

Proverbs 23-03-29b

Let's return now to our study in Proverbs in chapter six. We have seen the first three sections, the surety to a stranger section, the sluggard versus the ant section, the wicked man section, and then this fourth section, which as was wisely pointed out during the break does have a chiasmic structure versus 17 through 19. If you look at that closely, you can see that the outside and then increasingly inner lines correspond to one another.

That brings us then to verse 20, which is a reflection on adultery. Once again, adultery is the primary vehicle whereby principle is being expressed. It is not confined to adultery or even primarily aimed at adultery.

This is the artifice by which this principle is brought to our attention. My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart, tie them around your neck.

When you roam, they will lead you. When you sleep, they will keep you. When you awake, they will speak with you.

For the commandment is a lamp and the law is a light. Reproofs of instruction are the way of life to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids.

As is the case in many parts of the Middle East today, women in the ancient world were clothed with a view toward modesty and the vast majority of their form was covered. So what did show would often be the ankles and the upper portion of the face. So alluring with the eyelids, this was one of the primary mechanisms and the use of the eyes and the eyelids, the expression in the eyes was a part of the seductive charm of many a young woman.

Do not let her allure you with her eyelids. This is the evil woman and the flattering tongue. She can speak from behind her veil if she's wearing one, but her speech and her aspect.

Remember the proud look and the lying tongue that began the preceding section? This is reflected in this adulteress. By means of a harlot, a man is reduced to a crust of bread. And notice a man is reduced is in italics.

By means of a harlot, you end up with a crust of bread. That is a far cry from the promise and the imaginative allure that is spoken and suggested by the fluttering eyelashes. You end up with a crust of bread.

An adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be seared? Notice this

is exposure to a thing causing lasting harm. You take fire into your bosom, even if you remove it, the singeing of your clothes remains.

You can dance across hot coals. You're no longer standing on them or exposed to them, but the blisters remain. And the extent to which seductive and salacious material creates exposure through our eyes and through our ears, notice she is appealing visually and audibly, what you see and what you hear, this exposure creates lasting harm.

It doesn't beautify your clothes, it burns them. It doesn't bring health to your feet, it blisters them. And that effect lasts after the exposure is gone.

Anybody that's burned themselves, doesn't matter how quick you grab the ice, you get a severe enough burn, it is going to blister. You're gonna be suffering with that thing for days. Momentary exposure, long-term harm.

This is why avoidance is the key to not being entangled and reduced to a crust of bread by such things. So it is, verse 29, he who goes into his neighbor's wife, whoever touches her shall not be innocent. Now, the picture here is adultery.

This is something that is forbidden because it breaks covenant. It breaks covenant. There is a covenant in marriage to violate, breach, break, tread upon, disregard, disrespect that covenant is in view.

So adultery, sleeping with another man's wife violates his covenant with his wife, her covenant with her husband and one's own. So two covenants are broken at the same time. Covenant breaking is what God hates.

Now, are there other ways that that covenant can be broken? Can you break that covenant in your imagination? That is horrifying to me to hear people talk about, well, when I'm with my loved one, it's not always who they're married to, although it ought to be, but they say, you know, I'm fantasizing that he or she is someone else. That is this, there is no difference. You are breaking faith.

You are breaking covenant by imagining that you are with someone else. And you can imagine the application in other areas, whether it is watching salacious material in movies or in print or via the internet. There is one of the most lucrative internet industries, if not the most lucrative is the pornography industry.

Pornographic material, and it spreads far and wide. There is, it implicates children. It involves human trafficking and human slavery.

It goes into pernicious and vulgar areas that can't even be spoken of in polite company. But all of this comes under the umbrella pictured here. People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving.

Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold. It is still a crime, even if there is some emotional justification. People don't despise a thief if he is so hungry that he's going to take to live.

He's got a compulsive need. But when he is found, he must restore sevenfold. He may have to give up all the substance of his house because he has nevertheless incurred a debt.

It is still wrong. It doesn't become unwrong because there is an extenuating circumstance. Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding.

He who does so destroys his soul. He destroys his soul because it is the thinking. It is the self-justification.

It is the blinding oneself to the covenant implications. It is the deceiving out of one's own heart. It is blinding oneself to the effect on one's own spouse and to the spouse of the person with whom the adultery is accomplished.

This is pride. It is self-centeredness. It is self-gratification at the expense of others.

It is failing to think of others. It violates the essential principle of the golden rule, do unto others as you would have others do unto you. And this is utter disregard for anything but one's own short-term gratification.

Destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get. His reproach will not be wiped away.

You can't ever get out from under the guilt and the identity of having committed this. Restoring sevenfold something that you steal can be done if you steal food. But if you steal someone's faithfulness to covenant, if you ruin their character and their integrity, there is no sevenfold restoration that will make that right.

And you see the contrast. You can understand somebody who is hungry, stealing food, and they can restore that food. And if they can't restore the food, maybe their house will be taken to restore the value.

Value, somebody can understand a thief who steals something tangible. But when you rob and destroy the intangible, there is no restoration. There's no fixing that.

And that's the contrast that is given here. 34, jealousy is a husband's fury. He will not spare in the day of vengeance.

He will accept no recompense, nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts. You can't restore or appease an intangible injury and a permanent damage no matter how many gifts you try to give. This is an evil of a different order.

And there are such evils elsewhere in human life besides the marriage covenant. There are other covenants. There are other bonds.

There are other agreements that we enter into. And to breach the intangible, to corrupt and pervert and subvert the intangibles, there is no fix and there is no remedy. And there is a day of vengeance that will come.

Do you recall in the last few chapters of Revelation that dogs and fornicators and all liars are never able to enter the new Jerusalem? These types of breach of trust, breach of covenant are irretrievable. They have consequences that go into eternity. Something to think about.

Well, that is chapter six in a nutshell. Turn to chapter 10. Chapter 10 of Proverbs.

There is a clear break from the first nine chapters which are introductory, composed of long poems and lengthy discourses on a given topic. Now we have a new section. The Proverbs of Solomon, it says in chapter 10, verse one.

Let's read verses one through five. A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death.

The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but he casts away the desire of the wicked. He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a wise son.

He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame. You can continue for another few verses there. Blessings on the head of the righteous.

Violence covers the mouth of the wicked. Memory of the righteous is blessed. The name of the wicked will rot.

And you begin to glaze over if you just start reading these seriatim and don't stop to think about them. And I want to read you something that Robert Alter has to say in his introduction to the Proverbs, because this is a common observation and a common assumption about the Proverbs. As we have seen in our introduction, and he points out, the Book of Proverbs is not merely an anthology, but an anthology of anthologies.

It is made up of six discrete units, each marked editorially as such at the beginning, with notable differences of emphasis and style among the units. Chapters one through nine form a kind of general prologue to the subject of the instruction of wisdom. And we have seen that.

We saw the Lady Wisdom and the Seductress and the Crafty Harlot, Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly in chapter nine. The recurring theme in this initial unit, that the fear of the

Lord is the beginning of wisdom, also sets it apart from subsequent collections in which wisdom is more typically thought of without theological trappings. We see the consequences of wisdom and folly.

We see what harm or benefit may accrue or what the outcome in the individual's life, if they are wise or foolish, but you see far less reference to or implication regarding the fear of the Lord, what the divine point of view and the divinely appointed consequences might be. It seems to be more of a pragmatic and practical observation. The second grouping, which is what we are starting here, introduced like the first, with the phrase, the Proverbs of Solomon, runs from the beginning of chapter 10 to chapter 22, verse 16.

Many scholars think that this double ascription of the book to Solomon, who is celebrated in 1 Kings 5, verse 12 for his prodigious production of Proverbs, may have encouraged its inclusion in the canon, though that claim is hard to assess. In the one-line proverb, the symmetrical logic of poetic parallelism predominates. Does that make sense? These one-line things, you've got parallelism, this, but that, this and that.

It's a one-line parallelism where a topic is introduced and then something supplementary or complimentary is said along with it. And so it becomes sort of a one-line statement. Most of the Proverbs exhibit either neatly matching statements in the two versets or emphatic antitheses.

This is the longest unit in the collection. Then we have some others that follow. We're only interested in this one.

The large central core of the book from chapter 10 to the end of chapter 29 gathers these one-line Proverbs from a variety of sources. Is the part of the book in which poetry is liable to pose the greatest difficulty for modern readers. It's not like these themed poems that are lengthy and able to be analyzed like we have seen up to this point.

Now, some of the sayings are quite shrewd and events lively satiric perceptions like our door hinge example. Others, the admonitions show a good deal of predictability founded as they are on what the writers assumed to be tried and true principles for guiding a person through life. As a result, the poetry is sometimes boilerplate language, a rehearsal of traditional formulas.

And he says that the author of Job often puts these sort of platitudinous sayings into the mouths of Job's friends. They're kind of trite, they're truisms, they're sort of self-evident and they don't seem very deep or very subject to theological grist for the mill, right? And that is true, especially if you take them singly and treat them individually. And this is where I'm leaving the book behind because he just goes on to say, some of these are kind of trite, we can skip over them.

They're repetitious, you'll find them in more than one place in the book. And so I asked

myself this question, see if this is a question that has come to your mind. Do you really think that God would put truisms and platitudinous self-evident observations into the Bible? To me, the Bible is relatively small.

I would love to have a Bible that was 10 times as big, but it's only so big. And there's only so much space. So is God going to waste space repeating himself or saying things that anybody would say? And well, okay, somebody collected that from a Minnerabtad or somebody in Egypt and thought it was a good saying.

And so he just threw it in there because a stitch in time saves nine. The one in the hand is worth two in the bush. Really? Is that what God has did? Some of the Proverbs are kind of a waste and let's skip over those and get to the ones that have a satiric sharp wit and a door hinge and a sluggard in bed.

Okay, now I like that one. I don't think so. I have a suspicion.

In fact, I have a strong assumption that every word that proceeds from the mouth of God is valuable. So if you come to something that seems platitudinous, there must be something else going on, right? So one needs to look for a structure or a pattern or something that requires one to step back and do some thinking. If you're just gonna rip through and okay, a proverb a day for a year, there's this many Proverbs.

I got 22 chapters of them. So let's say I take two Proverbs. I'm just gonna read them.

That'll be my proverb or two for the day. Okay, so the righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not inherit the earth. Okay, I think I kind of knew that.

I don't expect God's gonna grant inheritance to the wicked. And I think he's gonna reward the righteous. So what have I learned here? How is this proverb helping me? Well, if you rip it out of its context, that's gonna be very difficult.

What are our three rules of biblical interpretation? I just reviewed this on Sunday. Hopefully you remember them. Context, context, and context.

Except in the Proverbs, sorry, no. All scripture is God-breathed and profitable. But it doesn't mean you can slice it up into tiny cubes and every little cube is gonna be profitable.

Many times the profit is in the structure. The profit is in the entirety of which that scripture is a part. And if you take a part and it doesn't seem to have particular value, that is a clue that it has been extracted from something larger where it plays an integral role in providing meaning and in contributing to understanding and that which is manna for the soul and that whereby we live.

Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God is what man lives by, right? So maybe

you sliced it too fine. Maybe you put your steak in a blender and you wonder why it doesn't seem like steak anymore. It seems like pate.

Well, don't do that. So let me suggest to you, and I did a lot of work on this because I can't find anybody that finds any structure and profit. There probably is somebody.

I'm sure somebody somewhere. And I'll give you a hint. I think the people that put the New King James together were attempting to find some sort of logic to the arrangement.

Look at your page, if your New King James is like mine, and do you notice that there is a gap between verse one and verse two? Do you have a blank line between those in your New King James? Do you have a gap between verse three and verse four? Debbie, yours is a perverse and uninspired New King James. If you don't have spaces, but oh, well, no wonder. You've got the devil's version there.

The New American, no, New American Standard is great. But in the New King James, if you have one before you, which you should, I'm kidding. I'll give you one.

There's one not far from you. You'll notice that there are spaces between verse one and two. Three and four, I'm sorry, two and three are put together, and then there's a space.

Four and five are put together, and then there's a space. And they see that there is some related material in these verses. You see that? And whoever did this, my hat is off, because I see the same thing, but I see it on a little bit larger scale.

Here's what I'm going to suggest to you. For the bulk of this chapter, we are going to have five verse chunks. So after the introduction to this new section, which is a title, the Proverbs of Solomon, we now have verse one and verse two.

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother. With that goes verse two. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death.

At the center, and put a circle around it, is verse three. This is the gem in the setting. Verse one and verse two are the initial part of the setting.

Verse three is the gem. Verse four and five are going to be the other side of the setting. So in the middle, as you might expect, the only verse of these five that mentions the Lord is this one.

The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but he casts away the desire of the wicked. That is the central idea of this five verse section. Now, if you look at these, each verse is composed of two lines.

Wise son makes a glad father is line one. Foolish son, grief of his mother, that's line two. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing is the first line of that next verse and so on.

Or you could number them one, two, three, four, then you've got the two in the middle. However you want to divide this up, I'm just saying verse one and verse two are an introductory section. You have this verse three that is at the center, verses four and five follow.

This pattern repeats four times exactly in this chapter all the way through. In fact, one, two, three, four, five times all the way to verse 26. Verses one through 26 is comprised of these.

Now, initially some of these pairings and some of these parallels and some of these symmetries don't look like they go together. And when you look at them, one side of that pairing looks like one of these trite truisms. And you think, well, duh, of course, anybody knows that would be true.

But when you look at its paired truth on the other side of the gem, you say, oh, now it has gone from a superficial truism to something fairly deep. So we're gonna take these one at a time. Let's start with verses one through five.

Let me just, to help you see the symmetry, do you notice that after the title, which is really not a part of verse one, a wise son makes a glad father, foolish son is the grief of his mother. What am I saying is the corresponding verse to verse one? Verse five, right? How does verse five begin? He who gathers in summer is a wise, what? Son. Ah, my clue.

Son hasn't been mentioned since verse one, but here it is mentioned again. Do you notice in verse four, slack hand, become poor, hand of the diligent, rich. Do you notice in verse two, treasures.

Being rich, you have treasure, right? So the idea of riches, of treasure, is repeated in verse two and in verse four. And here in verse three, the Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but whatever it is the wicked are desiring, that will be cast away. So at the center, the Lord is dictating what happens to the righteous soul and what happens to the wicked.

The wicked may want a lot of stuff, God is going to cast it away. But the righteous soul that is hungry will not be allowed to famish. The Lord will not allow that.

If you are hungry, you will be fed. Remembering that this is operating at more than one level, what should we hunger and thirst for? Think of your beatitudes. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, why? They shall be filled.

The Lord will not allow them to famish. So treasures of wickedness profit nothing in verse two, but righteousness delivers from death. How can you be delivered from death? Doesn't everybody die sooner or later? How can righteousness deliver from death? Because in your righteousness, where God feeds your soul, you are given something that makes death non-critical, non-troublesome.

It is not an occasion for loss. When you are filled with what God provides, you don't lose it at death. He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

What are you putting out your hand? What are you reaching for? Do you see how it corresponds to the desire up above? The desire of the wicked is cast away. He who has a slack hand becomes poor. There are allusions and connections within this five-verse section that help you remember it and move from verse to verse.

These were designed to be mnemonic. They were designed to be remembered. We can remember a short aphorism, but how much better to remember something that you can reflect on and take to the non-literal level and have spiritual benefit from? So what kind of foolishness becomes a grief to the mother? Look at the outside bracket in verse one.

A foolish son is the grief of his mother. Well, foolish how? Foolish in love, foolish in business, foolish in practical decisions, foolish in priorities. What kind of foolishness is a grief to the mother? He who sleeps in harvest.

Here is opportunity. Here is the time to gather. Here is the time to use your hand and be diligent.

As in the preceding verse, all of these are woven together. They connect, they tie together, they turn this truth in the light and show you different aspects of it. Righteousness is the key.

Using your hand diligently to acquire righteousness and the wisdom that is inherent and intrinsic to righteousness is the key. If you're sleeping in the harvest, you're oblivious to the opportunity. And the metaphor for this is people sleeping in church, there's all kinds of jokes about, I've seen Tim Allen talking about complimenting the pastor on his sermon because he slept to it so well and that kind of thing.

But there is a truth that when wisdom is available and we go somewhere else, we're not engaged, we're not concentrating, we're sleeping in harvest when we should be gathering while it is summer, while it is there to be had. There may come a day where we don't have internet, we don't have electricity. What we gathered when it was available is what is going to sustain us.

But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame. And so you see shame and sorrow linked together. And he who gathers in summer is a wise son.

He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame. A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother. And the son of each type is mentioned.

And it invites, this is the key, this new section. Have you ever seen a puzzle book where they say, okay, here's the kind of puzzle we're gonna give you now for the next page or

two. Here's one that is solved for you.

Here's the way you solve it. See how this works and it's real obvious. And then they start leaving things out in the next puzzles.

And you have to look back and say, so what is the, are they doing this sequentially or logically or how are they doing it? Well, this is the obvious one. It says, you can't miss this. I repeated son twice in verse one.

I'm repeating son twice in verse five. And so do you see that this is the beginning and ending piece. These things are gonna be this long and there's gonna be something in the middle that defines and pulls all of the threads together.

And they're gonna be connected and linked along. So you can take these five verses, but take them as a group, take them as a unit. Don't isolate one of them and say, well, I'd better be a wise son because I want my dad to be proud of me.

I want him to be glad. I better be not foolish or my mother will grieve. That doesn't do much for the soul.

But if you take this whole unit, that is a mouthful. That's a bite to digest and think of. Let's quickly take the second one.

Starting in verse six, blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot. Notice we've had righteous and wicked repeated in both of those verses.

Okay, so the repeated element isn't always gonna be in the same place. We had the son and the son in verse one and the son and the son in verse five. Now we get the righteous and the wicked in verse six and again in verse seven.

Then in verse eight, we have the wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall. He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will become known. He who winks with the eye causes trouble.

Remember we saw that back in chapter six. That's the wicked man who winks and he drags his feet and this, that, and the other. He who winks with the eye causes trouble, but a prating fool will fall.

Now pay attention here. He who winks with the eye causes trouble, but a prating fool will fall. Does that sound familiar at all? A prating fool will fall.

Did I not just read that? Look at verse eight. The wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall. Oh, a prating fool falling, brackets, verse nine.

So let's take verse nine as my center point and see if we work our way back out. I've got

the prating fool in verse eight and in verse 10. What do I have in verse six and verse seven? Blessings on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

Memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot. Look at verse 11. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

It's the exact same statement in verse 11 that we had in verse six. So here's our symmetry. It's a different kind of symmetry.

It's about the same length. You can easily see that verse 11 and verse six and verse eight and verse 10 are bracketing something, but it's not strict. We're not just counting lines and it's gonna be a robotic repetition.

You've got to kind of think your way through and be observant, right? You say, aha, so these are Proverbs for the wise. I can't just robotically go through here and mark them off with a pen and circle the middle and say, aha, I found the gem in the middle. I've got to think a little bit.

But now notice we know something about violence covering the mouth of the wicked because the mouth of the righteous is a well of life. And the other place that was mentioned is blessings are on the head of the righteous. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life.

His head is blessed because his head and his mouth are associated with righteousness. What he thinks and what he says reflects righteousness. Violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

And there's some notion here that this word mouth may be face, the face of the wicked. I kind of favor that a little bit because the head of the righteous, but the face of the wicked, it's only what you can see or perhaps what you hear. If it's his mouth, then it's what you hear from his face or it's his entire face.

But there is a shallowness there. Instead of the head and the mouth of the righteous being a well of life, but violence covering the mouth of the wicked. Righteousness and wickedness are emphasized here.

That's why we had two verses introducing it. Four lines, blessings on the head of the righteous, violence covering the mouth of the wicked. The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.

And you think about the ongoing legacy of those who have fought the good fight and finished their course and run their race. They are remembered with fondness, but the reputation, the name of the wicked decays. Rotting is decay, falls apart.

Pretty soon it's not visible anymore. And by whom is it remembered? By those who value righteousness, who value integrity, who value character. And keep in mind that idea that there is life to the righteous.

You don't end up with a crust of bread and in death. The memory of the righteous is going to go forward into eternity, but wickedness is going to be destroyed and forgotten. It will not exist in the eternal future.

It will be gone. So there is a lot to chew on here. As you look at these, you will see if you look at a section 12 through 16, you'll find verse 14 is the center of that.

And there are correspondences. You see sin in verse 12 and you see sin in verse 16 as your markers. When you get to verse 17 and verse 21, you'll find 19 right in the middle.

And you will find symmetries with the lips and the tongue and so on. They're so interesting because they vary. It's not robotic.

It's not rote. It's not mechanical. It's lively.

It's interesting. But my point here is don't take a single proverb out of its context and just say, well, that's a little great aphorism. These are part of larger truths and they are integrated and they are connected and they spark thought, reflection, meditation that is to our benefit.

These are applicable. We will see the meaning and the application of some of these next time. But don't let anybody short sell the Proverbs.

Don't underestimate them. Don't decide that some of them have more value than others. God has woven these into a beautiful tapestry as with all scripture.

It takes time to unravel. There is beauty in both the symmetry and the asymmetry. I was looking at a woman's face on an album cover.

It's the violinist for Secret Garden, if you wanna know. But when she was young, they had a scene that is largely trees. And if you look closely, you can see her face and the face of her accompanist and then husband.

It's beautiful music, but you can just barely see her face emerging from these leaves and tree trunks and so on. And if you look at her mouth, it's very asymmetrical in this depiction. One side doesn't look anything like the other.

And initially you think, well, how could an asymmetrical mouth be beautiful? She's a pretty woman when she was young, especially. But it is the asymmetry that tells you that this is a quarter view. It's not a straight on view and it's not a profile.

It's at a quarter. And so the left side that recedes, the shape is far different. And initially

all you see is the shapes.

And when you back up, you see, oh, it's a face. But that asymmetry, once you grasp that this is three-dimensional, you realize that there actually is asymmetry and a beauty there that you didn't initially appreciate. That's what these Proverbs do.

It's just amazing. The more you look at them, the more beautiful and more rich and more fulsome and more meaningful and valuable for application they become. And we're gonna see that as we move from chapter 10 forward in this great second section of the book of Proverbs.

But we'll close here tonight in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the richness of the spiritual meal that you have placed before us. We thank you for the Lord Jesus who has given us access to these divine truths in and through his own body offered on the tree, his own veil torn that gives us access to your very throne room.

We pray that as we seek understanding and as we reflect the hunger that we have for this righteousness by faith, that your Holy Spirit will reveal it to us, help us to understand it, see its pertinence and application in our own lives so that we can reflect your glory and vindicate and justify the work that the Lord Jesus did on our behalf. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.