyone may rise to a higher socio-economic level through hard work and industry, but this is not the scenario (scene) under evaluation in vv. 21-23. As I have mentioned earlier, the immediate promotion of *unworthy* persons to high positions can result in chaotic (confusing) social conditions simply because such persons are *not equipped* emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, or intellectually to accept the *responsibilities* of their promotion. As I noted in my commentary on Ecc. 10: 5-7, many political tyrants on the African continent have arisen from poverty only to turn around and oppress the very people who cheered their rise to power. The hopes and dreams of the poor who looked to such men for relief have been dashed to pieces when they discovered that their original intentions (sometimes) of helping the masses quickly gave way to the selfish goals of personal enrichment and power. This is not to say that rich people cannot also become tyrants, for they certainly can and have done so in the past; but this particular proverb is not concerned about that particular situation.

The NT is not altogether silent on the issue of proper social order even in light of the elimination of all distinctions between social class and sex in the church (Gal. 3: 28-29). When Paul writes Philemon about his runaway slave, Onesimus, he does not appeal to him on the basis of the "evils of the institution of slavery". While he advises Philemon to forgive Onesimus' debts by charging them to his account (v. 18), *he does not argue that Philemon should not have had any slaves in the first place*. Among the Jews, slavery was a *voluntary* institution in which a man could sell his labor for six years to repay his debts (Ex. 21: 2). Freedom after six years applied only to Hebrew slaves, but even if he was a foreigner (except in those situations in which slaves consisted of conquered peoples) he could still escape from his master and could not be returned (Deut. 23: 15-16). Kidnapping of either Hebrews or foreigners for the purpose of enslavement was forbidden by law and punishable by death (Ex. 21: 16; Deut. 24: 7; cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 136-137, 286). Onesimus was returning to Philemon voluntarily on his own accord. He had been converted under Paul's ministry, and Paul was now sending him

back to Philemon not merely as a former slave but as a believer (v. 16). As for Onesimus' indebtedness to Philemon, Paul made it clear that he would either pay the debts or allow Philemon to forgive the debts on the basis of his spiritual debt to Paul (vv. 18-20). In a not so subtle way, Paul encourages Philemon to do the latter (v. 20). Once again it must be emphasized that slavery in itself was not a social evil but an institution regulated by Biblical law. God does not regulate something he categorically forbids. In the same way, Paul does not instruct the Corinthians that slavery is a social evil without any exceptions, but that Christians should not enter into slavery voluntarily since they were bought with the blood of Christ. On the other hand, if they cannot acquire their freedom, they should not worry about it since in Christ they are free indeed (1 Cor. 7: 20-24).

c. Four small things that are very wise (vv. 24-28)

Agur presents the examples of four wise creatures in contrast to the four unwise upstarts in vv. 21-23 who do not know their proper place (Waltke, p. 495). All four are first noted for their limitations. Ants have no individual strength; badgers likewise are not strong; locusts have no leader; and lizards can be easily captured. However, their limitations are more than compensated by their wisdom. Ants survive by storing up food in the summer for use in the difficult seasons; badgers make their dwellings in well-protected areas among the rocks; locusts move in unison according to well-ordered patterns in divisions or companies; and lizards live among kings in luxurious places (Waltke, p. 496).

But what is Agur's point? He is obviously not concerned to give the reader biology lessons, for he assumes that the reader has already observed such phenomena. Again, he does not spell it out for us which makes the interpretation more difficult. The animals are likened to people who also have limitations but who can overcome their limitations through wisdom. A man may not be strong, but his lack of physical, social, economic, or intellectual strength may be overcome by Biblical wisdom. As the ant lays up food in the summer, the wise man will treasure up the wisdom of God in His word and will act upon it through diligence and labor (Prov. 6: 6-8). The rock badger is also weak in comparison to other animals, but he is safe in the shelter of the rocks. Likewise, the wise man will seek his refuge in God (30: 5), the rock of his salvation (Ps. 62: 2)

rather than in his own strength or the strength of men. The locusts have no ruler or king, but they march in unity with one another. How much more should believers, whose king is the Lord, live in unity with one another rather than attempting to gain superiority over one another and oppressing one another as the four upstarts of vv. 21-23 (cf. Eph. 4: 11-16). If the lizard is careful, it may live among kings in luxurious palaces. Likewise, the wise man, though perhaps vulnerable to the mistreatment of others, enjoys a life which transcends his earthly troubles through his relationship with God (Prov. 15: 16, 17; 16: 8, 16, 19). Paul tells Christians that although we are living in this world, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3: 20) and that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2: 6; cited by Waltke, pp. 496-498).

d. Four stately marchers (30: 29-31)

This is the last set of the seven numerical sayings. It would seem odd that Agur would wish to liken the wise man to a strutting rooster and a king strutting before his army, especially in light of the many exhortations in *Proverbs* against the sin of pride (see the category “Humility and Pride” in your notes). But the exaltation of man is obviously not his intent, and this is clear from what immediately follows in v. 32, “If you have been foolish in exalting yourself...put your hand on your mouth.” Throughout the “words of Agur”, the wise man has been encouraged not to lean on his own understanding (vv. 2-3). Confessions of stupidity and lack of understanding and knowledge are surely not signs of pride, but honest humility. If one wishes to be wise, he must rely fully upon the Lord who gives wisdom in His word, and this word will become to him a means of protection from all evil (v. 5). Having done this, ***the wise man need fear no one but God.***

The lion is known as an animal which fears nothing. The same can be said for the rooster and the male goat in their own realms. They are ready to fight any intruder who dares enter their protected territory. Dogs are known by all to be intensely territorial. Even a small dog will attack another animal five times its size if the animal intrudes upon its territory. Why? Because it knows that it has a right to its own turf or territory. On the human level, a king is ready to fight any other army, sometimes much larger, in order to protect his kingdom. The wise man also lives in a protected realm, the realm of wisdom (cf. your notes on “Wisdom’s Protection”).

If we trust in God’s wisdom rather than our own, and if it is our life’s goal to be pleasing to the Lord, we do not have to fear anyone else. “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion” (28: 1). “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted (29: 25). What we are really protecting is not our own dignity or reputation, but the Lord’s honor. The Apostle Paul was not being boastful when he said, “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10: 5). Within this context we can hold our heads high, not in human pride, but in the confidence that we have a right to our own turf—the territory of wisdom which God has given us.

C. Conclusion: A Warning Not to Upset the Divine Order (30: 32-33)

Throughout his speech, Agur has warned against any attempt to overstep the authority structures which God has built into the social order (vv. 11-14, 17, 20, 21-23). Man should never think more highly of himself than he ought to think (Rom. 12: 3). As Christians we should be content with the spiritual gifts God has allotted to us, not envying those who are more gifted. We should also be content with the social positions given to us. Contentment with one’s place in life should not rule out godly ambition to reach whatever potential God has given to us, but only that we should not be overly anxious to fill places of higher status which were never meant for us (Jer. 45: 5). When all is said and done, our rejoicing should be rooted in the fact that our names are recorded in heaven, not that we have certain spiritual gifts or status (Lk. 10: 20). Exalting ourselves and striving for recognition—“the churning of anger”—produces strife just as surely as the churning of milk produces butter and pressing the nose produces blood.

VII. Collection VII: The Sayings of Lemuel (31: 1-31)

The collection is divided into two parts: (1) advice to the king about ruling his subjects (vv. 2-9) and (2) advice about what virtues to look for in a wife (vv. 10-31). The fact that this oracle is one learned from Lemuel’s mother is a further testimony to the status of women as teachers in the book of *Proverbs* (see comments on 1: 8).

A. *The Wise Ruler (vv. 2-9)*

Lemuel's mother made a vow to God that if He gave her a son, she would teach him to live according to wisdom (Waltke, p. 506). This text is a confirmation that she kept that vow. The advice against giving one's strength to women (v. 3) must be interpreted within the context of OT law. The multiplication of wives and concubines was the normal procedure of oriental kings. Mosaic Law forbade such multiplication for the future kings of Israel in full recognition of its potential for apostasy (Deut. 17: 17), and Solomon's refusal to listen to the Law in this regard costs him his faith and his kingdom (1 Kings 11; especially v. 11). Thus, Lemuel is not being advised to live a life of celibacy (singleness), but to curb his sexual appetite. Waltke enumerates the many disadvantages associated with kingly obsession with women.

Obsession with such women corrupts the king's sovereign power, including wasting his money. Gratification of lust distracts his attention from serving the people, blunts his wit, undermines his good judgment, exposes him to palace intrigues, and squanders the national wealth (see 13: 22) better spent to promote the national good. David's lust for Bathsheba made him callous toward justice and cost Uriah his life [not to mention his soldiers' lives], and Solomon's many sexual partners made him callous toward pure and undefiled religion and incapable of real love. In other words, obsession with women has the same effect as obsession with liquor (v. 5) (p. 507, words in brackets mine).

Oriental kings were also known for their drinking habits. There was never any lack of money for the purchase of the most exquisite labels, and their parties could last for weeks—months, in fact (Esther 1: 4). In the same way that Lemuel's mother is not advising total abstinence from marriage in v. 3, she is also not advising Lemuel to be a “tee-totaler”, to practice complete abstinence from alcohol. A king needs a level head to enact and apply just laws to protect the innocent and those afflicted by the powerful (v. 5b). Somehow, the muddled thinking of an inebriated (drunken) king does not contribute much to the wise legislation and adjudication (legal application) of just laws. Besides, too much sauce could even make the king forget from day to day what laws he enacted (v. 5a). Her advice, then, is moderation. Enjoy it but don't become obsessed with it.

Her advice to anesthetize the poor and the perishing by getting them drunk must also be carefully interpreted (vv. 6-7). As Duane A. Garrett has observed, this was not a special welfare program of “free beer...as an opiate to the masses” (*Proverbs*, p. 246, quoted in Waltke, p. 508). Such advice would have been completely out of character and inconsistent with the teaching of *Proverbs* elsewhere (20: 1; 21: 17; 23: 29-35). Rather, the statement is a *sarcastic* critique of the conventional wisdom advising the “down-and-out” to drown their problems in alcohol. Drunkenness solves nothing, and when the drunkard sobers up—*if* he does—he will be facing the same problems with less material resources (Waltke, pp. 508-509).

After sarcastically debunking (disproving a myth or exaggerated claims) the virtues of “happy hour”, Lemuel’s mother challenges him to pursue *real* solutions to the poor and the oppressed. Rather than filling his mouth with alcohol and blurring his speech, he must open his mouth with wisdom for those who have no voice in the courts, no respect from the judges, and no money to purchase good lawyers (Waltke, p. 509). Poor people need a righteous king to defend them, one who is not distracted with too much sex, too much booze (alcohol), and too much luxurious living in general, all of which lulls him into “la-la-land”, an imaginary kingdom where only rich people live. To contextualize this into the 21st century, presidents, legislatures, and parliaments should be accessible to all their constituents (people living under their authority), not just those who can purchase their favor through lobbying, campaign contributions, or outright bribery. This accessibility should not translate into elaborate welfare programs for the poor which for decades in the US have proven to be miserable failures in elevating the conditions of the poor. What they need is fair representation in the courts which they often do not get. I have spoken personally with many low-income prisoners awaiting their day in court who had not seen their court-appointed lawyers for months. Court-appointed lawyers operating with tax-paid funds do not make much money, and they don’t spend much of their precious time developing a strong defense for their clients. It is still true that the poor have less access to legal justice than the wealthy.

B. The Valiant Wife (vv. 10-31)

Unlike *The Song of Solomon*, the description of the valiant wife is not about romance, but industry, virtually all of the verses pertaining to her prodigious (amazing) economic activity. Her worth (v. 10b) has more than a figurative meaning and relates to the eastern practice of paying a bride-price for a wife, something Africans are very familiar with. In the case of the valiant wife, whatever price her husband pays for her will be nothing in comparison with the economic return she makes to his household. Her “cottage industries” include weaving (v. 13, 19) which provides the foundation for other economic ventures, including real estate (v. 16a) and wine production (v. 16b). The New American Standard Bible renders v. 16b, “From her earnings she plants a vineyard” while the King James Version renders the verse literally, “with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.” Therefore, we understand that from the “profits” (New King James Version) of her weaving business she is able to purchase the field and plant the vineyard—no doubt complete with winepress (Waltke, p. 525).

Although wealthy enough to have female servants (v. 15), she is physically strong and does not shy away from hard work herself (v. 17), following in the foot-steps of her wealthy female ancestors (Gen. 18: 6-8; 24: 18-20; 29: 9-10; cited in Waltke, p. 525). Traditionally v. 18b, “Her lamp does not go out at night” has been interpreted as her habit of working at the spindle until the wee hours of the night. However, upon comparison with 13: 9; 20: 20; and 24: 20, this may be a reference to her enduring wealth (Waltke, p. 527) or her enduring life (cf. Job 18: 5-6; 21: 17; Ps. 18: 28. The three passages in *Proverbs* mentioned above could also be given this meaning. However, the ability to keep the oil lamps burning all night [for protection against intruders (?)] was a sign of prosperity; Waltke, p. 527).

Thus far her economic exploits have been the focal point of the passage, but the valiant wife is not a heartless entrepreneur (businessman or woman) whose only concern is making money. She is a woman of superlative (excellent) *inner character*. When she makes money, she shares it not only with her immediate family but with the poor and needy (vv. 20-21). Because of her expertise (expert skills) in weaving, her family is well-clothed and well-protected from extreme weather (snow can fall in Palestine in the winter from November to February; Waltke, p. 530). The prosperity which she contributes to the family, her reputation as a wise woman, and the domestic order she brings to the household enhance her husband’s reputation in the city gates

where important political decisions and business transactions are made (Waltke, pp. 530-531). (A good woman always makes her husband look good.) Her husband trusts her implicitly (without any reservation or hesitation), and throughout her life she will be a constant source of good to him (vv. 11-12)—quite the contrast to the “constant dripping” of the contentious woman who makes her husband crave the corner of a roof or an isolated desert (21: 9, 19).

Verse 24 returns to her business exploits only to transition quickly again to her *inner character* and back again to her *tireless labor* (v. 27). Her physical strength is matched by her inner strength, dignity, and optimistic outlook for the future (v. 25). As we say in the US tongue-in-cheek, “The harder she works the ‘luckier’ she gets.” (Meaning: It isn’t luck, but hard work which increases prosperity.) She is also a wise person who speaks the truth in love (v. 26; cf. Eph. 4: 15); and, once again, she’s no lazy busy-body or gossip, but a tireless worker (v. 27).

Her accomplishments do not go unnoticed by her children who rise up and bless her, and her husband who praises her saying, “Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all” (v. 29). “Honey, you’re the best!”

In verse 30, the oracle discloses the *source* of her inner strength and outward industry. She is a woman who fears the Lord, and this is what makes her special—not her outward appearance or sex appeal. There is nothing inherently wrong with being pretty or charming, and Solomon recommends the importance of sexual attraction to his son (cf. Prov. 5: 19; cited in Waltke, p. 535). However, charm can be “deceitful” by promising something it cannot deliver, and beauty can be “vain” or “transitory” since any happiness in a marriage which is based on beauty or sex appeal alone is destined to fail with increasing age (Waltke, p. 535). Far more than just another pretty face, this woman should be praised in the gates for her many accomplishments (v. 31).

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