



Proverbs - Chapter Fourteen

III Proverbs 10:1-22:16 - Wise Sayings of Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

The talk of fools is a rod for their backs. Even in laughter the heart may ache. Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker.

Introduction to Proverbs 14:1-3

The benefits of the sensible labour of the wisest of women (v.1a) and the prudent speech of the wise (v.3b) are contrasted with the way in which the acts of folly (v.1b) and the words of the fool (v.3a) ultimately result in self-harm.

- ¹ The wise woman builds her house,
but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.

Proverbs 14:1

The wise woman builds her house. Wisdom builds. It looks at what is and wisely considers how to make it better. Many homes have been made by a godly, wise woman who looks after the home and builds it: <<**By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established**>> (Proverbs 24:3). Adam Clarke commented, "By her prudent and industrious management she increases property in the family, furniture in the house, and food and raiment for her household. This is the true building of a house. The thriftless wife acts differently, and the opposite is the result."

The foolish tears it down with her own hands. Folly tears down. Instead of supporting and building what is, folly shows its destructive nature. The woman of a home has tremendous power to make it a better or worse place. Sinful people sometimes become highly irrational and foolishly destroy the fruit of many years of work.

- ² Those who walk uprightly fear the Lord,
but one who is devious in conduct despises him.

Proverbs 14:2

Those who walk uprightly fear the Lord. One who is upright through their heritage, past habits, and general course of life still has the decision to walk in their uprightness. Doing this demonstrates that they do fear the Lord. The first line of this proverb communicates the NT attitude towards Christian obedience. Their call is to be what they are. Jesus has made them new creatures in Christ; he has made them upright. Christian duty is to walk in that uprightness.

One who is devious in conduct despises him. The disobedience man shows that he really despises God and his authority. They say: <<**We do not want this man to rule over us**>> (Luke 19:14b). This displays the sinfulness of sin; it is often not only weakness, it often deep seated rebellion against God.

- ³ The talk of fools is a rod for their backs,
but the lips of the wise preserve them.

Proverbs 14:3

The talk of fools is a rod for their backs. The fool deserves the rod of correction: <<**a rod is for the back of one who lacks sense**>> (Proverbs 10:13b). In the word picture used here, the rod of correction is made of the fool's pride, and it comes from his own mouth.

The lips of the wise preserve them. The mouth of a fool brings punishment to the fool, but the wise man or woman is rescued or preserved by their own wise words.

- ⁴ Where there are no oxen, there is no grain;
abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.

Proverbs 14:4

Where there are no oxen, there is no grain. If the strength of the ox is the means for ploughing the ground to produce abundant crops, then keeping oxen in a stable is a necessary part of the overall labour, even though it involves the unpleasant work of cleaning the stable. An empty stable may be clean thus not requiring any unpleasant work, but it will not produce any abundance.

This is an important principle when it comes to church life and Christian community. There are some who, out of good intentions, are obsessed with making sure there is never any kind of 'mess' to address among believers. Each and every expression of spiritual life must be hyper-regulated and suspiciously

watched with the expectation of grave error. Not only is this an offence against Christian liberty, but it also creates an environment where, spiritually speaking, there is little increase - because no one will tolerate any mess in the trough. Derek Kidner commented, "Orderliness can reach the point of sterility. This proverb is not a plea for slovenliness, physical or moral, but for the readiness to accept upheaval, and a mess to clear up, as the price of growth. It has many applications to personal, institutional and spiritual life, and could well be inscribed in the minute-books of religious bodies, to foster a farmer's outlook, rather than a curator's."

Adam Clarke used this proverb to describe seven reasons why oxen were superior to horses as farm animals, concluding: "In all large farms oxen are greatly to be preferred to horses. Have but patience with this most patient animal, and you will soon find that there is much increase by the strength and labour of the ox."

Introduction to Proverbs 14:5-7

These verses refer to character manifested, in part, through speech: the faithful vs. false witness (v.5), the scoffer (v.6), the lack of words of knowledge from a fool (v.7), and the implication that such words can be found with a man of understanding (v.6). The verses appear to be prescriptive, i.e. walk the path of the faithful witness, as well as descriptive, that is, look out for those who manifest lying, scoffing, or foolishness. The Lord desires that his people be faithful witnesses; this is given in the Ten Commandments, specifically Exodus 20:16 and Deuteronomy 5:20, and the further instruction of the Mosaic Law; refer to Exodus 23:1-4 and Deuteronomy 19:15-21.

- ⁵ A faithful witness does not lie,
but a false witness breathes out lies.

Proverbs 14:5

A faithful witness does not lie. This simple and straightforward statement has much spiritual instruction in it. Shortly before his ascension Jesus called his followers to be his witnesses here on earth: <<***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***>> (Acts 1:8). One of the primary responsibilities of a witness is to simply tell the truth and to not lie. When Christians have a genuine faith and experience in the person and work of Jesus Christ, they can give simple, true witness to him.

A false witness breathes out lies. Again, this simple statement points to a great spiritual truth. Christians should never be a false witness for Jesus Christ and utter lies about who he is and what he has done in their life. This is often seen when his

followers embellish or even fabricate stories of miraculous healings, or pretending to have and use spiritual gifts to impress others. The Gospel stands any test without the need to add to it through falsehood, whatever the motivation for doing so may be.

- ⁶ A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain,
but knowledge is easy for one who understands.

Proverbs 14:6

A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain. When someone seeks wisdom and does not find it, it is evidence that they are likely a scoffer - someone whose pursuit of wisdom and the truth is cynical and superficial. Clarke observed, “Such may seek wisdom; but he never can find it, because he does not seek it where it is to be found; neither in the teaching of God’s Spirit, nor in the revelation of his will.”

But knowledge is easy for one who understands. Jesus promised: *<<Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you>>* (Matthew 7:7). This is a promise to the sincere seeker, the one who understands.

- ⁷ Leave the presence of a fool,
for there you do not find words of knowledge.

Proverbs 14:7

Leave the presence of a fool. Earlier Proverbs, such as Proverbs 13:20, spoke of the danger of foolish friends. Here the encouragement is to avoid the presence of a foolish man altogether.

For there you do not find words of knowledge. The fool and the wise man can almost always be known by their words. This is a wonderful and often neglected way to discern if someone is wise or a fool.

Introduction to Proverbs 14:8-15

This section is framed by verses that contrast the approach of the prudent (v.8a and v.15b) with that of fools (v.8b) and the simple (v.15a). It is prudent to recognise that appearances can be deceptive, i.e. a person’s exterior vs. the state of the heart (v.10 and v.13); the solidity of the house vs. the tent (v.11); and a way that seems right (v.12); and that whatever the appearance, the path of one’s life has consequences consistent with how it is walked.

- ⁸ It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go,
but the folly of fools misleads.

Proverbs 14:8

It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go. The prudent man or woman carefully considers and understands his way: <<***the upright give thought to their ways***>> (Proverbs 21:29b). They know the path they are on, their point upon the path, and their progress along the way.

But the folly of fools misleads. The approach of fools to their path is deceiving because they believe it to be wisdom and it appears so to the simple (v.15), when actually it is void of what is required for wisdom for they mock legitimate sacrifices to the Lord (v.9); their path is thus folly. This explains one reason why folly and fools can be popular. Their attraction is based on deceit, in the same way that the bait deceives the fish into ignoring the hook.

- ⁹ Fools mock at the guilt-offering,
but the upright enjoy God's favour.

Proverbs 14:9

Fools mock at the guilt-offering. This is in the nature of fools and their folly. They think sin is a light thing, worthy to be mocked. Their mockery of sin is connected with their lack of the fear of the Lord; refer back to Proverbs 1:29 and 8:13.

The reference to the guilt-offering; refer to Leviticus 5:14-6:7 for full details, indicates that the acceptance enjoyed by the upright likely means that the Lord accepts his sacrifice because it is given in sincerity: <<***If the offering is a burnt-offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the Lord. You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt-offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you***>> (Leviticus 1:3-4).

Clarke noted, "But he that makes a sport of sinning, will find it no sport to suffer the vengeance of an eternal fire."

The upright enjoy God's favour. Those who are upright before God and man find favour among God and men. The Hebrew *ratson* or acceptance, is also used in Proverbs to refer to what is a delight to the Lord, as in Proverbs 11:1, 11:20 and 12:22, or to one finding favour with him; refer to Proverbs 8:35, 12:2 and 18:22.

- ¹⁰ The heart knows its own bitterness,
and no stranger shares its joy.

Proverbs 14:10

The heart knows its own bitterness. There is pain and bitterness enough for every heart: <<***But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do***>>

not be boastful and false to the truth>> (James 3:14). The sense is that although one's heart knows its own bitterness, it is difficult for anyone else to know the pain and bitterness of another's heart. Charles Spurgeon commented, "We may not judge our brethren as though we understood them, and were competent to give a verdict upon them. Do not sit down, like Job's friends, and condemn the innocent."

No stranger shares its joy. What was true regarding the bitterness of life in the first line of this proverb is also often true regarding the joy of life. It can be difficult for someone else to truly share the joy of another's heart.

Spurgeon listed and described many joys that were personal in nature, and therefore often a stranger does not share its joy:

- The joy of sin forgiven.
- The joy of sin conquered.
- The joy of restored relationship with God.
- The joy of accepted service.
- The joy of answered prayer.
- The joy of usefulness for God.
- The joy of peace in time of trouble.
- Highest of all: the joy of communion with God.

¹¹ The house of the wicked is destroyed,
but the tent of the upright flourishes.

Proverbs 14:11

The house of the wicked is destroyed. Whatever is built on a poor foundation cannot stand, especially against the storm of God's coming judgement: <<***Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light***>> (Amos 5:18).

The tent of the upright flourishes. The wicked person boasts of his great house and looks down upon his upright neighbour who lives in only a tent. Yet the tent of the upright is more secure than the house of the wicked.

¹² There is a way that seems right to a person,
but its end is the way to death.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a person. Proverbs often speaks of the way, the path of life a man or woman walks upon. Solomon observed that this way often

seems right to a man. Their path of life seems fine to them, and they wonder why God or anyone else would have a different opinion.

But its end is the way to death. Although it seems right, it is not right - it leads to death. Wisdom understands that what may seem right to a man is not necessarily right; it can in fact be the way of death, as Paul would later teach: <<***Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?***>> (Romans 6:16), and: <<***For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death***>> (2 Corinthians 7:10). This makes plain the need for a revelation from God. People cannot entirely trust their own examination and judgement. To really know they are on the way of life instead of the way of death, people need to fear the Lord and receive his wisdom, especially as revealed in his word. The principle of this proverb is so important that God repeated it again at Proverbs 16:25.

¹³ Even in laughter the heart is sad,
and the end of joy is grief.

Proverbs 14:13

Even in laughter the heart is sad. The person who often laughs is not always happy: <<***Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad***>> (Ecclesiastes 7:3). The outward expression of laughter may be used to mask great sorrow in the heart.

The end of joy is grief. Laughter and mirth may do more than mask sorrow; they may very well end in grief. People are or should be grateful for laughter and godly mirth, but not if they keep them from the fear of the Lord and the wisdom associated with it.

¹⁴ The perverse get what their ways deserve,
and the good, what their deeds deserve.

Proverbs 14:14

The perverse get what their ways deserve. Those who decline in their relationship and obedience to God will suffer from it, even if their decline is only in heart. Their own backsliding ways will come upon them; ‘backslider’ is the KJV translation of **perverse** here. Spurgeon remarked, “The first part of his name is ‘backslider.’ He is not a back runner, nor a back leaper, but a backslider, that is to say he slides back with an easy, effortless motion, softly, quietly, perhaps unsuspected by himself or anybody else.” And again, “The story of Judas has been written over and over again in the lives of other traitors. We have heard of Judas

as a deacon, and as an elder; we have heard Judas preach, we have read the works of Judas the bishop, and seen Judas the missionary. Judas sometimes continues in his profession for many years, but, sooner or later, the true character of the man is discovered.” Clarke also noted, “What is implied in being filled with his own ways? Having his soul saturated with folly, sin, and disappointment.”

The good, what their deeds deserve. The wise ones who do good enjoy God’s blessing and the satisfaction that comes from him. As the prophet Azariah said to King Asa and the people: <<***But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded***>> (2 Chronicles 15:7).

¹⁵ The simple believe everything,
but the clever consider their steps.

Proverbs 14:15

The simple believe everything. The man or woman who lacks wisdom, i.e. the simple, has little ability to discern truth from falsehood. They believe everyone, especially if they seem sincere.

The clever consider their steps. The wise man or woman does not believe everything is as it first appears. While they do think carefully about others, they give even more consideration to their own steps.

Introduction to Proverbs 14:16-17

The wise gives thought to his path and turns away from evil. In contrast, the fool is reckless on his path (v.16b), a quality of heart that is aggravated further by a quick temper and results in his being hated for its ruinous effects (v.17).

¹⁶ The wise are cautious and turn away from evil,
but the fool throws off restraint and is careless.

Proverbs 14:16

The wise are cautious and turn away from evil. The wise man appreciates evil for what it is and keeps himself far from it. He does not overestimate or test his own strength in resisting evil; he departs from it: <<***The clever see danger and hide; but the simple go on, and suffer for it***>> (Proverbs 22:3).

The fool throws off restraint and is careless. Instead of godly fear, the fool rages with uncontrolled temper and outbursts. Despite his bad temper, he is self-confident. The self-confidence of fools is a mystery and a marvel. The word careless is also translated as self-confident.

17 One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly,
and the schemer is hated.

Proverbs 14:17

One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly. In the previous proverb the fool raged; here his quick temper leads him to act out his foolishness. The wise man has the self-control to not react immediately and out of bad temper. Clarke explained, “*Ketsar appayim*, ‘short of nostrils:’ because, when a man is angry, his nose is contracted, and drawn up towards his eyes.”

One biblical example of this is Naaman whose rage at having to wash in the river Jordan rather than one of his local rivers nearly cost him the chance to be cured of his leprosy: <<*Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?*>> *He turned and went away in a rage*>> (2 Kings 5:12)

The schemer is hated. The love that fools and wicked men have for each other is limited. The man of wicked intentions is understood to be untrustworthy and therefore hated. Heman was one such schemer: <<*Haman went out that day happy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and observed that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was infuriated with Mordecai*>> (Esther 5:9). He would eventually be executed for his scheming and his entire family brought down with him.

Introduction to Proverbs 14:18-24

The effects of inheriting folly (v.18a) or being crowned with knowledge (v.18b) are borne out in the fruit of each: a further crown for the wise (v.24a) and further folly for fools (v.24b). The verses in between show that the promised state of affairs in v.19 and v.22 is an encouragement to walk in the way of the good and righteous and not to devalue the poor or a neighbour according to their material means (vv.20-21).

18 The simple are adorned with folly,
but the clever are crowned with knowledge.

Proverbs 14:18

The simple are adorned with folly. Just as someone gains as inheritance that which is due to them, so the simple inherit folly. For those who wilfully reject wisdom, folly is due.

The clever are crowned with knowledge. A wise, i.e. **clever** or **prudent** man or woman enjoys the benefits of their wisdom. Knowledge sits upon them as a graceful and noble crown.

19 The evil bow down before the good,
the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Proverbs 14:19

The evil bow down before the good. In this present age it often feels that the evil win and sometimes triumph over the good. With true wisdom, Solomon provides a reminder that ultimately evil will bow in submission before the good: <<***the fool will be servant to the wise***>> (Proverbs 11:29b).

The wicked at the gates of the righteous. As if they came in humble surrender to the leaders of the city, the wicked will bow at the gates of the righteous.

20 The poor are disliked even by their neighbours,
but the rich have many friends.

Proverbs 14:20

The poor are disliked is an observation on how the world works, not an endorsement of such an attitude (v.21); refer also to the comment made on Proverbs 10:15. This is another of the proverbs that honestly describes the benefits of wealth. When a person is poor, they do not have as many friends and maybe one's own neighbour may hate them because of their status and situation.

The rich have many friends. This is a simple fact of life: <<***Wealth brings many friends, but the poor are left friendless***>> (Proverbs 19:4). The friends of the rich might be insincere friends, but there are more of them: <<***For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him'***>> (Jeremiah 20:10).

21 Those who despise their neighbours are sinners,
but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

Proverbs 14:21

Those who despise their neighbours are sinners. Men and women are made in the image of God, and therefore are commanded to love their neighbour; refer to Leviticus 19:18 and Mark 12:31. To despise is to hate, so to despise a neighbour is to commit a sin in the eyes of God.

Happy are those who are kind to the poor. Proverbs commends being kind and generous to the poor, particularly those among God's people; refer also to Deuteronomy 15:7-11. The generous heart is the happy heart. The link between the first and second lines of this proverb shows that whoever has mercy on the

poor should never do it in a superior manner that would show they despise the poor they say they help.

²² Do they not err that plan evil?

Those who plan good find loyalty and faithfulness.

Proverbs 14:22

Do they not err that plan evil? Doing evil is an obvious sin, but even the plotting and devising of evil leads people astray. God cares about the heart and mind as well as outward actions; refer to Matthew 5:21-32.

Those who plan good find loyalty and faithfulness. The wicked will plot their evil, but wisdom leads people to devise good for others and for themselves. This will bring the blessings of mercy and truth into their lives.

²³ In all toil there is profit,
but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Proverbs 14:23

In all toil there is profit. As a principle, hard work is always rewarded. Even if there is not an immediate profit from the work, there is reward from God and in the building and demonstration of character. As Paul once wrote: <<*The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone*>> (Titus 3:8).

But mere talk leads only to poverty. This is a rebuke against people who are always talking and planning but never accomplishing anything. If labour leads to profit, then anything that distracts from labour - such as idle chatter - will keep profits away, and lead to poverty. The reader can imagine a group of employees gathered together with idle chatter and entertaining conversation leading to no profit for their employer.

²⁴ The crown of the wise is their wisdom,
but folly is the garland of fools.

Proverbs 14:24

The crown of the wise is their wisdom. The circularity of the phrase ‘the folly of fools brings folly’ appropriately captures the self-perpetuating nature of the foolish path. The wise are free to enjoy their wealth and it is safe for them to do so, as they will not be led astray by greed. A crown can be anything that gives visible, public honour; refer to the comment made on Proverbs 12:4.

Folly is the garland of fools. For those who reject wisdom, the only crown they get is more folly. Their foolishness is multiplied.

²⁵ A truthful witness saves lives,
but one who utters lies is a betrayer.

Proverbs 14:25

A truthful witness saves lives. A person called to be a witness especially in legal matters must be truthful or faithful; the person who lies perverts justice – something that the Lord hates according to Proverbs 6:16-19. This is true on an everyday life level, where truth brings and light, blessing, and freedom. Where lies and false reports dominate, souls will be in darkness and bondage. This is also true on a spiritual or ministry level, where God will use the true witness of the preacher to rescue souls. Kidner observed, “A man who will trim the facts for you will trim them as easily against you; and a career or a life may hang on a word.”

But one who utters lies is a betrayer. Those who spread such lies and false reports fail to do the good of a true witness and they practice the evil of their lies. To be a false witness is contrary to God’s law: <<*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*>> (Exodus 20:16), and: <<*You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness*>> (Exodus 23:1).

Introduction to Proverbs 14:26-27

The fear of the Lord brings with it the confidence of lasting security (v.26) and moulds a person’s character to follow the right path (v.27).

²⁶ In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence,
and one’s children will have a refuge.

Proverbs 14:26

In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence. One might think that fear always leads to a loss of confidence. However, that is not how it works with the fear of the Lord. A person’s honour, reverence, and sense of awe towards God moves them away from self-confidence and towards strong confidence in God’s love and greatness.

One’s children will have a refuge. God always provides himself as a refuge for his children: <<*The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble*>> (Psalm 9:9), <<*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*>> (Psalm 46:1), and: <<*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe*>> (Proverbs 18:10).

27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,
so that one may avoid the snares of death.

Proverbs 14:27

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. One might think that fear always leads to less life, not more. However, that is not how it works with the fear of the Lord. Proper reverential fear of the Lord is rooted in understanding who God is and who people are in relation to him. That itself is like a fountain of life: <<*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence*>> (Proverbs 10:11)

So that one may avoid the snares of death. There are many additional benefits that come from a proper fear of the Lord, and one of those is to have a greater measure of God's watchful care and protection. Such is protection that comes from studying God's word and hearing wise counsel taken from it: <<*The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death*>> (Proverbs 13:14).

Introduction to Proverbs 14:28-35

Verses 28 and 35, both of which concern a king, form a frame for this paragraph. Verses 29-34 contain various proverbs on the life and heart of an individual. A person must rule his heart with wisdom (vv.29-30 and v.33), understand that all are under a higher sovereign (v.31), and have confidence that the wicked, however powerful they are, will be cast down (v.32). A nation perishes if its people lack righteousness (v.34). Ultimately, many of the same rules that govern one person's life also govern a nation.

28 The glory of a king is a multitude of people;
without people a prince is ruined.

Proverbs 14:28

The glory of a king is a multitude of people. Kings focus on the glory and strength useful and apparent in this world. With that focus, the more people the better. The great the multitude of people, the greater is the king's honour. Related to spiritual things and Christian ministry, the principle of this proverb shows the weakness of a worldly, humanistic view of ministry. It is of the carnal, worldly wisdom of kings to understand large crowds as the only real measure of success. The apostle Paul might rephrase this line, "In a multitude of people is a king's honour, but in love, faithfulness, and sacrificial service is an apostle's honour." A multitude of people in ministry is never to be despised, but Christians should have a greater measure of success than that.

Without people a prince is ruined. If there are no people to govern, there will not be much governing. In the ancient world rulers thought much about increasing the populations in their governed realm. The head of David's army Joab had similar advice for David as he mourned the death of his son Absalom instead of greeting his loyal soldiers who had gone out to fight for their king: <<*Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, 'Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your officers who have saved your life today, and the lives of your sons and your daughters, and the lives of your wives and your concubines, for love of those who hate you and for hatred of those who love you. You have made it clear today that commanders and officers are nothing to you; for I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. So go out at once and speak kindly to your servants; for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than any disaster that has come upon you from your youth until now'*>> (2 Samuel 19:5-7).

²⁹ Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,
but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 14:29

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding. There is great wisdom in the ability to control one's response to provoking situations. Being quick to anger brings many regrets. The person who is slow to anger, as in Proverbs 15:18, 16:32, and 19:11, as well as in James 1:19-20, reflects the Lord's self-disclosed character: <<*The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'*>> (Exodus 34:6).

But one who has a hasty temper exalts folly. The impulsive, uncontrolled person who quickly reacts without thinking lives in a way that exalts foolishness.

³⁰ A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,
but passion makes the bones rot.

Proverbs 14:30

A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh. **Mind** is literally 'heart.' If heart here meant the physical organ that beats in the chest, any medical doctor would agree. Yet Solomon had in mind heart as a metaphor for the innermost being. When a person is sound on the inside, it brings health and life to the whole body.

Passion makes the bones rot. The presence of envy, arguably a better translation than **passion** here, is presented as a contrast to a sound heart. Envy corrupts from within and can poison many otherwise good things: <<*A cheerful heart is a good*

medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones>> (Proverbs 17:22). Kidner commented, “The proverb teaches that to nurse a resentment is bad for body as well as soul: it is no sacrifice when we renounce it.”

³¹ Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honour him.

Proverbs 14:31

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker. To oppress the poor is to sin against them, but it is also to sin against and to insult God himself. To oppress and despise the poor is to despise his Maker, the one in whose image all humanity was made. Solomon goes even further in his condemnation of such cruel people: <<*Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished*>> (Proverbs 17:5).

Those who are kind to the needy honour him. The one who honours and loves God will reflect God’s own mercy on the needy. A cold, mean heart towards the poor shows a lack of honour towards God. This is reflected elsewhere: <<*You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns*>> (Deuteronomy 24:14), and: <<*Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts*>> (James 5:4).

³² The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing,
but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity.

Proverbs 14:32

The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing. Godliness and wisdom are useful for many things, and one of their great benefits is the way that they make for good community. Yet the wicked will be banished, being of no benefit and of definite danger to the community.

The righteous find a refuge in their integrity. The one who is righteous lives in the fear of the Lord and thus finds refuge in his integrity because the Lord rewards him: <<*But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me*>> (Psalm 49:15). The righteous man or woman enjoys refuge in the community, but also even unto his death. God will demonstrate his care for the righteous.

The OT in general and the Book of Proverbs in particular do not have much specific information or confidence in the life to come. There are rare flashes of this confidence, and a refuge in his death is one of those. Kidner observed,

“Job and the Psalms show occasional glimpses, such as this, of what lies normally beyond their view.”

³³ Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding,
but it is not known in the heart of fools.

Proverbs 14:33

Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding. Wisdom resides in the heart of the wise, but even in the heart of fools it can make itself known by manifesting the effects of folly - the picture of Wisdom calling out in the street to the simple, and the effects of rejecting her reproof; refer to Proverbs 1:20-33.

But it is not known in the heart of fools. The wisdom of a wise man’s heart will be revealed; so will the folly of the fool’s heart. What a person is will eventually be evident in what they do.

³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation,
but sin is a reproach to any people.

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation. Morally righteous behaviour has far-reaching effects – especially in the administration of justice and the compassionate care of people: <<*By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked*>> (Proverbs 11:11). Both the moral behaviour and the well-being of the people are exalted. Paul explains this in greater detail in Romans 13:1-7.

Because righteousness is to follow God’s will and God’s way, it will always exalt a person, a family, a neighbourhood, a city, a state, or even an entire nation. This is both because of the natural consequences of righteousness and because of God’s active response of blessing. Many things may, from a human perspective, exalt a nation. Military might, economic prosperity, status among nations, cultural influence, and sporting victory may each make a nation seem exalted. Yet ultimately none of those things match righteousness as a way a nation is truly exalted. One might say that the most patriotic thing a citizen might do is repent of their sin and then receive and pursue God’s righteousness in their life.

But sin is a reproach to any people. When people reject righteousness and choose sin, it will bring reproach and insult upon them. People never gain through their rejection of God and their embrace of sin.

35 A servant who deals wisely has the king's favour,
but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.

Proverbs 14:35

A servant who deals wisely has the king's favour. On a human level, there is nothing greater than the favour of those in places of power and prestige such as kings. Having that favour is one of the rewards of wisdom.

His wrath falls on one who acts shamefully. Kings are allergic to shame. Their power and presence rests upon the image of success and majesty. Therefore, to cause shame is to gain the wrath of the kings of this world. Christians are forever grateful that the King of kings, the name given to Jesus in 1 Timothy 6:15 and Revelation 19:16, did not despise the shame of human sin, but bore it in himself on the Cross. Kidner concluded, "The saying is a bracing reminder not to blame luck or favouritism but one's own shortcomings, for any lack of recognition. Moffatt gives the sense well: 'The king favours an able minister; his anger is for the incompetent.'"

Jesus taught on the rewards for faithful servants and the pitfalls for those who fall short in their service to the master in Matthew 24:45-51 and 25:14-30.