

# PROVERBS



On Friday morning's edition of *The Current* on CBC Radio, host Matt Galloway hosted several panelists who were discussing the state of the current federal government. As the conversation unfolded about the nature of late term government practices, two items were noted as deeply concerning: the first was that the interim ethics commissioner was forced to resign because the government had appointed the sister-in-law of one of the cabinet ministers. For a position that would have to rule on conflict of interest and ethical matters, the panelists were scratching their heads as to why the government would put someone who clearly had a conflict of interest into a position where they had to rule on conflict of interest. The second item was how fellow party members of the Prime Minister were troubled that the Prime Minister would take a vacation that was clearly a gift – something that had gotten him into trouble before and had been raised with the Ethics Commissioner. And this has been our Prime Minister's struggle from day one, and it has been the struggle of both Liberal and Conservative governments.

The problem with power is that the longer you have it, the more you tend to abuse it unless you create intentional practices to keep it in check and are willing to have others help you keep it in check.

Proverbs is a manual to help future monarchs rule and reign. As we move into the later part of this book, we receive 30 wisdom sayings that Solomon had passed on. Many of these are directly tied to Egyptian wisdom literature, and scholars have noted that the first 10 of 30 sayings are almost identical to several from the 30 chapters of Amenemope. As Christians, this shouldn't bother us that there are wise sayings that have made it into the Bible because we have been told in Proverbs 8 that God has made the world with wisdom; so we should expect that any person who is seeking wisdom will find it – Christian or not. We should expect wisdom from other sources because 1 Kings 3 we are told that he married an Egyptian princess and made an alliance with Pharaoh, so Solomon would have incorporated wisdom from others.

Yet the book is becoming increasingly pessimistic about leadership and power, and whoever pulled the proverbs together ordered them in a way to make us think about how Solomon abused his power and didn't finish well. So we are getting into questions that make us ask, "How can we keep power from going to our heads?" This section of Proverbs has five parts that point us to the wisdom of Christ.

## **Internalize Wisdom to Answer Others**

If Moses taught that Israel was to bind the law on their heads and wrists, Proverbs tells us to apply our hearts to knowledge and find that it is pleasant if we keep it within us – literally in your stomach. Wisdom is not just something that we need outside of us; it is something we need to incorporate into our lives so that it just comes out of our lips when we speak.

**Living the Good Life: How to Keep Power from Going to Your Head – Prov. 22:17-24:22**

Andrew Hall

CBC Ilderton

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Internalizing wisdom will do two things for us. First, it will enable us to trust in the Lord. How does wisdom help us to trust the Lord? I think there are two ways it does this for us. First, we see that the Lord's wisdom is practical and works in life, and that enables us to trust that his wisdom works for our good. The second thing that wisdom does to help us trust the Lord is it enables us to see that his wisdom is for all of life.

The wisdom of God has been given to us, first in Scripture. This is why v. 19 says it has been made known to us – this idea of wisdom being passed down from the sacred writings to us. This wisdom then allows us to discern the wisdom of others who are not Christians so that we can know what is right and true to give an answer to others.

Wisdom has to be internalized so that when questions come up, when temptations come to abuse power, we need wisdom to guide us and give us the reasons why we won't do what people are tempted to do – abuse power.

### **Be Skillful With Wealth (22:22-23:11)**

The opening and closing verses of this section point out that power can be abused by taking financial advantage of others, and the first verse warns about robbing from the poor. The reason for this is that both 22:22 and 23:11 say that the Lord will plead their cause.

This section is filled with 10 sayings, nine of which in Hebrew begin with the idea of "Do not". Over and over, there are cautions about wealth. In chapter 23, the warnings about wealth are that you can be led astray by power. People use power to influence, so it can be deceptive (v. 3), and it's fleeting (v. 5), and waste your words (v. 8).

The danger of wealth is that if you aren't wise, you can squander it (vv. 26-27). And when you have a taste of wealth and power, you may be tempted to gain more in ways that take advantage of people.

What is commended instead is that we become skillful in work and advance by honest, diligent labour. This is the way to be promoted – to stand before kings. In other words, working hard with your hands and not taking from others is God honouring. Jesus taught this principle in the parable of the talents. The men with 5 and 2 talents who invested their master's treasure were blessed with more and were given more. As we work hard, honestly, and with wisdom, what happens is that God will make you a blessing to be a blessing. The skill of wealth is to use it to bless others, not to take advantage of others for our benefit.

If power corrupts, then wealth must be used in a way that blesses instead of being used for our own self-promotion. And this means that we need to...

### **Give Our Heart to Discipline (23:12-24:2)**

Over and over we hear in this section commands about the heart. If you attended Corporis this year, we heard from Craig Troxel who reminded us that the heart is the center of our being. It is where our mind, our feelings, and our desires all come together. And the father instructs his son to apply his heart to instruction (v. 12), to direct his heart in the way of life (v. 19), and give his heart to follow his father as he follows the commands (v. 26).

The reason for giving attention to our heart is that our minds, our feelings, and our desires all need to be shaped by wisdom. Power and wealth and influence bring temptation, and three temptations are mentioned. First, there is the caution in vv. 20-21 about hanging out with people who are drunkards and gluttons. People who indulge their appetites will encourage you to do the same. And the principle here is simple: people who don't know how to use their power indulge themselves and will encourage you to indulge yourself. The end of this is poverty – they eat and drink their lives away to ruin and will take you with them.

The second appetite is sexual desire. In vv. 26-28, the son is warned again about adultery, and the principle here is that being self-controlled in our sexual desires is necessary when we have power and influence. King David is a great example of a man whose sexual desire got the better of him. He was up on his rooftop in the evening and was able to see out over the houses around the palace when he saw a woman doing her ceremonial cleansing. Instead of being a king who was out at war with his troops, David was abusing his power and taking a woman that wasn't his wife for his own. And the results were disastrous: David's sexual in seemed to cause him to struggle with his children when they sinned sexually, and it lead to abuse and death. Power rightly used has to be tamed, especially when it comes to our sexuality.

The final appetite is drunkenness. Verses 29-35. Wine tastes good. It goes down smooth, it sparkles in the cup. But in the end, it's like the bite of a snake and it causes you to lose perspective. You say foolish things and end up having people take advantage of you. And in the end, a lack of discipline will mean one more drink, and another, and another.

For this reason, this section ends with this warning in 24:1-2: don't envy those whose hearts are like this. Power is not meant for your pleasure. But if you don't use power how most people do...you will need to

### **Be Strengthened for Adversity (24:3-12)**

If you're going to resist the temptations of power, you've got to do two things – you've got to be strengthened and you've got to endure hardship.

So this section begins with an encouragement – build your house, fill the rooms with pleasantness and precious riches. Since wisdom is greater than silver and gold (3:14-15; 8:8-9; 16:16; 22:1-2), the house that is being built is not a physical house, but it is a house that has might and can stand against the temptation. It is a house built with friendships who give godly advice and it is the kind of house that fills up its life with goodness.

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The way you resist temptation is to fortify yourself with goodness. You fill your life with good things, you live in the right ways, you discipline yourself in the good times to prepare for the hard times. It's preparing for battle, it keeps you from the schemer.

We typically strengthen ourselves after we've been injured. We go to physio to recover and get more muscle. But the Apostle Paul would say that we need to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. In order to stand in the day of difficulty, we have to strengthen ourselves now.

The other part is that when we are tempted to use things to our advantage, we have to remember that the Lord keeps watch, and he will repay evil. We don't have to repay evil for evil. We can trust that God sees men's work (v. 12) and that he will judge every man according to his deeds (Rom. 2:6). Remembering who God is and how he will act will set us on the course of wisdom so that we can...

### **Live for the Blessed Future (24:13-22)**

This section begins and ends with the instruction to the son and has three commands, and it speaks about the future in vv. 14 & 19. Instead of lying in wait and doing violence, instead of rejoicing when people fall, and rather than worrying about evil, we fear the Lord (v. 21) and we respect authority (v. 21). We remember our future is blessing, whereas evil has no future (v. 19). And when we set our hearts on the Lord, we don't have to worry about political leaders – they are in the hands of the Lord (21:1). Power might be abused, but God is on the throne. Leaders might direct decisions of today, but God directs the future.

And when we trust in the Lord, we have a bright and blessed future – a future with him forever. Trusting him is the way of life and joy and peace. There is hope that won't be cut off (v. 14).

And all this is true because we can...

### **See the Wisdom of Christ**

When Jesus came to this earth, Luke tells us that he walked with the mighty and strong and influential. He went to the temple at 12 and Luke 2 tells us that he grew in wisdom and stature. He saw how power was abused by the religious leaders. He saw how they placed burdens on people that they could not carry.

And yet, here was the King of heaven. And how did he come? "The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," Jesus said (Mk. 10:45). When faced with temptation in the wilderness to abuse power, he had spent years preparing so that he was filled with the knowledge of the Scriptures and could say to the devil, "It is written" (Mt. 4). He knew what the Father had said. So when the temptation came, the temptations for entitlement, he resisted. He said no to the devil and yes to his Father.

And now, Paul says that when we trust in the good news of the gospel, what our Father does is he gives us the same spirit of wisdom and understanding by his revelation (Eph. 1:8, 17); and he lavishes it upon us. As we open the Word of God, as we listen to it preached, as we read it and study it for ourselves, we will grow in understanding more and more. And when temptation comes, he prepares us to walk in wisdom (Eph. 5:15) so that we can show Christian wisdom to non-Christians (Col 4:5) and show the power of God's wisdom in the church (Eph. 3:10).

So when power tempts, we remember the greatest display of power was seen not in taking, but in giving, for Jesus said "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)