



Proverbs - Chapter Twenty Five

Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence. If an enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. To seek one's own glory is not glory.

VI Proverbs 25:1-29:27 - Further Wise Sayings of Solomon

The present form of the Book of Proverbs came into existence, at earliest, in the reign of King Hezekiah, who reigned between 715-686 BC. Hezekiah is credited with reviving Judah's religious traditions: <<He did what was right in the sight of the Lord just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. The Lord was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him>> (2 Kings 18:3-7). A new, expanded edition of Solomonic proverbs was apparently part of that revival.

¹ These are other proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied.

Proverbs 25:1

These are other proverbs of Solomon. This collection of proverbs is from 25:1 through to 29:27, making up five chapters of the Book of Proverbs. These also were written by Solomon, yet collected under the supervision of Hezekiah king of Judah - some 270 years after Solomon's death. First Kings 4:32 states that Solomon spoke

three thousand proverbs. Even with Hezekiah's addition, not all of them are contained in the Book of Proverbs.

That the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied. King Hezekiah of Judah reigned over a time of national spiritual revival. He added these chapters to the previous collection of proverbs, having found these yet-to-be published proverbs of Solomon.

The references to Solomon and King Hezekiah indicate that, as usual in Proverbs, the kingship assumed is Davidic.

- ² It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out.
- ³ Like the heavens for height, like the earth for depth,
so the mind of kings is unsearchable.

Proverbs 25:2-3

It is the glory of God to conceal things. There are many mysteries in the universe, both material and spiritual mysteries. There are many things God has concealed, and this is one expression of his glory. It is one of God's ways to say, "You are amazed by what you see; yet what you do not see, what I have concealed, is even greater." Adam Clarke commented, "I know not, however, that there are not matters in the Book of God that will not be fully opened till mortality is swallowed up of life. For here we see through a glass darkly; but there, face to face: here we know in part; but there we shall know as we also are known."

The glory of kings is set here as subordinate to and derived from the glory of God because the king's searching is a function of his role under the overall governance of God, who keeps some things hidden: <<*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, to observe all the words of this law*>> (Deuteronomy 29:29). Verse 3 further describes the king from the perspective of his subjects and asserts by implication, i.e. reference to the heavens and the earth, that although his heart is hidden to those under him, it remains subject to the Creator: <<*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. All deeds are right in the sight of the doer, but the Lord weighs the heart*>> (Proverbs 21:1-2).

To search things out. According to Proverbs, the ideal king will both govern through the use of his wisdom and investigate and understand the world and its people.

Like the heavens for height, like the earth for depth, so the mind of kings is unsearchable. While it is part of the glory of kings to search out a matter, one thing every person has trouble searching is their own heart, and they have trouble searching the hearts of others. Such knowledge can be so far above human capability, like the heavens above the earth. Yet, God knows the heart: *<<And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God>>* (Romans 8:27), *<<But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God>>* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

- ⁴ Take away the dross from the silver,
and the smith has material for a vessel;
⁵ take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.

Proverbs 25:4-5

Take away the wicked from the presence of the king. In the same way that the dross should be removed from the silver, so too wicked counsellors and associates should be removed from the presence of kings and rulers. The close advisers of a ruler must be chosen with careful attention to their moral character: *<<Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm>>* (Proverbs 13:20). Following the picture of governance by the king under God in vv.2-3, here is wise counsel for those living and serving in that realm: every individual is called to search his or her own heart and seek to practice and pursue righteousness for the sake of the kingdom and the good of its people. Although this may particularly apply to those serving in the court of the king, the breadth of the imagery in vv.2-3 and the nature of the instruction that follows in vv.6-15 indicate that any attempt to act in accord with this passage, no matter how small it may seem, honours God and king: *<<My child, fear the Lord and the king, and do not disobey either of them>>* (Proverbs 24:21).

Clarke stated, “You cannot have a pure silver vessel till you have purified the silver; and no nation can have a king a public blessing till the wicked - all bad counsellors, wicked and interested ministers, and sycophants - are banished from the court and cabinet.”

- ⁶ Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence
or stand in the place of the great;
^{7a} for it is better to be told, ‘Come up here’,
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

Proverbs 25:6-7a

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great. Christians especially should always avoid self-exaltation. Even as they should humble themselves in the sight of the Lord: <<*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you*>> (James 4:10), they should also humble themselves before others.

Come up here. When a man or a woman properly humbles themselves before God and kings, they may be invited to a higher place. This is much better than arrogantly setting themselves high and then being put lower in the presence of a noble or the prince. Jesus gave much the same lesson in Luke 14:7-11, concluding with the thought: <<*For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted*>> (Luke 14:11).

These verses encourage proper humility; honour is better bestowed than wrongly presumed in the presence of the king.

- 7^b What your eyes have seen
8 do not hastily bring into court;
for what will you do in the end,
when your neighbour puts you to shame?
9 Argue your case with your neighbour directly,
and do not disclose another's secret;
10 or else someone who hears you will bring shame upon you,
and your ill repute will have no end.

Proverbs 25:7b-10

The last line of v.7 is understood by some ancient versions, i.e. the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate, and most modern versions as opening vv.8-10. This section encourages working out conflict with a neighbour in the context of personal relationship (v.9a) rather than imprudently rushing either to present a case in court (v.8) or to perpetuate a grievance by reporting it to others (vv.9b-10). Similar principles are operative in the instruction that Jesus gives in Matthew 18:15-20; refer to the comments made there and on Matthew 5:25-26.

Sometimes the court of law is necessary, but Christians should never go hastily into court. If it is possible to resolve a dispute any other way, they should do it that other way. This was Paul's later teaching to the Corinthian church; refer to 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. Clarke added, "After squandering your money away upon lawyers, both they and the judge will at last leave it to be settled by twelve of

your fellow citizens! O the folly of going to law! O the blindness of men, and the rapacity of unprincipled lawyers!”

When your neighbour puts you to shame. This is another strong reason why one should avoid court - the complainant might lose and be put to shame. Many people who go to court have an unrealistic confidence that they will win.

Argue your case with your neighbour directly. Solomon’s wise advice is to settle it out of court. If the case can be debated outside of the courtroom, do it there. The debate may expose a secret that would be to the complainant’s shame in open court and from that their reputation could be ruined. Derek Kidner commented, “To run to the law or to the neighbours is usually to run away from the duty of personal relationship – see Christ’s clinching comment in Matthew 18:15b.”

Adam Clarke could not help but add this: “On this subject I cannot but give the following extract from Sir John Hawkins’s Life of Dr. Johnson, which he quotes from Mr. Selwin, of London: ‘A man who deliberates about going to law should have, 1. A good cause; 2. A good purse; 3. A good skilful attorney; 4. Good evidence; 5. Good able counsel; 6. A good upright judge; 7. A good intelligent jury; and with all these on his side, if he have not, 8. Good luck, it is odds but he miscarries in his suit.’”

The remainder of Proverbs Chapter 25 contains one or two verse proverbs that will be considered individually.

- 11 A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
- 12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold
is a wise rebuke to a listening ear.

Proverbs 25:11-12

There is something special and powerful about **a word fitly spoken**. The right word at the right time has power to heal and strengthen, to guide and rescue. It is like an **apple** made of **gold** set on a beautiful **silver** platter. The **apples** refer to a decorative motif in jewellery, similar to the more familiar ‘pomegranate’ pattern in the tabernacle: <<*On the lower hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the lower hem of the robe all round, between the pomegranates*>> (Exodus 39:24-25), and in the temple: <<*He made the columns with two rows round each lattice-work to cover the capitals that were above the pomegranates; he did the same with the other capital*>> (1 Kings 7:18). The image represents godly speech - **a word fitly spoken**, i.e. suited to its occasion.

The word fitly spoken may also be a wise rebuke. When the one who is wise meets a listening ear, it is like beautiful jewellery, i.e. like a gold ring or an ornament of gold. A listening ear is like gold jewellery; that is, stunningly beautiful and valuable, possibly because of its rarity: <<*the wise, when rebuked, will love you. Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning*>> (Proverbs 9:8b-9).

¹³ Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest
are faithful messengers to those who send them;
they refresh the spirit of their masters.

Proverbs 25:13

The time of harvest for the various crops runs from June through to September, and the heat can be withering. At such a time, the cold of snow – however it was brought – would refresh the workers. Note that a literal snowfall is probably not in view, as that could be a catastrophe for the crops; it is more likely a reference to a cool, refreshing drink given to the worker to refresh them and revive their spirits. The refreshing, invigorating nature of that cold drink illustrates the blessing of a faithful messenger to those who send him: <<*For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward*>> (Mark 9:41). The faithful messenger is beloved by the one who sends the message. God wants his people to be faithful messengers of his Gospel and work. In the Apocrypha there is a description of a man who died from heat stroke during time of harvest; refer to Judith 8:2-3.

They refresh the spirit of their masters. The sender of the message is refreshed and comforted knowing that the message is being faithfully delivered. So God is pleased with his faithful messengers today. The apostle Paul often acknowledged this refreshment to his anxious spirit when he was burdened with all the care of the churches: <<*I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence; for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. So give recognition to such people*>> (1 Corinthians 16:17-18), <<*Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus – my brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honour such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me*>> (Philippians 2:25-30), and:

<<Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour had been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you. For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith>> (1 Thessalonians 3:1-7).

¹⁴ Like clouds and wind without rain
is one who boasts of a gift never given.

Proverbs 25:14

Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of a gift never given. In an agrarian context, skies that promise but never produce rain would be a familiar image to illustrate a person who brags that he will give a gift, most likely to incur some sort of favour, but who has no intention to fulfil his promise.

There are some who give nothing but want to be known as people who gave; others give small gifts and want to be known as those who gave great gifts, such as Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. They want the reputation of generosity without actually being generous. The short NT letter of Jude used this figure to describe dangerous, unproductive people: <<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; 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).

¹⁵ With patience a ruler may be persuaded,
and a soft tongue can break bones.

Proverbs 25:15

With patience a ruler may be persuaded. A person's self-control and patience can persuade great men to their cause, even a ruler: <<If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post, for calmness will undo great

offences>> (Ecclesiastes 10:4). William Wilberforce persuaded the leaders of the British Empire to outlaw slavery through long forbearance and dedication to his righteous cause.

A soft tongue can break a bone. Diplomacy with superiors means using tact even while trying to persuade. The patient, gentle words of a wise man or woman can have a great impact over a long period of time. Such words can have shattering power.

Introduction to Proverbs 25:16-17

Verse 16 is at first glance a warning against gluttony and perhaps, by extension, an encouragement to take care in enjoying all pleasant things. However, in context it is a metaphor leading into v.17: one's presence, even though it may be pleasant, may become too much of a good thing.

¹⁶ If you have found honey, eat only enough for you,
or else, having too much, you will vomit it.

Proverbs 25:16

Eat only enough for you. If someone has found honey - something good and wonderful to find - the honey should be enjoyed, but one should only eat what they need, not necessarily what they want or can eat or drink: <<**Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit**>> (Ephesians 5:18).

Or else, having too much, you will vomit it. If something good, like honey, is eaten to excess, if a person overindulges, then it may cause an unpleasant reaction, i.e. vomit, and the good thing they thought they had gained is lost. Overindulgence in good things is harmful and counterproductive. Kidner observed, "Since Eden, man has wanted the last ounce out of life, as though beyond God's 'enough' lay ecstasy, not nausea."

¹⁷ Let your foot be seldom in your neighbour's house,
otherwise the neighbour will become weary of you and hate you.

Proverbs 25:17

Let your foot be seldom in your neighbour's house. It is expected that neighbours would visit neighbours: <<**Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved**>> (Acts 2:46-47), but such hospitality should not be abused.

Otherwise the neighbour will become weary of you and hate you. The wise man or woman will be sensitive to the sense that a neighbour may become tired of their presence. Since good neighbourly relationships make life much better, this is an important principle of wisdom.

Introduction to Proverbs 25:18-20

In this collection, three types of people – the liar, the untrustworthy, and the insensitive – are each described with a pair of appropriate metaphors.

18 Like a war club, a sword, or a sharp arrow
is one who bears false witness against a neighbour.

19 Like a bad tooth or a lame foot
is trust in a faithless person in time of trouble.

Proverbs 25:18-19

Like a war club, a sword, or a sharp arrow is one who bears false witness against a neighbour. Many proverbs speak against the person who bears false witness. This liar, whether in the court of law or common conversation, does great damage. Their words are like a weapon: a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow: <<*I lie down among lions that greedily devour human prey; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords*>> (Psalm 57:4), <<*Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit through the mouth. They all speak friendly words to their neighbours, but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush*>> (Jeremiah 9:8), <<*And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell*>> (James 3:6). It is not a small sin to bear false witness against a neighbour: <<*Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour*>> (Deuteronomy 5:20).

Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is trust in a faithless person in time of trouble. These two proverbs are connected because the one who bears false witness is often also the unfaithful person in time of trouble. In one aspect they bring pain, in the other aspect they are a pain. The unfaithful person is useless and like a persistent, debilitating pain.

20 Like vinegar on a wound
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.
Like a moth in clothing or a worm in wood,
sorrow gnaws at the human heart.

Proverbs 25:20

Like vinegar on a wound is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. No one needs to experience the stinging sensation of vinegar poured into an open wound to understand just how much it would hurt. Similarly, someone singing a joyous song to someone who is down or depressed, even if done for the right reason, would be just as hurtful. This verse is also translated as someone taking away a garment on a cold day, leaving the person to suffer in much the same way.

Solomon recognised that suffering was part of the cycle of life, even a life with God: *<<For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace>> (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).*

Like a moth in clothing or a worm in wood, sorrow gnaws at the human heart. The sense here is the destructive nature of the insects is reflected in the way that deep sorrow and despair can destroy the very soul of a person.

- ²¹ If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;
- ²² for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,
and the Lord will reward you.

Proverbs 25:21-22

For you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and the Lord will reward you. Although interpreters differ about the meaning of the metaphor of heaping burning coals on the enemy's head, it is likely an image for leading them to repentance or shame, suggesting that they will feel inward burning pangs of guilt for their wrongdoing. In any case, the message is clearly to repay evil with good, as Paul also called for: *<<Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good>> (Romans*

12:17-21). The image of ‘burning coals’ does not imply something that harms the enemy, because it further explains the bread and drink, which do them good and also because Proverbs forbids taking personal vengeance. Finally, the Lord will reward you implies a good result from these ‘burning coals,’ which is most consistent with leading the person to repentance.

²³ The north wind produces rain,
and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.

Proverbs 25:23

The north wind is not the usual source of rain in Palestine, which generally comes from the west, but when it is, it brings unexpected and damaging rain. In the same way a backbiting tongue brings sudden anger and damage. The words of David indicate that such people will not enter the Kingdom of God: <<*O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbours; in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honour those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved*>> (Psalm 15:1-5).

²⁴ It is better to live in a corner of the housetop
than in a house shared with a contentious wife.

Proverbs 25:24

It is better to live in a corner of the housetop. The corner of a housetop is not a great place to live. It is small, confined, and exposed to the elements because it is on the roof. Yet in some circumstances the corner of a housetop is a better place to live if it allows those concerned to overcome domestic tension; refer also to the comment made on Proverbs 21:9.

Introduction to Proverbs 25:25-26

These two proverbs are joined by water metaphors relating to the proximity and expectation of the source. Good news that comes from a far country is unexpected and revitalising (v.25). However, a righteous man who yields to injustice or to evil pollutes his way (v.26) – a way that people close to him had likely come to trust as 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), <<*The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death*>> (Proverbs 13:14), and: <<*The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death*>> (Proverbs 14:27).

- 25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul,
so is good news from a far country.

Proverbs 25:25

Like cold water to a thirsty soul. When a person is weary, a gift of cold water is greatly refreshing. Soul in this proverb is used in same sense as most other proverbs, as a reference to the whole person and life, not only the inner spiritual aspect of a person.

When good news is received, especially from a far country, it brings great and life-giving refreshment. This applies to good news of many types, not the least is the Gospel, that good news of what God has done in Christ Jesus to rescue all who put their trust in him: <<*The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the body*>> (Proverbs 15:30), <<*And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'*>> (Romans 10:15). The fact that someone travels from a far country to deliver good and important news makes the news all the more important. Many are willing to listen to the good news of Christ Jesus from someone who comes from a distance, just because the trouble they went to in bringing the message adds to its importance.

- 26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain
are the righteous who give way before the wicked.

Proverbs 25:26

Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain are the righteous who give way before the wicked. Sometimes it is true that a righteous man stumbles and falters. This is always sad, but even more so when it happens before the wicked, in the view of those who reject God and his wisdom. Instead of the clarity and life-giving property of clean, clear water; a compromised life is like a dirty pool: <<*Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?*>> (Ezekiel 34:18-19). It gives no life, no clarity, no refreshment, and no help. It only frustrates the purpose of water in that context.

- 27 It is not good to eat much honey,
or to seek honour on top of honour.

Proverbs 25:27

It is not good to eat much honey. Honey is an example of one of God's great gifts. In the world of Solomon's day sweets were rare and nothing was sweeter than honey. Yet, overindulgence in even a good gift like honey is not good. Self-control must be practiced even with good things, perhaps especially with good things!

To seek honour on top of honour. Glory can be a good thing, and it is part of God's promise to the believer: <<*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us*>> (Romans 8:18). Yet to seek one's own glory is not good; it is not glory at all. Christians should seek God's glory and not worry about their own glory. The solution adopted for the difficult second line has fairly wide support. The point is that to seek one's own glory can make people sick (v.16).

Introduction to Proverbs 25:28-26:12

All of these proverbs focus on the fool, who is mentioned explicitly in every verse except Proverbs 25:28 and 26:2.

²⁸ Like a city breached, without walls,
is one who lacks self-control.

Proverbs 25:28

Self-control relates to the passions such as anger or love, the appetites for food, sex, etc., and the will as illustrated by impulsive decisions. The lack of self-control is a mark of a fool. He is like a city breached, without walls, that is, with no means of defence against enemies.

There are many who have so little self-control that it can be said that they have no rule over their own spirit. The world, the flesh, or the devil rule over such people, and not the spirit of self-control that is part of the fruit of the Spirit, which Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23.