

Wisdom in Self Control

Proverbs 14:15-35

Proverbs 14:15-35 - *"The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.*

A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident. A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.

The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

The evil will bow before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Even his own neighbor hates a poor man, but the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who has mercy on the poor.

Do they not go astray who devise evil? But mercy and truth belong to those who devise good.

In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty.

The crown of the wise is their riches, but the foolishness of fools is folly.

A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies.

In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge.

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.

In a multitude of people is a king's honor, but the lack of people is the downfall of a prince.

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.

A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rotteness to the bones.

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.

The wicked is banished in his wickedness, but the righteous has a refuge in his death.

Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known.

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

The king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame."

Background Notes

For our background notes, let's look at how biblical background illustrates the proverb in verse 35: *"The king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame."* Consider the background of these three biblical cases: Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai (in the Book of Esther). In all three cases, the king shows favor to three men who acted wisely: Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai. And in all three cases, the king's anger was turned against the servants who acted shamefully.

In the case of Joseph, the shameful servants were the magicians and so-called “wise men” of Egypt who could not interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. In the case of Daniel, it was the “wise men” and diviners of Babylon could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In the case of Mordecai, it was wicked Haman who acted shamefully before King Xerxes.

Proverbs 14:35 is just as true for Christians today as it was in those three biblical stories. *“The king’s favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame.”*

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 15: *“The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.”* The old sayings, “Look before you leap” or “Think before you act” would be good applications of this proverb. Foolish and naïve people don’t think ahead. They’re easy prey for every “snake-oil salesman” or sensational scam email that comes along.

Verse 16: *“A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.”* A wise person is aware of the pitfalls of evil that are all around us, and avoids them. A foolish person plunges forward in his arrogant self-confidence, and gets angry with anyone who cautions him to be careful. “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread” would be an appropriate paraphrase for the second part of this proverb.

Verse 17: *“A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.”* It’s bad enough to live or work with a hotheaded person who slams doors and throws things and yells insults, but it’s even worse to have to relate with a person who purposely and craftily plans evil.

Verse 18: *“The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.”* Naïve and foolish people end up with more folly than they started with. As wise and prudent people mature, they gain more and more knowledge.

Verse 19: *“The evil will bow before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.”* Sometimes we see this good result in this life, as when wicked Haman had to bow before Mordecai, for example. But there will be no exception in the future when every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus Christ, and righteous people are rewarded and *“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).*

Proverbs 14:20-21: *“The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, but the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who has mercy on the poor.”* Let’s say that your next-door neighbor is very rich and has lots of connections, because money has clout. But the neighbor on the other side of your house has less education,

less social status, and is less affluent than you are. Are you going to treat both neighbors the same way? Or will you look down on the less-well-off neighbor? Despising your poor neighbor is sin (v21). You'll find more joy in life if you're a friend and help for your less affluent neighbor. *"You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).*

Verse 22: *"Do they not go astray who devise evil? But mercy and truth belong to those who devise good."* How do you view and treat a person you don't naturally like? This proverb encourages us to plan out how we can do good things for them. If you do, you'll be blessed with God's loving-kindness and truth. But if you plan to avoid the person you don't like, or think of ways to bring this person down - perhaps out of jealousy or spite - you're not only sinning, but you are moving away from God's love and truth.

Verse 23: *"In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty."* Did anyone come to mind as you read that proverb? Some folks spend a lot more time talking than working. This proverb can even be applied to Christian service. You can talk a lot about new programs, and foreign missions, and how your church should be run, but if you're all talk and little work, the results will be few and far between.

Verse 24: *"The crown of the wise is their riches, but the foolishness of fools is folly."* Here again we have an illustration of the moral principle: you reap what you sow. Fools sow folly and they reap folly. The wise live wisely, and gain riches. And those "riches" could be material or spiritual – or both!

Verse 25: *"A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies."* In court, it is vitally important for a witness to tell the truth. The truth could determine the life or death of the person on trial. Think of this proverb in reference to our responsibility to share the truth of the gospel to those who are lost. If we water down the truth that Christ is the only way of salvation (as the liberals do), people will die in their sins.

Verses 26-27: *"In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death."* Remember, these are **proverbs** - general truths stated in general terms. It is a general truth that parents who trust the Lord, reverence Him, and put the Lord first will have children who also put their trust in the Lord. And it is a general truth that the fear of the Lord and following His Word is a principle for living a more stress-free life, and for avoiding and being protected from the snares that lead to early death.

Verse 28: *"In a multitude of people is a king's honor, but in the lack of people is the downfall of a prince."* The size of a nation is in view in this proverb, as well as the long-term approval rating of the leaders. When the majority of the people honor their good leaders, the leaders will receive appreciation and praise. But when the majority of the people speak poorly of their leaders, it's a good indication that the leaders and the nation are in big trouble.

Verse 29: *“He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive [or quick-tempered] exalts folly.”* Based on this proverb, would you say that God sees you as a person of *“great understanding,”* or a person who *“exalts folly”*? If you want to please the Lord, you must learn to control your temper.

Verse 30: *“A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.”* *“A sound heart”* is not a reference to your cardiovascular condition, but to your emotional state of mind. Again we see that the Bible teaches that peace of mind is good for our health. Envy, stress, and emotional turmoil are detrimental to our physical wellbeing.

Verse 31: *“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.”* Can we say that we love and honor the Lord if we don’t have some concern for the poor and less fortunate? No! If we love and honor the Lord, we’ll be concerned about the people for whom He is concerned. Over and over, Scripture tells us that the Lord has great concern and love for those who are disadvantaged.

Verse 32: *“The wicked is banished in his wickedness, but the righteous has a refuge in his death.”* Death ends all hope for the wicked, but for the righteous, the best is yet to come!

Verse 33: *“Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known.”* The point of this proverb is that wise people don’t have to put their knowledge on display for others to recognize that they have understanding. On the other hand, when a fool shares his lack of knowledge, it’s obvious that he’s a fool.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

Vote in line with the Bible - as much as possible!

Verse 34: *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”* Our own nation is evidence of the truth of this proverb. Our nation has reached greatness because it was founded on biblical (Judeo-Christian) principles. But we have departed from those values. Our nation is steadily going downhill, morally and spiritually. We’ve taken God out of our educational system, and by foolishly trying to separate state from church, we’ve ended up separating state from God. The Founders who wrote our Constitution never intended separation from biblical values.

In our post-Christians culture, what can believers do about politics? After all, we are *“the salt of the earth”!* We should vote in line with the Bible as much as possible. Sometimes this is hard to do, because the lines are not always obvious and clearly drawn. But some lines **are clearly drawn**, such as protection for the life of the unborn.

So - vote in line with the Bible - as much as possible!