



## Proverbs - Chapter Twenty Three

### **IV Proverbs 22:17-24:22 - Sayings of the Wise (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty Three

Do not gorge on choice foods or wear yourself out to get rich. Do not move a boundary marker. Buy the truth, and do not sell it. Do not linger long over wine.

- <sup>1</sup> When you sit down to eat with a ruler,  
observe carefully what is before you,
- <sup>2</sup> and put a knife to your throat  
if you have a big appetite.
- <sup>3</sup> Do not desire the ruler's delicacies,  
for they are deceptive food.

#### Proverbs 23:1-3 - Saying Seven

When you sit down to eat with a ruler. The idea is of a generous invitation to eat with powerful people at a table loaded with delicious, well-prepared food. This was something similar to the situation Daniel and his companions later faced in Daniel Chapter 1.

Observe carefully what is before you. Do not be overwhelmed and seduced by the atmosphere of power and luxury. If a person is vulnerable to these temptations, then beware, i.e. put a knife to your throat: <<*Do not turn my heart to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with those who work iniquity; do not let me eat of their delicacies*>> (Psalm 141:4).

The ruler's table may be your ruin. A person may be so seduced by the atmosphere of power and luxury that they surrender what should not be surrendered: <<*These are blemishes on your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; 13 wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved for ever*>> (Jude 12-13). One may promise what should not be promised and, in effect, worship and serve what should not be worshipped and served.

The warning here is that the rich host may be using the luxuries he can provide to entrap his less wealthy guests so that they feel obliged to do his bidding. His hospitality is deceptive.

- 4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich;  
be wise enough to desist.
- 5 When your eyes light upon it, it is gone;  
for suddenly it takes wings to itself,  
flying like an eagle towards heaven.

#### Proverbs 23:4-5 - Saying Eight

Do not wear yourself out to get rich. Many times the Book of Proverbs rebukes and even mocks the lazy man. Yet this does not mean that work and the wealth that comes from work should be made an idol. One may begin to worship work; that one should cease, and do so because of their wisdom. The workaholic is exhorted to be discerning and wise enough to desist in their pursuit of wealth: <<*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal*>> (Matthew 6:19-20).

Suddenly it takes wings to itself. Wealth is fleeting; there should come a point where a person decides they have enough, and they will devote some of their time and effort to valuable activities that bring no financial reward. Although working hard is a mark of wisdom, Christians do not live for the riches that may come from that work. Those riches are too vulnerable and temporary to be a worthy focus of life. Refer also to the comment made on Proverbs 8:18-21.

- 6 Do not eat the bread of the stingy;  
do not desire their delicacies;
- 7 for like a hair in the throat, so are they.

‘Eat and drink!’ they say to you;  
but they do not mean it.

- <sup>8</sup> You will vomit up the little you have eaten,  
and you will waste your pleasant words.

#### Proverbs 23:6-8 - Saying Nine

This group is similar to the warning of vv.1-3, but here the host is someone who is stingy.

Do not eat the bread of the stingy; do not desire their delicacies. The ruler’s table was a dangerous place, but so is the table of the miser, the one with an evil or ungenerous eye: <<*But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. Now God allowed Daniel to receive favour and compassion from the palace master. The palace master said to Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king’*>> (Daniel 1:8-10).

‘Eat and drink!’ they say to you; but they do not mean it. The stingy man says this to his guests, but his heart is not with his guests. He does not want them to really enjoy themselves as his table, because he wants to keep more food for himself. The guest will offend him if they are foolish enough to take him at his word.

You will vomit up the little you have eaten probably signifies eventual revulsion and regret on the part of the guest when they realise what a fool they have been. The table of the miser will be such an unpleasant experience that the food the guest enjoyed will come back to bother them. The pleasant words spoken at his table will seem wasted.

- <sup>9</sup> Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,  
who will only despise the wisdom of your words.

#### Proverbs 23:9 - Saying Ten

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool. This assumes that the one doing the speaking is not himself a fool, and is a wise person. The problem is not the fool’s lack of intelligence or ability to comprehend the words but their obstinacy and refusal to understand. Derek Kidner commented, “In the hearing: rather, in the ears; it is direct address, not something overheard.”

Who will only despise the wisdom of your words. The fool will not receive or appreciate your wisdom. It will be as Jesus later described - like throwing pearls before pigs; refer to Matthew 7:6 and the associated comment.

- <sup>10</sup> Do not remove an ancient landmark  
or encroach on the fields of orphans,  
<sup>11</sup> for their redeemer is strong;  
he will plead their cause against you.

### Proverbs 23:10-11 - Saying Eleven

These sayings reaffirm the warning of Proverbs 22:28, but the reference to orphans suggests that the victims may be too weak to defend themselves. In this case, the movement of the boundary stone is not something surreptitiously done but is an open seizure of another family's land, perhaps even taking the matter through the courts.

Do not remove an ancient landmark. Literally, the ancient landmark was normally a stone marker for a property line. Moving the landmark was a way to make one's own field bigger and to steal from a neighbour. Symbolically, the ancient landmark was a tradition or custom from ancestors.

Or encroach on the fields of orphans. The field of the orphan needed special care and protection. It was evil to enter the fields of orphans to take some of the harvest from those who had trouble protecting it and relied on its produce for their very survival.

Their Redeemer is the Lord himself: <<*He blessed Joseph, and said, 'The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth'>> (Genesis 48:15-16), <<Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer>> (Psalm 19:14), and: <<Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise>> (Psalm 119:154), perhaps portrayed here as the near kin: <<If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next-of-kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. If the person has no one to redeem it, but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference shall be refunded to the person to whom it was sold, and the property shall be returned>> (Leviticus 25:25-27).*

- 12 Apply your mind to instruction  
and your ear to words of knowledge.

### Proverbs 23:12 - Saying Twelve

Apply your mind to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge. Wisdom can be given out, but it must be received to be of any lasting good. The reception of wisdom is not passive; it is active, received with a heart that truly applies wisdom and instruction: <<*My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding*>> (Proverbs 2:1-2). The command suggests that one should doggedly pursue wisdom. It cannot be acquired without determination.

And your ear to words of knowledge. Wisdom is mostly receive by what a person hears, especially in the guidance they receive from the wise. Their ears must be tuned to receive and apply God's wisdom. When the heart and the ears work together to receive wisdom, much can be gained.

- 13 Do not withhold discipline from your children;  
if you beat them with a rod, they will not die.
- 14 If you beat them with the rod,  
you will save their lives from Sheol.

### Proverbs 23:13-14 - Saying Thirteen

Do not withhold discipline from your children. This saying clearly affirms the place of corporal punishment in child rearing although it is generally accepted as not being appropriate in modern times. At the same time, even in the culture of Solomon's day, the father's overriding desire was to teach the child, rather than to vent his anger.

The connection of the two verses shows that they will not die and you will save his soul from Sheol are parallel ideas. On the use of the proper name Sheol, refer to the comment made on Psalm 6:5. Since Proverbs generally contrasts 'life' and 'death' as a right relationship with God vs. estrangement from him, (which lasts beyond one's bodily death; refer to the comment made on Proverbs 7:26-27), Sheol here is the place where the ungodly go: <<*Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home*>> (Psalm 49:14). The point is that the discipline has character training as its goal, not simply behavioural change or punishment for wrong-doing; and this training equips the child to persevere in the way of life: <<*Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy,*

*but the rod of discipline drives it far away*>> (Proverbs 22:15), which is the godly parents' chief aim.

<sup>15</sup> My child, if your heart is wise,  
my heart too will be glad.

<sup>16</sup> My soul will rejoice  
when your lips speak what is right.

#### Proverbs 23:15-16 - Saying Fourteen

This saying develops the teaching of vv.13-14. The father speaking here is motivated to teach by love, and his joy is in seeing his son succeed in life.

My child, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. The general context of the Book of Proverbs is of a father teaching wisdom to his children. Here Solomon reflected on the great happiness he would have if his son actually received and lived in this wisdom.

My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right. Wisdom, or even the lack of wisdom, is often seen in the words a person speaks. When the father hears his child's lips speak what is right, he has reason to believe that the lessons of wisdom have been learned and this brings great joy to both the natural and the spiritual parent: <<*I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father*>> (2 John 4).

<sup>17</sup> Do not let your heart envy sinners,  
but always continue in the fear of the Lord.

<sup>18</sup> Surely there is a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.

#### Proverbs 23:17-18 - Saying Fifteen

Do not let your heart envy sinners. Instead of envying those who disregard God's way, one should make pleasing the Lord one's top priority, because such a path embodies the true hope that there is a future for the godly: <<*For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight in abundant prosperity*>> (Psalm 37:9-11), <<*Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on the destruction of the wicked*>> (Psalm 37:34), <<*Mark the blameless, and behold the upright, for there is posterity for the peaceable. But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off*>> (Psalm

37:37-38), <<*Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find a future, and your hope will not be cut off*>> (Proverbs 24:14), and: <<*for the evil have no future; the lamp of the wicked will go out*>> (Proverbs 24:20).

Although Proverbs does not refer explicitly to the nature of this future: <<*Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death*>> (Proverbs 10:2), <<*Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death*>> (Proverbs 11:4), and: <<*The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing, but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity*>> (Proverbs 14:32), its encouragement to walk in the fear of the Lord presents the benefits of wisdom as fixing and guarding not only the present path but also the eternal destiny to which the path leads.

- <sup>19</sup> Hear, my child, and be wise,  
and direct your mind in the way.
- <sup>20</sup> Do not be among winebibbers,  
or among gluttonous eaters of meat;
- <sup>21</sup> for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,  
and drowsiness will clothe them with rags.

#### Proverbs 23:19-21 - Saying Sixteen

Hear, my child, and be wise. This repeats the basic context of Proverbs, that it is the wise instruction and guidance of a father to his children: <<*But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children*>> (Deuteronomy 4:9). Charles Spurgeon commented, "I have read that in the reign of Queen Elizabeth there was a law made that everybody should go to his parish church; but many sincere Romanists loathed to go and hear Protestant doctrine. Through fear of persecution, they attended the parish church; but they took care to fill their ears with wool, so that they should not hear what their priests condemned. It is wretched work preaching to a congregation whose ears are stopped with prejudices."

**It is equally as wrong to impose one viewpoint on to someone who does not share it, whether they are non-believers or of the faith but from a different church denomination.**

Do not be among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat. The wise counsel to a son or daughter is that they should not mix with those who overindulge in alcohol or food: <<*Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want; whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich*>> (Proverbs 21:17), <<*Those who*

*keep the law are wise children, but companions of gluttons shame their parents*>> (Proverbs 28:7), <<*Ah, you who rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine, whose feasts consist of lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine, but who do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands!*>> (Isaiah 5:11-12), <<*'Come,' they say, 'let us get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink. And tomorrow will be like today, great beyond measure'*>> (Isaiah 56:12), and: <<*Alas for you who make your neighbours drink, pouring out your wrath until they are drunk, in order to gaze on their nakedness!*>> (Habakkuk 2:15). The drunk and the glutton have a bad future (poverty and rags), and the wise man or woman will not share it with them. Drowsiness here describes the results of intoxication or gluttony. Eating and drinking to excess will impoverish people.

**In modern western culture overindulgence in both alcohol and food has led to an increase in a variety of health problems, and binge drinking is often the cause of violence on the streets and in the home.**

- 22 Listen to your father who begot you,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old.
- 23 Buy truth, and do not sell it;  
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.
- 24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice;  
he who begets a wise son will be glad in him.
- 25 Let your father and mother be glad;  
let her who bore you rejoice.

### Proverbs 23:22-25 - Saying Seventeen

Listen to your father who begot you. Wisdom can never be learned until the attention is won. There must be a deliberate effort to listen.

Do not despise your mother when she is old. This affirms the principle of <<*honour your father and mother*>> in Exodus 20:12, and later in Ephesians 6:2. When parents become old they should receive special attention and care from their children.

Buy truth, and do not sell it. Christians especially should have the mentality that they are willing to gain truth and wisdom, and gain it at a cost instead of wanting to forsake it for profit. Spurgeon wrote, "Buy the truth; that is, be willing at all risks to hold to the truth. Buy it as the martyrs did when they gave their bodies to be burned for it. Buy it as many have done when they have gone to prison for it."

And again, “Sell it not; sell it not; it cost Christ too dear. Sell it not; you made a good bargain when you bought it. Sell it not. Sell it not; it has not disappointed you; it has satisfied you, and made you blessed. Sell it not; you want it. Sell it not, you will want it. The hour of death is coming on, and the day of judgement is close upon its heels. Sell it not; you cannot buy its like again; you can never find a better.”

**Buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.** Acquiring wisdom is a duty in that it is the best way one can fulfil the command to honour one’s parents.

**The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice.** It is a great blessing for parents to have righteous and wise children. That parent will delight in them.

**Let your father and mother be glad.** One reason for a son or daughter to pursue and gain wisdom is that it should make their parents glad. It will be an appropriate blessing and reward to those who gave the son or daughter life and an upbringing.

26 My child, give me your heart,  
and let your eyes observe my ways.

27 For a prostitute is a deep pit;  
an adulteress is a narrow well.

28 She lies in wait like a robber  
and increases the number of the faithless.

### **Proverbs 23:26-28 - Saying Eighteen**

The preface, **give me your heart**, guides parents in their nurturing task: their target must ever be the deepest core of the child’s inner life. Solomon understood that wisdom must be received with the heart. It cannot only be a matter of facts or principles learned in the mind or even memorised. Wisdom must be received into a willing servant heart.

**Observe my ways** further guides parents. They must aim to embody the virtues they commend. At least at the time of writing this, Solomon could point to his own life as an example of wisdom when it came to the dangers of an immoral woman. He knew teaching is most effective when it comes from a life that knows and lives wisdom. He had learned this from his father David: <<***For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God***>> (Psalm 18:21).

The **prostitute** is compared to **a deep pit** or **a narrow well** in that she entraps a young man and he cannot escape, refer to the comment made on Proverbs 22:14; and to **a robber**, in that she will cost him dearly. Prostitution is used as a striking

example of those ‘personal sins’ that, far from affecting the sinner alone, corrupt and bankrupt society and so ruin communities.

The pit in mind is the trap dug and concealed to capture a large animal. As an animal might fall into such a deep pit, so the danger of the harlot is real and concealed. A well is a source of satisfying water, and the sexual relationship of a husband and wife is described as good water from a well in Proverbs 5:15. Here the idea is of a well that does not satisfy. The seductress offers great satisfaction but ultimately does not deliver, lacking the true intimacy and trust that build a satisfying sexual experience.

And increases the number of the faithless. This is not to lay all the blame upon the harlot or immoral woman, but her trap captures many. If there were fewer harlots and immoral women there would be fewer unfaithful among men. However, the men who engage in illicit sexual activity must accept that they are sinners and not victims. Kidner observed, “Unchastity may be romanticised, but the hard facts are faithfully given here: captivity (v.27: no unaided escape), ruthlessness (v.28a), social disruption (v.28b).”

- 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?  
Who has strife? Who has complaining?  
Who has wounds without cause?  
Who has redness of eyes?
- 30 Those who linger late over wine,  
those who keep trying mixed wines.
- 31 Do not look at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup  
and goes down smoothly.
- 32 At the last it bites like a serpent,  
and stings like an adder.
- 33 Your eyes will see strange things,  
and your mind utter perverse things.
- 34 You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,  
like one who lies on the top of a mast.
- 35 ‘They struck me’, you will say, ‘but I was not hurt;  
they beat me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake?

I will seek another drink.'

### Proverbs 23:29-35 - Saying Nineteen

This exposition on the folly of drunkenness opens with a poignant question and answer (vv.29-30); commands those who would listen to heed a warning (vv.31-32); and, in order to communicate the tragic consequences of overindulgence in wine, presents a painfully comedic image of the drunkard deluded about his self harm (vv.33-35). The final two lines are as clear a picture as any in Proverbs of a fool who repeats his folly: <<*Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who reverts to his folly*>> (Proverbs 26:11).

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Solomon provides a reminder of many of the ill effects of alcohol and intoxicating drugs. They bring woe and sorrow. They bring strife and complaining. They bring wounds and redness of eyes. Unrestrained, immoderate use of alcohol and abuse of drugs will bring these sorrows to one's life, and countless tragedies prove it.

Those who linger late over wine. The picture is of those who abuse alcohol or other intoxicants, and who are always looking for a stronger drink, i.e. those who keep trying mixed wines. Alcoholic bombs are perhaps the modern equivalent that seems very popular among the younger generation in western culture.

It sparkles in the cup. Wine can be pleasing on many levels - in how it looks, smells, tastes, and makes one feel. These pleasing aspects of intoxicants never justify their unrestrained or immoderate use.

At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Eventually, the abuse of alcohol or drugs will bite and sting. They often lead to social disorder and the breakdown in relationships.

Your eyes will see strange things. A drunken person does not 'see' clearly, i.e. they cannot perceive the cause and effect connections of events.

You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea. The person who abuses alcohol or drugs will drown in their sin and misery. They will be like a person on a sinking ship who denies their danger. Living in denial, unable or unwilling to see their danger, i.e. they beat me, but I did not feel it, their only thought is when they 'will seek another drink.'

Like one who lies on the top of a mast. This is a notoriously unstable place to stay: the comparison is either to the staggering gait of the drunken person, or to the nausea he will feel, something as uncontrollable as seasickness.