



## Proverbs - Chapter Six

### **II Proverbs 1:8-9:18 - A Father's Invitation to Wisdom (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Six

After admonitions against suretyship and sloth, the character and fate of the wicked generally are set forth, and the writer resumes the warnings against incontinence, pointing out its certain and terrible results. This train of thought seems to intimate the kindred of these vices.

#### **II.j Proverbs 6:1-35 - Practical Admonitions**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

##### **II.j.i Proverbs 6:1-19 - Warnings Relating to Securing Debt, Sloth, and Sowing Discord**

This section gives instruction in wise dealing that takes into account both the nature of a situation and the sort of person involved. The instruction, which refers to types of people with increasing responsibility for their plight, includes: a warning against putting up security because it can lead to harm (vv.1-5), an exhortation of the idle to follow the example of the ant lest he come to ruin (vv.6-11), and a description of the sort of characteristics that the Lord hates (vv.12-19).

#### Introduction to Proverbs 6:1-5

These proverbs describe putting up security for someone else's debt, i.e. promising to pay his debt if he defaults, as a trap in which one's life is endangered. The son is to be tireless in trying to get out of such a position in which his labour, wealth, or goods could be squandered because someone else who is ultimately responsible for satisfying the debt has defaulted. The warning is intended to instil prudence in such situations. Therefore it does not imply that putting up security for someone is

morally wrong in every possible situation, but rather that it is generally unwise. Wisdom recognises that in nearly all cases putting up security is ultimately not good for either party involved.

- 1 My child, if you have given your pledge to your neighbour,  
if you have bound yourself to another,
- 2 you are snared by the utterance of your lips,  
caught by the words of your mouth.

### Proverbs 6:1-2

My child, if you have given your pledge to your neighbour. Solomon warned his son against guaranteeing the debts of others, whether they were a friend or a stranger. This was the promise to pay the debts of the friend or stranger if they failed to pay. This was not really like loaning someone money, nor exactly like consigning a loan. In modern financial terms, it was more like guaranteeing someone's open line of credit. Derek Kidner commented, "The New Testament shows us Paul accepting Onesimus' past liabilities, but not his future ones (Philemon 18-19)." And again, "Even to the recipient, an unconditional pledge may be an unintended disservice by exposing him to temptation and to the subsequent grief of having brought a friend to ruin."

You are snared by the utterance of your lips. To promise to pay the debts of another person can trap the person making the pledge. It is a promise made with words, but will affect and afflict the person's own finances. The image of being trapped by one's own words uses verbs typical of capturing animals, i.e. snared and caught, which foreshadows the images of v.5 and highlights the danger: one who puts up security is trapped because he is at the mercy of a debtor who no longer has any stake in satisfying the debt. Kidner observed, "Job 17:3 uses this circle of ideas to declare that Job is too bad a risk for anybody but God – and to plead that God will take him up (as confirmed in Psalm 119:122). So a bridge is made in the Old Testament between the idea of material insolvency and spiritual."

- 3 So do this, my child, and save yourself,  
for you have come into your neighbour's power:  
go, hurry, and plead with your neighbour.
- 4 Give your eyes no sleep  
and your eyelids no slumber;
- 5 save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter,  
like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

### Proverbs 6:3-5

The main point of the appeal begins in v.3: save yourself from the whim of the one in debt and plead urgently with him. The point of such pleading is made clear by the comparison to game caught in a trap: the one making the pledge should focus all their energy and seek to get out of such a situation and thus save yourself (v.5) from ruin.

Save yourself or literally, deliver yourself. Solomon counselled his son that if he did make himself responsible for the debt of another person he should do all he could to save himself. He should humble himself and plead to be released from his promise.

Save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter. A gazelle would do anything to escape the hunter and a bird would do anything to escape the fowler. Solomon tried to communicate the urgency his son should have in escaping responsibility for the debt of others.

### Introduction to Proverbs 6:6-11

The idle person is addressed twice in these proverbs and instructed to observe the careful labour of the ant (vv.6-8) so that he may gain wisdom and heed the warning about the result of his sloth (vv.9-11). The ruinous end that awaits the idle is described with some of the same images in Proverbs 24:30-34, and the ant is called wise in labouring for its provision in Proverbs 30:24.

- <sup>6</sup> Go to the ant, you lazybones;  
consider its ways, and be wise.
- <sup>7</sup> Without having any chief  
or officer or ruler,
- <sup>8</sup> it prepares its food in summer,  
and gathers its sustenance in harvest.

### Proverbs 6:6-8

Go to the ant, you lazybones. Solomon spoke wisdom to the idle - essentially, the lazy man or woman. That lazy person should learn from the ant, an insect proverbial for hard work. The Book of Proverbs speaks a lot about the value of hard work and for good reason. The difference between success and failure, between potential disappointment or fulfilment, is often hard work. Adam Clarke commented, "No insect is more laborious, not even the bee itself; and none is more fondly attached to or more careful of its young, than the ant."

The ant is wise and worthy of imitation because it works hard without having to be told to work hard. The ethic of diligence comes from within, and does not have to be imposed on by a chief, officer, or ruler. The fact that the ant has no one ruling over it or supervising its work shows that it has initiative, which the idle person clearly lacks.

It prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest. The ant works hard when the work is to be done. In the summer and in the harvest, the work gets done. This means that the ant gives a good lesson in its ways and its wisdom.

- <sup>9</sup> How long will you lie there, O lazybones?  
When will you rise from your sleep?
- <sup>10</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,
- <sup>11</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want, like an armed warrior.

### Proverbs 6:9-11

How long will you lie there, O lazybones? Solomon asked the lazy man to give an account for his ways. The thought is, “You want to sleep - how long? There is life to be lived and work to be done.”

When will you rise from your sleep? Obviously, every person needs sleep. Solomon’s advice is not that people should never sleep, but that they should not sleep excessively.

A little sleep, a little slumber. The idle man may rationalise his late rising and his too frequent naps as ‘just a little,’ but they destroy his productivity. Solomon imagined the lazy man saying this. He claimed that he only needed a little sleep, but actually he needed to work more.

The similes used to describe the end of the idle are tragic. The poverty and want that his idleness has created are likened to external forces that will bring about his destitution, i.e. by a robber and an armed warrior, or armed man.

### Introduction to Proverbs 6:12-19

A person who seeks to cause strife among others is heading for an end of irreparable damage. These verses use repeated vocabulary to highlight the characteristics of such a person in two representative descriptions: characteristics of a worthless person (vv.12-15), and things hateful to the Lord (vv.16-19). These

descriptions give a unified warning that it is the Lord himself (v.16) who brings about the final end of the worthless person (v.15).

- 12 A scoundrel and a villain  
goes around with crooked speech,  
13 winking the eyes, shuffling the feet,  
pointing the fingers,  
14 with perverted mind devising evil,  
continually sowing discord;  
15 on such a one calamity will descend suddenly;  
in a moment, damage beyond repair.

### Proverbs 6:12-15

A scoundrel and a villain. Other translations give the designation a **worthless person**, a **wicked man** that indicates an individual who lacks ‘worth’ in the sense of any desire to act in accord with righteousness, for that is what God values: <<*Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near’, and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt*>> (Deuteronomy 15:9). The four following phrases, each beginning with a participle in Hebrew, i.e. shuffling, pointing, goes, and winking, describe the person more fully as one desiring to cause conflict, exploit situations, and gain personal advantage in all that he does. Not only his mouth, i.e. crooked speech, but also his eyes, feet, and fingers are used to communicate deceptively. The final participle (devising) indicates that the external character of a worthless person’s communication stems from a perverted heart that seeks to plant seeds of distrust and suspicion among others for he is continually sowing discord.

On such a one calamity will descend suddenly. The primary justification for the conclusion of this verse is the content of v.16: the Lord hates and thus also knows and judges these things. The unity of vv.12-19 around these two central verses is indicated by the way vv.12-14 and vv.17-19 are knit together in vocabulary and theme; refer to the comment made on vv.16-19 below.

- 16 There are six things that the Lord hates,  
seven that are an abomination to him:  
17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue,

and hands that shed innocent blood,  
18 a heart that devises wicked plans,  
feet that hurry to run to evil,  
19 a lying witness who testifies falsely,  
and one who sows discord in a family.

### Proverbs 6:16-19

Six things, seven. This numeric literary device presents a representative rather than exhaustive list that seeks to draw particular attention to the final item as the focus of God's hatred. It is easy to agree that God hates the first six items; it is also easy to overlook the seventh (v.19b), and thus the author pulls the reader up short.

The repeated vocabulary from vv.12-14 indicates that the things listed here are embodied in the character of the worthless person: eyes, tongue, hands, feet, and mouth (lying) used for wrong purposes, a heart that devises wicked plans (v.14a), and the same evil intent of one who sows discord among brothers (v.14b).

Most of these sins are connected to something people do in or through their body. The eyes have a proud look, the tongue lies, and so on. Christians are again reminded of what Paul wrote in Romans about presenting the parts of the body (its members) to God for the work of righteousness, not sin; refer to Romans 6:13. This collection of seven sins is also focused on how a person treats others. They must honour God and worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24); yet God is also concerned about how his people treat others. Each of these are serious sins against other people and ultimately against God: <<And Achan answered Joshua, 'It is true; I am the one who sinned against the Lord God of Israel>> (Joshua 7:20a), <<David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord'>> (2 Samuel 12:13a), <<Why do we sit still? Gather together, let us go into the fortified cities and perish there; for the Lord our God has doomed us to perish, and has given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord>> (Jeremiah 8:14), and: <<All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you>> (Daniel 9:11).

One who sows discord in a family. This is presented as the result of the previous six or the ultimate among them. It is one of the highest among the things that God hates and regards as an abomination. Clarke describe this one as "he who troubles the peace of a family, of a village, of the state; all who, by lies and misrepresentations, strive to make men's minds evil-affected towards their brethren."

## II.j.ii Proverbs 6:20-35 - Adultery Leads to Ruin

This is the second of three paternal appeals that focus on sexual ethics; refer to Proverbs 5:1-23 and 7:1-23. Wisdom here helps the son see past the immediate temptation to the consequences, namely, spiritual ruin in the midst of social and financial disgrace, and possibly even death. The fuller description of disaster here evokes and intensifies the description in Proverbs 5:7-14. The emphasis on sexual sin may be due to the fact that it is an obvious representative of various kinds of sins; probably it is such a good representative because a person in the throes of sexual temptation easily ignores the consequences and the results are so destructive. Wisdom, then, is the means by which God protects his faithful from such disaster, refer to the comment made on Proverbs 2:9-11.

- <sup>20</sup> My child, keep your father's commandment,  
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
- <sup>21</sup> Bind them upon your heart always;  
tie them around your neck.
- <sup>22</sup> When you walk, they will lead you;  
when you lie down, they will watch over you;  
and when you awake, they will talk with you.
- <sup>23</sup> For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light,  
and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,
- <sup>24</sup> to preserve you from the wife of another,  
from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

### Proverbs 6:20-24

My child, keep your father's commandment. Solomon probably had in mind both the wisdom a father passed to his children and the word of God received and cherished by the parents. A wise child, indeed anyone who is wise, will keep God's word close, upon your heart and around your neck.

Your mother's teaching. In the appeals of Chapters 1-9, usually only the father is mentioned. The mother as teacher appears here and in Proverbs 1:8; refer to the comment made there. The young man's mother represents respect for the institutions of family and marriage.

When you walk, they will lead you. The word of God is living and active. When it is cherished and kept close, people benefit from its living power. It then will lead

them, it will keep them, and it will speak to them. Anyone who wants God to lead, keep, or speak should begin by cherishing God's word.

Verse 22 presents God's word as a person who helps in many ways:

- A guide: it will lead you.
- A guardian: it will watch over you.
- A companion: it will talk with you.

On 'they will talk with you' Charles Spurgeon commented, "This Bible is a wonderful talking book; there is a great mass of blessed talk in this precious volume. It has told me a great many of my faults; it would tell you yours if you would let it. It has told me much to comfort me; and it has much to tell you if you will but incline your ear to it. It is a book that is wonderfully communicative; it knows all about you, all the ins and outs of where you are, and where you ought to be, it can tell you everything."

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light. Solomon seems to quote Psalm 119:105 <<*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*>>. When given attention and properly valued, God's word brings light to his people in their darkness.

The adulteress. The specific situation here is another man's wife who would willingly commit adultery with the son being addressed. Such a case would present sexual temptation in its most powerful form. God's word and wisdom will never lead a person to the evil woman, or keep them with her. The light of God's word will wisely keep them from her, and speak to them better thing than her flattering words. There are other kinds of temptation, of course, and the wise reader will apply this example by making the appropriate adaptations

- 25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart,  
and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;
- 26 for a prostitute's fee is only a loaf of bread,  
but the wife of another stalks a man's very life.
- 27 Can fire be carried in the bosom  
without burning one's clothes?
- 28 Or can one walk on hot coals  
without scorching the feet?
- 29 So is he who sleeps with his neighbour's wife;  
no one who touches her will go unpunished.

## Proverbs 6:25-29

Do not desire her beauty in your heart. Solomon granted that the immoral woman may have beauty to lust after. Wisdom and the word can help prevent one from being mastered by the desire of her beauty or her allure. Jesus raised the bar in his teaching on adultery: <<*You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart*>> (Matthew 5:27-28).

And do not let her capture you with her eyelashes. In Solomon’s day this allure normally took place in a personal encounter. In the modern world images constantly hope to allure. Wisdom and the word help people to see these alluring images for what they are: crooked lies that do not tell the truth about sex, relationships, or human nature.

For a prostitute’s fee is only a loaf of bread, but the wife of another stalks a man’s very life. The Hebrew of this verse is very difficult, and translations vary, but the ESV rendering is one that seems to capture the meaning: <<*for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life*>>. The meaning is that a prostitute may be quite cheap – as cheap as a loaf of bread – but that having an affair with a married woman has fatal consequences.

The father applies two analogies to make his point that succumbing to this temptation leads to disaster. First, he says that one cannot engage in outrageously foolish behaviour and not suffer for it (vv.27-29). Sleeping with a neighbour’s wife is like taking fire to one’s chest. Solomon’s wisdom is brilliant in its clarity and simplicity. To take up with the harlot or adulteress is to play with fire, and to surely be burned. He warned, whoever touches her shall not be innocent.

No one will go unpunished. The obvious question is, ‘By whom?’ In Proverbs, the term ‘go unpunished’ (Hebrew *naqah*) usually implies that God does the punishing; refer also to Proverbs 11:21, 16:5, 17:5, 19:5, 19:9 and 28:20.

- <sup>30</sup> Thieves are not despised who steal only  
to satisfy their appetite when they are hungry.
- <sup>31</sup> Yet if they are caught, they will pay sevenfold;  
they will forfeit all the goods of their house.
- <sup>32</sup> But he who commits adultery has no sense;  
he who does it destroys himself.
- <sup>33</sup> He will get wounds and dishonour,

and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

<sup>34</sup> For jealousy arouses a husband's fury,  
and he shows no restraint when he takes revenge.

<sup>35</sup> He will accept no compensation,  
and refuses a bribe no matter how great.

### Proverbs 6:30-35

Thieves are not despised who steal only to satisfy their appetite when they are hungry. In the second analogy (refer to the comment on vv.27-29), using an argument from lesser to greater, the father reasons that if someone who steals under a sense of compulsion has to pay a severe penalty, how much greater penalty will a man suffer for committing a more disgraceful and altogether unnecessary offense. Solomon considered how people may, in some way, excuse a thief who steals to survive. Yet even when that thief is caught, justice would require him to restore what he has stolen and more. The adulterer steals, but not out of necessity - and in such a way that true restitution is impossible.

Although Solomon contrasted theft and adultery, there is an interesting link between them. Sexual immorality and adultery are like stealing. When a person has sex with anyone other than their appointed partner within the covenant of marriage, they are stealing something from their spouse (present or future), from their illicit sexual partner, and from the present or future spouse of their illicit sexual partner. Paul confirmed this likeness in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6, where he wrote that to commit sexual immorality is to take advantage of and to defraud a brother.

But he who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself. To commit adultery, and to commit sexual sin in general, is not only to sin against God and others, but also against one's own soul: <<*Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?*>> (1 Corinthians 6:18-19). People usually think that the penalty for sexual immorality comes if the sin is exposed and known; wisdom and God's word reveal that it destroys whether it is exposed or not. King David, Solomon's own father, almost came to destruction when he lusted after Bathsheba; refer to 2 Samuel Chapter 12 and he gives due warning to his son. Note that the blame is upon the adulterer. He may blame the temptress, his wife, his lusts, his desires, his circumstances, God, or the devil himself. Yet at the end of it all, he destroys himself.

**He will get wounds and dishonour.** Sexual immorality offers pleasure and excitement and often romance. It may or may not deliver those things, but even if it does it will also bring wounds and dishonour. It brings wounds to one's body and soul, and dishonour in the family, congregation, and community. Kidner concluded, "The picture of the adulterer as social outcast may seem greatly overdrawn. If so, the adjustment that must be made is to say that in any healthy society such an act is social suicide. Condemnation, as distinct from forgiveness, only proves the adulterer to be part of a general decadence."

**His disgrace will not be wiped away.** In addition to the ways that sexual immorality brings harm it will also bring disgrace when it is discovered. The jealous husband will often **show no restraint when he takes revenge** and will not be appeased in his anger.

**He will accept no compensation.** The offended husband will not be satisfied until the full penalty has been paid. Clarke observed, "This is an injury that admits of no compensation. No gifts can satisfy a man for the injury his honour has sustained; and to take a bribe or a ransom, would be setting up chastity at a price."