

The Proverbs

Lesson 23

Proverbs 20

Proverbs 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

The consumption of wine causes a person to act ridiculously. The consumption of whiskey often causes a person to become rough, noisy and quarrelsome. People who lose control of their faculties or behavior because of wine or strong drink are fools.

Proverbs 20:2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

The first clause of this verse is almost like Proverbs 19:12 which says, “The king’s wrath is like the roaring of a lion... .” Nothing is more dreadful than an angry tyrant king who cares nothing for the life of another human.

Proverbs 20:3 Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.

Some people live their lives in pursuit of quarrels and strife. They are angry with everyone. They do not agree with the opinions of anyone. They speak sensibly to no one. It takes only a moment of interaction to determine who is a man of honor and who is a fool.

Proverbs 20:4 The sluggard does not plow after the autumn, So he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

In Israel, the land must be plowed in late September and the winter wheat must be planted in mid-October or the crop will not make in the spring. Septembers in Israel include cold and blustery days; nevertheless, the land must be plowed in that proper season. The lazy sluggard will intentionally fail to do the proper work at the proper time and his crop will not produce.

Proverbs 20:5 A plan in the heart of a man is *like* deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out.

This verse is about the “man of understanding” rather than the “plan in the heart of a man.” A wise man will take the time to discover the plan that is within the heart. That plan may be godly or evil; nevertheless, a wise man will take the time to investigate that plan from the deepest part of a person in order to understand how to help or how to avoid evil.

Proverbs 20:6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?

Who can find a loyal man? Who is loyal in word and deed? Who can find a loyal man who is also trustworthy? A loyal man ought to be a trustworthy man, but that is not always the case. Many proclaim to be loyal, many promise to be loyal, but many are not loyal. Loyalty cannot be obtained through words alone; loyalty must be shown over time. A loyal man is a trustworthy man and he does not have to tell anyone that he is both loyal and trustworthy; such a character will be known by his words and deeds; however, neither are always positive.

Proverbs 20:7 A righteous man who walks in his integrity-- How blessed are his sons after him.

Righteousness and integrity go hand in hand. A righteous person will be a man of integrity; a man of integrity will be a righteous person. How fortunate it is to have a father who is a man of righteousness and integrity because he has set the standard of how people will think about his sons. It is then up to the sons to prove that they have the same character as their father.

Proverbs 20:8 A king who sits on the throne of justice disperses all evil with his eyes.

When the king sees all the witnesses give their testimony in his court, he will pass judgment will on that which is presented. If evil is inserted in the case and then found out, the king will change his decision and he will bring judgment against the one who inserts evil.

Proverbs 20:9 Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"?

Can anyone say with a pure conscience, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"? Can anyone cleanse his own heart? Can anyone purify himself from sin? A man can try but he will fail. Every person needs the LORD Who can cleanse the heart and purify from sin.

Proverbs 20:10 Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD.

Fairness is important to the LORD. He is fair to all in how He dispenses justice to those who deserve justice. A person who uses different weights and measures in the course of business is a stench in the nostrils of the LORD.

Proverbs 20:11 It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself if his conduct is pure and right.

Solomon already knew that a trustworthy man of integrity may have distinguished himself as such as a lad. That is not to say that a young lad will not be a child and act in childish way; yet for the lad of this verse, childish play and mistakes will teach lessons that will enable him not to repeat his mistakes.

Proverbs 20:12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made both of them.

Surely, Solomon means more in this proverb than just attributing one's hearing and eyes to the LORD; He made the eyes and ears of everyone and He deserves all credit. Nevertheless, it can

rightfully be said that all hearing and seeing should be directed toward the LORD and His divine will and glory!

Proverbs 20:13 Do not love sleep, lest you become poor; open your eyes, *and* you will be satisfied with food.

Sleep is important but it has its proper time and place in the schedule of every day. In Solomon's day and in most of history since his life, sleep occurs at night and work occurs during the day. In his day, the lazy sluggards often spent their nights in drunken evil acts and their days asleep. Such behavior leads to poverty. However, if, in the mornings, a person will open his eyes and go to work, he will not be in poverty and the daily needs of food and supplies will be provided.

Proverbs 20:14 "Bad, bad," says the buyer; but when he goes his way, then he boasts.

Here, Solomon presents an example of a man who curses that which he wants to purchase in order to obtain a better price for that which he craves. Then, once he has made his purchase, he proudly boasts of his victory. In the first place, he has lied about the product that he desires. In the second, he uses his words to badger the seller into a discount. Finally, he proudly boasts about his deed. All three acts can be sinful.

Proverbs 20:15 There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; but the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing.

Nothing of this world is as precious and valuable as the teacher of true knowledge, specifically that which is found in God's Word and applied to everyday life.

Proverbs 20:16 Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger; and for foreigners, hold him in pledge.

This verse encourages a creditor to take the outer garment of a person who co-signs for another. Holding the outer garment is the one surety that the debt will be paid. Israelites were commanded not to borrow money in Deuteronomy 9. They were also instructed not to take another Israelite's garment in pledge. However, they were allowed to lend to foreigners and strangers. In that case, they needed something to act as collateral and the outer garment was a vital piece of clothing that generally assured that the debt would be paid quickly.

Proverbs 20:17 Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.

Stolen goods may bring joy for a moment; however, such actions will soon expose the thief.

Proverbs 20:18 Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance.

In general, wars are begun by old men and fought by the young. The necessity of war is the usually the idea of one man. His actions precipitate a reaction from the opposing side. The victor will be the side that carefully prepares for the war through a multitude of counselors who have been trained in the art of engagement. Nevertheless, war is war and the outcome can never be assured based on training and strength.

Proverbs 20:19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip.

Slanderers are almost always gossips and gossips are almost always slanderers. If a person is foolish enough to share a secret with a gossip, he can be assured that that secret will soon be common knowledge. The wise person will not “associate with a gossip” and thus will avoid being slandered.

Proverbs 20:20 He who curses his father or his mother, his lamp will go out in time of darkness.

The fifth commandment reveals the proper attitude of a child to his parents. Breaking the fifth commandment could invoke the death penalty. In Solomon’s day, the snuffing of the lamp was a metaphor for one who suffered from the death penalty.

Proverbs 20:21 An inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning, will not be blessed in the end.

The LORD gives a clear example of this proverb in the story of the Prodigal Son. One son asks for his inheritance early, before the death of his father. That inheritance is soon wasted. The money he wasted could not be regained.

Proverbs 20:22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and He will save you.

The LORD has placed governments, rulers and magistrates in place to be His ministers over evil; however, not all such rulers are immune from evil themselves. Notwithstanding, the LORD will work through those He trusts to “repay evil” with a just punishment.

Proverbs 20:23 Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, and a false scale is not good.

This theme is important to Solomon. He uses it in Proverbs 11:1 and 20:10. Any gain acquired falsely will ultimately be put down by the LORD.

Proverbs 20:24 Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, how then can man understand his way?

Every person’s life has been established by the LORD including the days of his birth and death. The person who understands that his life is a gift from the LORD and makes his choices and decisions in light of the LORD’s direction will do well. The man who ignores the LORD will wander far from the most important decision of his life – to walk in the will of the LORD.

Proverbs 20:25 It is a snare for a man to say rashly, "It is holy!" And after the vows to make inquiry.

Simply put, it is a sin to make a decision and proclaim "It is holy," or praise the LORD before seeking the LORD's will in the matter.

Proverbs 20:26 A wise king winnows the wicked, and drives the *threshing* wheel over them.

In the process of preparing wheat for use in meals, the stalks were spread on the ground and a metal threshing wheel with spikes was pulled back and forth over the stalks to cut them up and expose the grain. Then, the employees would use rakes to winnow the grain by casting it up in the air. The breeze would blow the chaff away and the wheat would fall straight down to the floor to be gathered and ground into meal. In this verse, Solomon reverses the order in referring to the wise king's actions against a wicked person. First, he winnows them from the righteous; second, he executes him.

Proverbs 20:27 The Spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being.

In this case, the Spirit of the LORD enlightens the man by searching out and exposing the inner thoughts of the man's soul. Both good and evil reside in the soul.

Proverbs 20:28 Loyalty and truth preserve the king, and he upholds his throne by righteousness.

Good and godly kings are usually well established and respected by the people because his kingdom reflects his personal characteristics.

Proverbs 20:29 The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair.

Rarely will a young man seek to expound upon his wisdom. Even though most young men believe they possess all the answers to the world's problem and blatantly believe they know all the wisdom of the world, their focus is usually on physical appearance, agility and stamina. Conversely, old men rarely flaunt their appearance and physical traits, opting to focus on the wisdom they have acquired over the many years of life that is symbolically identified by their gray hair.

Proverbs 20:30 Stripes that wound scour away evil, and strokes *reach* the innermost parts.

By using the word "Stripes", Solomon is speaking of the open cut made by some sharp object. In order to heal properly, the two sides of the wound must be held together long enough for a scab to form and healing begin. Open wounds are startling to almost everyone and, as such, they are abrasive even to the eyes of an evil person. The "strokes" refer to a beating, and in this case one that is so painful that it damages the internal organs. Both stripes and strokes affect the body of clay; however, the external punishment of the temporal housing can fundamentally transform the direction of the eternal soul in most people!