

## Sermon 76, What Have You Learned?, 22:10-16

**Proposition:** Part 2 of Proverbs (10:1-22:16) concludes by reminding us of its main ideas about the wise son and his relationship to money, and asking whether what we've heard has made us wiser.

- I. The Fate of Bad Words, vv. 10-13
  - A. The Scoffer Is Driven Out, v. 10
  - B. The King Befriends the Pure Speaker, v. 11
  - C. Yahweh Overthrows the Words of the Treacherous, v. 12
  - D. The sluggard Asserts the Preposterous, v. 13
- II. The Fate of Bad Men, v. 14
- III. The Fate of the Reader of Proverbs, vv. 15-16
  - A. How Part II Began
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    2. The Discipline of Wisdom that Creates a Wise Son, v. 15
    3. Treasures of Wickedness Profit Nothing, 10:2
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  - B. What Part II Asks: Are You Wiser?
    1. Do you scoff, or speak purely?
    2. Are your words faithful?
    3. Do you verbally defend your laziness?
    4. Do you keep yourself to your own woman?
    5. Do you worship money?
    6. Are you a wise son?

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this evening to the conclusion of the largest single section of the book of Proverbs. As we saw, lo these many months ago, Proverbs consists of 7 sections, referred to in ch. 9 as wisdom's seven pillars. The first section is the connected segments in chs. 1-9; the second is "the Proverbs of Solomon," chs. 10:1-22:16; and coming up next are the thirty sayings of the wise and the further sayings of the wise, sections 3 & 4 respectively. Section 5 is the further proverbs of Solomon which Hezekiah's men copied out (chs. 25-29), while the last two chapters are each one section in their own right. Thus, as you can easily see, the section that comes to an end here in 22:16 is the longest portion of the book, and the reason that it is called "Proverbs." Essentially, these (roughly) 13 chapters consist of one-sentence sayings, one per verse. We have looked in greater or lesser detail at all of them. But as we come to the end, what does Solomon pull out? What does he consider most important to go

over once more? Well, we see a strong focus on the power of words to reveal character and determine fate, combined with a perfect repetition of the themes found in the first two verses of this section. We have come full circle, then, and this section leaves us with a single lingering question: Am I any wiser? So together, let's look at Solomon's parting words.

### **I. The Fate of Bad Words, vv. 10-13**

As we coast into the dock to park this section of Proverbs, what final thoughts does the sage leave with us? He focuses hard on words, and especially on the fate of bad words.

#### **A. The Scoffer Is Driven Out, v. 10**

He uses one of the few imperatives in the book of Proverbs, telling us to drive out the scoffer because when we do, we will also get rid of conflict, quarreling, and abuse. Yes, sometimes the conflict really is the result of a single troublemaker who sets everyone by the ears. In my own family, my next brother had this skill. Though in general a neutral observer would more readily identify me than him as the mocker, he had the ability to enter a room where six or seven of his siblings were sitting peacefully and get them all upset with him and each other.

So how do we handle this? Kick the guy out. Get rid of the scoffer, and the fights, quarrels, and so on will come to an end. Sometimes it really is as simple as saying "You're fired." Of course, as in the example I just gave of my little brother, sometimes you can't fire the person. Sometimes you have to live with him. But brothers and sisters, the point here is that the wise son should not be a scoffer. He should not be someone who laughs at all that the people around him hold sacred.

#### **B. The King Befriends the Pure Speaker, v. 11**

Instead, positively speaking, the wise son needs to be a pure speaker. How do you fix your tongue? By working on your heart! Imagine, if you would, an engine whose exhaust gas temperature is too high. Such a thing has been known to happen. What would you say to the mechanic who tried to fix it by putting an air conditioning unit on the exhaust pipe? Obviously, he's addressing the symptom rather than the problem! And so it is with an impure mouth. The mouth only says what's in the heart. The mouth simply repeats what the heart has laying around. The exhaust gas coming off your heart can't be fixed by putting some kind of attachment on your mouth; instead, you have to go to the root of the problem, which is of course the heart.

How do you train your heart to love purity when it naturally is corrupt and delights in corruption? The answer is two-fold. First, you must go to the wise Son Jesus for purification. You need to ask Him to clean your heart of its inborn corruption. And then second, you need to stay with Jesus because only He can change your heart to love purity.

What's the consequence? The king befriends the pure speaker! God loves you when you have come to His Son and had your heart changed so that your mouth speaks gracious words. Of course, earthly kings are famous for their love for flattery and their desire for approval rather than truth. But the good king, the true King whose name is Jesus Christ, loves the pure-hearted man who is a gracious-speaking man. Are your lips coated in grace? Or do your words singe everyone around you like the words of the mocker we just spoke about?

### **C. Yahweh Overthrows the Words of the Treacherous, v. 12**

Further, though, the LORD Himself is implicated as the one who stands against the scoffer and the unfaithful. His eyes watch over knowledge to guard it; God is watching out for wisdom and for the wise, for knowledge and for the knowledgeable! But He overthrows the words of the treacherous. Again, this is not always the case right away. Often the unfaithful and treacherous prevail for a time. But they cannot and will not prevail forever. God Himself stands against their words.

Practically speaking, what does this mean? It means that those who lie to get ahead won't prosper, not ultimately. It means that those who buttress their position with half-truths will not succeed. And it means that no knowledge is ultimately lost, because even if all human beings forget it, God retains it. He guards knowledge.

### **D. The Sluggard Asserts the Preposterous, v. 13**

The sluggard, meanwhile, openly attacks knowledge by telling the most preposterous lies! The whole point here is that laziness will stoop to any ridiculous assertion in order to justify itself. Don't buy it, don't believe it, and above all, don't say it! Brothers and sisters, tell the truth. The truth oftentimes is that you need to get your rear in gear and do some work. In fact, that's the truth most of the time! The wise son works hard — that's a theme that appears already at the beginning of this collection, back in ch. 10. Indeed, this proverb is a one-sentence summary of the triple salvo at the beginning of this section:

The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will thrust aside the craving of the wicked.

Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully. (Proverbs 10:3-5)

Brothers and sisters, in addition to telling the wise son by his attitude toward his father and his attitude toward money, you can tell him by his attitude toward work! I don't know whether Max Weber had anything correct in his *Protestant Work Ethic*, but I do know that Solomon says a wise son will work hard.

### **II. The Fate of Bad Men, v. 14**

Well, you can also tell a fool by his attitude toward women. A wise son loves his own woman; a foolish man loves a "strange woman." Now, we've seen this designation before. What's so strange about the strange woman? Just this: She is not yours. She's a stranger in the sense that she doesn't belong to you. She's not your wife. Thus, every woman except the one you've taken in marriage is a strange woman to you, as far as sexual relations or activity are concerned.

Well, what does this proverb say, then? It says that God punishes the men He's angry with by letting them fall into the mouth of a strange woman. Now, this is both disturbing and interesting. It's disturbing because it says outright that God punishes bad men by handing them over to sexual sin. Sin is often the punishment of sin. If you sin and make God angry with you, He may very well let you fall into bed with some floozy off Tinder. Now, the proverb does *not*

say that everyone who gets into bed with a strange woman is abhorred by God. But it does say that one way God punishes those He's angry with, those He abhors, is by letting them fall into the clutches of a woman not their wife.

What's interesting about this, though, is that it doesn't say "fall into the hands of" but "fall into the mouth of." It seems as though Solomon is continuing his focus on speech. The strange woman is almost never portrayed as physically alluring; rather, her power as portrayed in Proverbs is in her mouth. She is verbally alluring. She affirms your male ego and tells you what you want to hear. Yes, we think of the mouth as sexy, and presumably that bedroom connoisseur Solomon did as well. But the sexiness of the mouth is not in its perfect looks, but in its skill in speech. The man God hates will fall into the strange woman's mouth. It's a deep pit; once you've listened to those seductive words, you have a very hard time climbing back out.

The fool, then, speaks ill and listens to ill speech. The fate of bad words and the fate of bad men are alike appalling.

### **III. The Fate of the Reader of Proverbs, vv. 15-16**

Well, the final two verses close the circle with the first verses of this section in a very obvious way. They repeat the same two ideas in the same sequence.

#### **A. How Part II Began**

##### **1. A Wise Son Makes a Glad Father, 10:1**

Remember, 10:1 begins with the statement that a wise son makes a glad father. We have majored on that theme for the rest of our time in collection 2, constantly reminding ourselves that the descriptions of the wise Son are ultimately another way of describing the Lord Jesus Christ and that He always makes His Father glad. Thus, we've seen that the point of wisdom is to please your Father, and that Jesus walked wisely because He had an overwhelming desire to please His Father! We've further seen that the whole point of wisdom, the whole idea of what we're trying to do with wisdom, is to please God as our Father. Why be wise? Because you are already a son of God by faith. Don't think, then, that Proverbs is a book of laws or a book of advice that is irrelevant to the gospel. No! Proverbs is a book that tells us who Jesus is, and what He looks like. When you know that, then you know how to look like Him. That's what we were saved to do: please our Heavenly Father.

##### **2. The Discipline of Wisdom that Creates a Wise Son, v. 15**

Well, that first point made in this collection comes out again the next-to-last verse of the collection, which says that the rod of discipline is the way to create a wise son. No, it doesn't mention the word "wisdom;" instead, it speaks negatively of driving folly away. How do you get inbred folly out of a child? By using the discipline of wisdom. That discipline will frequently involve a literal rod, especially when the child is young. Later on, it will involve other forms of disciplinary action. We probably too easily underrate the effectiveness of physical discipline. But there is no doubt that here at the end of the collection Solomon is telling us how to achieve what he was talking about at the beginning. How do you create a son who wants to wisely please his

father? You discipline him. Parents, do you do this for your children? Do you do it for yourself? If you don't live your life in a disciplined manner, then you are a fool.

### **3. Treasures of Wickedness Profit Nothing, 10:2**

Well, the second verse in this collection contrasts righteousness and money. It says that ill-gotten gains, the "treasures of wickedness," are of no value because they don't and can't deliver from death. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing! That is, they don't give anything of value, and certainly not of ultimate value. Money can't save your life, not ultimately! So why do you worship money and stuff and bargains and deals as though they were the source of life? They aren't. They never will be.

### **4. The Treasures of Wickedness that Profit Nothing, v. 16**

Solomon specifically identifies two of those treasures of wickedness here in the final verse of collection II. They are the treasures acquired by squeezing the poor and the treasures acquired by giving to the rich.

Let's talk about those two kinds of ungodly treasure for a minute. What might you and I have that we acquired by oppressing the poor? An obvious answer is places like Rent-a-Center or other locations that charge twice the price for consumer goods, but that allow people to pay in installments over the course of a year or more in order to disguise the item's true cost. If you run a rent-a-center or issue credit cards that rip off poor people, repent!

But obviously, no one here does those things. Are we not guilty of oppressing the poor for financial gain? In one sense, I hope we're not. I would like to think that no one here does anything like that. But what about refusing to give time off to people who work for you? What about voting for policies and candidates who will harm the poor? What about saving money on the backs of your wife and children? All of those things are things you and I can do and sometimes do do that hurt the poor.

Let's think about the other side of it: Solomon denounces the man who gives gifts to the rich. Now, we probably look at that and think "Are you crazy? I'm even less likely to give gifts to the rich than I am to oppress the poor!"

But don't make that mistake so fast. In our own era, the most egregious examples of this phenomenon are gigantic donations to universities, culminating in the \$1.8 billion gift from Michael Bloomberg to Johns Hopkins in the fall of last year. Many other such gifts are on the record, though, from the \$750 million the Resnicks gave to Caltech in 2019 to the \$350 million the Morningside Foundation gave to Harvard in 2014. Folks, these are gifts to universities with billions of dollars in the bank. They are pretty much classic examples of giving to the rich. There is no blessing in that kind of activity! It may not precisely be a sin in the same way that oppressing the poor is, but it is certainly an activity that any follower of Jesus Christ should regard with deep suspicion. Do you give to your alma mater? Should you? Or would the money be better spent giving to a poverty-stricken foundation or crisis pregnancy center that actually helps the poor? Brothers and sisters, there is enough need in the world to absorb all of the surplus we humans have been able to generate. The wise son gives to the poor, as exemplified above all

by the ultimate gift, Jesus Christ, who gave His life and His righteousness for poor lost sinners here on earth.

I don't want to hear that one of you gave a donation to Harvard. I don't want to hear that one of you gave a donation to Johns Hopkins. Don't give to the rich! And the same goes for any non-profit to which you choose to donate. If the non-profit could fairly be described as "rich," it's not an appropriate place for a follower of Jesus to give. While I'm saying this, just let me mention that Ligonier Ministries' total net assets grew from \$25 million in 2017 to \$36 million in 2018. Brothers and sisters, the one who gives to the rich will surely come to poverty. God has riches in store for the generous; Proverbs tells us that repeatedly. But there are no riches in store for the lazy who just give where it's easy to give. Indeed, if you do insist on giving to the rich, you will come to poverty.

So, seeing as how most of us are quite rich, and have very little direct contact with the poor, whether in terms of seeing them or of squeezing them, we need to ask ourselves this: how much do I give to the rich? Why? Why am I not giving more to the poor?

Brothers and sisters, we followers of Christ here in the USA are famous for our generosity. We are tied with Myanmar for the position of most generous nation on Earth. Yet do we do our homework? Do you do your homework? How much time did you spend last year determining which charitable causes to invest in? If the answer is "20 minutes," shame on you. That is not how a wise son behaves!

## **B. What Part II Asks: Are You Wiser?**

So we've seen what this section of Proverbs has to say to us. But now we come to the final question: Are you any wiser because of it? Are you better off? Do you understand more than you did? Do you live in a way that's more appropriate for a wise son who has become a son of God through faith in Jesus Christ?

### **1. Do you scoff, or speak purely?**

Our passage this morning crystallizes this question in half-a-dozen ways. Do you scoff, or speak purely? When's the last time you mocked something? When is the last time someone of noble character and position reached out to you and found you trustworthy as a friend?

### **2. Are your words faithful?**

Are your words faithful? Are they the sort of thing that God will defend, or that He will overthrow? Are you glad or sorry about how you spoke to your children this week?

### **3. Do you verbally defend your laziness?**

How about your laziness? Do you admit it and do your best to forsake it, or do you defend it with the most outrageous and improbable lies?

### **4. Do you keep yourself to your own woman?**

Do you keep yourself to your own woman, or do your eyes wander after other ones?

### **5. Do you worship money?**

Do you worship money? Do you act like it can deliver from death? If I talk to you, will I only hear financial information, with nothing spiritual in sight?

## **6. Are you a wise son?**

And finally, the ultimate question: Are you a wise son? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you want to please your Heavenly Father in your heart of hearts and therefore in your daily life? Brothers and sisters, commit with me that you will walk wisely, that you will give to the poor and not to the rich, and that you will work hard to please your Father.

That's what Solomon wanted. That's what he hoped for when he wrote his book. He will have succeeded if by the power of the Holy Spirit you act now to please your Father by being a wise son. Amen.