

# PROVERBS

## Chapter 23

When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, 2 and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. 3 Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food. 4 Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. 5 When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven. 6 Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, 7 for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you. 8 You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words. 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words. 10 Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, 11 for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you. 12 Apply your heart to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge. 13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. 14 If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol. 15 My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. 16 My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right. 17 Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day. 18 Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off. 19 Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. 20 Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, 21 for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags. 22 Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. 23 Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. 24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. 25 Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice. 26 My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways. 27 For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well. 28 She lies in wait like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind. 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. 31 Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. 32 In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. 34 You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. 35 “They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink.”

**23:1–8** As the previous proverb indicated, competence raises one’s station in life, but the proverbs that begin this chapter warn about the dangers of climbing the social ladder foolishly. The mighty are not always as welcoming as they appear (vv 1–3). Wealth is not all there is to life (vv 4–5). The stingy feign generosity, but their hospitality will cost you in the long run (vv 6–8). (TLSB)

**23:2** *put a knife to your throat.* Curb your appetite. (TLSB)

**23:3** *Do not desire his delicacies.* Repeated in a different context in v. 6. (CSB)

While we may never be invited to eat with royalty, the underlying principle is the same. Don’t lose sight of your Savior amid the tinsel and glitter of worldly pleasures. (PBC)

*deceptive*. Perhaps the meaning is that the ruler wants to obligate you in some way, even to influence you to support a wicked scheme (cf. Ps 141:4). (CSB)

The king appears to have put a lavish fare in front of you, but this is only to test you, to see whether you have the discipline to eat moderately. (TLSB)

When rulers invited someone to dine with them, they probably had ulterior motives. The meal was but a way to make a guest indebted to the host or to get some information from them. Instead of being taken in the wining and dining, the wise person stays focused on saying and doing what is right. There is no free lunch. (PBC)

**23:4** *Do not toil to acquire wealth*. The desire to get rich can ruin a person physically and spiritually. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1Ti 6:10; cf. 15:27; 28:20; Heb 13:5). (CSB)

Money can’t buy happiness, so don’t burn yourself out in accumulating it. (PBC)

**23:5** *wealth ... is gone*. Our trust must be in God, not in riches (see Jer 17:11; Lk 12:21; 1Ti 6:17). (CSB)

*when your eyes light on it is gone* – Anyone who’s lost money in the stock market or in other ways understand just how quickly it can fly away. (PBC)

I.e., as soon as your eyes fall upon the wealth. Hbr has a play on words: “When your eyes fly over to it, it flies away.” (TLSB)

**23:6** *stingy man*. One eager to get rich (see 28:22). (CSB)

Lit, “evil of eye.” Just as a generous giver was described as having “a bountiful eye,” a stingy person is called “evil of eye.” “The eye is the lamp of the body,” Jesus warned in Mt 6:22. How we look at life determines how we live. (TLSB)

This is man with an evil eye. He is selfishly looking out for his own welfare and his alone. If making money is your priority in life, you’ll probably end up at quite a few of these dinners. (PBC)

**23:7** *inwardly calculating*. He is adding up the value of the food his guests are consuming and intends to make them pay for it later. (TLSB)

*his heart is not with you*. Their heart is on the business deal they hope to get from you. Such a man is mentally counting up the cost of this business lunch or party, and has no true concern for your enjoyment. (PBC)

**23:8** *vomit*. Out of disgust at the attitude of the host. (CSB)

Figuratively; stingy hosts will make their guests wish that they had never eaten at their house. (TLSB)

You’ll sense your host’s motives and the dinner will be sickening. (PBC)

*pleasant words.* As the guests become aware of the host's true character, they realize that the exchange of pleasantries was a waste of breath. (TLSB)

**23:9** *he will despise the good sense of your words.* Fools despise wisdom (1:7) and hate knowledge and correction (1:22; 12:1). They heap abuse on one who rebukes them (9:7). (CSB)

Fools only want to hear their own "wisdom" (18:2). One cannot directly correct a fool and expect to make headway. (TLSB)

**23:10** *ancient landmark.* Boundary stones marked property lines. To move these stones was in effect stealing land. (PBC)

*fatherless.* Oppressing the widow and the fatherless is strongly denounced (see Isa 10:2; Jer 22:3; Zec 7:10). (CSB)

Fatherless and widows often fell victim to predators, since there was no male adult to protect them. God warned those who thought to harm these vulnerable people that He esp protected widows and the fatherless (Dt 10:18; 27:19). (TLSB)

**23:11** *Redeemer.* Kinsman-Redeemer, someone who helped a close relative regain land (see Lev 25:25 and note) or who avenged his death (Nu 35:12, 19). God is a "father to the fatherless, a defender of widows" (Ps 68:5). (CSB)

The word Defender is the Hebrew word for Redeemer (Goel). This term referred to the closed relative who would be responsible for the widow and her children. In the OT often applies the word to God Himself. (PBC)

*plead their cause.* See Ps 12:5; 140:12; Isa 3:13–15; Mal 3:5. (CSB)

What a threat to the ungodly! The Almighty will take up the cause of the downtrodden. And what a comfort to God's people! Jesus, our Redeemer-Defender, has stood upon this earth and will visibly return as Judge of all. He promises, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:29). (PBC)

**23:12** *discipline – moo-sawr' – properly chastisement; figuratively reproof, warning or instruction; also restraint:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. – This is another key concept in Proverbs. It is that quality of being able to follow through and apply our God-given wisdom. We might call it self-discipline. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a saying, "The wicked are under the control of their impulses, but the righteous have their impulses under their control." - Self-discipline is especially important for us to keep in mind, since our society encourages just the opposite. In a thousand different ways we are told, "If it feels good, do it!" Proverbs does not deny emotions their due. Joy and self-satisfaction have their place. But they are fully realized only when kept within the limits of God's Word. God sets up rules for living, not to make us unhappy, but to bring us real, lasting happiness. (PBC)*

*knowledge – dah'-ath knowledge:—cunning, know(-ledge), awares (wittingly).(QV)*

**23:13** *discipline – moo-sawr' – properly chastisement; figuratively reproof, warning or instruction; also restraint:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. (QV)*

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Can be understood in two ways. First, a child will not die from the blows inflicted. Second, a child will learn wisdom from being disciplined and so will not come to an early grave, as the next verse makes clear. (TLSB)

**23:14** *strike with rod...save his soul* – Physical discipline can work spiritual good. Spoiling the child can lead to physical death because of the reckless lifestyle or spiritual death or both. Notice also that discipline of the rod is far different from child abuse, which is done in anger and not for the child’s good and, at times, is fatal. (PBC)

**23:15–28** Teaching about parents and children. These verses contain three direct appeals of a father to his son (vv 15, 19, 26), much as Solomon had addressed his son directly 15 times in chs 1–9 (e.g., 1:8; 2:1; 3:1). These proverbs give pointed advice that the young need to hear: do not envy sinners (vv 17–18) and their drunken orgies (vv 19–21); instead, listen to your parents and make them happy (vv 22–25); do not give in to youthful passions (vv 26–28). The admonition on wine (vv 29–35) can be seen as a continuation of this appeal to avoid the sins of youth. (TLSB)

**23:15** *My son*. See 1:8, 10. (CSB)

Vv 13–14 instructed parents about how they were to raise their children. This verse and the ones that follow ask children to take their parents’ instruction seriously. (TLSB)

*wise* – *khaw-kam'* – A primitive root, to *be wise* (in mind, word or act):— exceeding, teach wisdom, be (make self, shew self) wise, deal (never so) wisely, make wiser. (QV)

**23:16** *inmost being*. Lit, “kidneys.” Israelites spoke of the kidneys as the seat of extreme emotions, while the heart was the seat of both the intellect and less intense emotions. (TLSB)

*when your lips speak what is right* – Alongside the rod of discipline, godly parents will keep the apple of praise. They let their children know how much they love them, and how happy they are to see their children grow in maturity and wisdom. (PBC)

Lit, “straight” or “level” things. (TLSB)

**23:17** *your heart envy sinners*. Psalm 37:1-11 has been called “the classic passage” among those telling us not to envy sinners. In verse 17-18 Solomon summarizes what his father David had expresses more at length in the psalm. The basic thoughts are:

- Don’t envy sinners, even though for a while they seem to prosper.
- Continue following the Lord, for this is the only right way.
- In the end, the ungodly will be “cut off,” that is, destroyed.
- You can look forward to a happy future, as God promises.

**23:18** *future... hope.*

We also have the wonderful examples of believers who have gone before us (Heb 11:1-12:13). Most important, we have our Savior who suffered that we might live forever in heaven. (PBC)

**23:19** *wise – khaw-kam'* – A primitive root, to *be wise* (in mind, word or act):— exceeding, teach wisdom, be (make self, shew self) wise, deal (never so) wisely, make wiser. (QV)

**23:20** *be not among drunkards.* Drunkenness is also condemned in vv. 29–35; 20:1 cf. Dt 21:20; Mt 24:49; Lk 21:34; Ro 13:13; Eph 5:18; 1Ti 3:3. (CSB)

Drunkenness and gluttony are linked here as well as in other passages of Scripture (Dt 21:20; Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34) because they are both sins of overindulgence that attempt to satisfy through food and drink the God-sized hole in the human heart. This warning follows shortly after the warning not to envy sinners but to fear the Lord. We are most tempted to envy sinners when we see how they indulge themselves in alcohol and food. (TLSB)

Our society encourages heavy drinking. Even the celebration of Jesus' birth is for many an excuse for drunkenness. (PBC)

**23:21** *come to poverty.* True wisdom allows us to see beyond momentary pleasure and discern the long-term consequence of overindulgence: poverty. (TLSB)

*slumber.* Cf. the poverty that overtakes the sluggard in 6:9–11. (CSB)

Both drunkenness and gluttony can dull one physically and mentally. They can lead to poverty. (PBC)

**23:22** *do not despise your mother.* Cf. 15:20; 30:17. (CSB)

**23:23** *Buy the truth ... buy wisdom, instruction.* Could refer to payment for education. Although truth and wisdom cannot be bought outright, they have a cost: the diligence of those who pursue them. (TLSB)

We should not understand these items as only abstract pieces of knowledge or merely practical information. Jesus Christ is the Truth (Jn 14:6) and He is Wisdom (Pr 8:22). The invitation to learn and grow in understanding is an invitation to deepen one's faith. (TLSB)

*wisdom – hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

*instruction – moo-sawr'* – properly *chastisement*; figuratively *reproof, warning* or *instruction*; also *restraint*:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. (QV)

This is another key concept in Proverbs. It is that quality of being able to follow through and apply our God-given wisdom. We might call it self-discipline. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a saying, “The wicked are under the control of their impulses, but the righteous have their impulses under their control.” - Self-discipline is especially important for us to keep in mind, since our society encourages just the opposite. In a thousand different ways we are told, “If it feels good,

do it!” Proverbs does not deny emotions their due. Joy and self-satisfaction have their place. But they are fully realized only when kept within the limits of God’s Word. God sets up rules for living, not to make us unhappy, but to bring us real, lasting happiness. (PBC)

*understanding* – *binah* – The emphasis in this word is on understanding and the ability to distinguish. – This word is related to the concept of “between” and refers to the ability to make distinctions. Young King Solomon prayed for this type of wisdom early in his reign. (1 Kings 3:9) – Life constantly calls on us to distinguish between what is good and bad, or between what is a wise choice and what is an even better choice. How we make such choices does much to determine in the course of our life. When we face important decisions in life, how do we distinguish between the options? Do we merely act on impulse? Do we follow the advice of friends? Do we read books to gain insight? All these are important factors in life’s choices. But it is even more important that we consult God’s Word (including the scriptural advice of wise Christian friends, counselors and pastors) and that we ask God’s guidance in prayer. (PBC)

**23:24–25** Good parents rejoice when they see their children growing wisely. This brings them more joy than if their children become rich or successful in school or work. (TLSB)

**23:24** *wise* – *khaw-kawm'* (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man).(QV)

**23:27** *deep pit*. Deep pits were frequently used to capture wild animals. (TLSB)

Proverbs 22:14 called the mouth of an adulteress a deep pit; now the wayward woman herself is referred to in that way. Her entire demeanor, along with her seductive words, leads into a deep trap. As if stuck in a narrow well, once you’re in, its impossible to escape without help. (PBC)

*adulteress*. Described at length in ch 7. (TLSB)

*narrow well*. A person who fell down a narrow well might sink into the mud and die. Cf Jer 38:6. In the same way, adultery traps a person. (TLSB)

**23:28** *lies in wait*. Cf 7:12, where the adulteress also lurks to see whom she may snare. (TLSB)

*increases the traitors*. Books and movies go on romanticizing promiscuity. And sexual sin continues to spread across our land. Along with unchastity, venereal diseases are rampant everywhere – the physical fruits of a spiritual sickness that destroys lives, families, civilizations, and souls. (PBC)

**23:29–35** A vivid description of the physical and psychological effects of drunkenness. (CSB)

This teaching about wine is the longest series of verses devoted to any one topic in Pr since chs 1–9 and the most comprehensive exposition on drunkenness found in the Scriptures. The passage begins with a riddle (v 29), followed by its answer (v 30). After a warning (v 31), the rest of the passage looks at the consequences of drunkenness (vv 32–35). (TLSB)

**23:29** *Who has woe?* Cf. the woes pronounced on drunkards in Isa 5:11, 22. (CSB)

*wounds*. Cf. the “beatings for the backs of fools” in 19:29. (CSB)

**23:30** *tarry long over wine*. See 1Sa 25:36. (CSB)

*mixed wine.* Probably with spices (see 9:2; Ps 75:8). (CSB)

Wine was often mixed with spices. (TLSB)

**23:31** *when it is red.* Wine was usually diluted, but some preferred to drink it straight (i.e., when it was pure red). The Hbr for “when the eye of the wine is red” is a play on words with “Who has redness of eyes?” (v 29). (TLSB)

**23:32** *bites like a serpent.* Death will be the result (cf. Nu 21:6). (CSB)

*adder.* Poisonous snake of the Near East. (TLSB)

**23:33** *see strange things.* Perhaps a reference to the delirium that afflicts the alcoholic. (CSB)

Those who abuse alcohol may see hallucinations. (TLSB)

*utter perverse things.* Often, people who are drunk say things that they would never say when sober. (TLSB)

**23:34** *You will be like one who lies down in midst of the sea.* Your head will be spinning. (CSB)

Israel lacks natural ports; few people were sailors. Drunkenness makes one as unsteady as a novice at sea. (TLSB)

For the most part OT Israelites were not a seagoing people. Hence the comparison of drunkenness to sea-sickness would be especially nauseating. (PBC)

**23:35** *They struck me...did not feel it!* Cf. the condition of Israel in Jer 5:3. (CSB)

So drunk they do not feel the blows. (TLSB)

*When shall I awake?* People who are drunk sleep fitfully. They often wait until they are sober enough to rise and then drink away their headache. (TLSB)

*I must have another drink.* The woe and misery do not prevent him from repeating his folly (cf. 26:11; 27:22; Isa 56:12). (CSB)