Proverbs 19: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0:00] Proverbs chapter 19. Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool. Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.

When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord. Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend. A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.
Many seek the favour of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. All a poor man's brothers hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him? He pursues them with words, but does not have them.
Whoever gets sense loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding will discover good. A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish.
It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, much less for a slave to rule over princes. Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offence.
[1:11] A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion, but his favour is like dew on the grass. A foolish son is ruin to his father, and a wife's quarrelling is a continual dripping of rain.

House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.
Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life. He who despises his ways will die. Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.
Discipline your son, for there is hope. Do not set your heart on putting him to death. A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.
Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.
[2:11] What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar. The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied. He will not be visited by harm.

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it back to his mouth. Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence. Reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.
He who does violence to his father, and chases away his mother, is a son who brings shame and reproach. Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.
A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity. Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and beating for the backs of fools.
Wisdom, as we have seen elsewhere in the book of Proverbs, involves walking by faith, not by sight. The fear of the Lord leads us to trust in the instruction of the Lord, over those things that he forbids that seem more promising to our natural understanding.
[3:15] Proverbs chapter 19 opens with a principle that relates to this. The poor man who walks in integrity is better off than the person who's deceitful and foolish in his speech.

This is not immediately obvious. Maybe it becomes more apparent over time. Recognising the truth of this statement requires faith in the moral governance of the Lord. Desires that are unchecked and untested by reason are not a good thing.
Where knowledge and understanding are lacking, being driven by your desires can lead you into all sorts of danger. Unchecked desire is often the cause of precipitous action that brings people into trouble, provoking the sort of hastiness that this proverb describes as causing people to lose their way.

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However, when the fool loses his way in such a manner, he will far more typically blame the Lord than his own folly. He will blame the Lord for his misfortune, for the family that he put him in, for the neighbours that he has, for some of the circumstances that he's experienced in his life.
Anything but dealing with his own folly. Verses 4-7 largely deal with the impact of money upon friendship. Many who feign to be true friends of a rich man are merely driven by mercenary interests.
[4:24] Meanwhile, the poor man, whose friendship may be a financial liability, is someone who's deserted by his friends. A man who is generous in handing out gifts will find many people clustering to him.

Everyone is a friend to such a man, but it's very difficult to discern which of those friends are true, which will stick with him in hard times. The poor man, by contrast, has the opposite struggle.
Even those who are closely related to him may cut him off, because they are concerned that he might expect them to provide for him. The person who gets sense, or literally gets a heart, loves his own soul.
Such a man, in his quest for wisdom, is seeking his own best interests. The fool, by contrast, whether he knows it or not, loves death. Verses 5 and 9 are very closely related.
Verse 5, A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape. And verse 9, A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish.
[5:21] They are very similar, and they are also similar to other verses elsewhere in the book. For instance, in Proverbs chapter 21 verse 28, A false witness will perish, but the word of a man who hears will endure.

When we encounter such repeated proverbs, we should be alert to the way that they play differently in different contexts. We should also consider their more subtle variations, which may be highlighted by the repetition of something in almost exactly the same terms.
This may encourage us to reflect upon the finer details. The repetition of a principle may also encourage us to recognise some literary pattern within the texts in which they are found.
On other occasions, the repetition may serve primarily to underline a particular point. It is not clear to me which, if any of these things, are occurring in this particular instance. However, perhaps if we looked more closely, one of these lines of investigation would reward us with some insight.
Verse 10 expresses a principle that might surprise us in our modern sensibilities. It might be compared in some respects to chapter 17 verse 7. Fine speech is not becoming to a fool.
[6:26] Still less is false speech to a prince. It argues from the lesser to the greater. We know that riches in the hands of a fool are unfitting. We might think of the character of Nabal, for instance.

Great power over princes is even less fitting in the hands of a slave. We might be a bit shocked by this. We think that the slave exercising power over the prince is a great and positive sign of social mobility.
However, the parallel may be instructive. In the case of the fool, the fool has no inner principle by which to produce great wealth. He is someone who will not keep his wealth. He squanders and wastes it and uses it in an unwise manner, in a manner that accentuates his vices.
The wise man, by contrast, stewards his wealth well and uses it for the upbuilding of the entire community. If the fool lacks the power to produce and to steward wealth well, the slave is someone who does not know how to exercise rule well.
He is not even the master of himself. Being ruled by the slave is a very bad sign that you have come under an intense form of tyranny. When your leaders are weak, dependent and ruled over by other authorities, they will become mere administrators of an authority that they cannot produce, have not produced, and are beholden to.
[7:39] The slave is empowered. He is not actually powerful. The prince, by contrast, is someone who has independent power of his own, and hence is qualified to exercise rule. The whole community is poorer off when it is led by weak and dependent persons.

If they cannot exercise true power over themselves, how on earth are they going to do so for the wider community? This is a principle that we encounter on several occasions in scripture. For instance, in chapter 30 verses 20 to 21 of Proverbs, Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up, a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food.
And again in Ecclesiastes chapter 10 verses 5 to 7, There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a

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low place.
I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves. Verse 11 expresses a two-stage process, the first which is being slow to anger, not being hot-headed, and the second which is the quality of graciously overlooking an offence.
Being slow to anger gives one the time and the space to think through an issue, to reflect, deliberate, and then come to a wise decision. The person who has this characteristic is someone who is in a position then to forgive.
[9:00] He can overlook an offence, having considered it, not just reacted against it, but responded thoughtfully and after deliberation to the situation. Such a man, by virtue of his control over his own spirit, is able to bring healing to a situation.

The goodness of a king is described in verse 12. A similar description is found in chapter 16 verse 15. In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain. The king's wrath can be a positive thing. The threatening growl of the lion is a warning to any that might come close, and the might of the king described here is something that can bring peace to his realm, as no one will dare attack.
One could think about the conversation that Susan has with Mr Beaver in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe concerning the lion Aslan. Susan, concerned about meeting a lion, asks whether Aslan is safe, and Mr Beaver responds by saying of course he isn't safe, but he's good.
The good king is supposed to be like such a lion, terrifying to the enemies of the people of God, but a source of health and peace to all within his realm. A man can be ruined by a foolish son, and his life can be made a continual misery and frustration by a quarrelsome wife.
[10:15] A successful society has a one body with many members quality to it. When all of the people within such a society are working together and in harmony, all are made stronger by each other.

However, in a quarrelsome society where people are at odds with each other, where counsel goes unheeded, where antagonisms exist, where people are in rebellion against their leaders, and those who are in authority prey upon those under them, the entire society will be weakened as a result. Proverbs describes the dynamics of such a society elsewhere. An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones. When a husband and wife are working together well, the husband gives his strength to his wife, and his wife glorifies him and brings him honour in the society.
In a healthy society, a son receives wisdom from his father, a place in the world from his father, authority from his father, and the son who honours his father in such a society empowers his father even further, as by acting in his father's name he extends his father's dominion.
There is mutual honour between the generations in a healthy society. Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their father's. Proverbs chapter 17 verse 6 A similar thing is true of a people and their leader.
[11:32] A people can be glorified in a wise and good leader, and a king for his part is glorified by his people. Proverbs chapter 14 verse 28 In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined.

While wisdom builds people up then in mutual honour, folly produces societies where people are always tearing each other down, where everyone is weaker by virtue of the others. In Proverbs chapter 18 verse 22 we are told that he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the Lord.
A similar principle is expressed in verse 14, perhaps to counterbalance verse 13, and to present the positive vision of the wife. The wife is someone who glorifies her husband and is received as a gift from the Lord.
Finding a prudent wife is not something a man can take full credit for himself. Ultimately this is a gift of the Lord, a sign of the Lord's favour. Verse 15 describes the way that slothfulness can sap people of their energies.
The person who is slothful will find his energies forsaking him. He is put, as it were, into a stupor. Where a person's resolve and their abilities are not engaged, they will gradually diminish.
[12:41] Once again, the source of life is keeping the commandment of the Lord. Yet the meaning of the second half of verse 16 is not entirely clear, and different suggestions have been put forward for its interpretation.

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Michael Fox suggests that the original text should be read as a reference to a word, rather than his ways. However, it is also possible that despising his ways refers to the way that the foolish person has treated his way of life with disregard and contempt.
Ultimately he loves death and hates himself. The Lord is the patron and the protector of the poor. It is easy to practice a form of charity that makes others beholden to us, that puts others into our debt. However, the Lord, as the guarantor of the debts of the poor, presents himself as the one who will repay the giver to them. It is indeed a remarkable notion that we could lend to the Lord. But the fact that the Lord is the guarantor of the poor, protects the poor from being put in the debt of other people, in a way that might lead to them being controlled.
Paul expresses this same principle when he responds to great gifts by saying, My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus. He does not say, I am deeply beholden to you, I am in your debt.
[13:53] Rather, he points them to God as his guarantor, the one who will ensure that they do not go unrewarded for what they have done. At various points in the book of Proverbs, disciplining one's children is seen as a sign of love and concern for them.

In verse 18, this is expressed in a particularly stark way. While a father still has hope, he should discipline his son. As long as his son's character has some degree of malleability to it, he should take the opportunity to discipline him, to ensure that he does not end up going in the way of death and folly.
However, as verse 19 expresses, there are some people who are so set in the ways of folly that any attempt to deliver them will be short-lived and ultimately futile. A man with a hot head will end up getting into trouble again and again.
You'll always be bailing him out. Until that character flaw has been dealt with, you will always find yourself trying to pick up the pieces after his failures. Far better to address that character flaw when you still have the chance.
This is also expressed to the son in verse 20. To listen to advice and accept instruction sets you on the path to gain wisdom in the future. Proverbs chapter 16 verses 1 to 3 read, The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.
[15:07] All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. Commit your ways to the Lord, and your plans will be established. Once again in verse 21 we see the power and the sovereignty of God as overruling the affairs of men.

Whatever we may plan in our hearts, ultimately it is the will of the Lord that will stand.
Consequently, we shall commit our ways to the Lord, so that our plans and our ways would prosper.
Kindness or steadfast love is the fruit of a man, and a man is better off being a poor man than a liar.
It is more beneficial for a man to produce steadfast love and kindness than to produce much wealth.
He will be better off being poor and truthful than to be rich and a fool and a liar. The fear of the Lord is a repeated theme as we have seen in the book, and here again in verse 23 the text returns to it.
The fear of the Lord here is said to lead to life. It is also the source of satisfaction and contentment.
The person who has such fear will not ultimately be visited by harm.
[16:10] He may suffer certain misfortunes, but ultimately he will know the Lord's blessing. The sluggard, even when he has the means for his satisfaction, will not take advantage of them.
Solomon compares this to a situation where the sluggard has a dish of food right in front of him, and he still cannot even exert himself to bring his hand to his mouth.

Such resources are wasted on the sluggard, and as we see elsewhere in Proverbs, he will tend to lose them in time. Punishment can serve not merely to judge and instruct the person who is punished, but also as a means of deterrence and instruction for others.
When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise. When a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge. Proverbs chapter 21 verse 11. One of the ways that the simple can gain wisdom is by paying attention to the way that others are rebuked and punished for their actions.
There is benefit to be gained from cautionary examples. Verse 26 describes a situation where a son squanders his parents' wealth and dishonours them. We see something similar in Proverbs chapter 28 verse 24.
Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, That is no transgression, is a companion to a man who destroys. Children must honour and build up the legacy that they receive from their parents.
[17:25] This duty to receive instruction and to walk in the path of wisdom is reinforced in the verse that follows. The chapter concludes with a condemnation of false witnesses and of wicked

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people whose mouths feed upon iniquity, presumably in their speech.

The fate of such persons is condemnation and beating. A question to consider. In studying this chapter we have considered the way that a healthy society is one in which people mutually honour and build up each other by their own gifts.

How can we see this principle expressed elsewhere in the scriptures? How can we see this principl e[redacted]

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