

Woodland Baptist Church
 Wednesday, August 13, 2014
 Seeking Wisdom Together - Proverbs 20:16-30

1) READ PROVERBS 20:16-30

a) **16 Take a man's garment when he has put up security for a stranger, and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for foreigners.**

- i) Again and again we are warned not to take a pledge for a stranger. We should not do this for a stranger, no matter how enticing it may be, still less from a wayward woman, whose character has lost all credit. This is the sure road to ruin. If a person is so weak as to plunge into his folly, he is not fit to be trusted. Do not lend anything to him without good security. If necessary, take his garment as a pledge. The letter of the Mosaic law forbade this extremity (Exodus 22:26-27; Dt. 24:12-13). But the spirit and intent of the law pointed to the protection of the poor and unfortunate who were forced to borrow from necessity and therefore were to be treated compassionately. Here the command refers to the inconsiderate, who deserve to suffer for their folly as they deliberately plunge themselves into ruin. The love of our neighbor does not involve us in forgetting ourselves. The path of godly prudence is the safest for all parties. It can never be wise to help where such kindness will only bring ruin. To refuse may be to exercise self-denial. It is right that this should be so.¹

b) **17 Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.**

- i) The taste of food gained dishonestly (cf. dishonest dealings in vv. 10, 14) may at first seem sweet (cf. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious," 9:17) but eventually it is as unpleasant as eating gravel. This contrasts the short-range pleasure of sin with its long-range consequences. Sin, usually attractive in its immediate payoff, ultimately turns on its host (cf. 7:14-23).²

¹ Bridges

² Bible Knowledge

c) 18 Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war.

- i) Note, 1. It is good in every thing to act with deliberation, and to consult with ourselves at least, and, in matters of moment, with our friends, too, before we determine, but especially to ask counsel of God, and beg direction from him, and observe the guidance of this eye. This is the way to have both our minds and our purposes established, and to succeed well in our affairs; whereas what is done hastily and with precipitation is repented of at leisure. Take time, and you will have done the sooner. Deliberandum est diu, quod statuendum est semel—A final decision should be preceded by mature deliberation.
- ii) 2. It is especially our wisdom to be cautious in making war. Consider, and take advice, whether the war should be begun or no, whether it be just, whether it be prudent, whether we be a match for the enemy, and able to carry it on when it is too late to retreat (Lu. 14:31); and, when it is begun, consider how and by what arts it may be prosecuted, for management is as necessary as courage. Going to law is a kind of going to war, and therefore must be done with good advice, Prov. 25:8. The rule among the Romans was nec sequi bellum, nec fugere—neither to urge war nor yet to shun it. ³

d) 19 Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.

- i) He who flatters to the face will as readily scandalize behind the back. By soft, sinuous words and ways he will gain the confidence of his victim, appealing to his pride and love of approbation, and thus loosening his tongue, till he relates things far better left unsaid. When he has thus lured him on to unbaring his heart, he will go to others, and pour into their ears what he has just learned, flattering them in the same way, and giving them to suppose that they alone are the recipients of his favor. No character is more detestable. Utterly lacking in moral principle, and destitute of godliness, when such a person gets in among a Christian assembly, he can do untold mischief. The safe plan is to refuse altogether to listen to “him that flattereth with his lips.” By so doing, much sorrow may be averted. The one who praises his listener while he backbites another, deserves to be treated in the spirit that David manifested toward the Amalekite who brought him news of Saul’s death (2 Sam. 1:1–16).⁴

³ Henry

⁴ Ironside

e) 20 If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.

- i) This is an enforcement of the fifth commandment, by denouncing the punishment which the moral government of God shall exact from the unnatural child. The legal penalty may be seen (Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9); but this was probably seldom or never carried into execution (comp. Matt. 15:4; Mark 7:10). His lamp shall be put out in obscure (the blackest) darkness (comp. ch. 13:9). The expression is peculiar; it is literally, In the apple of the eye of darkness, as in ch. 7:9; i.e. in the very centre of darkness; he will find himself surrounded on all sides by midnight darkness, without escape, with no hope of Divine protection.
- ii) "Lamp" is a metaphor applied to the bodily and the spiritual life, to happiness and prosperity, to a man's fame and reputation, to a man's posterity; and all these senses may be involved in the denunciation of the disobedient and stubborn child. He shall suffer in body and soul, in character, in fortune, in his children. His fate is the exact counterpart of the blessing promised in the Law.⁵

f) 21 An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.

- i) The "inheritance" in view evidently comes prematurely—by request or by dishonesty (cf. 19:26). In either case, the consequence is often lack of divine blessing, because the motive is selfish (cf. 21:6; 28:20). The Prodigal Son is an obvious example of this proverb (Luke 15:11-24). "Such wealth may be squandered and often squelches initiative and work."⁶

g) 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.

- i) No lesson is harder for some of us to learn than that of confiding all our affairs to the hands of the Lord, especially when we feel we have been wronged and ill-treated. Yet it is plain from Scripture that the saint can make no greater mistake than to take charge of his own affairs in such a case. Nothing could be clearer than the injunction, "Recompense to no man evil for evil.... Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto

⁵ Pulpit Commentary

⁶ Constable

wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:17–19). To set about meting out evil for evil in the face of words like these is to act in direct disobedience to God, and we need not wonder if we make a terrible botch of it all. He who, owning that all has been allowed by the Lord for his good, bows his head and bends before the blast, will find God ever ready to interfere at the needed moment. To look away from the human instrument of our grief, however vindictive he may be, and to see, behind it all, the purposes of our Father working out, gives rest and comfort to the sorely-tried soul.⁷

h) 23 Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good.

- i) This proverb restates the advice already given (cf. 11:1a; 20:10), but it evidently appears here again because of the preceding verse. One form of taking inappropriate revenge is tilting the scales in one's favor. It would have been tempting for Israel's priests to tamper with the scales when the people came to present their annual "half shekel," since the shekel was not a coin but a weight of measure (Exod. 30:11-16).⁸

i) 24 A man's steps are from the Lord; how then can man understand his way?

- i) We are here taught that in all our affairs,
 - (1) 1. We have a necessary and constant dependence upon God. All our natural actions depend upon his providence, all our spiritual actions upon his grace. The best man is no better than God makes him; and every creature is that to us which it is the will of God that it should be. Our enterprises succeed, not as we desire and design, but as God directs and disposes. The goings even of a strong man (so the word signifies) are of the Lord, for his strength is weakness without God, nor is the battle always to the strong.
 - (2) 2. We have no foresight of future events, and therefore know not how to forecast for them: How can a man understand his own way? How can he tell what will befall him, since God's counsels concerning him are secret, and therefore how can he of himself contrive what to do without divine direction? We so little understand our own way that we know not what is

⁷ Ironside

⁸ Constable

good for ourselves, and therefore we must make a virtue of necessity, and commit our way unto the Lord, in whose hand it is, **follow the guidance and submit to the disposal of Providence.**⁹

j) 25 It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows.

- i) The situation in view here is that of a person who impulsively pledges something to God and then, upon reconsidering, wishes that he had not done so (cf. Eccles. 5:5; Mark 7:11). It is better to wait to make the pledge, until one thinks through the implications of the decision carefully. In a larger application, we should avoid all unconsidered action. **Jephthah** made a vow "rashly" because he acted impulsively (Judg. 11:30-40).¹⁰

k) 26 A wise king winnows the wicked and drives the wheel over them.

- i) See here,

- (1) 1. What is the business of magistrates. They are to be a terror to evil-doers. They must scatter the wicked, who are linked in confederacies to assist and embolden one another in doing mischief; and there is no doing this but by bringing the wheel over them, that is, putting the laws in execution against them, crushing their power and quashing their projects. Severity must sometimes be used to rid the country of those that are openly vicious and mischievous, debauched and debauching.
- (2) 2. What is the qualification of magistrates, which is necessary in order to do this. They have need to be both pious and prudent, for it is the wise king, who is both religious and discreet, that is likely to effect the suppression of vice and reformation of manners.

l) 27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts.

- i) A king ferrets out sinners (v. 26) and the Lord ferrets out one's inner heart. Just as a lamp shows up what is in the darkness, so God reveals what is in man's spirit and searches out his inmost being (cf. v. 30).¹¹

⁹ Henry, logos

¹⁰ Constable

¹¹ Bible Knowledge

m) 28 Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.

- i) In verse 26 we saw that it was the king's wisdom to execute judgment upon his foes. Here we are reminded of the other side of his character. His throne rests on righteousness, but it is upheld by loving-kindness. The two are essential—loving-kindness and truth. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." When He reigns, both shall be displayed in perfection (Isa. 32).¹²

n) 29 The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.

- i) This shows that both young and old have their advantages, and therefore must each of them be, according to their capacities, serviceable to the public, and neither of them despise nor envy the other. 1. **Let not old people despise the young**, for they are strong and fit for action, able to go through business and break through difficulties, which the aged and weak cannot grapple with. The glory of young men is their strength, provided they use it well (in the service of God and their country, not of their lusts), and that they be not proud of it nor trust to it. 2. **Let not young people despise the old**, for they are grave, and fit for counsel, and, though they have not the strength that young men have, yet they have more wisdom and experience. Juniores ad labores, seniores ad honores—Labour is for the young, honour for the aged. God has put honour upon the old man; for his gray head is his beauty. See Dan. 7:9.

o) 30 Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts.

- i) The purpose of corporal punishment (blows ... wounds ... beatings) is not to inflict pain but to veer one's conduct from sin. Such punishment, however, is not merely to change a person's conduct out of fear of physical pain but to help him mature (to purge his inmost being; cf. v. 27).¹³

2) CLOSE

¹² Ironside

¹³ Bible Knowledge