

The first section of Proverbs (chapters 1-4) set forth the path of wisdom.
Proverbs 5-7 sets forth the Father’s teaching on the way of folly.

While the dominant theme of Proverbs 5-7 is the adulteress,
chapter six reminds us that folly takes many forms

And here in Proverbs 6:1-19 we see three types of fools:

the surety
the sluggard
the troublemaker

There is a descending path in our text,

since the surety is still addressed as a son—
a foolish son, perhaps, but a son nonetheless

The sluggard, however, is not addressed as a son, but as “O sluggard!”
but like the surety he harms primarily himself

The troublemaker, on the other hand, harms others.

He is connected to the sluggard by the image of sudden judgment

Just as poverty comes upon the sluggard like a robber,

so also calamity comes upon the troublemaker suddenly.

1. The Surety (6:1-5)

*My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,
have given your pledge for a stranger,*

² *if you are snared in the words of your mouth,
caught in the words of your mouth,*

³ *then do this, my son, and save yourself,
for you have come into the hand of your neighbor:
go, hasten,^[a] and plead urgently with your neighbor.*

⁴ *Give your eyes no sleep
and your eyelids no slumber;*

⁵ *save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,^[b]
like a bird from the hand of the fowler.*

Moses called for liberality toward the poor, and forbade taking interest from the needy,
but the law did permit the practice of the creditor taking a pledge

to secure the repayment of the debt (Ex 22:26; Dt 24:10-13, 17)

Proverbs, however, consistently warns against becoming surety for a stranger’s debt

“Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm” (Prov. 11:15)

“One who lacks sense gives a pledge

and puts up security in the presence of a neighbor” (17:18)

“Take a man’s garment when he has put up security for a stranger,

and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for foreigners.” (20:16)
“Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts.” (22:26)

Just because a thing is lawful does not make it wise.

Would you cosign a mortgage for a stranger?

Throughout Proverbs the son is exhorted to be generous and kind to the poor.
But don't be stupid!

Now, what would tempt an Israelite to put up security for a stranger?

You see, Israel was forbidden to charge interest to a fellow Israelite.
But they *could* charge interest to a stranger.
So it might be tempting to make a loan to a stranger,
since you could make a quick profit.

Think about who the “neighbor” and the “stranger” are.

The neighbor is the creditor
and the stranger is the debtor
(since the neighbor is the person who can let you out of the arrangement—v3—
something a debtor usually cannot do)

In other words, the neighbor is lending money to a stranger –
and you have offered to be the surety – to provide the collateral –
in case the stranger cannot pay his debt.

But the problem is that if he defaults, you are stuck!

So before you get into the mess—get out!
Go to your neighbor, humble yourself,
and plead with him to let you out of your foolish agreement.

“So give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber;
save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,
like a bird from the hand of the fowler.”

The gazelle would be hunted by chasing them into a triangle shaped trap
where they would be slaughtered *en masse*.

You have fallen into a trap.
Get out!

So one route to folly is to become a surety for others.

This is not a prohibition against putting up security for others.
This is a warning.

It is permitted by God's law—but ordinarily it is not wise.

Hebrews 7:22 refers to Jesus as “the guarantor of a better covenant.”

He is our surety.

One could say from an economic vantage point that Jesus was foolish—
he took upon himself to stand as our guarantor
for a debt that he *knew* we could never repay.

He did that with full knowledge of the warnings of Proverbs—
knowing that *because* we could not pay our debt,
he would have to pay it for us.

And thus the foolishness of men reveals the wisdom of God.

So perhaps it is no accident that the surety is still called “my son.”

Being a surety does not compromise one’s sonship—
it is not normally a wise thing to do,
but it is not inherently contradictory to being the Father’s son.

2. The Sluggard (6:6-11)

⁶ *Go to the ant, O sluggard;*

consider her ways, and be wise.

⁷ *Without having any chief,*

officer, or ruler,

⁸ *she prepares her bread in summer*

and gathers her food in harvest.

⁹ *How long will you lie there, O sluggard?*

When will you arise from your sleep?

¹⁰ *A little sleep, a little slumber,*

a little folding of the hands to rest,

¹¹ *and poverty will come upon you like a robber,*

and want like an armed man.

This is not so with the sluggard.

Sluggardliness is inconsistent with sonship.

And so the father does not address the sluggard as “my son” but as “O sluggard!”

Like the surety, the sluggard wants to get something without doing anything.

The sluggard wants food and rest – but doesn’t want to work for it.

This poem has two parts, verses 6-8 and 9-11

The first deals with learning from the ant:

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways and be wise.

Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,

she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

What can we learn from the ant?

1) she has no leader (cf. 30:27 regarding locusts and 30:25 regarding ants)

The ant needs no leader to tell it to work–

its motivation is derived from within;

the lesson should be clear:

the wise son will learn to find his motivation within.

If you internalize wisdom, then you will be diligent in your labors.

2) we learn that the ant works when there is work to be done (v8)

“she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.”

Imagine the squirrel who waits until winter to go looking for nuts...!

Or the bee who waits until fall to look for flowers!

All other creatures that God made seem to have this diligence built into them.

Maybe there are lazy squirrels – but they die out each winter!

How is that humanity has learned laziness?

Most creatures have a pretty strong instinct for self-preservation.

Humans have it too – but it has become muted by prosperity.

If you had no food, what would you do?

Go to the store and buy some.

Okay – but now you lost your job – and you have no money.

Now what?

Well, between your family, your church, and your government –
you can probably make it...

Why do families, churches, and governments do this?

Because of the strong instinct for self-preservation!

After all, if there are millions of people with no jobs, no money, and no food –

it's going to get pretty crazy out there!

So we have designed a society in which pretty much anyone who is hungry can find food.

Of course, this has the tendency of muting the impulse to work.

Our society permits a measure of laziness –

indeed, encourages the impulse to sluggardliness –

because we fear food riots.

So it is perhaps especially important for us to heed the Father's voice

when he warns us that sluggardliness is inconsistent with being his son!

Part two consists of an accusation and a warning.

The accusation is “how long will you lie there, O sluggard?
When will you arise from your sleep?” (v9)
When will you get to work?

*A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,
and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.* (v10-11)

Poverty and want will invade the home of the sluggard.

Who is the sluggard?

Bruce Waltke points out that at least 14 proverbs connect idleness to poverty,
and yet *none* of them refer to the sluggard as “poor.”
The sluggard may be impoverished,
“poverty will come upon him”
but he will never be poor!

Why do I say this?

Because Proverbs distinguishes between “the poor,”
--who are the proper objects of mercy--
and the sluggard, whose poverty is his own fault.
As Proverbs 19:17 says, “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will repay him for his deed.”

The poor are objects of the Lord’s special concern.

How do you tell the difference between the poor and the impoverished sluggard?

Get to know them.
The difference will become clear.
The sluggard just wants a free handout.
The poor is an honest worker.

Listen to how these other proverbs put it.

First, listen to four proverbs about the sluggard:
“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing,
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied” (13:4)
“The sluggard does not plow in the autumn;
he will seek at harvest and have nothing” (20:4)
“The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.” (21:25)
“In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty,” (14:23)

The sluggard is one who wants, and craves, and seeks, and desires, and talks –
but he refuses to work, to be diligent, to labor, or to toil.

But then listen to these proverbs that speak of the poor:

“Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth,
or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty (22:16)
“Whoever gives to the poor will not want,
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.” (28:27)
“The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice.” (13:23)
“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker,
but he who is generous to the needy honors him.” (14:31)
“Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate,
for the LORD will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.”
(22:22-23)
“A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.” (29:7)

Someone who just sits around complaining – that is a sluggard.
He is a fool – there is nothing you can do for him except uncover his folly.

But anyone who is willing to work qualifies as the poor and needy
to whom we are to be generous.

The solution for the lazy sluggard is the call to diligence:
“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
He who gathers in summer is a prudent son,
but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.” (Prov 10:4-5)
“The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns,
but the path of the upright is a level highway.” (15:19)

And we should apply this to our daily labors.
Laziness is one of my besetting sins.
It was particularly ironic that I had to preach this sermon this week –
because the temptation to sloth was particularly strong this week!
As we go through this season of social distancing –
it may be difficult at times to get motivated to do what you need to do!
(It is hard for me too!)

Jesus is the wise and faithful son.
He was diligent in all his Father’s ways.
Now we are called to repent of our slothful ways
and be diligent laborers bringing in the harvest.

3. The Troublemaker (6:12-19)

The third (and worst) of the three foolish men is the “worthless person.”
Literally, this is “a man of belial.”

By the New Testament this word “belial” will be used of the devil,
but in the OT it is used to refer to those who rebel against God and man.
All sorts of antisocial behavior (from rape to murder to idolatry)
can be expected when you encounter a man of belial.

Bruce Waltke prefers to translate it “insurrectionist,”
because it consistently refers to someone who is overthrowing
either the law of man or of God. [Dt 13:13, 1 Sam 2:12; Nahum 1:11, 15; 1 Sam
10:27; 2 Sam 20:1; Prov 19:28; Ps 101:3; 1 Sam 1:16; 2 Sam 22:5 (=Ps 18:5/6)]

I will call him the “troublemaker” – because “worthless” is not helpful.
The problem with the man of belial is not that he is worthless –
the problem is that he causes trouble for others!
So let’s call him the “troublemaker”!

This third path of fools also has two parts.

Verses 12-15, which refer to the troublemaker’s misuse of the body,
and then verses 16-19 which focus on God’s hatred for this misuse of the body.

¹² *A worthless person [a troublemaker], a wicked man,
goes about with crooked speech,
¹³ winks with his eyes, signals^[c] with his feet,
points with his finger,
¹⁴ with perverted heart devises evil,
continually sowing discord;
¹⁵ therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly;
in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.*

In verses 12-15 there are six things that the troublemaker does:

- 1) he has a crooked mouth (the ESV says speech, but the word here is “mouth”
to keep up with the body part theme)
- 2) he winks with his eyes
- 3) signals with his feet
- 4) points with his finger—these nonverbal gestures may well have magical overtones;
at the very least they are signals to his cohorts

All of this is rooted in:

- 5) devises evil with perverted heart
- 6) continually sowing discord

His outward signs reveal the devices of his inward heart.

The troublemaker – the man of belial – the insurrectionist –
the one who is constantly upending people and causing trouble –
is one whose heart is devising evil and sowing discord.

Whether zoombombers who are interrupting zoom meetings with their foul messages –
or those manufacturing or distributing “fake news” to harm others.
The internet has certainly provided plenty of space for troublemakers!

But don't be afraid.

Because the troublemaker cannot win!
“calamity will come upon him suddenly;
in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.” (v15)

The man of belial—the troublemaker—will not flourish.
His misuse of the body will result in the breaking of his body.
Judgment will come upon the wicked and destroy them “beyond healing.”

All this is explained in verses 16-19.
It is because the LORD hates this misuse of the body.

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 make haste to run to evil,*
¹⁹ *a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.*

The connection between verses 12-15 and verses 16-19 is found in the body parts

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him.
And so we run through the same six things that we saw in verses 12-15
(though in different order):

- 1) haughty eyes
- 2) a lying tongue
- 3) hands that shed innocent blood
- 4) a heart that devises wicked plans
- 5) feet that make haste to run to evil

These first five are the same first five from verses 12-15,
only this time they are arranged from top to bottom:
eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet

He is a complete package—this man of belial.
He is corrupt, through and through.

And we conclude in verse 19 with an expansion of verse 15's "continually sowing discord"

6) a false witness who breathes out lies

7) one who sows discord among brothers

Spreading strife/sowing discord is the keystone of both halves.

The troublemaker sows discord.

The troublemaker wreaks havoc wherever he goes.

Let me remind you that the Father is speaking to his Son about the church.

Everyone in Israel was a part of the covenant people.

So these "troublemakers" were not "those wicked heathens out there!"

They were professing Christians.

Professing Christians do not have an exemption from being sons of belial!

I am afraid that there are too many sons of belial who name the name of Christ on Facebook –
and yet are still troublemakers in their communities.

They breathe out lies and sow discord among brothers.

In many cases, I don't doubt, they are well-intentioned.

But think about how it works:

it starts with "haughty eyes."

They think too highly of themselves and their own understanding.

They think too little of others.

They are afraid of "being taken in" by "liberals" –

and so they spread misinformation – they spread *lies* –

and thus, perhaps unwittingly, their hands shed innocent blood.

It's happening on all sides.

Many on the left cannot possibly consider encouraging President Trump
when he does something good.

They must make him sound like he is always evil all the time.

Likewise, many on the right cannot bring themselves to admit
that doctors and scientists actually know something.

Having spent decades creating a culture of rejecting "mainstream science" –
some have endorsed foolish theories

that would result in the deaths of thousands.

The LORD *hates* haughty eyes.

He doesn't care whether your arrogance is liberal or conservative.

He hates haughty eyes.

And the LORD *hates* a lying tongue.

He doesn't care whether your lies are socialist or capitalist!

And he hates hands that shed innocent blood.

I can't help but think of some of the so-called churches that have ignored God's servants,
the magistrates.

Ignorance is one thing.

But if, in their arrogance and pride, they believed lies and repeated lies –
and now people are dead because of their arrogance and pride? –
then yes, their hands have shed innocent blood.

In many cases, there is no legal recourse.

But they will answer before the throne of God!

Wisdom is all about how to live in *God's world*.

The wise son will always honor and respect those in authority.

It doesn't mean they are always right!

But it does mean that he will respect and honor them.

Whereas as the first list ended with the heart,
this list puts the heart at the center.

We saw a couple weeks ago that Proverbs 4 concluded with a similar concern for the body:

“Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.

Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.

Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.

Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.” (4:23-27)

There is a proper use of the body, and an improper use.

Speak straight.

(Or as Paul puts it, speak the truth in love)

Look straight ahead

for where your eyes lead, your feet follow.

And walk straight–

and above all, “guard your heart” for from it flow the springs of life.

Again, we are seeing the importance of self-discipline –
internalizing the Father's teaching.

Becoming a disciple.