

Sayings of the Wise – Wisdom in Building

Proverbs 24:1-22

Proverbs 24:1-22 - *“Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them, for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.*

Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established. By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

A wise man is strong. Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength. By wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counselors there is safety.

Wisdom is too lofty for a fool; he does not open his mouth in the gate.

He who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men.

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it, and will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb is sweet to your taste. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul. If you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off.

Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous. Do not plunder his resting place. A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, nor let your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him.

Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked, for there will be no prospect for the evil man. The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

My son, fear the LORD and the king.

Do not associate with those given to change, for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?”

Background Notes

For our background notes, let's consider the background significance of the phrase “*in the gate*” in verse 7. We talked about “the gate” back in Proverbs 22. In ancient days the city gate area functioned as the courthouse. Legal transactions took place in the city gateway. In Genesis 19, Lot was sitting in the gate of the city when the angels came to rescue him from Sodom. Likely Lot was sitting in the gate because he was a member of Sodom's city council. He may have been trying to bring about social reform. In the Book of Ruth, the legal transaction for Boaz to marry Ruth took place at the city gate.

With that background, we see that the phrase *“in the gate”* means involvement in the governing and legal transactions of the city. Now we can appreciate the wise saying of Proverbs 24:7: *“Wisdom is too lofty for a fool; he does not open his mouth in the gate.”*

We can draw a number of practical conclusions from this proverb:

1. It takes wisdom to govern a city or state and understand legal transactions. A fool cannot understand or deal with such matters. It is beyond him.
2. Don't vote for a fool, no matter how popular he or she may be. If your elected leader has no real appreciation or understanding of the affairs of state, you're in for trouble.

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verses 1-2: *“Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.”* Why would you ever want to be envious of evil men? Because so many wicked people are prosperous, and they don't seem to have the problems that righteous have.

In this chapter, two reasons are given why we should not be envious of the wicked, even though they're prosperous and seem to have no problems:

1. Their thoughts and their talk are ungodly: *“for their heart devises violence and their lips talk of troublemaking”* (v2). Would you really want to be that kind of person? Their speech and actions certainly do not please the Lord.
2. There is no future for the wicked: *“Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked; for there will be no prospect for the evil man. The lamp of the wicked will be put out”* (v19-20). Things may look good now, but in the end the wicked person will die with no future hope.

Verses 3-4: *“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established. By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”* Taken literally, this wise saying makes perfect sense. You don't build a house without first drawing up the plans and counting the costs. Then you don't buy just any kind of furniture to fill the rooms. Thought and purpose go into building and furnishing a home.

This proverb is also true in building a marriage and family, or a ministry or church. It takes patient planning, disciplined work, and constant prayer.

Verses 5-6: *“A wise man is strong. Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength. By wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”* Wise strategy is better than mere strength. Of course this is true in literal warfare. Napoleon found this out when, without wise counsel, he invaded Russian in winter. Not wise strategy, as history has shown.

But this wise saying certainly has more in view than military warfare. Overcoming obstacles and fighting the battles of life requires wisdom, not just strength. James 3 promises *“wisdom from above”* for the believer - if we look to the Lord. And wisdom is not self-reliant, but seeks out the godly counsel of others (v6). So when you have major decisions to make in life, don't be too proud to ask godly believers for their counsel. And consult more than one person! In a multitude of counselors there is victory and safety.

Verses 8-9: *“He who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men.”* Some people have the idea that planning and scheming to do wrong is not so bad, as long as you don't actually commit the sinful act. That idea is certainly not taught in the Bible! Here we see that planning and scheming to do wrongful activity is just as much sin in God's eyes - and in the ways of other people as well.

Verses 11-12: *“Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it, and will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”* We are responsible to rescue helpless people who are in mortal danger. We cannot claim ignorance before God. What does this say about those who stood by during World War II, as innocent people were led off to the gas chambers? And what does it say about people today who stand by while the lives of helpless unborn infants are snuffed out? This wise saying also speaks to our responsibility to share the gospel with lost people. We can't claim ignorance.

Verses 13-14: *“My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul. If you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off.”* Getting wisdom isn't like taking cod liver oil. Cod liver oil, of course, is good for you - but doesn't taste good! But getting wisdom is like eating honey. It's not only good for you and for your future, but it tastes good as well! It's generally a pleasant experience to gain wisdom and knowledge.

Verses 15-16: *“Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous. Do not plunder his resting place, for a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.”* You've heard the expression “A cat has nine lives.” That's not a Bible verse and neither is the expression “The righteous person has seven lives.” However, it is a biblical truth (v16). The point is that the wicked should be warned about plotting anything bad against the righteous because with the Lord, righteous people are far more resilient than unrighteous people. And God has ways of making the wicked person's plans backfire!

Verses 17-18: *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him.”* This wise saying reminds us of Obadiah 12: *“Do not gloat over your brother's day of misfortune.”*

The context of this proverb is personal. It's not talking about victory over the enemy in a just war, or the removal of the “Hitlers” of history. It has to do with personal enemies. In that case, we leave retribution in God's hands. As Romans 12:19 says, *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”* And we don't gloat!

Verses 19-20: *“Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked; for there will be no prospect for the evil man. The lamp of the wicked will be put out.”* Logically, why would you ever envy the wicked? They are doomed; they have no hope. Believers have an eternal future, regardless of our prosperity or popularity in this life.

Verses 21-22: *“My son, fear the LORD and the king. Do not associate with those given to change, for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?”* The apostle Paul and the apostle Peter both drew on these verses in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. We should obey God, and we should obey the government in everything that does not contradict the Word of God.

And we should not associate with rebels and revolutionaries - that's the idea in *“those given to change.”* However, if government is going in the wrong and ungodly direction, this proverb does not mean that we shouldn't vote for change when change is needed.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

“If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen.”

President Harry Truman is said to have coined that “wise saying,” so it's not a Bible verse, but it's close to verse 10: *“If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”* In terms of the kitchen and the heat, the point of the proverb is: if you can't cope, leave the work for someone who can handle it. Get out of the way!

However, as a believer, you never really know how strong or weak you are until you're tested by the heat and pressure of tests and trials. The good news is that believers can be strong: *“Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1)*. So another saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going” can be said of every believer who looks to the Lord for strength.

So our practical application is really a challenge to be willing to “stay in the kitchen” of Christian commitment. Do your best to hang in there, even when the going gets tough! Stand firm, stay strong, and continue to serve. It will be hot, but the heat will never be too overwhelming.

But if you're not up for the challenge of being a committed disciple of Christ, and you're unwilling to stand up to pressure, you'll have to just cheer from the sidelines (as is the case with many Christians).

“If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen” may be a convenient cop-out for some people, but for committed Christians, remember: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going”!