

Be Not Envious of Evildoers

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 October 2020

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] But we are in Proverbs chapter 23. Please turn with me there. Normally I would both read the whole passage in the beginning and then preach on it.

But today I'm just going to read as I preach so that we can save some of the time. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we do want to focus this morning on the one thing that is necessary.

Let us sit at your feet. To listen to your word. Regardless of what distractions we face this morning.

Regardless of what is going on in our lives. Regardless of what is going on in the outside world. The most important thing for us is to be beholden to you.

To come to you in humility and submission. To hear from you and to follow and obey you. So please God, teach us to do that this morning. In Jesus' name we pray.

[1 : 1 2] Proverbs chapter 23 verse 15 going to chapter 24 verse 22. Nobody in this world sins.

Sins out of duty. We sin because sin tastes sweet to us. Because it's pleasurable. Because we love sin. And though it is but poison in our mouths, we love its taste and are loath to spit it out.

And the proper antidote to this sin is to develop a taste for something even sweeter. And that's what our passage this morning is about.

It helps us to cultivate those spiritual taste buds. And the recurring theme of this passage is that we are to hope in the future guaranteed by our Lord. So that we do not envy evildoers in the present.

Verses 15 to 35 of chapter 23 speak of, tells us not to be envious of the pleasures of evildoers. And then chapter 24 tells us not to be envious of the successes of evildoers.

[2 : 1 9] First, let's look at chapter 23 verses 15 to 19. It says, The word heart, as you may have noticed, this is repeated five times in this passage to emphasize the importance of inner reorientation.

Outward behavioral modification is insufficient. The following verses will warn us against becoming drunkards, gluttons, or adulterers. But God's not merely after behavior modification.

He's after a transformation, a reorientation of the heart. Because when our idolatrous hearts are not reoriented toward God, it will switch from one idol to another.

It will never lead to true freedom. An alcoholic can replace his compulsive drinking with compulsive gambling. A glutton can replace his compulsive eating with compulsive exercising and an idolatry of health and or beauty.

A philanderer can replace his compulsive lust with compulsive working and an idolatry of money or success. Deliverance from sinful vices and evil spirits, if not followed by the Holy Spirit's possession of a person's heart through faith in Jesus, leads to even greater bondage.

[3 : 56] And this reorientation of the heart begins with the fear of the Lord. It says in verses 17 to 18, In order to guard our hearts against sin, we need the fear of the Lord, which is a faith that takes God at His word, believing that what God says is true and good and living in accordance with it.

And then starting in verse 20, the author provides specific examples of the company of evildoers that we should avoid. It says in verses 20 to 21, Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.

Gluttonous eaters of meat is a translation of the phrase, those who make light of meat. Meat was not as readily available in the ancient world, and some people, nonetheless, even back then, made light of meat.

They consumed meat in inordinate amounts, making it seem like it's nothing precious, nothing costly, like it was something cheap or common. So that phrase can be applied to all kinds of gluttony.

Drunkard is an old-fashioned word that literally means wine addict. Nowadays, people refer to use the term alcoholic, and this change in terms is not insignificant.

[5 : 26] The word drunkard preserves the sense of the addict's personal responsibility and culpability. Whereas the word alcoholic nowadays implies that the cause of the addiction is the person's genetic makeup, or his addictive personality, perhaps.

It subtly moves drunkenness from the category of sin to the category of sickness, a disease. However, in Scripture's numerous descriptions of drunkards, from Noah and Lot to Nabal and Elah, drunkenness, which is the prototype of all addictions in Scripture, is never described as a sickness.

It is always described as a sin. Some people think that they are being more compassionate by describing alcoholism as a disease, but it actually denies people the dignity of human responsibility.

Of course, addiction is real, and the drunkard's self-control decreases the longer he continues in that sin, as we'll see vividly later on in this passage. And of course, some people are more predisposed toward certain addictions than others, but being predisposed to something is not the same thing as being predetermined by something.

Drunkenness is not something that just happens to people, like a virus that invades our bodies. It's something that people choose because they feel that there are worthwhile payoffs, however fleeting and however costly it may be.

[6 : 59] Some people drink to forget their troubles, their loneliness. Some drink to numb their pain. Some drink as a way of punishing someone that they're angry at or bitter toward.

Some drink to fit in. Some drink to hide their insecurities, to feel bolder and less self-conscious. But everyone chooses to get drunk for its perceived benefits.

And it's because the drunkard and glutton are responsible for their overindulgence that verse 21 motivates us to avoid that by telling us about the unpleasant outcomes of both.

It says, For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags. Drunkenness and gluttony both lead to poverty for two reasons. One, as it says in Proverbs 21, verse 17, Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man.

He who loves wine and oil will not be rich. Affording such pleasures costs money. Beer and wine cost a lot of money.

[8 : 03] So does eating a lot of meat. Two, as the second half of verse 21 says, Slumber will clothe them with rags. Drunkenness causes what we colloquially call booze snooze.

Gluttony causes what we colloquially call food coma. Both foster idleness, which then leads to poverty. For this reason we are commanded, Be not among drunkards or among the gluttonous eaters of meat.

We are to avoid their company, because as 1 Corinthians 15, 32-34 tells us, Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.

The wise person does not test his resolve, his willpower, by putting himself in the company of drunkards and gluttons to see if he could resist the temptation and the peer pressure.

The wise person avoids their company altogether. This doesn't mean that we should refuse drunkards and gluttons who come seeking to join our company.

[9 : 07] Nor does it mean that we should avoid sinners like a plague and never serve them or share the good news of Jesus Christ with them. Jesus was, in fact, accused of being a glutton and a drunkard.

Jesus says in Matthew 11, 18, For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. But it's important to make some crucial distinctions. First, Jesus is labeled here as a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

But this was not a moniker that Jesus took upon himself. Rather, it was an insult that his detractors labeled him with. And Jesus did not accept their claim wholesale.

He qualifies it. He says, Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. Jesus was the paragon of wisdom, and he believed that he would be justified by his deeds, proven righteous by his deeds.

[10 : 10] Second, sinners were drawn to Jesus because he preached a message of repentance and forgiveness for all. And as Jesus says in John 6, 37, He never cast out anyone that came to him.

In this sense, Jesus was a friend of sinners. But Jesus was in no way a friend of sin. Jesus received sinners who were sorry for their sins and open to hearing the gospel.

He never winked at sin or made light of sin. We never in Scripture see Jesus in drunken revelry or gluttony.

The charge that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard was in fact false. So there is no contradiction between Jesus' example and Proverbs 23. Jesus will not turn a blind eye to sin, but if you're willing to turn from your sins and turn toward him, he will in no wise turn away from you.

He will never turn his back on you. No matter how deeply entangled you are in sin, drunkenness, gluttony, lust, whatever it may be, Jesus can save you and he can help you.

[11 : 22] Instead of squandering our wealth in funding our insatiable appetites, we should focus on buying something else. It says in chapter 23, verses 22 to 25, Listen to your father who gave you life and do not despise your mother when she is old.

Buy truth and do not sell it. Buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice. He who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.

Now earlier in Proverbs chapter 4, we were told to go all in on wisdom. We're always advised by people not to put all our eggs in one basket. But the wisdom of God is the one basket where we should put all of our eggs.

Whatever it may cost us, we are to buy wisdom. The irony, of course, is that wisdom is offered to us freely. But the sage uses the metaphor of buying wisdom in order to convey its true worth, to tell us what a precious commodity it is.

It is exceedingly precious and we should seek to buy wisdom and we should never pawn it off. Verse 26 says, My son, give me your heart and let your eyes observe my ways.

[12 : 37] The mention of the heart and the eyes is repeated in verse 33 in the warning about alcohol and lust. It says, Your eyes will see strange things and your heart utter perverse things.

The connection is this. In order to avoid lust and alcohol's hostile takeover of your eyes and your heart, you are to commit your heart and your eyes to the instruction and example of God's wisdom.

That is the only solution. And in the rest of this chapter, the author brings together the temptation of the adulteress and the temptation of wine in order to compare their seductive powers.

He says in verse 27, For a prostitute is a deep pit, an adulteress is a narrow well. Now, this refers to a trapper's pit, a deep pit, a pit that is too deep to get out of once you fall into it.

There might be a double meaning here as well because the deep pit is parallel to a narrow well. And the word pit is used in Scripture sometimes to refer to gorges.

[13 : 43] And notably in Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 6, that same word is used to refer to the dry gorges, a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and deep darkness.

So then the prostitute is like a dry gorge that you climb down into hopes of finding refreshing water, only to find that there is no water there at all.

The fool enters into a prostitute in hope of finding satisfaction, but in the end he finds nothing at all. Likewise, an adulteress is a narrow well.

A well is a common metaphor for sex. As Proverbs chapter 5 verse 15 taught the young man to be satisfied with his wife, saying, Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

However, if he foolishly seeks satisfaction from another woman, an adulteress, he will be frustrated to discover that she is a narrow well.

[14 : 46] A narrow well is hard to draw water from. It has restricted access. Your bucket can get stuck in it. This imagery has so many helpful applications in fighting lust.

Though this verse is speaking specifically of adultery, transgressing the sacred and exclusive boundaries of marriage and having sexual relations with other people, that's what adultery is, but Jesus expanded this in Matthew 5 verse 28 to include even a lustful glance at someone, that that is tantamount to adultery in one's heart.

So then we can apply this to all forms of lust, including fornication, pornography, and all other forms of illicit affections. The fool that thinks the thrill of having sex with a forbidden man or a woman will be more satisfying than sex with a faithful spouse who knows you inside and out and yet loves you like he or she loves nobody else in the entire world.

That's foolishness. It's baloney. Adultery is only as satisfying as a dry gorge and a narrow well that you can get no water out of.

You will increasingly lose your capacity for love and your thirst will only increase. The fool thinks that he can enjoy a fleeting encounter in secret and never suffer the consequences.

[16 : 14] He thinks that he can get in and get out quickly, but he will find that such lustful ventures are like a deep pit and a narrow well that traps him. Once he goes in, he cannot come out.

And the unpleasant consequences will follow him for the rest of his life. The adulteress, it says in verse 28, is like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind.

Similarly, wine has an enticing beginning, but a bitter end. It says in 31 to 32, Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.

In the end, it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Wine is like a seductive adulteress, and we must be wary of its charm. In the end, it bites like a serpent.

The serpent slithers along smoothly. It glides on the ground, unnoticed, until it bites you and injects its venom. Verses 29 to 30 say this, Who has woe?

[17 : 18] Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine. Those who go to try mixed wine.

The word tarry long has the same Hebrew root as the word end in verse 32. So then, those who tarry long over wine will become a victim to its poisonous end.

Those who try mixed wine, mixing it with spices and other alcohol types of drinks to make it more tasty and potent, will have woe, sorrow, strife, complaining, redness, or dullness of eyes.

Now, the exhortation of verse 30 is this, Make your encounters with alcohol short and sweet. Don't tarry long over wine.

Enjoy it as God's blessing if you wish, but don't let your heart be entranced by it. As soon as you start to feel its seductive charm, when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly, see it for what it is, a seductress, a serpent, seeking your doom and flee from it.

[18 : 33] Because the consequences are not pretty for those who tarry long over wine and there's a vivid graphic description of this in verses 33-35. Your eyes will see strange things and your heart utter perverse things.

You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. 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. After speaking of the dangers of wine in the third person, the Father now used the second person pronoun to make sure that we understand that these dangers are real to us.

your eyes will see strange things. Your heart utter perverse things. You will be like this person. Don't ever think that you're the exception to the rule. That it's those other people who lack self-control who will be taken by wine like this.

Don't ever think that it will never happen to you. It will if you linger long over wine. The top of the mast is the most unstable part of the ship. The person who sleeps on it in the midst of the sea is an apt picture of the staggered drunkard, rocking to and fro, completely oblivious to the peril that is about to overtake him.

[19 : 53] He gets beat up by others, but his senses are too dull to feel it. And yet he is full of boasts and blusters. And all he can think of is where he can get his next fix. They struck me, but I was not hurt.

They beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink. It's such a sad but realistic picture of drunkenness. Instead of being beguiled by the adulteress or wine or meat, we have to hope in the future guaranteed by our Lord so that we do not end the evildoers in the present.

After telling us this to avoid the pleasures of evildoers, chapter 24 tells us not to be envious of the successes of evildoers. Once again, it starts with the refrain, verse 1, Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them, for their hearts devise violence and their lips talk of trouble.

The wicked devise violence and plot trouble because they want to enrich themselves, prosper themselves at the expense of their community, at the expense of others.

And we can be tempted to join them because in this sinful, topsy-turvy world, they are sometimes, the wicked, are wildly successful. They do violence to others and cause trouble to others.

[21 : 12] And they seem to be getting away with it and doing well for themselves. But verses 3 to 4 remind us, By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established.

By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. This is the right way to accumulate wealth. Not by violence and schemes, but by wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

A house built any other way is but a house built on sand that will collapse in due time. Though it might seem like the wicked are powerful, though it might seem like they are triumphing, verses 5 to 6 teach us this.

A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might. For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory. Verse 5 speaks of the strength that you need for victory.

Verse 6 speaks of the strategy that you need for victory. And it is wisdom of God that supplies both. It's metaphorical, of course, not referring to literal warfare, but it's those who live in accordance with the wisdom of God who will ultimately be victorious and be vindicated.

[22 : 27] In contrast to the fool who schemes to do violence and cause trouble for his community, the wise person rescues those who are beset by the fool's wicked schemes. It says in verses 10 to 12, if you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

Rescue those who are being taken away to death. Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, behold, we did not know this, does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?

Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay man according to his work? Since verse 5 told us that a wise man is full of strength, this person who faints in the day of adversity, whose strength is small, is not a wise person.

The wise person does not shrink in the face of adversity and trouble. His wisdom is proven by his integrity, his perseverance, and his resourcefulness in times of trouble.

And this refers to many kinds of trouble. That's why it's general, intentionally general. And in such situations, the wise person rescues those who are in trouble and does not feign ignorance, saying, behold, we didn't know this.

[23 : 42] I didn't know this person was in trouble. I didn't know this was happening in the world. It says, behold, God who weighs the heart, who sees right through our lives, will see such pathetic excuses for what they are and repay each person according to his deeds.

So the wise person should come to the aid of those who fall prey to the schemes of the wicked. And he himself need not fear the hospitality of the wicked. It says in verses 15 to 16, Lie not in wait as a wicked man against the dwelling of the righteous.

Do no violence to his home, for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity. Interestingly, the word righteous is singular, but the word wicked is plural.

As if to contrast the lone righteous person amidst a multitude of the wicked. You might feel alone in this world in your righteousness. You might feel outnumbered in your fidelity to God.

Yet you need not fear because it says the righteous fall seven times a number of perfection, meaning you can fall every time. You will rise again. But the wicked stumble in the times of calamity.

[24 : 59] Because it's the Lord's perfect justice that prevails in the end. But when that ruin finally comes to the wicked, we should not gloat over them. It says in verses 17 to 18, Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.

Our God, the Lord, is even more repulsed by those who vindictively and self-righteously gloat over the fall of the wicked than by the wicked who fell in the first place.

So that our gloating over the ruin of the wicked might make God relent from the disaster that he has wrought. So we are never to stoop to the same level of wickedness, of the prideful selfishness that characterizes the wicked, and we should be humble instead of gloating over the wicked.

And all of this, overcoming our appetite for sin, as I said in the beginning, requires developing an appetite for the Lord and His wisdom. It says in verses 13 to 14, My son, eat honey for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.

Know that wisdom is such to your soul. If you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off. The word soul in Hebrews is the same word for the Hebrew word for appetite.

[26 : 22] So there's a neat wordplay here. Wisdom is to our soul, while honey is to our appetite. The wisdom of God is, sometimes it's seen this way, but this is not true.

The wisdom of God is not a bitter pill, a bitter medicine that needs a spoonful of sugar to make it go down. It is not. It is sweet itself like honey, which also has medicinal properties.

Have you tasted the sweetness of God's wisdom? Is the word of God, the teachings of God's ways, delightful to you? Or do you obey God begrudgingly, reluctantly?

There's only one way to develop your soul's palette for the wisdom of God, and that is the heart transformation that Jesus brings about by the Holy Spirit.

heart. The word heart is repeated no less than nine times in this passage because it is the driver's seat of our lives. God had promised in Ezekiel 36 that I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

[27 : 38] And this promise was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As it says in Romans 2, it is by repenting, turning from our sins, renouncing our selfish ways, and turning toward Jesus in faith.

It is by doing that that we receive the circumcision of the heart. That's chapter 24, verse 15 of our book says in Proverbs, wicked men lie in wait to do violence, and that is indeed what they did to Jesus, the righteous one.

They ambushed Him in the cover of night, and falsely accused Him, bringing about His wrongful death on the cross. But as verse 16 says, the righteous fall seven times and rises again.

On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead victoriously, and it is His death and resurrection that become the means, the basis for our rescue from sin and death.

We all, like sheep, had gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way. We were headed to the slaughter because of our own insatiable appetite for sin.

[28 : 50] But Jesus, who was the wise man full of strength, did not faint in the day of adversity, and He rescued us who were being taken away to death. That's how Jesus fulfills this passage.

We were stumbling to the slaughter, but Jesus, on the cross, takes our place. He went to the slaughtering house that we were destined for because of our sins so that He might pay the penalty for sin that we owed, that we might be free, that we might live forever, that we might have resurrection life.

And apart from this new heart and that new life given by the Spirit of God through Jesus, we cannot acquire the appetite for the wisdom of God. So if you have not yet pledged allegiance to Jesus, if you are still living for yourself and not for God, you need to renounce your selfish and sinful ways and turn toward Him.

That's your only hope for overcoming gluttony, drunkenness, lust, all other sins. And as those who have put our faith in Jesus Christ, as those who have been born again by the Spirit of God, we are to fix our eyes and set our hope on that future guaranteed by our Lord Jesus.

That's the key to our discipline and self-control in this life. Twice in this passage, chapter 23, verse 18, chapter 24, verse 14, we are assured that the righteous has a future and that our hope will not be cut off.

[30 : 26] In contrast, chapter 24, verse 20 says that the evil man has no future. The lamp of the wicked will be put out. It's when we keep this future in view that we never envy the wicked because envy of sinners stems from an unhealthy preoccupation with our own present circumstances.

It's that discontentment looking at our own lives that makes us look around with longing at evildoers. The solution is to look up toward God with the fear of the Lord and to look ahead into the future that God guarantees for us.

Instead of wallowing in the difficulties, the dearth of today, we are to set our hope on the future that God guarantees to us. That's why it says in 1 Peter 1, verse 13, therefore, preparing your mind for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

what inspires holy living in us is hope, unwavering hope in that future grace, the grace that we will receive when Jesus returns, when all of God's promises will be fulfilled.

This is what elite athletes throughout the world do. They enter into a strict diet and exercise regimen because for them, the indulgences that they forego are outweighed by the glory that awaits them in the winning of trophies and medals.

[32 : 03] Likewise, keeping our eyes on the prize is the key to self-control. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9, 24-27, do you not know that in all race, in a race, all the runners run, but only one receives the prize.

So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, an imperishable.

So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The key to self-control, the key to obedience, is keeping our eyes on the eternal prize that we have in Jesus Christ. So brothers and sisters, let's fix our eyes on our Savior and pay no heed to the pleasures and the successes of evildoers.

Let's take a moment to reflect on this, what God is calling you to, what action He's calling you to, what change in your attitude that He's calling you to. And after a few moments, we're going to respond together as a church by praying.

[33 : 18] and then we'll be doing this, we'll be doing this holy with him. Toülstand, what somebody has With DEFIC