



## Proverbs - Chapter Twenty Four

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

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

Do not envy the wicked. Wisdom is sweet to the soul. Fear the Lord and the king. There are thorns in the field of the sluggard.

- <sup>1</sup> Do not envy the wicked,  
nor desire to be with them;
- <sup>2</sup> for their minds devise violence,  
and their lips talk of mischief.

#### Proverbs 24:1-2 - Saying Twenty

Do not envy the wicked. This is a common and sometimes difficult temptation for the righteous man or woman. There are times when evil men seem to prosper and others may become envious of them, and then desire to be with them. The young person's peers can often be the greatest threat to his moral life. The advice of wisdom is: <<*Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always continue in the fear of the Lord*>> (Proverbs 23:17).

For their minds devise violence. The kind of evil this proverb has in mind is the kind associated with violence and mischief. The seemingly quick and easy money and status gained through violence and troublemaking is a temptation to be resisted. Derek Kidner noted, "The antidote to envy is the long view: the glory (Proverbs 23:18) or darkness (Proverbs 24:20) to come."

- <sup>3</sup> By wisdom a house is built,  
and by understanding it is established;

- 4 by knowledge the rooms are filled  
with all precious and pleasant riches.

#### Proverbs 24:3-4 - Saying Twenty One

The images of wisdom's benefits, i.e. a house is built, established, and filled, include material provision in addition to a blessed family life. However, the means by which they are received, by wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, are presented in Proverbs as stemming from the fear of the Lord. Thus the nature of and posture toward precious and pleasant riches is always to be governed by the priority of pursuing wisdom.

- 5 Wise warriors are mightier than strong ones,  
and those who have knowledge than those who have strength;  
6 for by wise guidance you can wage your war,  
and in abundance of counsellors there is victory.

#### Proverbs 24:5-6 - Saying Twenty Two

Wise warriors are mightier than strong ones. Solomon understood the strength of wisdom, and how a person of knowledge increases inner strength. Folly makes a person weak and vulnerable. The source of true strength is found in wisdom; by implication, strength and might apart from wisdom will be ineffective. Wise guidance obtained in consultation with an abundance of counsellors is the key to victory whether in war or in any circumstance that requires strength and power. Wisdom carefully acquired and applied is the means of success in all of life.

- 7 Wisdom is too high for fools;  
in the gate they do not open their mouths.

#### Proverbs 24:7 - Saying Twenty Three

Wisdom is too high for fools. The fool looks at wisdom and thinks it is above him or her in the sense of being too high. They think it is overly smart and superior and tend to glory in the lowliness of their folly. Other proverbs indicate that fools can never stop talking: <<*When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech*>> (Proverbs 10:19), and: <<*Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives; those who open wide their lips come to ruin*>> (Proverbs 13:3). The point here is that they are at a loss when a situation calls for serious analysis.

In the gate they do not open their mouths. Often, the fool will be denied influence and a platform of leadership. At the place where the elders gather and

decision are made, i.e. the gate, the fool will not open his mouth. Due to lack of wisdom, the fool realises that he does not know how to speak at such a forum.

8     Whoever plans to do evil  
       will be called a mischief-maker.

9     The devising of folly is sin,  
       and the scoffer is an abomination to all.

#### Proverbs 24:8-9 - Saying Twenty Four

Whoever plans to do evil will be called a mischief-maker or schemer. The evil man who plots his evil will be recognised for the schemer he is - even though, the devising of folly is sin, and that evil person will be regarded as an abomination to all. Those who plan to do evil quickly get a reputation for it.

10    If you faint in the day of adversity,  
       your strength being small;

11    if you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death,  
       those who go staggering to the slaughter;

12    if you say, ‘Look, we did not know this’ –  
       does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?

       Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it?

       And will he not repay all according to their deeds?

#### Proverbs 24:10-12 - Saying Twenty Five

If you faint in the day of adversity. The day of adversity comes to everyone. The godliest and the most evil will experience their own adversity, and that is a test to see whether or not they will faint, i.e. lack the courage to face their situation. Adam Clarke commented, “In times of trial we should endeavour to be doubly courageous; when a man loses his courage, his strength avails him nothing.” Although framed as an observation, this is actually an exhortation for the reader to show himself strong and courageous in times of adversity.

Your strength being small. The day of adversity did not make a person’s strength weaken; it revealed their strength to be small. There is a sense in which a person should welcome the day of adversity as a revelation of their strength or weakness, especially when facing adversity in the Christian life, since: <<*Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*>> (2 Timothy 3:12).

Verses 11-12 further expand on the call of v.10 to act with strength of character amid difficulty. Although the circumstances of those taken away to death and staggering to the slaughter are not specified, the themes of Proverbs make it likely that the images refer to those suffering under the injustice of the wicked: <<*If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent; like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole, like those who go down to the Pit. We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty*>> (Proverbs 1:11-13), and possibly to those walking a path that leads to death: <<*Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths. For many are those she has laid low, and numerous are her victims. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death*>> (Proverbs 7:25-27). Proverbs calls the righteous to integrity of character that protects justice, proclaims the benefits of wisdom, and warns against living as if such things are unknown or do not matter. Claiming ignorance of a widely known evil is no excuse for not rescuing the victims of slaughter, for God knows the true condition of the heart. The one who embraces wisdom can never be content with merely seeking their own wellbeing or that of their family; they will also seek justice as widely as they can.

Look, we did not know this. Christians should not be indifferent towards those headed toward death, especially with regard to spiritual death and eternal life absent from God. Since many people often reject God's wisdom and are hostile, it is easy to give up on them or even ignore them. Yet God, he who weighs the heart, does know and consider this: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9).

And will he not repay all according to their deeds? God will make the fool answer for his folly, but he will also cause the indifferent one to answer for their lack of care. God will render to each man according to his deeds: <<*For according to their deeds he will repay them, and according to their ways he will make it befall them*>> (Job 34:11), <<*steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work*>> (Psalm 62:12), <<*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done*>> (Matthew 16:27), <<*For he will repay according to each one's deeds*>> (Romans 2:6), <<*For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil*>> (2 Corinthians 5:10), <<*Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds*>> (2 Timothy 4:14), and: <<*Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed*>> (Revelation 18:6). This implies that a person's deeds reveal the true state of their heart, whether they walk on the path of life or of death.

13 My child, eat honey, for it is good,  
and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.

14 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 24:13-14 - Saying Twenty Six

Eating honey is rewarded by the sweetness of the taste. It is easy to understand the reward of the honeycomb. Just as honey is sweet to the taste and good for the body, so wisdom is pleasant to the soul that feeds on it, fostering a secure hope; refer also to the comments made on Psalm 37:9 and Proverbs 23:17-18.

Know that wisdom is such to your soul. The gaining of wisdom rewards the life the way the sweetness of taste is the reward of honey. People should learn to discern and appreciate the sweetness of wisdom. Once a person appreciates the reward of wisdom, their hope will not be cut off.

15 Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against the home of the  
righteous;

do no violence to the place where the righteous live;

16 for though they fall seven times, they will rise again;  
but the wicked are overthrown by calamity.

#### Proverbs 24:15-16 - Saying Twenty Seven

Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against the home of the righteous. This warns against joining with the wicked in injustice because it forms a person's character in a way that will not be beneficial in calamity. The righteous are able to rise repeatedly because both their person and their path are sustained by the Lord: <<*For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones*>> (Proverbs 2:6-8), and: <<*The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous*>> (Proverbs 15:29).

Do no violence to the place where the righteous live. This proverb presents its wisdom in the form of a command to the wicked person, telling them to not rob or plunder the home of the righteous.

For though they fall seven times, they will rise again. The reason why the wicked person should not rob the righteous is that in the end, the righteous person will not be defeated. Even when they may fall - even seven times! - they shall rise again.

The number seven in Hebrew understanding represents completion or perfection. This concept of completion can be applied here.

Many commentators insist that the fall that a righteous man may experience here is trouble, not sin. There is no adequate reason why it cannot include both ideas. Clarke commented, "Though God permit the hand of violence sometimes to spoil his tent, temptations to assail his mind, and afflictions to press down his body, he constantly emerges; and every time he passes through the furnace, he comes out brighter and more refined."

They will rise again. This should not only give warning to the wicked, but also assurance to the righteous. Like Paul the righteous can be confident of this very thing: <<*that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ*>> (Philippians 1:6). They can use that confidence to strengthen their resolve to never give up, even though they may fall seven times.

But the wicked are overthrown by calamity. The wicked have a different destiny than the righteous. God will protect and preserve his righteous ones, but the wicked shall fall and stay fallen.

- 17 Do not rejoice when your enemies fall,  
and do not let your heart be glad when they stumble,  
18 or else the Lord will see it and be displeased,  
and turn away his anger from them.

#### Proverbs 24:17-18 - Saying Twenty Eight

If vv.15-16 are aimed at the wicked, who commit crimes against the righteous, this saying is directed against the righteous, who might be tempted to gloat over the downfall of the wicked: <<*those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished*>> (Proverbs 17:5b).

Do not rejoice when your enemies fall reflects the heart of God, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Speaking through the prophet, God said: <<*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live*>> (Ezekiel 33:11b). The Bible is clear that God will punish sin and vindicate his holiness and justice. At the same time, God feels sorrow over the punishment and death of creatures created in his image.

**The Lord will see it and be displeased.** If God sees his people rejoicing over the fall of the wicked, he may turn away his wrath from the wicked just to rebuke the proud, unloving heart against the wicked man. When Edom, near kin of Israel, rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, God spoke out against them: <<*On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted on the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity; you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives; you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress*>> (Obadiah 11-14).

- <sup>19</sup> Do not fret because of evildoers.  
Do not envy the wicked;
- <sup>20</sup> for the evil have no future;  
the lamp of the wicked will go out.

#### **Proverbs 24:19-20 - Saying Twenty Nine**

This saying, building on vv.13-18, once again reassures the reader that **the evil have no future**. In short, the righteous must beware of two attitudes: gloating celebration when the wicked fall (v.17), and a despairing fear that they never will fall (v.19). The words of v.19 are very close to those of Psalm 37:1; the wisdom psalm is in truth a hymnic reflection on this topic.

**Do not fret because of evildoers.** Verse 1 instructs the reader not to be envious of evil men; here the reader is told to also not worry, i.e. **fret**, because of them, as well as to not to **envy the wicked**.

**The lamp of the wicked will go out.** This speaks of death waiting for the evil person both in this life and the next. Any good or pleasure they experience in this life is the best they will ever have or experience. The wicked person has no prospect for the future. Clarke explained, "Some have thought that this text intimates the annihilation of sinners; but it refers not to being, but to the state or condition of that being. The wicked shall be; but they shall not be HAPPY."

- <sup>21</sup> My child, fear the Lord and the king,  
and do not disobey either of them;

22 for disaster comes from them suddenly,  
and who knows the ruin that both can bring?

### Proverbs 24:21-22 - Saying Thirty

My child, fear the Lord and the king. Wisdom instructs all to fear the Lord, but it is also wisdom to fear the king. Earthly rulers deserve respect and honour: <<*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due*>> (Romans 13:1-7). Both God and the Davidic king appear in Proverbs as agents of wrath, i.e. Proverbs 14:35, 16:10-15, 19:12, and 20:2. The young person should respect authority, both human and divine.

### V Proverbs 24:23-34 - Further Sayings of the Wise

These sayings are grouped in a parallel fashion, as follows:

- A: Justice in court (vv.23-26).
- B: Economy lesson for the home (v.27).
- A': Justice in court (vv.28-29).
- B': Economy lesson for the home (vv.30-34).

23 These also are sayings of the wise:

Partiality in judging is not good.

24 Whoever says to the wicked, 'You are innocent',  
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations;

25 but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight,  
and a good blessing will come upon them.

### Proverbs 24:23-25

These also are sayings of the wise. The series of thirty sayings of the wise ended at v.22. Here, until the end of the chapter, is a set of additional sayings attributed to the wise.

Partiality in judging is not good. Courts must render honest verdicts, convicting the guilty and acquitting the innocent. People may be prejudiced for or against a person because he or she is rich and famous or of a certain race, but partiality of any kind is to be rejected.

You are innocent or righteous. This is what should not be said to the wicked. In a wise, moral society the people will curse someone with such confused moral judgement, and the nations will abhor them. It is a mark of the folly of this present age that many monstrous examples of evil or wickedness today are told, “You are innocent, i.e. righteous.” This proverb describes the working of a culture wiser than this present culture.

Those who rebuke the wicked will have delight. Evil should be addressed and rebuked. Christians especially should not romanticise or excuse the wicked.

<sup>26</sup> One who gives an honest answer  
gives a kiss on the lips.

### Proverbs 24:26

One who gives an honest answer. The proper response to a question or a difficult problem is always welcome to the wise. Christians think of the many occasions when Jesus Christ was presented with difficult questions yet always gave a right answer. Kidner added, “Note the paradox, that a proper forthrightness, costly though it may seem, wins gratitude, and has its special charm.”

Gives a kiss on the lips. The right answer comes from the lips, just like a friendly and welcoming kiss. Clarke added, “Shall treat him with affection and respect.”

The Hebrew phrase translated a kiss on the lips is found only here in the OT. It is either an act of homage, e.g. those who have not kissed Baal (1 Kings 19:18), or an act of affection, e.g. Esau kissed Jacob upon their meeting (Genesis 33:4). Either sense fits the verse well in that an honest answer treats the other person involved with both respect and affection (note the appeals to honest speech in the surrounding text, vv.23-25 and vv.28-29). The sexually oriented kiss, although known in Israel – as seen in Proverbs 7:13 and Song 8:1 – is not relevant here.

<sup>27</sup> Prepare your work outside,  
get everything ready for you in the field;  
and after that build your house.

## Proverbs 24:27

**Prepare your work outside.** The idea is that before a house is built, proper preparations must be made. The field and the ground must be readied. Wisdom reveals that work should be done with proper planning and in the proper order. Clarke advised, “Do nothing without a plan. In winter prepare seed, implements, tackle, gears, &c., for seed-time and harvest.”

**After that build your house.** Some want to skip right away to the building without preparing the field. This foolishness will not be blessed. Proverbs encourages sensible preparation before building a **house**, so that one may attend well to the life lived in it. Kidner stated, “As, in a rural economy, well-worked fields justify and nourish the farmhouse, so a well-ordered life (in things material and immaterial) should be established before marriage.”

- 28 Do not be a witness against your neighbour without cause,  
and do not deceive with your lips.
- 29 Do not say, ‘I will do to others as they have done to me;  
I will pay them back for what they have done.’

## Proverbs 24:28-29

**Do not be a witness against your neighbour without cause.** Christians should only speak against someone if there is good and righteous cause to do so. People often speak ill of others to entertain others, and themselves - this is sin. Commitment to giving an honest answer (v.26) includes refraining from paying back a **neighbour**, through false testimony or deception, for past acts of injustice: <<*You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the Lord. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:15-18), and: <<*You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*>> (Matthew 5:43-48).

Do not deceive with your lips. When people speak against others without cause, they usually exaggerate or colour the truth, making it a deception. This is sin and should not be the practice of a Christian.

I will pay them back for what they have done. This is what wisdom and grace tell people not to say. Christians should not return evil for evil: <<**See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all**>> (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Just because someone has spoken evil or lies against them does not mean that they should speak evil and lies in return.

30 I passed by the field of one who was lazy,  
by the vineyard of a stupid person;  
31 and see, it was all overgrown with thorns;  
the ground was covered with nettles,  
and its stone wall was broken down.  
32 Then I saw and considered it;  
I looked and received instruction.  
33 A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
34 and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want, like an armed warrior.

#### Proverbs 24:30-34

These verses illustrate how proverbs are supposed to function: upon walking by a field and vineyard that has fallen into ruin through laziness, the observer takes it to heart and rightly recognises that the wise instruction he has heard about the sluggard applies to the situation at hand; note that vv.33-34 are identical to Proverbs 6:10-11. Both the observer and the reader are encouraged to believe that sustained and steadfast labour is a part of the path of wisdom.

I passed by the field of one who was lazy, see, it was all overgrown with thorns. This is what the wise man saw when he looked at the field or the vineyard of the lazy man. The lazy man did not plant the thorns or nettles, and he did not deliberately break down the stone wall. Yet his laziness made these things happen just as much as if he had deliberately done them.

**Then I saw and considered it.** The wise man learned from the tragedy of the lazy man. He did not have to suffer the same things the lazy man did to learn the lesson. This is one of the marks of wisdom.

**A little sleep, a little slumber.** This is how the lazy man rationalises his neglect of duty. “A little sleep causes no harm; surely we all need a little slumber.” The problem is not the sleep of the lazy man; it is his neglect of duty. Charles Spurgeon commented, “Rest assured of that; the best will become the worst if we neglect it. Neglect is all that is needed to produce evil. If you want to know the way of salvation I must take some pains to tell you; but if you want to know the way to be lost, my reply is easy; for it is only a matter of negligence.”

**Poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.** This is the destiny of the lazy man or woman. Because of their sinful neglect, poverty will come upon them as suddenly, as strongly, and as unwelcomed as an armed man. In this case the lazy man thinks himself innocent because he did not deliberately, actively sow the thorns or break the wall, but his neglect of duty did them - and he is without excuse.