

Proverbs 24-09-25b

We're in Proverbs chapter 14, and we are halfway through this particular chapter. We are now at verse 20, I say roughly halfway through, and we have seen how helpful it is to identify these sections so that there is more to any individual two-line saying than would meet the eye if you isolated it. So our next one is verse 20 through 24.

The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, but the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor sins, but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he. Do they not go astray who devise evil, but mercy and truth belong to those who devise good.

In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter, and this is literally talk, this is lip talking. Just remember we talked last time about lips being so expressive. Sometimes scripture will talk about the mouth.

Other time, the lips. I love the verse in the Psalms, set a watch, O Lord, on my mouth, keep the door of my lips. And there's a difference between mouth and lips.

Some words are very close. We had a good question on the break. What's the difference between evil and wickedness? And there's not a great distance between those two.

What's the difference between good and righteous when talking about a person? You have Tov and Tzedek. There's not a great distance between them. There is an emphasis or a perspective with these various words.

But mouth and lips is one where there is more of an emphasis. Lips is what people see when you're talking. And so they are hearing and seeing.

And there are expressions and nuances that come across as with body language. A big part of body language is the lips. When you watch someone signing to the deaf, you notice that they're not just using their hands.

They're using their face and especially their lips. And there will be exaggerated facial expressions that are a part of the communication process for someone who can see but not hear. And that's the lips.

The mouth, you tend to think more of the internal parts, your palate and your tongue and your guttural stops and that which goes on in your throat. So in all labor, there is profit. But idle chatter or these talk of the lips, idle chatter, this is that which is pleasing to someone else but doesn't really say much.

There are political candidates who are currently being accused of this. This is also referred to as a word salad. It has platitudinous, beneficent words and ideas and allusions.

But it doesn't actually say very much. That's talk of the lips. If that rings a bell with you, just import that impression and that idea into verse 23, because that's going to lead to poverty.

It's the Bible, folks. The word salads will lead to poverty. And then finally, verse 24, the crown of the wise is their riches, but the foolishness of fools is folly.

Notice there is a symmetry not only within this unit, but to the last unit. Didn't we just talk about a crown in the previous unit? The prudent will be crowned with knowledge. Here, he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.

And then the crown of the wise, the corresponding verse 24, the crown of the wise is in their riches, but the foolishness of fools is folly. And you think, well, wait a minute. I thought, you know, the rich versus the poor, and it's often the poor that are better off than the rich.

And what does this mean? Well, this is where our symmetry helps us understand, is this good rich or bad rich? Good rich makes tires. Bad rich doesn't make anything. So beginning again in verse 20 now, we've got the idea of the poor, and then you have riches again, or profit in verse 23.

This is going to be another, and I'll just save you the trouble. You can sit and figure this out on your own. Look at the concepts, look at the parallel vocabulary, and you will detect that there is a resonance and a linking between these verses.

But we have a V in verses 23, 21 that leads down to the center in verse 22. And then in 23, 23 and 24 correspond in a V like fashion, not a chiasm. It's not an inner and outer bracket, but 23 goes back to 20 and 24 goes back to 21.

So the poor is hated even by his own neighbor. There are themes that weave through this section of Proverbs, and these units have been juxtaposed. Didn't we see someone being hated in our previous unit? The man of wicked intentions back in verse 17, a man of wicked intentions is hated.

Is this good hate or bad hate? Should we love the man of wicked intentions? Remember love and hate in the sense of Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated? God doesn't hate Esau personally. He doesn't despise him and vilify him and desire his hurt. Hate in the Bible is often a policy.

God hates six things, yea, seven are an abomination to him, a proud look, a lying tongue, feet that are swift in running to mischief and so on. What does it mean by hate? It means it is opposite to everything I approve, everything I pursue, believe in, stand for, desire to embody. It is an antithesis.

Hate is antithetical to love. We tend to think of hate as I want to extinguish and

exterminate whatever this is that I hate. I hate roaches.

I will stomp on them. I will poison them. I will do anything I can.

Mice, I've got no patience with them whatsoever. You modify your opinion about rodents when you have relatives who keep them as pets and realize that they may not be quite as scary and evil as they are caricatured to be. We have sympathy for the rats that show up in the subways of New York in our movies because we know some personally, have known.

But the poor man is hated by his own neighbor. How does that compare with the man of wicked intentions being hated? There is a well-deserved desire to separate and be antithetical to someone that has wicked intentions. We want to be well intentions.

Our intentions and our motivations ought to be godly, positive, wedded to that which is eternal. But here the poor man is hated even by his own neighbor. This is a different context.

If you are hated because you are poor, who are you going to be hated by? Those who only value someone who can benefit them with their assets, with their wealth, with their riches, with what they possess. I like living next to a man that has a warehouse full of tools. I love him not because we have a great relationship in this hypothetical, but because he's got tools I can borrow.

I can use his stuff and it doesn't cost me anything. And so you have a relationship for what you can get out of it. Many a shallow romance has been built on a guy pursuing a girl for what he can get out of it rather than a genuine interest in the girl as a person, someone of character and inner beauty.

So the poor is hated even by his own neighbor. Shallow people and materialistic people find you of no value if you don't have anything that is of use to them. But the rich has many friends.

What kind of friends do you think these are? The contrast itself and whether there is a presence or absence of friends based on the economic status, this tells you something. It's hard really to assign a positive and a negative to this. Is it positive for the rich to have many friends? Well, remember the prodigal.

He had many friends while he spent his inheritance on riotous living. But what happened when he ran out of money? This is what you call fair weather friends or fat wallet friends. So the poor is hated even by his own neighbor.

That's really a shame that someone is hated simply because they don't have something you can get from them. The rich has many friends, kind of like pretty girls have many friends. Is that really the kind of friend you want? Is that someone you want to marry you

for your looks or your social popularity? Then in verse 21, he who despises his neighbor sins.

So I'm thankful to have verse 21 following verse 20 because hating a poor man and you're his neighbor, you ought to know better. You ought to be looking beyond his economic status. But he who despises his neighbor sins.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. We've talked about neighbor love as that next circle of endeavoring to be sacrificial and beneficial to people, but in a different way and to a different extent than the inner circle of the one and others. But despising one's neighbor, you sin, particularly if you despise them and hate them because they're poor.

That's a double indemnity. That is a double guilt. But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.

And this extends because the poor is the neighbor here to have mercy on a neighbor regardless of his economic status, but particularly if there is no way he can repay. And it is often a delight to be able to do for someone. And there is no ability or expectation of recompense.

And it in some ways simplifies the equation. But verse 20 and 21 go together. Either one of them considered in isolation, you could run amok and go astray.

But with them together, realizing that the neighbor in view here is poor, you can either benefit them and have mercy on them, or you can despise and hate them. Despising them and hating them on the basis of a superficiality or a circumstance is sinful. And you don't need to go try to befriend the rich.

They've already got many so-called friends. There are song lyrics that come to my mind, and I'll leave you to imagine what they are. Now the center, verse 22, do they not go astray who devise evil, but mercy and truth to those who devise good? This gets back to wicked intentions.

We saw the harking back to hating someone of wicked intentions by the allusion in verse 20 to who is it that is hated? There are wrong reasons to hate someone, and there are valid reasons to hate them in the sense of being antithetical and maintaining a safe distance from them. So those who devise evil, wicked intentions, should be hated, should be separated from. Now what's the practical outworking of this? We can agree with it in the abstract, but think in practical terms here.

Whether it is in our individual social circulation, our social contacts, those in our periphery, do we come across, do we associate with, either voluntarily or involuntarily, with people who it becomes clear over time, and it takes time, their intentions are not honorable. Young ladies who are invited out on a date, and maybe a second date, maybe a third date, but it may quickly become clear that intentions here are wicked. There is a

young man who is looking for someone to spend his life with.

There are other young men who are looking for someone to spend the night with. And there are wonderful, godly intentions, and there are shallow, self-gratifying, wicked intentions. People with wicked intentions should be hated.

You should not continue to take up with someone who is only interested in taking advantage for their own gratification. You can't run away fast enough. That's kind of an obvious example, but there are people in our periphery, sometimes they're related to us, sometimes they are co-workers, sometimes they are fellow students.

I've been in work groups where someone in the work group is only interested in coming to the meetings and participating to copy your work and submit it as their own. I am completely opposed to collaborative assignments. Because most of the ones that I know of in any depth, and particularly the ones I've been a part of, one or two people wind up doing all the work and other people coast.

And they've got all the excuses and dissimulations in the world, but a few people wind up doing the lion's share of the work. There are cases where the entirety of another person's part got done by somebody because they had wicked intentions. They're in the group so they can skate.

And they're going to use the group to duck responsibility. But ultimately the inheritance of such a fool is foolishness, because when they graduate they're not going to know anything. They copied other people's work, they plagiarized, they skated through to get a grade or to get a passing evaluation, but now they're unqualified.

They didn't actually learn the material. And it's going to cost them dearly when there are bigger stakes than a grade. And someone's health, someone's financial well-being, the outcome in a company when you are given an assignment and you don't actually know how to do your job.

And so you rush it, you copy it, you fake it, and this comes out and you inherit foolishness. So these, my point being, these units link. And not only can you look at the symmetry immediately, but look at what you just read.

These are sequenced for a reason. This section 20 through 24 comes after 15 through 19 for a reason. And having just reviewed, and remember a lot of these proverbs were committed to memory.

And so someone is reviewing them in their mind and working their way forward. And when they get to this section, they have just refreshed their soul with what was in the preceding unit. And now the poor man is hated.

And we think, oh, I was just thinking about hating a wickedly intentioned man. Well,

that's right and proper to hate someone with wicked intentions. But should I hate my neighbor just because he's poor? I should do the opposite.

If I've got a poor neighbor, this is Lazarus at the gates of the wealthy man. And why didn't the rich man benefit Lazarus who is his neighbor? He's just outside his gate. Why didn't he help? So being hated for being poor or being poorly off as Lazarus was, this is sinful.

Do they go astray? Do they not go astray? Who devise evil, wicked intentions? You inevitably are off the path. And so when you discover, you identify, you perceive someone in your periphery and they are out for number one, they take advantage of others. They develop friendships based on what they can get out of it rather than an appreciation for genuine character, genuine integrity, genuine values.

Separate. These people are deservedly hated. They are antithetical to who we are and why we're here.

And continued association is detrimental. The good apple is not going to turn the bad one good and saying, well, but if maybe I can be a good influence, stop. You can't be a good influence on someone who has made the decision and is constantly devising wickedness and evil, mercy and truth.

Remember our greeting in second Timothy, when Paul says to his son in the faith, grace, mercy, and peace. And Paul prays mercy on the household of Onesiphorus, mercy. What a wonderful benefit.

What a tremendous blessing to have the mercy of God. There is mercy and truth to those who devise, who figure out ways to walk in and bless others with good. That's the pearl.

That's the gem at the center of this setting. When you get to verse 23, in all work, in all labor, there is profit. But this talk of the lips, this superficial chatter leads to poverty.

We know this harks back to verse 20. There is a poverty that should not be looked down on and shouldn't be despised. But there is a poverty that is a proper result of all talk and no work.

There is a lot of speechifying. There is a lot of, and again, you can't help but think of politics in this regard, a lot of talk about what I'm going to do, but what have you done? What's your record? This is an interesting presidential election. It is unique in recent history because both people at the top of the ticket have a four year record you can look at.

That's rare. Usually you've got an incumbent and you have somebody who's running for the highest office in the land for the first time. Not so this time.

Each of these people has an executive branch record, particularly and uniquely these last four years because the president in the last four years has been nominal due to loss of ability. Those immediately beneath his office have been largely running the show. Fault isn't so much that you lose your abilities as that you don't recognize it and acknowledge it and others around you don't do so and bad things happen.

But there is an executive branch record of four complete years and so you can look not at the talk of the lips, but what did you do? Has what you followed as policy resulted in poverty? Were people better off or worse off? And I'm not trying to be political here. I'm simply pointing out this is one of the ways you can analyze and cut through the fog of political punditry and sophistry and advocacy and he said, she said, which we literally have this time around. What leads to poverty? Talk talk of the lips.

Talk doesn't get things done. Policies actions. That gets things done in work.

Actual work. There is profit in talk. There's poverty.

This is true, not just in politics. It's in our own lives. I can talk about getting something done or I can do it.

But it's work and I can find reasons why I can't quite get to that work. I was going to do it today, but you know, I ended up on the phone. I ended up talking to someone and I didn't get it done.

Talk doesn't get it done. Work gets it done. It's a biblical principle.

Remember, he who does not work should not eat in terms of support in the church and even the elderly widows are to work and then they eat those that are on the full-time support roles. We saw this in first Timothy and Titus. Then you come to verse 24.

The crown of the wise is their riches. The foolishness of fools is folly. Can you think of a more truistic self-evident statement than the foolishness of fools is folly? The foolishness of fools is folly.

The crown of the wise is their riches. One of the reasons that these things are sequenced is do you remember what riches is? When you pay attention to context in Proverbs, as there are two different kinds of poverty, there are two different kinds of riches. There are two different kinds of hatred.

There is a good kind of hatred. There are things that God hates. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with hate.

It is the object of hate that determines whether the hate is good, just as the object of faith determines whether that faith is good. If you have faith in yourself, that's bad faith. If you have faith in God, that's good faith.

If you hate that which is evil, that's a good thing. If you hate the good, that's a bad thing. Same thing here.

The crown of the wise is their riches. You could say, well, if they're wise, they're going to get rich and their wealth is going to be their crown. Which way do you take this? Their wisdom is their crown, and that crown is their wealth.

What is valuable is the crown. Have we seen a crown recently? Remember verse 18? This is why these have to be seen in their context. They're not just thrown in the blender like a bingo cage.

Look at verse 18. The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. The prudent are crowned with knowledge, and the crown of the wise is their riches.

So as we have already figured out in our earlier studies in Proverbs, riches in Proverbs is often talking about wisdom and knowledge, not material gain, not money, not flocks and herds and lands and houses. The crown of the wise is their riches, and this goes all the way back to verse 18. Looking at inheritance, and this explains why the second part of verse 24 is not just a weird self-evident and repetitive claim.

The foolishness of fools is folly. What was the concomitant in verse 18? The simple inherit folly. This is talking about inheritance.

It isn't just that the foolish man perpetrates foolishness, and that's foolish. This has consequences. This has a future.

This is going to be your inheritance. It's not just foolish now, it's foolish later. In the same way that learning wisdom and knowledge now builds into the future and becomes a crown that fades not away, we are warned, Paul says, watch out that no one takes your crown.

Wisdom and knowledge to maintain and be devoted to it, to love it, to cherish it, to consider our steps, to endeavor to be prudent has not just consequences now, but even more important consequences later. Being foolish now, there's a lot of people in the Christian world, and we've observed this in the past, that think, well, even if I don't do too well now, Jesus is going to come back. We're all going to go to heaven.

We're going to walk the streets of gold. We're going to have manna and hear angels sing, and everybody will be happy over there. Maybe I don't quite make it now.

I may make some foolish choices. I may do some bad things, but that's just in this life. And in the resurrection, it won't matter.

Jesus paid for my sins, and it's all going to be good over there. And people don't stop and think about Jesus saying that there are going to be first, and there will be those who are

last. There will be those who are inside the celebration and the wedding feast, and there are those who are cut in two and apportioned their lot with the hypocrites and cast into the darkness, which is outside.

Foolishness has consequences. Apathy and indifference, self-interest, failing to consider well our steps has consequences. And rather than getting invested in circumstances and society and politics and externalities of religion and what is Christianity doing and what is the impression in the world, we have got to focus on our individual destiny in Christ.

Pursuing wisdom now, as we are doing tonight, we're looking at the Word of God and endeavoring to understand it and have it make a difference tonight, tomorrow, the next day, to think back and use this as a measuring stick of our steps, our lives, our priorities, our goals, our values. Read these Proverbs and look at the potential for personal application. We're talking about the wise and the foolish.

It's easy to talk about that guy over there, but can we take our laser-focused vision and turn it inside and realize that all of these principles apply to me? I am either wise or I am foolish. Have you noticed how there doesn't seem to be any medium rare here? There's no intermediate ground. You're either one or you're the other.

You're either wise or you're foolish. You are either rich in knowledge and wisdom or you are poor. We are either sinning when we look at our neighbor or we are loving and approved in the treatment of our neighbor.

That brings us to this next section here that begins in verse 25, centers on verse 27, and goes down through verse 29. And we don't have enough time to do this justice tonight, but for homework, if you want to look ahead, see what you can do with these five verses based on what we've done with the preceding 10. You would expect that there will be repeated concepts.

There is truth and deceit in verse 25. You might watch for those things in the snares of death in verse 27 or in what follows. But primarily, the 10 verses that we've looked at tonight, how should we then live? It seems pretty clear when we're sitting here looking at it on the page, but will it make a difference as we pick up with life tasks, schedules, priorities, activities, conversations, input from the information age that surrounds us? Can we maintain this perspective? Can we do better in considering well our steps? And even if we are poor toward men and we might be viewed askance, are we rich toward God? Have we got the riches that count? You think about the rich man who decided he would build more barns.

And in Jesus' parable, what does the man hear? Fool, do you not know that this night your soul is required of you? Fool is the first word when he goes to bed planning to build more barns for his earthly success, his accomplishments in the horizontal. Fool, do you not know that your soul will be required of you? And what are you going to carry to the

judgment in your soul? Soul is the only basket we've got to carry to eternity. So what's in there? And to remember this at times other than Bible class is the challenge.

It makes great sense to us right now. What will we think tomorrow? What will we think Friday? What will we do on Saturday? This is the challenge to consider well our steps. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

We will pick up next time at verse 25 of Proverbs 14. Father, we are so grateful for the food, the manna for our souls that we find in your word, the fuel that grants your power and divine guidance, divine energy, divine enablement for living the life to which we have been called to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus who lived his life for your pleasure and not for his own, who was willing to drink the cup, that bitter gall contained in the cup that was necessary to achieve the greater goal of our salvation, expressing your love so sacrificial and so beneficial. We pray that as we reflect on it, as we rehearse in our minds what we've seen from your word, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to us in a way that is effective, that makes a difference so that we can continue to walk the narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.