

Wisdom in Later Years

Proverbs 19:15-29

Proverbs 19:15-29 - *“Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.*

He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul; he who is careless of his ways will die.

He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.

Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

A man of great wrath will suffer punishment. If you rescue him, you will have to do it again.

Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.

There are many plans in a man’s heart; nevertheless the LORD’s counsel will stand.

What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.

The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction. He will not be visited with evil.

A lazy man buries his hand in the bowl, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.

Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become wary. Rebuke one who has understanding and he will discern knowledge.

He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.

Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

A disreputable witness scorns justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.

Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.”

Background Notes

For background notes, let’s consider verse 16, and what the Bible has to say about the death of one who is careless of the way of wisdom. Verse 16: *“He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of His ways will die.”*

Verse 16 is “antithetic parallelism.” Remember, Proverbs is written in Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is characterized by what’s known as parallelism - the second line follows the first line in parallel structure. If the second line says something that is in contrast to the first line, it is “antithetic parallelism.”

Does the term “his ways” refer to God’s ways, or the ways of the individual? In other words, is the point of the proverb that being careless of **God’s ways** leads to death, or is the point that just being careless in **your own ways** can lead to death? In this case, the parallel structure helps us with the interpretation. If “keeping the commandment” in the first line refers to God’s Law, then being “careless of His ways” refers to God’s ways in the second line. The second line parallels with keeping the commandment, just as the respective results are in parallel: life (keeping his soul) for keeping God’s Law, and death for being careless of God’s ways.

Under the Old Testament Law, an obedient believer was blessed with literal long life, but rebellion and disobedience to God's Law led to an early death. Think of the many Hebrew people who died in the wilderness because of their ingratitude and unbelief, or the many who died an early death in Korah's rebellion.

How do we apply this proverb today? In the light of the New Testament, it can be applied in the ultimate sense. If you obey God's command to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, you will have everlasting life, but not following God's way of salvation will lead to eternal death (John 3:16-18). This proverb could even be applied to the disciplinary death of a believer who turns to a life of sin and is careless of God's ways (1 Corinthians 11). Of course, in general, careless disregard of biblical guidelines for proper and healthful living can lead to premature death.

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 15: *"Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger."* If you're lazy and unwilling to work to provide for yourself and your family, you will go hungry. Is it right for a lazy person to go hungry - or should others provide for him? According to 2 Thessalonians 3:10, he should go hungry! *"If anyone will not work, let him not eat."*

Verse 17: *"He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given."* What a great concept and truth! Think about that. When we care for people who are in need, we're making a loan to God! And does God pay back His loans? He certainly does - and with the best interest rate as well! (Read Malachi 3:10.)

We couldn't loan our time and money and energies out at any higher return rate. So catch the concept. When you give to those who are truly in need, you are giving to the Lord. You're letting Him borrow from you temporarily. And He pays back with a great interest rate!

Verse 18: *"Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction."* What do you think Solomon, the inspired author, had in mind when he penned the last line: *"And do not set your heart on his destruction,"* or as some translations say, *"Do not desire his death."* Is the idea that if you neglect discipline in your children's lives, you are actually contributing to a possible premature death because of their undisciplined ways? Or, as some commentators say, is it a warning to use restraint when you discipline, and avoid uncontrolled anger, which could lead to child abuse and could be life threatening? It's hard to be dogmatic on this point, but I tend to favor the former interpretation. If you don't discipline your children, their undisciplined lifestyle and bad decisions could lead to a shattered life - or even a premature death.

Verse 19: *"A man of great wrath will suffer punishment. If you rescue him, you will have to do it again."* Don't bail out a hothead who gets into trouble. If you do, it's only a matter of time before you'll have to bail him out again. Let hotheads (including teens) suffer the consequences of their uncontrolled tempers. Tough love is biblical!

Verse 21: *“There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the LORD’s counsel will stand.”* I love the truth of this proverb. Some folks have a problem with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. But the truth that God overrules and controls everything is a comforting doctrine. Have you ever thought that through? God can overturn the plans of people who are against us, and He can take our bad plans and overrule them for our own good and for His glory. And He can take our good plans that are in line with His will and bring them to pass. It doesn’t get any better than that!

Verse 22: *“What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.”* What’s the relationship between the two parts of this proverb? Let me paraphrase: A poor man who has nothing but sympathy to offer is better than a rich man who promises to help, but he has no intention of following through.

Verse 23: *“The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction. He will not be visited with evil.”* The point of this proverb is not that bad things never happen to good people. The point is that God’s people can rest secure and experience abundant life when they walk with the Lord. They know they are protected from evil.

Verse 24: *“A lazy man buries his hand in the bowl, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.”* That’s pretty lazy, isn’t it? Think of reaching out to take a sandwich and then being too lazy to get it into your mouth! The point of this humorous proverb is that lazy people never finish the projects they start. What about us? Think it over. Do I have any unfinished projects? Is my lazy hand still buried in the dish?

Verse 25: *“Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become wary. Rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge.”* Three kinds of people are mentioned in this proverb:

1. The mocker or scoffer with a closed mind who will not learn, even though flogged.
2. The simple and open person who will learn when they see scoffers punished. This is the principle that is presented in 1 Timothy 5:20: *“Rebuke those who are sinning in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”*
3. The wise and discerning person. Only a simple word of rebuke is needed to correct a wise person.

So - into which of the three categories do you fit? We should all ask ourselves that question after reading this proverb.

Verse 26: *“He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.”* Notice that this proverb does not mention the character of the parents. They may not be the perfect parents, but mistreating or abandoning your parents as they get older is shameful, even from a human perspective. And it is certainly very wrong from God’s perspective.

Verse 27: *“Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.”* When you check various translations of this proverb, you’ll find that there are two possible interpretations:

1. One interpretation is that it's an exhortation to young people to stop listening to instruction or advice that would cause them to stray from true knowledge that's found in the Word of God. That's an important proverb, by the way, for a college student taking philosophy or biology courses at a secular university.
2. The other interpretation is that it is an exhortation to young people not to stop listening to good instruction, because if you don't listen to good teaching you'll stray from the words of true knowledge found in the Word of God.

Verse 28: *"A disreputable witness scorns justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity."* Wicked people only want to escape true justice when **they're** on trial. Otherwise they gulp down iniquity like a banquet, and they scorn justice. It's bad enough that bad witnesses are part of society, but it's even worse when they're witnesses in court. To function properly, the courts of justice must have honest and true witnesses.

Verse 29: *"Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools."* Scoffers and fools think that they have the last laugh - but they don't. Scripture is clear: in the end, they will be judged. This proverb alone should be enough to cause scoffers and fools to change their ways.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

Remember, it's not too late!

Verse 20: *"Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days."* You may have heard the old saying, "We get too soon old and too late smart." It's not a Bible verse, but it is a biblical truth about people who avoid discipline and won't accept godly counsel and instruction when they're young.

The good news of this proverb is that it is not too late. Start now! If you listen to godly counsel and accept godly discipline now, you'll become wise for the rest of your life. And that will certainly please the Lord as well. Wisdom is a long-term investment. Remember, it is not too late!