

The Sovereignty of the Lord over Human Business

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[0 : 00] Good morning, guys. Good morning, y'all. Can you hear me okay?

Good? Okay. It's so good to see everyone here at Starlight. Shout out to everyone joining online. You are loved. You are missed. I want for the day when we can hug each other again.

Please turn with me to our passage this morning in Proverbs chapter 20. First is chapter 23. While you turn there, let me introduce myself. My name is Ray Park.

And along with Matt Hawkins, I'm one of the pastoral interns here at Trinity English Church. Matt and I are in the process of taking our exams in order to get ordained. After which, we joined Sean in forming the local eldership at Trinity.

Our elders currently consist of Sean plus two provisional elders. So Paul Buckley and Dan Broca. Sorry, guys. They're basically elders on loan for us from other churches.

[1 : 02] And we're grateful for Paul and Dan for their service to us. So let me pray for us before reading today's passage. Heavenly Father, you are God over us.

You are God over Cambridge. God over all things. And we thank you for your word, which is our spiritual bread and is sweeter than honey. God, we pray that you would give us an appetite to eat from your word.

Faith to digest your word. Give us a heart to apply your word to our lives. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Proverbs 20, starting in verse 10.

Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike in abomination to the Lord. Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.

The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both. Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty. Open your eyes and you will have plenty of bread.

[2 : 05] Bad, bad, says the buyer. But when he goes away, then he boasts. There is gold and abundance of costly stones. But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.

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. Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man.

But afterward his mouth is full of gravel. Plans are established by counsel, by wise guidance, rage, rule. Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets.

Therefore, do not associate with a simple battle. If one curses his father or his mother, his lamb will be put out in utter darkness. And inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.

Do not say, I will repay evil. Wait for the Lord and he will deliver you. Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord. And false feels are not good.

[3 : 10] So the Boston Marathon, which usually takes place in April, was canceled this year. One of the many things impacted by the pandemic. Just random note.

Another thing impacted was how often I wear pants. I was worried this morning. It's the first time I wear pants in a long time. But so the marathon, instead of being held in person, it was held as a virtual event.

But I'm guessing most people didn't get to run Heartbreak Hill. This is a notorious incline at mile 20, which is really a rough part of the marathon. So we're at chapter 20 of Proverbs.

And I'm reminded of Heartbreak Hill. Because I don't know about you, but I'm looking for some endurance to get through the book. But Proverbs is a wonderful book. And of course, all scripture is useful for teaching and rebuking and correcting and training in righteousness.

But I think Proverbs can be a little bit tough. Part of it is the genre and the style of Proverbs. So it's a wisdom miniature. It's not dripping storytelling of narratives or the deep, meaty theology of New Testament epistles.

[4 : 18] And some of it's the style. We're well into the same portion of Proverbs. So it's the rhythm of A but B, A but B, A but B. And part of it's the concept.

You can read a chapter of the sayings and you feel pretty disjointed. They don't have much in common. But there are some common things going throughout Proverbs.

But after a while, too, they seem to be more competitive. So, I mean, like a tired runner, hitting that hill, looking for motivation to crush on, it might be helpful to remember the immense value of the book of Proverbs.

It's a book about wisdom. It's a book about learning the skill of the art of godly living. So wisdom helps us to live holy lives.

So why is that important, to live holy, godly lives? It's because we, as you, as a person who trusts in Jesus to save you from sin, that's who you are.

[5 : 23] You are holy. You are set apart for God. You are God's special treasured possession. Titus chapter 2 tells us, For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself and people for his own possession, who are selfish and religious.

So telling you, my Christian brother and sister, to be holy is like telling our Korean pastor, Sean Woo, to be Korean. Or telling our chemistry PhD student, Bailey McLernan, to be smart.

Or telling our 6'2 Justin Koontz to be tall, right? It's, we are holy in Christ. And so we are holy. And so that was a part of who we are.

Now, holy and godly life, it doesn't happen by accident any more than does a good marriage or a successful career. It takes diligence. It takes pursuit.

It takes discipline. It takes hard work. But for a child of God who was born again and filled with the Holy Spirit, I think it's harder work to live an ungodly life because that's our new nature.

[6 : 53] That's against our new nature. He can't tell and expect Justin to stop being tall. And you can't expect and tell a child of God to stop being like the Heavenly Father.

If you do find that it's easy and natural to live counter to who God is, then it's time to examine whether or not your faith is genuine, whether it's alive. But for those pursuing God in this, Proverbs provides words of wisdom on how to be holy.

How to be holy and normal, day-to-day things of life, work, money, communication, family. These are all topics that Proverbs touches on.

And today in chapter 20, verses 22, it touches on the topics of human business and wealth, as well as discernment and judgment. So the main message for today is that we should trust God in our business dealings and be fair, discerning, and diligent.

So we should trust God in our business dealings and be fair, discerning, and diligent. Let's jump into verses 10 through 12. These verses are repeated from last week's sermon.

[8 : 02] That's because they're related both to the previous section about foolish behavior before it came, and to the next section about foolish business dealings. God sees, and God will judge both things.

So verse 10 says, Unequal ways and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord. An abomination is a thing that causes hatred or disgust, something that's vile, something that's detestable.

Maybe to us that might be adultery, child abuse, public defecation. Those things are abominations. And to God, unequal weights and measures are abominations.

So think of a trader who's buying and selling goods. He's trying to be as profitable as possible. He sets up shop. He works for long hours. He builds up his network of buyers and suppliers.

He does everything he can to make money within what's ethical. Maybe things beyond the ethical. About something that he needs to be sure to go unlimits.

[9 : 05] He holds out a couple scales for measuring money. One, he uses for measuring gold to pay suppliers. And he tweaks it so that he ends up paying a little bit less than he should. And the other, he uses it for customers.

And he tweaks it so that his customers pay a little more than they should. And he thinks that no one will see it. He'll never get caught. But what these verses tell us is that God, who made the seeing eye, he sees and knows.

And to God, this kind of dishonest dealing stinks. It stinks like an overflowing quarter potty, overflowing quarter potty like we have here on a hot summer day. And, you know, God is truthful. He does not lie. Dishonest business is hateful to him. Whether it's manipulating scales for your benefit, or insurance fraud, you have to pay out. Or exaggerating the severity of a patient who comes in.

To convince them to buy more or additional services. So this is the first few verses I'm talking about. Verse 12 is actually paired with verse 13.

[10:12] And this is a pattern that we see in our passage. There are a couple verses related to each other that are coupled throughout. So verse 12 says that God has made the seeing eye.

And verse 13 tells us to open your eyes to avoid poverty and have abundance of bread. In other words, God gave you eyes to see. Now we should open them and use them.

It's a unique balance in this division of responsibilities. It's less like one of our school or work projects. Where, you know, you might say, hey, you go create slides 1 to 10.

I'll create slides 11 to 20. It's more like God saying, I'm going to help you create slides 1 to 20. So you go and do it. Create all 20. We see this balance in Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 through 13. Which tells us to work out your own salvation with mere trembling. For it is God who works in you. Both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God has given us bodies and minds and hearts for this life.

[11:12] And we should use them to live fruitful for him. In the next pair of verses, in 14 and 15, we move on from one warning to another. On one hand, you can fail in your work and use property.

By being lazy, you can fail to open your eyes. But you can also fail in your work through active deceitfulness or personal gain. So verse 14 paints a picture of a buyer in a market who's haggling with his seller.

He's whittling down the price and later bragging about his buy. I lived in China for a time. And this kind of haggling is pretty common in certain markets.

You know, I walk into a store. And I'd ask the price of something. I'd put something out. And the owner can obviously tell me that I'm a foreigner because of my awful Chinese accent. And we do like a little dance, right?

I say, how much is that? We say, that's 100 bucks. I say, what? Like, that's too expensive. 20 bucks. Yeah, right. 90 bucks. We go back and forth. 30, 80, 40, 70.

[12:14] I might throw in some George Costanza for you cycle fans. I would say, I'll walk out of here right now, you know? You might get some from the seller. I was like, come on. I'm barely making money on this.

And then we eventually settle on \$50. Everyone's happy. So you'd think it's easier to skip that kind of dance. But every now and then, the owner gets someone who actually pays the \$100. You know, no questions asked.

So it's worth it for him. But this type of haggling doesn't seem to be what's in focus in this verse for a couple reasons. One is that the buyer is saying that the product is bad. It's bad, bad, right?

And if something is actually bad, you wouldn't buy it, no matter how cheap it is, no matter how good a deal it is. So it doesn't seem like this guy's being shrewd. It seems like he's being a liar.

He's just lying, right? So that's the first reason. Second, he goes away and brags about it. So he brags about himself. The foolish man depicted here is the boastful liar.

[13:10] Someone who's skilled in deceitful business practices and proud of it. So that's the first of this pair. In the second part of this verse, in this pairing, is verse 15.

It speaks of lips of knowledge that are more precious than gold, which is a contrast to the proud, lying lips in verse 14. I've grown to value. I've grown to value lips of knowledge more and more during years of marriage.

God has gifted me with a beautiful wife in Carolyn. But one day we'll both be old and gray. She'll be a more beautiful old and gray than I am, but we're all going to get there.

So I've learned that. More than her beauty, it's her lips of knowledge that are valuable. She's smart. She's great at understanding people and situations. She knows how to respond wisely. I don't know if you noticed me in our members meeting a couple weeks ago, but we're all muted.

But every now and then I'm talking off screen. I'm talking to Carolyn. I'm saying, hey, what do you think about this? How would you respond? What do you think is the best course of action? And I rely on her for counsel. And lips of knowledge are immensely valuable.

[14:16] They're valuable because they're a product of hard work. It takes study of God's word and God's mind to understand what is good and what is not. It takes practice trying to speak wisely, sometimes succeeding and sometimes putting your foot in your mouth.

It takes prayer to change your heart. So even if you know the words to say, you would have the heart to say it, to want to speak kindly and lovingly to others instead of being disparaging or sarcastic.

It's hard work, but it's valuable work. So that's verses 14 and 15. In the next pairing is verses 16 and 17. Verse 16 instructs us not to rashly take on the debt of strangers.

So we've heard this topic before in the book of Proverbs. The Proverbs says to take a man's garment, which is his basic property, as collateral when you foolishly become security for a stranger.

Now this is said with rhetorical sarcasm. It's not a command to actually do that. It's meant to emphasize the stupidity of becoming security for a stranger. A similar situation today might be co-signing someone else's contract.

[15:26] So I found some advice online about co-signing loans. So it says, co-signing a loan can distribute your financial life. When a friend or family member comes to you and asks you to co-sign a loan for them, just say no.

Co-signing puts you in the worst of both worlds. You don't get the benefit of the house, the car, the student loan, etc. that you're guaranteeing. But if things go wrong, you'll be responsible for paying. So this advice talks about turning down a friend or a family member. Someone you already have a relationship with. How much more unadvisable is it to co-sign for a stranger?

Someone you don't know. Verse 17 escalates this from rash words of saying that you'll back somebody out that you don't know.

To again, deceitful words for personal gain. Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel. This is one of Satan's schemes when he tempts us to sin.

[16:33] He shows us the short-term gratification and gain of sin, but he blinds us. The more long-term consequences and the more significant loss that it brings.

We see the instant gratification of pornography, but are blind to the future impact on our marriages. Or in business, we see the immediate gains of stolen riches, but are blind to the sorrow and shame of justice.

I think of Bernie Madoff. He ran a massive \$64.8 billion Ponzi scheme. And he's currently serving a 150-year prison sentence.

And his eldest son committed suicide in the aftermath. But even when justice doesn't catch up in this life, we know that it will in the next.

Because God sees, God hears all. Vengeance belongs to God. Verses 18-19 give guidance on decision-making.

[17:36] It means that you should seek counsel in making decisions, but not with gossip. It is the humble and God-fearing person who values input from others.

Others who love and trust God. But the proud person already has the only opinion that he thinks that he needs. And so he doesn't ask for it, he doesn't look for it. Verse 18 applies this need for advice to war, but it's equally applicable for other areas of life.

I found that it's really helpful when you're dating somebody to have one or two people that you really trust walking with you throughout. In the midi-gritty of the relationship.

Because you can lose sight, lose perspective when you're dating. You need someone who can see straight, who can call out some red flags. Especially when your own judgment is clouded.

So, yeah, the need for advice, the value of that is super important. But someone you shouldn't trust in verse 19 is a gossip. It's a person who can't keep their mouth shut.

[18:41] Who goes without revealing secrets. At the heart of gossip is unfaithfulness. It's unfaithfulness to the person being gossiped about. And a lack of love.

When you confide in a person who has these character flaws. And you seek their guidance. They might come off initially as a good listener. Someone who gives good counsel in the moment. Plus you get the benefit of gifts and juicy details about other people's lives.

But the gossip is also likely to share your secrets with others. So be careful there. Says the prophet. Moving on to verses 20 and 21.

They speak to how we treat our parents. Namely, we should honor our mother and father. Verses 20. Verse 20 is the flip side of Exodus. Chapter 20, verse 12.

It says in the Ten Commandments. Honor your father and your mother. That your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God has given you. Honoring one's parents can be very difficult.

[19 : 45] Some of us have parents that are great. They love us. They provide for us. And we respect them. But some of us have parents that it's hard.

You know? We might not judge them as honorable. And in this world, it's the norm to give what is earned by a person. We honor those who are honorable. Love those who are lovable.

Respect those who are respectable. But the biblical norm is to give what is deserved by the position. Not the person. So in Exodus chapter 20, verse 12.

We read, honor your father and your mother. Ephesians 5, verse 33. Let each one of you love his wife as himself. And let the wife see that she respects her husband. 1 Peter 2, 17.

Honor the emperor. And in verse 18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect. Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. There are no caveats here.

[20 : 47] The last verse actually points out that servants are to respect even unjust masters. Those who don't deserve it. And this type of honoring and respecting, irrespective of the person, is good and right.

Because in these relationships between person to person, there's a third party, the most important party, who's God. Who has created families and marriage and work and all the roles within them. He's the one who deserves our obedience and honoring and respecting and loving. So we see an example of this in the Old Testament with David. In 1 Samuel chapter 24.

This is a time when he's running for his life from King Saul. And he takes refuge in some caves.

Saul hears that he's over there and he comes after him.

But while in pursuit, Saul needs to use the bathroom. So he decides to go to number two in a cave.

And actually that cave is the very one that we're designing. And I'm reading in 1 Samuel chapter 24 and verse 4.

[21 : 50] And the men of David said to him, Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand. And you shall do to him as it should seem good to you.

So his men are saying, Hey, God said he's going to give your enemies to your hand. This is exactly it. You should go take care of them. So David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

And afterward, David's heart struck him because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my Lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed.

So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. And then later, when David reveals to Saul what happened, he says, May the Lord judge between me and you.

May the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. So it's clear that David trusted and feared God. When it comes just to human wisdom, this was a perfect opportunity for David to be rid of his enemies.

[23 : 03] And though Saul had come out to kill him, David honored God so he would not harm God's kingdom. And he would trust God to avenge rather than taking vengeance into his own hands.

So it's hard to honor those who are not honorable and to love those who are not lovable. And God understands this. He knows this because he does this for us. You and I, we are not good enough for God.

We will never be good enough for God. He is God and his standards of perfection, of purity, of love, of righteousness are beyond any of us. So we will never be good enough for God, yet we are of immense value, incredible value to God.

We are valuable enough that God sent his only son on a rescue mission so that Jesus could be good enough for us and pay for our penalties. So we're not good enough, but Jesus is good enough.

God chooses to forgive us because Jesus deserves it. He chooses to make us his children because Jesus deserves it. And he chooses never to leave us nor forsake us because Jesus deserves it.

[24 : 10] So honor your parents because Jesus deserves it. And he also helps us to obey. Verse 20 is paired with verse 21.

An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end. This verse probably isn't referring to a fortune made quickly through immoral means.

It seems specifically to pertain to inheritance received from parents. It has in mind a grieved child who somehow speaks out the process like put his hands on his parents running faster. Maybe he tries to get his parents to die quicker.

Maybe it's like a prodigal sign in Luke 15. Which is equivalent to saying to his father, I wish you were dead.

I'd rather have your money. Maybe the child wants a head start on his life. He needs money to find an education or pay for a way to pay a down payment on a house.

[25 : 14] Maybe he wants to start up a business. All good things, but doing these things by taking from his parents what is not his and what is theirs before the time is right will not be blessed by God.

The ultimate source of a successful education and a marriage and business is not money more hard work but it's from God. So this brings us to our final two verses in verses 22 and 23 which tells us that we should trust God to avenge even in the workplace.

Without the fear of God we are tempted to avenge in God's place to try to make things right with our own hands. But with the fear of God we know that vengeance belongs to him.

God created everything everything belongs to him and he will repay injustice and wrongdoing even in the workplace because the workplace also belongs to him.

This nuance is given with verse 23. Verse 23 sounds very similar to verse 10. The last and first verse of our passage they sound similar but the difference is in the context surrounding it and around business and God's vengeance.

[26 : 27] Verse 23 says that remember dishonest and deceitful business dealings are an abomination to God and he's also the God of vengeance. So when you find out that someone cheated you out into paying 10% more than was fair don't try to even that out and do the same to your next customer.

Don't take things into your own hands. Or when you find out that you're going for a promotion and you've got a co-worker who's fighting for the same promotion and you hear that he's bad-mouthing you behind your back and playing politics don't get into the temptation to do the same thing.

Whether it's inside or outside the workplace we will be wrong it's inevitable it's going to happen but will you choose to trust God to be God?

Will you let him take vengeance? Will you say like David did may the Lord judge between me and you may the Lord avenge me against you but my hand shall not be against you.

So let's trust God to be God in our work to be God in every sphere of our life to see and to know and judge and avenge and let's strive to be God in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 45] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.