

PROVERBS

Part Two: Chapters 10-31

In Part Two of Proverbs, we move to the first of two sections titled “The Proverbs of Solomon.” This twelve chapter section contains 375 single proverbs. Unfortunately, they are not arranged thematically. Hence, we will be reading proverbs on just about every topic scattered throughout the twelve chapters. Some commentaries such as *The Daily Bible Study Series* treat this section according to topic (related topics are grouped together). As we read the individual proverbs, we should keep in mind the main focus of the book, i.e., how to be a wise believer.

CHAPTER 10: Role of the just person

“Ill-gotten treasures profit nothing, but virtue saves from death.” (v.2)

“Blessings are for the head of the just, but a rod for the back of the fool.” (v.6)

“Hatred stirs up disputes, but love covers all offenses.” (v.12)

The proverbs that follow note the contrast in human condition between the righteous and the ungodly. The statements by no means apply universally to all people in every situation (for example, some good people do go hungry). Rather, these proverbs seek to communicate the general truth that the person who seeks God and his ways lives a better life in the long run as opposed to the wicked person whose life sooner or later leads to ruin.

The major topic that runs through chapter 10 is the role of the just person.

Verses 1-7 give examples of careful stewardship on the part of the wise in contrast to the lack of foresight and shortsighted cravings of the foolish.

Verses 8-17 differentiate between the life of the wise person and that of the foolish. *“He who walks honestly walks securely, but he whose ways are crooked will fare badly”* (v.9).

Verse 12 which states that *“love covers all offenses,”* is reminiscent of Jesus’ words to Simon concerning the sinful woman: *“Her many sins have been forgiven, since she has shown great love”* (Lk 7:47), and Paul’s words: *“The one who loves has fulfilled the law”* (Rom 13:8).

Verses 18-21 focus on speech and its role in becoming a wise person.

Verse 22 underlines the role of God in all human endeavors: *“It is the Lord’s blessings that bring wealth, no effort can substitute for it.”*

Verses 27-32 name some of the blessings that comes to those who seek to follow God’s ways: long life, joy, security, peace, as well as skill in speaking, and a charming manner: *“The lips of the just know how to please...”* (v. 32).

Pause: What proverb spoke to you most in chapter 10?

CHAPTER 11: Uprightness

“When pride comes, disgrace comes; but with the humble is wisdom.” (v.2)

“A newsmonger reveals secrets, but a trustworthy man keeps a confidence.” (v.13)

The proverbs in this chapter continue the theme of uprightiness.

Verses 2-8 contrast the *personal* attitudes of the just and the wicked, while *verses 9-15* define their social differences. They also show the social ramifications of one’s behavior. The social community as a whole can either benefit or suffer from the choices made by individual members. Verse 9 focuses on how we can use the marvelous gift of speech to build up or tear down.

CHAPTER 12: Education of the beginner

“The good man wins favor from the Lord, but the schemer is condemned by him.” (v.2)

“No man is built up by wickedness, but the root of the just will never be disturbed.” (v.3)

“No harm befalls the just, but the wicked are overwhelmed with misfortune.” (v.21)

“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who are truthful are his delight.” (v.22)

The education of the beginner continues with more examples of the differences between the just and the

wicked. Verses 1-3 set the tone by bringing together the older ideal of wisdom through correction and the development of good habits through obedience to God's will.

Verses 14-23—Use of speech. According to verses 14-15, good speech is a combination of saying the proper words that win people over and listening to learn, rather than speaking before thinking. This is given flesh in the series of sayings in verses 17-23 which deal with thought versus speech. Lying and dishonesty can be powerfully destructive uses of the tongue, but their gain is short-lived. Truth endures, and it not only outlasts dishonesty but also brings the benefits of peace, security and joy to the one who serves it. Also see verse 22.

Verse 21. “No harm befalls the just....” This is generally but not universally true. The godly are better equipped to deal with life's problems, whereas the wicked are ill-equipped especially from a faith perspective.

Pause: What causes someone to be loose with his/her speech—be it lying, stretching the truth, etc.?

CHAPTER 13: Danger of uncontrolled appetites

“Virtue guards one who walks honestly, but the downfall of the wicked is sin.” (v.6)

“Lust indulged starves the soul, but fools hate to turn from evil.” (v.19)

“Walk with wise people and you will become wise, but the companion of fools will fare badly.” (v. 20)

“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him takes care to chastise him.” (v. 24)

This chapter opens with a contrast between the wise and foolish son or pupil. Two themes develop the contrast:

- the dangers of uncontrolled appetites (vv 2-12)
- the quality of life that results from the choices each person makes (vv 13-25)

CHAPTER 14: “Wisdom builds her house, but Folly turns hers down”

“The scoundrel suffers the consequences of his ways, and the good man reaps the fruits of his paths.” (v.14)

“The quick-tempered man makes a fool of himself, but the prudent man is at peace.” (v.17)

“He sins who despises the hungry; but happy is he who is kind to the poor.” (v.21)

“He who oppresses the poor blasphemes his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy glorifies him.” (v.31)

The difference between the wise and the foolish continues to occupy center stage in this chapter. Many of the proverbs show themes already mentioned: lying, arrogance, refusal to learn from discipline, resourcefulness, truthfulness and shrewd planning. A new theme of anger and quick-tempered behavior appears in verses 17 and 29.

Pause: Have you ever struggled with impatience or a bad temper? If so, what helped/helps you to deal with it?

CHAPTER 15: Cool temperament versus hot spirit

“A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse one crushes the spirit.” (v.4)

“An ill-tempered man stirs up strife, but a patient man allays discord.” (v.18)

Many of the proverbs in this chapter center around the blessings of having a cool temperament versus the trouble a bad temper can get us into.

CHAPTER 16: Godly and human wisdom

“Better a little virtue than a large income with injustice.” (v.8)

“Pride goes before disaster and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (v.18)

“Good sense is a fountain of life to its possessor, but folly brings chastisement on fools.” (v.22)

“Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by virtuous living.” (v.31)

Verses 1-15. The College Bible Commentary states that “these fifteen verses are the center of Solomon's collection in chapters 10-32” (p.660). Verses 1-9 outline the proper relationship of God to human wisdom. God is mentioned eight times in the nine sayings. Verses 10-15 are a mini-guidebook for Kings.

Verses 16-33 return to general advice on good conduct for everyone.

CHAPTER 17: Miscellaneous proverbs

“The evil person gives heed to wicked lips, and listens to falsehood from a mischievous tongue.” (v.4)

“The start of strife is like the opening of a dam; therefore, check a quarrel before it begins!” (v.14)

“A joyful heart is the health of the body, but a depressed spirit dries up the bones.” (v.22)

Among the general words of advice in this chapter are a number of sayings on strife (vv 1, 4, 14, 19, 20) and bribery (vv 8, 23). The first of sayings underscores the importance of social relationships in the thinking of wisdom. The fool also figures prominently in the proverbs of this chapter (vv 10, 12, 16, 21, 24, 25). *“There is a hard-headed stubbornness in the fool that really tries to break up the accepted order and established ways of human relationships in society”* (Collegeville Commentary, p.661).

CHAPTER 18: Wise and unwise speech

“The fool’s mouth is his ruin; his lips are a snare to his life.” (v.7)

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who make it a friend shall eat its fruit.” (v.21)

Several of the proverbs in this chapter return to the topic of good speech. We also find several mention of sinful speech.

CHAPTER 19: Miscellaneous proverbs

“Better a poor person who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked in his ways and rich.” (v.1)

“The false witness will not go unpunished.” (v.5)

“He who has compassion lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his good deed.” (v.17)

“The fear of the Lord is an aid to life” (v. 23). No particular theme dominates chapter 19. It has several sayings on the problems of laziness (vv 15, 24), royal service (v.12), control of anger (vv 11, 19), false witnesses (vv 9, 28), and the training of children through discipline (vv 13, 18, 25, 27)—similar to those in earlier chapters. The most attention is paid to the dangers of wealth. Riches can lead to crooked behavior, false friends, greedy associates, and eventually to dishonesty (vv 1, 4, 6, 7, 22).

Pause: What proverb spoke to you most in this chapter?

CHAPTER 20: Miscellaneous proverbs

“When a man walks in integrity and justice, happy are his children after him!” (v.7)

The proverbs in this chapter are of a general nature. They point out, among other things, that sin takes many forms: gossip, laziness, drunkenness, and dishonesty.

Pause: What proverb spoke to you most in this chapter?

CHAPTER 21: Man proposes, but God disposes

“All the ways of a man may be right in his own eyes, but it is the Lord who proves hearts.” (v.2)

This chapter opens with three sayings about God and closes with two more. In between is a body of traditional old wisdom offering advice on a wide range of subjects.

CHAPTER 22: More miscellaneous proverbs

“A good name is more desirable than great riches, and high esteem, than gold and silver.” (v.1)

“Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not swerve from it.” (v.6)

“The Lord loves the pure of heart....” (v.11)

Once again, we have a chapter of miscellaneous proverbs repeating themes we have already heard in previous chapters: the value of a good name, humility/pride, riches/poverty, laziness.

PART 3: THIRTY SAYINGS OF THE WISE (CHAPTERS 22:17 to 24:34)

Scholars believe that the sayings contained in this section of Proverbs are closely related to an ancient Egyptian wisdom teacher called Amen-em-Ope. *“I will make known to you the words of Amen-em-Ope”* (22:19).

These sayings warn against the oppression of the poor and defenseless, anger, giving surety for debts, bad manners at a king’s table, anxiety for riches, a grudging host, intemperance in food and drink, and adultery. They exhort to careful workmanship,

respect for the rights of orphans, correction of the young, filial piety, and fear of the Lord (The New American Bible, p.723, footnote).

PART 4: SECOND COLLECTION OF SOLOMON'S SAYINGS (CHAPTERS 25-29)

Two observances about this section: a) many of the proverbs are a repeat from chapters 10-22; b) connection to God is rarely mentioned.

The Collegeville Bible Handbook helps our reading of these chapters with the following brief comments.

CHAPTER 25 (*Egyptian-style instruction*) contains a mixture of admonitions and practical sayings about life.

CHAPTER 26 has no religious content. It can be divided into three major topics: the fool (vv 1-12); the lazy person (vv 13-16); and evil speech (vv 17-28).

CHAPTER 27 covers the full range of wisdom concerns. Friendship and neighbors appear most frequently (vv 5, 6, 8, 10, 14, 16, 19).

CHAPTER 28. Although God is mentioned only in verses 5 and 25, the majority of the proverbs reflect a very developed piety and morality built around the concept of care for the poor and obedience to the law.

CHAPTER 29 deals predominantly with two themes: the king (vv 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 14, 16, 26) and the need for disciplined learning (vv 15, 17, 19, 21). A sub-theme speaks about the passion of anger. (p.154)

PART 5: WORDS OF AGUR AND LEMUEL; THE IDEAL WIFE (CHAPTERS 30-31)

CHAPTER 30: The words of Agur

“Two things I ask of you, deny them not to me before I die: put falsehood and lying far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; [provide me only with the food I need;] lest, being full, I deny you, saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or, being in want, I steal, and profane the name of my God.” (vv 7-9)

Nothing is known of Agur other than he was a wisdom teacher.

Verses 2-4. Human knowledge is nothing compared with that of God.

Verses 7-9. Too much or too little money can be dangerous.

Verses 10-33—Numerical proverbs. Several of the proverbs in this section are in the form of comparison or riddles. *“Three things, not four”* is a poetic way of saying the list is not complete. The writer observes the world with delighted interest. The reader is invited to look at nature from the perspective of a keen observer.

CHAPTER 31

Verses 1-9— The words of Lemuel come with three commands: (1) restrain sexual appetite; (2) be aware of the dangers of drink (except when a person is dying and in pain); (3) respect the rights of the poor.

Verses 10-31— The ideal wife. Commenting on this passage, the *Life Application Study Bible* states:

Proverbs has a lot to say about women, how fitting that the book ends with a picture of a woman of strong character, great wisdom, many skills, and great compassion.

Some people have the mistaken idea that the ideal woman in the Bible is retiring, servile, and entirely domestic. Not so! This woman is an excellent wife and mother. She is also a manufacturer, importer, manager, realtor, farmer, seamstress, upholsterer, and merchant. Her strength and dignity do not come from her amazing achievements, however. They are a result of her reverence for God. In our society, where physical appearance counts for so much, it may surprise us to realize that her appearance is never mentioned. Her attractiveness comes entirely from her character (p. 105, 108).

Pause: In your opinion, what are characteristics of the ideal wife? What do you like and not like about the description in 31:10-31?