

Woodland Baptist Church
 Wednesday, September 17, 2014
 Seeking Wisdom Together - Proverbs 23:1-18

1) INTRODUCTION

2) READ PROVERBS 23:1-18

- a) **When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, 2 and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. 3 Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.**
- i) This admonition follows nicely the question of 22:29. If one is to stand before kings, one had better know how to behave. Rule one in this series is to control your “appetite.”
- ii) The steps for doing this are clear.
- (1) First, “consider carefully” suggests understanding full well (Hebrew root *bîn* appears twice for emphasis) the situation in which you find yourself. “What is before you” may include both the food served and the royal scene and personage that go with it. Such occasions are opportunities both to learn and to impress. Gluttony is never a virtue (23:21), much less in this lofty setting.
 - (2) Second, “put a knife to [or “in”] your throat” is a **hyperbole** that means take whatever drastic steps are necessary to curb your urges, especially if you are a noted trencherman (“given to appetite” translates literally “owner of a ravenous gullet”).
 - (3) Third, “do not desire” large quantities of the royal “delicacies” no matter how attractive they look nor how eager your palate is for them. The Hebrew for “delicacies” occurs only in this chapter (v. 6) and in Genesis 27 where it occurs as savory food in the account of the trick that Jacob and Rachel played on Isaac who thought he was eating Esau’s gamey cuisine. “Deceptive food” may recall that story, but certainly speaks of the seductive nature of special dishes that lure us to eat more than is politic or healthful.¹

¹ Hubbard, kindle.

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

i) The dangers of greed are well documented in Proverbs (see chs. 11 and 25 on generosity and chs. 19 and 26 on wealth). Here they are illustrated in what is almost a cartoon.

(1) The imperatives are apt and biting: “Do not overwork” entails laboring to the point of collapse through fatigue—“burnout” in our jargon; “cease” means “stop right this minute” and for good reason—you yourself perceive sharply (“understanding”) the fleeting value of money. Now you see it, now you don’t. Quicker than your “eyes” can flit to it (“set” really means “cause to fly”) it disappears.

(2) “Riches”—the subject here carries over from the thought of the first line—have an uncanny ability to “make themselves wings” and head for the sky (“heaven”) with the alacrity of an “eagle” (the word can also mean “vulture”!). The simile recalls the comics of my youth. When a pitiful character wasted, lost, or was conned out of money, the balloon above his head inevitably pictured a bird with a dollar sign on the chest flapping its wings skyward.

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

i) The disciple of wisdom should not eat a meal with “one who has an evil eye,” i.e., a stingy person. Such a person may extend a cordial invitation. Throughout the whole meal, however, he is calculating what this hospitality might be costing him. Though he may invite the guest to eat and drink, his heart is not in his words because he is worried about the outlay. When the guest senses the true attitude of the host the food grows nauseating. The vomit would cause the guest to “lose” the “sweet words” which normally a guest will bestow upon a host when he has enjoyed a fine evening.²

² Wisdom and Psalms

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

i) This brief instruction picks up the theme of wasted words from verse 8. Time is precious, and speaking, especially in teaching or counseling, takes energy. The prudent, disciplined leader will guard both zealously.

(1) “Wisdom” (Hebrew *s’ē-ke-ḥ*; see 3:4; 12:8), the art of making perceptive and successful decisions, is not a commodity to be wasted.

(2) Having another “despise” what you have worked hard to garner is an intolerable experience and more than adequate reason to avoid conversation with someone who has proven to be totally unappreciative or even thoroughly resentful of it.³

e) 10 Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, 11 for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.

i) Note, 1. The fatherless are taken under God’s special protection; with him they not only find mercy shown to them (Hos. 14:3) but justice done for them. He is their Redeemer, their *Goël*, their near kinsman, that will take their part and stand up for them with jealousy, as taking himself affronted in the injuries done to them. As their Redeemer he will plead their cause against those that do them any injury, and, one way or other, will not only defend their right, and recover it for them, but avenge the wrongs done to them. And he is mighty, almighty; his omnipotence is engaged and employed for their protection, and their proudest and most powerful oppressors will not only find themselves an unequal match for this, but will find that it is at their peril to contend with it.

ii) 2. Every man therefore must be careful not to injure them in any thing, or to invade their rights, either by a clandestine removal of the old land-marks or by a forcible entry into their fields. Being fatherless, they have none to redress their wrongs, and, being in their childhood, they do not so much as apprehend the wrong that is done them. Sense of honor, and much more the fear of God, would restrain men from offering injury to children, especially fatherless children.⁴

³ Ibid

⁴ Henry

f) **12 Apply your heart to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge.**

- i) The wholehearted commitment to the teacher's lessons is called for once again (see 22:17–21), as the instructions or specific patterns of behaviors are underscored with a general command to give full attention. (On "heart" and "ears" as organs of heeding, obeying, and deliberately choosing see 22:17.) "Knowledge" serves as a summation of God's will and way (see 1:2; 22:19–21). "Apply" implies deliberate discipline. Literally it says, Take your heart in hand and bring it into the presence of "instruction." The latter word pictures the cost of learning: correction, even punishment and pain (see Hebrew *mûsār* at 1:2).⁵

g) **13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. 14 If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.**

- i) That theme of painful "correction" (23:12) is amplified in an instruction that centers in corporal discipline of children; see chapters 20 and 29.
- (1) This saying is a counsel to **consistency**. Correction is to be applied regularly as needed and continued until the child is fully grown. Hebrew *na(ar)* covers an age range that includes what we would call "young adult"; Jeremiah used it to describe his youthfulness at the time of his call to prophesy (Jer. 1:6).
- (2) It is also a counsel to **restraint**. Discipline with a stick ("rod") is not designed to wound or maim but to teach lessons of care, caution, and obedience.
- (a) Despite the yells, shrieks, and tears of the willful youngster, **death will not be the result**. "He will not die" in no way justifies child abuse. All that the proverbs teach would preclude that. Its point seems to be, "Don't let the young one bluff you to 'withhold correction' by shouts, protests, or accusations.
- (i) 'I hate you,' 'I'll never speak to you again,' 'I'm going to run away,' 'You're a bad daddy,' 'You're killing me' "—none of these outbursts is accurate under normal circumstances; they should not deter us

⁵ Ibid

from our parental duties to correct our children when they violate the rules of the household.

- (b) Though rod is mentioned twice, the emphasis is on the **firmness of the discipline** not on the specific means. Suggestions of nonphysical yet very effective means of discipline are found elsewhere in the commentary (see “Firm Hands” in ch. 20).
- (c) The saying is also a counsel to **concern**. The parent personally is to administer the correction, as “you,” emphatic in Hebrew, informs us (v. 14). But the parent is to act not to vent her or his spleen at the young one’s expense but in love to save (“deliver”) the child’s life (“soul”) from the threat of an early death (“hell” is Hebrew she)ōl, the grave).
 - (i) Uncorrected waywardness leads to rasher acts of disobedience, which, if left unchecked, can be literally life-threatening. Parents who carelessly or fearfully turned their backs on substance abuse, on petty thievery, on modest acts of cruelty or violence, on companionship with unruly gang members have learned this lesson from a sheriff’s phone call, a judge’s verdict, or a coroner’s report. Love may have to inflict moderate pain to “deliver” a child from ultimate pain.⁶

h) 15 My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. 16 My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right.

- i) This saying echoes the thoughts of Saying 1 (22:17–20) by emphasizing “wise” thinking and upright (“right things” suggests ethical integrity; Hebrew *mêysaḥârîm*; 1:3; 23:31) speech.
- ii) The call to attention in the earlier passage did not make explicit how much the teacher cared about the pupil’s response. Here the whole relationship—like that of the parent and child in Saying 13 (23:13–14) is reciprocal. What happens to the one deeply affects the other. In fact, Saying 14 would serve well as a summary of the parental speech to the child about to be disciplined in Saying 13. The structure is chiasmic (reversed order): The first and last lines picture the pupil’s conduct in thinking (“heart”) and speaking (“lips”); the middle two lines describe the teacher’s reaction—“rejoice” and “exult” or “thrill with the joy of victory,” as the second “rejoice” (Hebrew *aḥlaz*; Hab. 3:18; Ps. 28:7; 60:6; 149:5) may be translated.

⁶ *ibid*

iii) The structure casts the spotlight on the pupil's behavior, mentioned first and last, and only secondarily on the teacher's intellectual ("heart") and emotional ("inmost being" is literally "liver," Hebrew *kilyaḥ* used here only in Proverbs; for physical use, see Lev. 3:4; for figurative, see Ps. 16:7) reactions. The apostle John knew full well the meaning of this saying (3 John 4).⁷

i) **17 Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. 18 Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.**

i) This admonition touches on a subject familiar to Israel's teachers: How should we react when persons who spurn God's way seem to get what they want and go unpunished (see Ps. 37:37)?

(1) In such cases we may be tempted to "envy ["be jealous of"; Hebrew *qaḥ-naḥ*]; 3:31; 24:1; 24:19, all negative in meaning] sinners" (see 1:10), who while missing the mark of responsible conduct gain rewards that ought to be reserved for those who live in the "fear of the LORD" (see 1:7 and ch. 16).

(2) They are the ones to be envied, is the thrust of the Hebrew which assumes that the verb carries over to the second line in a positive use like that of Yahweh's envy, jealousy, or zeal for His land in Joel 2:18.

(3) "All the day" is counsel to patient and consistent obedience as the motivation in verse 18 makes explicit.

(4) "Hereafter" does not necessarily point to life after death, but to life further down the road when the sinners' missteps will catch up with them and the Godfearers' steadfastness will be honored.

(5) "Hope" (see ch. 13)—maintained over the long haul—"will not be cut off" and be left frustrated. The justice of God will come to pass for those who obey ("fear") Him and wait. Good counsel is all of this for a generation conditioned by the cheap, tricky, and instant solutions of television comedy (thirty minutes) or drama (sixty minutes).⁸

3) Close

⁷ Hubbard

⁸ Ibid