

CHAPTER 23

PROVERBS 23:1-3

CAUTIONS AGAINST LUXURY AND COVETOUSNESS

The sin we are here warned against is luxury and sensuality, and the indulgence of the appetite in eating and drinking, a sin that most easily besets us.

1. We are here told when we enter into temptation, and are in most danger of falling into this sin: “*When thou sittest to eat with a ruler thou has great plenty before thee, varieties and dainties, such a table spread as thou has seldom seen; thou are ready to think, as Haman did, of nothing but the honour hereby done thee (Esther 5:12), and the opportunity thou hast of pleasing thy palate, and forgettest that there is a snare laid for thee.*” Perhaps the temptation may be stronger, and more dangerous, to one that is not used to such entertainments, than to one that always sits down to a good table.

2. We are here directed to double our guard at such a time. We must,

(1.) Apprehend ourselves to be in danger: “*Consider diligently what is before thee, what meat and drink are before thee, that thou mayest choose that which is safest for thee and which thou art least likely to eat and drink of to excess. Consider what company is before thee, the ruler himself, who, if he be wise and good, will take it as an affront for any of his guests to disorder themselves at his table.*” And, if when we sit to eat with a ruler, much more when we sit to eat with the ruler of rulers at the Lord’s table, must we *consider diligently what is before us*, that we may not in any respect *eat and drink unworthily*, unbecomingly, lest that table become a snare.

(2.) We must alarm ourselves into temperance and moderation: “*Put a knife to thy throat, that is, restrain thyself, as it were with a sword hanging over thy head, from all excess. Let these words, Take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that*

day come upon you unawares — or those, *For all these things, God shall bring thee into judgment* — or those, *Drunkards, shall not inherit the kingdom of God, be a knife to the throat.*” The Latins call luxury *gula* — *the throat*. “Take up arms against that sin. Rather be so abstemious that thy craving appetite will begin to think thy throat cut than indulge thyself in voluptuousness.” We must never *feed ourselves without fear* (⁶¹¹²Jude 1:12), but we must in a special manner fear when temptation is before us.

(3.) We must reason ourselves into a holy contempt of the gratifications of sense: “*If thou be a man given to appetite*, thou must, by a present solution, and an application of the terrors of the Lord, restrain thyself. When thou art in danger of falling into any excess *put a knife to thy throat*; that may serve for once. But that is not enough: lay the axe to the root; mortify that appetite which has such a power over thee: *Be not desirous of dainties.*” Note, We ought to observe what is our own iniquity, and, if we find ourselves addicted to flesh-pleasing, we must not only stand upon our guard against temptations from without, but subdue the corruption within. Nature is desirous of food, and we are taught to pray for it, but it is lust that is desirous of dainties, and we cannot in faith pray for them, for frequently they are not food convenient for mind, body, or estate. They are deceitful meat, and therefore David, instead of praying for them, prays against them, ⁶¹¹³Psalm 141:4. They are pleasant to the palate, but perhaps rise in the stomach, turn sour there, upbraid a man, and make him sick. They do not yield men the satisfaction they promised themselves from them; for those that are given to appetite, when they have that which is very dainty, are not pleased; they are soon weary of it; they must have something else more dainty. The more a luxurious appetite is humoured and indulged the more humoursome and troublesome it grows, and the more hard to please; dainties will surfeit, but never satisfy. But especially they are upon *this* account deceitful meat, that, while they please the body, they prejudice the soul, they overcharge the heart, and unfit it for the service of God, nay, they take away the heart, and alienate the mind from spiritual delights, and spoil its relish of them. Why then should we covet that which will certainly cheat us?

~~120~~ PROVERBS 23:4-5

CAUTIONS AGAINST LUXURY AND COVETOUSNESS

As some are given to appetite (v. 2) so others to covetousness, and those Solomon here takes to task. Men cheat themselves as much by setting their hearts on money (though it seems most substantial) as by setting them on dainties. Observe,

I. How he dissuades the covetous man from toiling and tormenting himself (v. 4). “Do not *aim to be rich*, to raise an estate, and to make what thou hast in abundance more than it is.” We must endeavor to live comfortably, and provide for our children and families, according as our rank and condition are, but we must not seek great things. Be not of those that will be rich, that desire it as their chief good and design it as their highest end, ~~100~~ 1 Timothy 6:9. Covetous men think it is their wisdom, imagining that if they be rich to such a degree they shall be completely happy. *Cease from that wisdom*, for it is a mistake; *a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*, ~~125~~ Luke 12:15.

1. Those that aim at great things fill their hands with business more than they can grasp, so that their life is both a perfect drudgery and a perpetual hurry; but be not thou such a fool; *labour not to be rich*. What thou hast, or doest, be master of it, and not a slave to it as those that *rise up early, sit up late*, and *eat the bread of carefulness*, and all to be rich. Moderate labour, *that we may have to give*, is our wisdom and duty, ~~100~~ Ephesians 4:28. Immoderate labour, that we may have to hoard, is our sin and folly.

2. They fill their heads with projects more than they understand, so that their life is a constant toss of care and fear; but do not thou thus vex thyself: *Cease from thy own wisdom*; go on quietly in the way of thy business, not contriving new ways and setting thy wits to work to find out new inventions. Acquiesce in God's wisdom, and cease from thy own, ~~100~~ Proverbs 3:5, 6.

II. How he dissuades the covetous man from cheating and deceiving himself by an inordinate love and pursuit of that which is vanity and vexation of spirit; for,

1. It is not substantial and satisfying: “*Wilt thou* be such a fool as to *set thy eyes*, to cause thy eyes to fly with eagerness and violence, *upon that which is not?*” Note,

(1.) The things of this world are things that are not. They have a real existence in nature and are the real gifts of Providence, but in the kingdom of grace they are things that are not; they are not a happiness and portion for a soul, are not what they promise to be nor what we expect them to be; they are a show, a shadow, a sham upon the soul that trusts to them. They are not, for in a little while they will not be, they will not be ours; they perish in the using; the fashion of them passes away.

(2.) It is therefore folly for us to set our eyes upon them, to admire them as the best things, to appropriate them to ourselves as our good things, and to aim at them as our mark at which all our actions are levelled, to fly upon them as the eagle upon her prey. “*Wilt thou* do a thing so absurd in itself? What thou, a reasonable creature, wilt thou dote upon shadows? The eyes are put for rational and intellectual powers; wilt thou throw those away upon such undeserving objects? To set the hands and feet upon the world is well enough, but not the eyes, the eyes of the mind; those were made to contemplate better things. Wilt thou, my son, that professest religion, put such an affront upon God (towards whom the eyes should ever be) and such an abuse upon thy soul?”

2. It is not durable and abiding. Riches are very uncertain things; certainly they are so: *They make themselves wings, and fly away.* The more we cause our eyes to fly upon them the more likely they are to fly away from us.

(1.) Riches will leave us. Those that hold them ever so fast cannot hold them long; either they must be taken from us or we must be taken from them. The goods are said to flow away as a stream (~~1818~~ Job 20:28), here to flee as a bird.

(2.) Perhaps they may leave us suddenly, when we have taken a great deal of pains for them and begin to take a great deal of pride and pleasure in them. The covetous man sits hatching upon his wealth, and brooding over it, till it is fledged, as the young ones under the hen, and then it is gone. Or, as if a man should be fond of a flight of wild-fowl that light in his field, and call them his own because they are upon his ground, whereas, if

he offers to come near them, they take wing immediately and are gone to another man's field.

(3.) The wings they fly away upon are of their own making. They have in themselves the principles of their own corruption, their own moth and rust. They are wasting in their own nature, and like a handful of dust, which, if it be grasped, slips through the fingers. Snow will last awhile, and look pretty, if it be left to lie on the ground where it fell, but, if gathered up and laid in the bosom, it is dissolved and gone immediately.

(4.) They go irresistibly and irrecoverably, as *an eagle toward heaven*, that flies strongly (there is no stopping her), and flies out of sight and out of call (there is no bringing her back); thus do riches leave men, and leave them in grief and vexation if they set their hearts upon them.

PROVERBS 23:6-8

CAUTIONS AGAINST LUXURY AND COVETOUSNESS

Those that are voluptuous and given to appetite (v. 2) are glad to be where there is good cheer stirring, and those that are covetous and saving, that they may spare at home, will be glad to get a dinner at another man's table; and therefore both are here advised not to be forward to accept of every man's invitation, but especially not to thrust themselves in uninvited. Observe,

1. There are those that pretend to bid their friends welcome that are not hearty and sincere in it. They have a fair tongue, and know what they should say: *Eat and drink, saith he*, because it is expected that the master of the feast should so compliment his guests; but they have *an evil eye*, and grudge their guests every bit they eat, especially if they eat freely. They would seem to be liberal in making the entertainment, and would have the credit of it, but they have so great a love to their money, and so little to their friends, that they cannot have the comfort of it, nor any enjoyment of themselves or their friends. The miser's feast is his penance. If a man be so very selfish, and sordid, and mean that he cannot find in his heart to bid his friends welcome to what he has, he ought not to add to that the guilt of dissimulation by inviting them, but let him own himself to be what he is, that *the vile person may not be called liberal nor the churl bountiful*,

 Isaiah 32:5.


2. One can have no comfort in accepting the entertainments that are given grudgingly: “*Eat not thou the bread* of such a man; let him keep it to himself. Do not sponge upon those that are bountiful, nor make thyself burdensome to any; but especially scorn to be beholden to those that are paltry and not sincere. Better have a dinner of herbs, and true welcome, than *dainty meats* without it. Therefore,”

(1.) “Judge of the man as his mind is. Thou thinkest to pay thy respect to him as a friend, so thou takest him to be, because he compliments thee, but *as he thinks in his heart so is he*, not as he speaks with his tongue.” We are that really, both to God and man, which we are inwardly; and neither religion nor friendship is worth any thing further than as it is sincere.

(2.) “Judge of the meat as the digestion is and as it agrees with thee. He bids thee eat freely, but, first or last, he will discover his sordid covetous humour, and *as he thinks in his heart* so will he look, and give thee to understand that thou art not welcome, and then *the morsel thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up*; the very thought of that will make thee even to vomit the meat thou hast eaten, and eat the words thou has spoken in returning his compliments and giving him thanks for his civilities. Thou shalt *lose thy sweet words*, which he has given thee and thou has given him.”

PROVERBS 23:9

CAUTIONS AGAINST LUXURY AND COVETOUSNESS

We are here directed not to *cast pearls before swine* ( Matthew 7:6) and not to expose things sacred to the contempt and ridicule of profane scoffers. It is our duty to take all fit occasions to speak of divine things; but,

1. There are some that will make a jest of every thing, though it be ever so prudently and pertinently spoken, that will not only despise a wise man's words, but despise even the wisdom of them, that in them which is most improvable for their own edification; they will particularly reproach that, as if it had an ill design upon them, which they must guard against.

2. Those that do so forfeit the benefit of good advice and instruction, and a wise man is not only allowed, but advised, not to *speak in the ears* of such

fools; let them be foolish still, and let not precious breath be thrown away upon them. If what a wise man says in his wisdom will not be heard, let him hold his peace, and try whether the wisdom of that will be regarded.

~~2170~~ PROVERBS 23:10-11

CAUTIONS AGAINST LUXURY AND COVETOUSNESS

Note,

1. The fatherless are taken under God's special protection; with him they not only find mercy shown to them (~~2348~~ Hosea 14:3) but justice done for them. He is *their Redeemer*, their *Go%ol*, their near kinsman, that will take their part and stand up for them with jealousy, as taking himself affronted in the injuries done to them. As their Redeemer *he will plead their cause* against those that do them any injury, and, one way or other, will not only defend their right, and recover it for them, but avenge the wrongs done to them. And he *is mighty*, almighty; his omnipotence is engaged and employed for their protection, and their proudest and most powerful oppressors will not only find themselves an unequal match for this, but will find that it is at their peril to contend with it.
2. Every man therefore must be careful not to injure them in any thing, or to invade their rights, either by a clandestine removal of the old landmarks or by a forcible entry into their fields. Being fatherless, they have none to redress their wrongs, and, being in their childhood, they do not so much as apprehend the wrong that is done them. Sense of honour, and much more the fear of God, would restrain men from offering injury to children, especially fatherless children.

~~2172~~ PROVERBS 23:12-16

PARENTAL DUTIES

Here is,

1. A parent instructing his child. He is here brought in persuading him to give his mind to his book, and especially to the scriptures and his catechism, to attend *to the words of knowledge*, by which he might come

to know his duty, and danger, and interest, and not to think it enough to give them the hearing, but to apply his heart to them, to delight in them, and bow his will to the authority of them. The heart is *then* applied to the instruction when the instruction is applied to the heart.

2. A parent correcting his child. A tender parent can scarcely find in his heart to do this; it goes much against the grain. But he finds it is necessary; it is his duty, and therefore he dares not *withhold correction* when there is occasion for it (*spare the rod and spoil the child*); he *beats him with the rod*, gives him a gentle correction, the *stripes of the sons of men*, not such as we give to beasts. *Beat him with the rod and he shall not die*. The rod will not kill him; nay, it will prevent his killing himself by those vicious courses which the rod will be necessary to restrain him from. For the present *it is not joyous, but grievous*, both to the parent and to the child; but when it is given with wisdom, designed for good, accompanied with prayer, and blessed of God, it may prove a happy means of preventing his utter destruction and *delivering his soul from hell*. Our great care must be about our children's souls; we must not see them in danger of hell without using all possible means, with the utmost care and concern, to snatch them as brands out of everlasting burnings. Let the body smart, so that the spirit be *saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*.

3. A parent encouraging his child, telling him,

(1.) What was all he expected, nothing but what would be for his own good, that *his heart be wise* and that his *lips speak right things*, that he be under the government of good principles, and that by those principles he particularly maintain a good environment of his tongue. It is to be hoped that those will do *right things* when they grow up who learn to *speak right things* when they are young, and dare not speak any bad words.

(2.) What a comfort it would be to him if herein he answered his expectation: "*If thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice*, shall rejoice in thee, *even mine*, who have taken so much care and pains about thee, my heart, that has many a time ached for thee, for which thou shouldst study thus to make a grateful requital." Note, The wisdom of children will be the joy of their parents and teachers, who have no greater joy than to see them *walk in the truth*, ~~God~~ 3 John 1:4. "Children, if you be wise and good, devout and conscientious, God will be pleased with you, and that will be our joy: we shall think our labour in instructing you well bestowed; it will be a comfortable answer for the many prayers we have put up for you; we

shall be eased of a great deal of care, shall not need to be so strict and severe in watching over you, and shall consequently be the easier both to you and to ourselves. We shall rejoice in hope that you will be a credit and comfort to us, if we should live to be old, that you will bear up the name of Christ in your generation, that you will live comfortably in this world and happily in another.”

~~(17)~~ PROVERBS 23:17-18

PARENTAL ADVICE

Here is,

- 1.** A necessary caution against entertaining any favourable thoughts of prospering profaneness: “*Let not thy heart envy sinners*; do not grudge them either the liberty they take to sin or the success they are to be pitied rather than envied. Their prosperity is their portion (~~(14)~~ Psalm 12:14), nay, it is their poison,” ~~(13)~~ Proverbs 1:32. We must not harbour in our hearts any secret discontent at the providence of God, though it seem to smile upon them, nor wish ourselves in their condition. “*Let not thy heart imitate sinners*” (so some read it); do not as they do; walk not in the way with them; use not the methods they take to enrich themselves, though they thrive by them.
- 2.** An excellent direction to maintain high thoughts of God in our minds at all times: *Be thou in the fear of the Lord every day and all the day long*. We must be in the fear of the Lord as in our employment, exercising ourselves in holy adorings of God, in subjection to his precepts, submission to his providences, and a constant care to please him; we must be in it as in our element, taking a pleasure in contemplating God's glory and complying with his will. We must be *devoted to his fear* (~~(38)~~ Psalm 119:38); and governed by it as our commanding principle in all we say and do. All the days of our life we must constantly keep up an awe of God upon our spirits, must pay a deference to his authority, and have a dread of his wrath. We must be always so in his fear as never to be out of it.
- 3.** A good reason for both of these (v. 18): *Surely there is an end*, an end and expectation, as ~~(11)~~ Jeremiah 29:11. *There will be an end of the prosperity of the wicked, therefore do not envy them* (~~(17)~~ Psalm 73:17);

there will be an end of thy afflictions, therefore be not weary of them, an end of thy services, thy work and warfare will be accomplished, *perfect love will shortly cast out fear*, and *thy expectation* of the reward not only will be *not cut off*, or disappointed, but it will be infinitely outdone. The consideration of the end will help to reconcile us to all the difficulties and discouragements of the way.

~~1789~~ PROVERBS 23:19-28

PARENTAL ADVICE

Here is good advice for parents to give to their children; words are put into their mouths, that they may *train them up in the way they should go*. Here we have,

I. An earnest call to young people to attend to the advice of their godly parents, not only to this that is here given, but to all other profitable instructions: “*Here, my son, and be wise*, v. 19. This will be an evidence that thou art wise and a means to make thee wiser.” Wisdom, as *faith, comes by hearing*. And again (v. 22): “*Hearken unto thy father who begot thee*, and who therefore has an authority over thee and an affection for thee, and, thou mayest be sure, can have no other design than thy own good.” We ought to *give reverence to the fathers of our flesh*, who begot us, and were the instruments of our being; much more ought we to obey and be in subjection to the *Father of our spirits*, who made us and is the author of our being. And since *the mother* also, from a sense of duty to God and from love to her child, gives him good instructions, let him not *despise her*, nor her advice, *when she is old*. When the mother was grown old we may suppose the children to be grown up; but let them not think themselves past being taught, even by her, but rather respect her the more for the multitude of her years and the wisdom which they teach. Scornful and insolent young men will make a jest, it may be, of the good advice of an aged mother, and think themselves not concerned to heed what an old woman says; but such will have a great deal to answer for another day, not only as having set at nought good counsel, but as having slighted and grieved a good mother, ~~1817~~ Proverbs 30:17.

II. An argument to enforce this call, taken from the great comfort which this will be to their parents, v. 24, 25. Note,

1. It is the duty of children to study how they may gladden the hearts of their good parents, and do it yet more and more, so that they may *greatly rejoice* in them, even when the *evil days come and the years of which they say they have no pleasure in them* but this, to see their children do well, as *Barzillai* to see *Chimham* preferred.

2. Children will be a joy to their parents if they be *righteous and wise*. Righteousness is true wisdom; those who do good so well for themselves. Those are completely such as they should be who are not only *wise* (that is, knowing and learned), but *righteous* (that is, honest and good), and not only *righteous* (that is, conscientious and well-meaning), but *wise* (that is, prudent and discreet) in the management of themselves. If such the children be, especially all the children, the father and mother will be glad, and think nothing too much that they have done, or do, for them; they will please themselves in them, and give God thanks for them; particularly she that bore them with pain, and nursed them with pains, will rejoice in them, and reckon herself well requited, and the sorrow more than forgotten, because a wise and good man is the product of it, who is a blessing to the world he was born into.

III. Some general precepts of wisdom and virtue.

1. *Guide thy heart in the way*, v. 19. It is the heart that must be taken care of and directed aright; the motions and affections of the soul must be towards right objects and under a steady guidance. If the heart be guided in the way, the steps will be guided and the conversation well ordered.

2. *Buy the truth and sell it not*, v. 23. Truth is that by which the heart must be guided and governed, for without truth there is no goodness; no regular practices without right principles. It is by the power of truth, known and believed, that we must be kept back from sin and constrained to duty. The understanding must be well-informed with wisdom and instruction, and therefore,

(1.) We must buy it, that is, be willing to part with any thing for it. He does not say at what rate we must buy it, because we cannot buy it too dear, but must have it at any rate; whatever it costs us, we shall not repent the bargain. When we are at expense for the means of knowledge, and

resolved not to starve so good a cause, then we *buy the truth*. Riches should be employed for the getting of knowledge, rather than knowledge for the getting of riches. When we are at pains in searching after truth, that we may come to the knowledge of it and may distinguish between it and error, then we buy it. *Dii laboribus omnia vendunt — Heaven concedes every thing to the laborious*. When we choose rather to suffer loss in our temporal interest than to deny or neglect the truth they we buy it; and it is a pearl of such great price that we must be willing to part with all to purchase it, must make shipwreck of estate, trade, preferment, rather than of faith and a good conscience.

(2.) We must not sell it. Do not part with it for pleasures, honours, riches, any things in this world. Do not neglect the study of it, nor throw off the profession of it, nor revolt from under the dominion of it, for the getting or saving of any secular interest whatsoever. *Hold fast the form of sound words*, and never let it go upon any terms.

3. *Give my thy heart*, v. 26. God in this exhortation, speaks to us as unto children: “Son, Daughter, *Give my thy heart*.” The heart is that which the great God requires and calls for from every one of us; whatever we give, if we do not give him our hearts, it will not be accepted. We must set our love upon him. Our thoughts must converse much with him, and on him, as our highest end. *The intents of our hearts* must be fastened. We must make it our own act and deed to devote ourselves to the Lord, and we must be free and cheerful in it. We must not think to divide the heart between God and the world; he will have all or none. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*. To this call we must readily answer, “*My father, take my heart*, such as it is, and make it such as it should be; take possession of it, and set up thy throne in it.”

4. *Let thy eyes observe my ways*; have an eye to the rule of God's word, the conduct of his providence, and the good examples of his people. Our eyes must observe these, as he that writes observes his copy, that we may keep in the right paths and may proceed and persevere in them.

IV. Some particular cautions against those sins which are, of all sins, the most destructive to the seeds of wisdom and grace in the soul, which impoverish and ruin it.

1. Gluttony and drunkenness, v. 20, 21. The world is full of examples of this sin and temptations to it, which all young people are concerned to

stand upon their guard against and keep at a distance from *Be not a wine-bibber*; we are allowed to drink *a little wine* (⁴⁸³1 Timothy 5:23), but not much, not to make a trade of it, never to drink to excess. *Be not a riotous eater of flesh*, as the Israelites were, who lusted exceedingly after it, saying, *Who will give us flesh to eat?* Whereas Paul, though he is free to eat flesh, yet resolves that *he will eat no flesh while the world stands rather than make his brother to offend*; so indifferent is he to it, ⁴⁸³1 Corinthians 8:13. *Be not an excessive eater of flesh*. Intemperance must be avoided in meat as well as drink. *Be not a luxurious eater of flesh*, not pleased with any thing but what is very nice and delicate, savoury dishes, and forced meat. Some take not only a pleasure, but a pride, in being curious about their diet, and, as they call it, eating well; as if that were the ornament of a gentleman, which is really the shame of a Christian, making a God of the belly. “*Be not a wine bibber, and be not a riotous eater; and therefore, be not among wine-bibbers nor among riotous eaters; do not give them countenance, lest thou learn their ways and insensibly fall into those sins, or at least lose the dread and detestation of them. They covet to have thee among them; for those that are debauched themselves are very desirous to debauch others; therefore do not gratify them, lest thou endanger thyself.*” He fetches an argument against this sin from the expensiveness of it and its tendency to impoverish men: and if men will not be deterred from it by the ruin it brings on their secular interests, which lie nearest their hearts, no marvel that they are not frightened from it by what they are told out of the word of God of the mischief it does them in their spiritual and eternal concerns. *The drunkard and the glutton* hate to be reformed, though they are told they *shall come to poverty*, nay, though they are told they shall come to hell. Drunkenness is the cause of *drowsiness*; it stupefies men, and makes them inattentive to business, and then all goes to wreck and ruin: thus men that have lived creditably come to be *clothed with rags*.

2. Whoredom. This is another sin which *takes away the heart* that should be given to God, ³⁰⁴¹Hosea 4:11. He shows the danger which attends that sin, v. 27, 28,

(1.) It is a sin from which few recover themselves when once they are entangled in it. It is like *a deep ditch* and *a narrow pit*, which it is almost impossible to get out of; and therefore it is wisdom to keep far enough from the brink of it. Take heed of making any approaches towards this sin,

because it is so hard to make a retreat from it, conscience, which should head the retreat, being debauched by it, and divine grace forfeited.

(2.) It is a sin which bewitches men to their ruin: *The adulteress lies in wait as a robber*, pretending friendship, but designing the greatest mischief, to rob them of all they have that is valuable, to strip them both of their armour and of their ornaments. Even those who, being virtuously educated, endeavour to shun the adulteress, she will *lie in wait* for, that she may assault them when they are off their guard and she has them at an advantage. Let none therefore be at any time secure.

(3.) It is a sin that contributes more than any other to the spreading of vice and immorality in a kingdom: It *increases the transgressors among men*. One adulteress may be the ruin of many a precious soul and may help to debauch a whole town. It increases the treacherous or perfidious ones; it not only occasions husbands to be false to their wives and servants to their masters, but many that have professed religion to throw off their profession and break their covenants with God. Houses of uncleanness are therefore such pest-houses as ought to be suppressed by those whose office it is to take care of the public welfare.

~~1739~~ PROVERBS 23:29-35

CAUTIONS AGAINST INTEMPERANCE

Solomon here gives fair warning against the sin of drunkenness, to confirm what he had said, v. 20.

I. He cautions all people to keep out of the way of temptations to this sin (v. 31): *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red*. Red wine was in Canaan looked upon as the best wine, it is therefore called *the blood of the grape*. Critics judge of wine, among other indications, by the colour of it; some wine, they say, looks charmingly, looks so well that it even says, “Come and drink me;” *it moves itself aright*, goes down very smoothly, or perhaps the roughness of it is grateful. It is said of generous strong-bodied wine that it even *causes the lips of those that are asleep to speak*, ~~2179~~ Song of Solomon 7:9. But *look not thou upon it*.

1. “Be not ruled by sense, but by reason and religion. Covet not that which pleases the eye, in hopes that it will please the taste; but let thy serious

thoughts correct the errors of thy senses and convince thee that that which seems delightful is really hurtful, and resolve against it accordingly. Let not the heart walk after the eye, for it is a deceitful guide.”

2. “Be not too bold with the charms of this or any other sin; *look not*, lest thou lust, lest thou take the forbidden fruit.” Note Those that would be kept from any sin must keep themselves from all the occasions and beginnings of it, and be afraid of coming within the reach of its allurements, lest they be overcome by them.

II. He shows the many pernicious consequences of the sin of drunkenness, for the enforcement of this caution. Take heed of the bait, for fear of the hook: *At the last it bites*, v. 32. All sin will be bitterness in the end, and this sin particularly. *It bites like a serpent*, when the drunkard is made sick by his surfeit, thrown by it into a dropsy or some fatal disease, beggared and ruined in his estate, especially when his conscience is awakened and he cannot reflect upon it without horror and indignation at himself, but worst of all, at last, when the cup of drunkenness shall be turned into a cup of trembling, the cup of the Lord's wrath, the dregs of which he must be for ever drinking, and shall not have a drop of water to cool his inflamed tongue. To take off the force of the temptation that there is in the pleasure of the sin, foresee the punishment of it, and what it will at last end in if repentance prevent not. In *its latter end it bites* (so the word is); think therefore what will be *in the end thereof*. But the inspired writer chooses to specify those pernicious consequences of this sin which are present and sensible.

1. It embroils men in quarrels, makes them quarrel with others, and say and do that which gives others occasion to quarrel with them, v. 29. He asks, *Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow?* Who has not, in this world? Many have woe and sorrow, and cannot help it; but drunkards wilfully create woe and sorrow to themselves. Those that have *contentions* have *woe and sorrow*; and drunkards are the fools whose *lips enter into contention*. When the wine is in the wit is out and the passions are up; and thence come drunken scuffles, and drunken frays, and drunken disputes over the cups; many a vexatious ruining law-suit has begun thus. There is *babbling*, quarrels in word and the exchanging of scurrilous language; yet it rests not there: you shall have *wounds without cause*, for causes are things which drunkards are in no capacity to judge of, and therefore they deal blows about without the least consideration why or wherefore, and

must expect to be in like manner treated themselves. The wounds which men receive in defence of their country and its just rights are their honour; but *wounds without cause*, received in the service of their lusts, are marks of their infamy. Nay, drunkards wound themselves in a tender part, for they have *redness of eyes*, symptoms of an inward inflammation; their sight is weakened by it, and their looks are deformed. This comes,

(1.) Of drinking long, *tarrying long at the wine*, and spending that time in drunken company which should be spent in useful business, or in sleep, which should fit for business, v. 30. O the precious hours which thousands throw away thus, every one of which will be brought into the account at the great day!

(2.) Of drinking that which is strong and intoxicating. *They go up and down to seek wine* that will please them; their great enquiry is, “Where is the best liquor?” *They seek mixed wine*, which is most palatable, but most heady, so willingly do they sacrifice their reason to please their palate!

2. It makes men impure and insolent, v. 33.

(1.) The eyes grow unruly and *behold strange women* to lust after them, and so let in adultery into the heart. *Est Venus in vinis — Wine is oil to the fire of lust. Thy eyes shall behold strange things* (so some read it); when men are drunk the house turns round with them, and every thing looks strange to them, so that them they cannot trust their own eyes.

(2.) The tongue also grows unruly and talks extravagantly; by it the *heart utters perverse things*, things contrary to reason, religion, and common civility, which they would be ashamed to speak if they were sober. What ridiculous incoherent nonsense men will talk when they are drunk who at another time will speak admirably well and to the purpose!

3. It stupefies and besots men, v. 34. When men are drunk they know not where they are nor what they say and do.

(1.) Their heads are giddy, and when they lie down to sleep they are as if they were tossed by the rolling waves *of the sea, or upon the top of a mast*; hence they complain that their heads swim; their sleep is commonly unquiet and not refreshing, and their dreams are tumultuous.

(2.) Their judgments are clouded, and they have no more steadiness and consistency than he that sleeps *upon the top of a mast*: they *drink and*

forget the law (^{<2816>}Proverbs 31:5): *they err through wine* (^{<2817>}Isaiah 28:7), and think as extravagantly as they talk.

(3.) They are heedless and fearless of danger, and senseless of the rebukes they are under either from God or man. They are in imminent danger of death, of damnation, lie as much exposed as if they slept *upon the top of a mast*, and yet are secure and sleep on. They fear no peril when the terrors of the Lord are laid before them; nay, they feel no pain when the judgments of God are actually upon them; they cry not when he binds them. Set a drunkard in the stocks, and he is not sensible of the punishment. "*They have stricken me, and I was not sick; I felt it not: it made no impression at all upon me.*" Drunkenness turns me into stocks and stones; they are scarcely to be reckoned animals; they are dead while they live.

4. Worst of all, the heart is hardened in the sin, and the sinner, notwithstanding all these present mischiefs that attend it, obstinately persist in it, and hates to be reformed: *When shall I awake?* Much ado he has to shake off the chains of his drunken sleep; he can hardly get clear of the fumes of the wine, though he strives with them, that (being thirsty in the morning) he may return to it again. So perfectly lost is he to all sense of virtue and honour, and so wretchedly is his conscience seared, that he is not ashamed to say, *I will seek it yet again. There is no hope; no, they have loved drunkards, and after them they will go,* ^{<2425>}Jeremiah 2:25. This is *adding drunkenness to thirst, and following strong drink*; those that do so may read their doom ^{<5299>}Deuteronomy 29:19, 20, their *woe* ^{<2381>}Isaiah 5:11, and, if this be the end of the sin, with good reason were we directed to stop at the beginning of it: *Look not upon the wine when it is red.*