

Sayings of the Wise - Wisdom in Readiness

Proverbs 22:17-29

Proverbs 22:17-29 - *"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge; for it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you. Let them all be fixed upon your lips, so that your trust may be in the LORD.*

I have instructed you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?

Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and will plunder the soul of those who plunder them.

Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.

Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge - one of those who is surety for debts. For if you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?

Do not remove the ancient landmark that your fathers have set up.

Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before unknown men."

Background Notes

In our previous Talks from Proverbs we said that the simplest outline of the Book of Proverbs would be "Precepts of Wisdom" (chapters 1-9) and "Proverbs of Wisdom" (chapters 10-31). Solomon wrote most of the proverbs, but from the second half of Proverbs 22 to the end of chapter 24, we have a section known as the "Sayings of the Wise." This section includes proverbs that were written by several wise writers. We know this because the "wise" (v17) is plural in the Hebrew language. The last phrase of verse 17, *"And apply your heart to my knowledge,"* indicates that Solomon not only compiled these wise sayings, but likely wrote some of them himself as well.

Verses 17-21 form the introduction to the "Sayings of the Wise." After the call to hear and apply these sayings, there are three motivations given to follow these instructions:

1. It will be pleasing store of wisdom that you can share with others. *"For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you. Let them all be fixed upon your lips" (v18).*

2. If you hear and apply these sayings to your lives you'll have a deeper trust in the Lord. *"So that your trust may be in the Lord, I have instructed you today, even you" (v19).*

3. If you hear and apply these sayings to your lives, you will have answers to give to those who come to you with questions. *“That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?” (v20-21)*. The New Testament teaches that this is our responsibility as believers. We are to be ready to give answers to unbelievers who come to us with questions. *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for reasons for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15)*.

In Proverbs 22:19-20, the “eye” could just be the “wise teacher,” but again I think this supports the position that Solomon compiled and even wrote some of these “Sayings of the Wise.”

Some translations have *“thirty sayings”* in verse 20, rather than *“excellent things.”* It can be shown that the included proverbs could be divided into thirty sayings (24:17-22). Then there are an additional six sayings of the wise (24:23-34).

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verses 22-23: *“Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate, for the LORD will plead their cause and plunder the soul of those who plunder them.”* Of course it’s wrong to rob anyone, rich or poor, so the point of this proverb seems to be against robbing the poor **legally**. That’s why *“the gate”* is mentioned in verse 22.

In Old Testament times the city gate functioned as the court where legal transactions were carried out. In the Book of Ruth, the legal OK for Boaz to marry Ruth was transacted at the gate of the city. So in verse 22, *“the gate”* is not about a fence and gate around your house or farm, but rather the town court held in the gate of the city.

The point of the proverb is that even though you could take advantage of the poor and find legal ways to rob and oppress them by loopholes and technicalities, don’t do it! It’s wrong. The Lord is their defense attorney, and you will not win in court against the Lord! In fact, your life is in danger if you continue your wrongful legal wrangling. Distorting justice to take advantage of the poor was one of the curses under the Mosaic Law: *“Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deuteronomy 27:19)*. A word to the wise is sufficient.

Obviously, Scripture speaks to another side of the coin. The poor are not to rob the welfare system by refusing to work, yet expecting and demanding government handouts.

Verse 24-25: *“Make no friendship with an angry man. Do not go with a furious man lest you learn his ways, and set a snare for your soul.”* Do you know any hotheads? Stay away from them. Did you say your spouse? Well, that’s a

different matter (*laughter*). The Bible counsels you to keep your distance from someone who reacts to life with bitter rage and outbursts of temper.

Notice the reason for avoiding a hothead: *“lest you learn his ways, and set a snare for your soul”* (v25). If you don't stay away from a hothead, you become desensitized to the sin of anger and complaining, and before you know it, you're condoning the same kind of behavior in yourself. As 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, *“Bad company corrupts good habits.”* Remember: Just one uncontrolled outburst of anger, and your testimony could be ruined for life.

Verses 26-27: *“Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, one of those who is surety for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?”* Haven't we heard this warning before in Proverbs? Yes! We saw this warning in chapters 6, 11, 17, and 20. So this is the fifth time in Proverbs that we're warned about becoming “surety” - co-signing a loan, or making a promise to financially cover for someone who may go into debt.

Be extremely careful in this area of life, because a creditor could literally “take your bed out from under you”! That's another way of saying that you could be completely cleaned out financially. It's true, and it has happened. Maybe you know of some sad situations here. It's far better to give a helpful financial gift to a person than to co-sign for a loan. You could be left in a financial mess if your friend or relative defaults on payments.

Verse 28: *“Do not remove the ancient landmark that your fathers have set up.”* In the ancient world, large stones or boulders marked property lines and boundaries. These stones could be moved, especially at night. If the stones were moved just a little bit at a time, it was easy to steal your neighbor's property and add to your own. This wise saying has an important and far-reaching present day application for the land of Israel. Who gave the land of Israel and its boundaries to the Jewish people? God did! How dare the international community attempt to move God's ancient landmarks!

This wise saying also has a spiritual application. Jude 3 says, *“Contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* The content of the Christian faith, or New Testament doctrine, has been revealed and given to the Church once and for all. We're not to change it, or add to it, or take away from it, or water it down, or say it's outdated. Don't remove the ancient landmarks or boundaries!

Verse 29: *“Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before unknown men.”* This wise saying is very practical. It's the key for moving up the proverbial “ladder.” Whatever talent or potential skill you have, work on it! Perfect it, so that you become a skilled carpenter, or accountant, or whatever. Be the best that you can be at whatever you find you can do well - and you will move up!

We see this principle at work every day. If you see an efficient, hardworking and honest new employee at a Walmart or a McDonalds, come back a few months later and it's likely that they have already moved up the ladder - maybe even to manager of their area. It's a biblical principle at work. Remember Joseph, Moses, Daniel, and Nehemiah?

This biblical principle also works in the spiritual realm. When you realize what your spiritual gift is, use it and develop it. Become skilled in the use of your spiritual gift. You'll find that your fellow believers be blessed, and the doors to larger spheres of ministry may open for you.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

Be ready with an answer!

Proverbs 22:21: *"...know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you."*

Be ready with an answer. It's a biblical command! 1 Peter 3:15 says, *"...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."* The word that's translated "defense" is the Greek word *apologia*, from which we get the word "apologetics." An apologetic is a well-reasoned and well-thought-out defense. It's a term that describes what a defense attorney would do to defend a client. Christian apologetics involves defending the Christian faith with answers to questions that people ask about the Bible, God, Jesus Christ, and our faith.

We need to study God's Word and learn answers to tough questions so we're ready to explain and defend the historic Christian faith. Jude 3 says, *"I urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's people."* This is a good application of the wise saying in Proverbs 22:21: *"That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you."*

Do you know how to give good and correct and adequate answers? Do you know your Bible? Have you studied apologetics? Have you learned some solid evidences for the Bible and the Christian faith? 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be ready to answer the questions of the unbeliever. It's not an option – it's a command!

Be ready with an answer!