

Impartiality and Integrity

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[0 : 00] Wow, it is a little chillier than I was praying for, but I don't control the weather.

So here we are. Thank you guys for braving it. If you're at home, thank you for listening and joining us. Let's start out in a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you for the church that you build.

We thank you for your love, and we thank you for sending your son for our salvation, and we thank you for your word. Lord, help us this morning as we read a passage from your word, as we seek to gain wisdom and apply it to our life so that we can help others, so that we are stronger in our walk with you, and so that you are glorified.

We ask these things in your name. Amen. Proverbs 24, verses 23 to 34 is our passage. We're going to read it in just a minute, but before we do, I just want to let you know that we're going to be talking about two different topics in this one small section.

One deals with impartiality, which is wisdom in our words, and the second topic has to do with laziness, and that deals with wisdom in our work.

[1 : 15] So we want to look at those two things this morning. And at first, it might seem a little disconnected. Even as we read this passage, we're going to see it jump back and forth between these two topics.

So it may feel disconnected. But I hope by the end that we'll see how these two come together and how purposefully the writer of this wise saying goes back and forth for a purpose.

It isn't a mistake because he mentions both topics and jumps back and forth twice within just 12 verses. And so there seems to be intentionality there.

And so we want to hone in on that. And I think the reason for that is because he wants to draw out the importance of wisdom with our words and wisdom in our work.

He's going to address impartiality that is favoring one person when we should be fair and honest. And he's also going to be addressing diligence in our hard work.

[2 : 19] So let's read our passage together. Also realize that it's a little not warm out there. So if you guys need to stand up and walk around, if you need to move a little bit to warm up, I totally understand.

Proverbs 24, starting in verse 23. These also are sayings of the wise. Partiality and judging is not good.

Whoever says to the wicked, you are in the right, will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations. But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight and a good blessing will come upon them.

Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips. Prepare your work outside. Get everything ready for yourself in the field. And after that, build your house. Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause.

And do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay the man back for what he has done. I pass by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense.

[3 : 30] And behold, it was all overgrown with thorns, and ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it.

I looked and received instruction. 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.

Partiality is favoritism or biasness towards something. We can be partial to a lot of things. Much of the time, those things aren't bad.

I can be partial towards a sports team, a color, a type of food. And everyone has those biases, those favorites, and that's normal.

But the partiality that we see in these verses are talking about something entirely different. Verse 23 says, partiality in judging is not good. These verses are talking about judgments that are made in the court system.

[4 : 36] A true and an honest judicial system has no place for partiality or favoritism. An impartial system will take the actions of a wrongdoer and place them on the scales of justice and produce a decision that is right and fair.

Maybe not a decision liked by both sides, but a fair decision based on the wrong that was committed. True justice cannot take place if decisions are influenced by things other than the truth.

Fairness for all. Impartiality in judging allows for the dismissing of evil, the dismissing of wrongdoing, the winking of things that we should not be doing, and allowing those to continue.

We see this in verse 24, when those who are judging say to the wicked, saying to the ones doing wrong, you're in the right. Those people will be cursed by people abhorred by nations.

When evil actions are committed, people want justice. We can understand that. We relate to that. The problem is that we live in a sinful world where every judicial system, every government, every political party is made up of people who are sinful.

[6 : 09] That's the flaw in humanity. That's the brokenness. That's our sin. And it stands between us and God, and it stands between us and one another. In every level of society, sin is our biggest problem.

It stands between us and God, and it leaves us with a broken system. Learning about equality and fairness, those things are good, but that's not the solution.

Putting reforms and protections in place are good, but that's not ultimately what's going to fix our sin problem. We see it played out everywhere, talking about human trafficking and enslavement, genocide, sexual crimes, racism, abortion, abuse, envy, jealousy, murder, hatred, pride.

The list goes on. These are all sins, and they are all in rebellion to God and his law, and we're all guilty of those sins. See, the problem is sin.

We are sinful people, so the solution can't come from us. The solution can only be found in Jesus Christ. We are sinners by nature, and so we need a new nature in order to change, and that can only be done through repenting of our sins and putting our trust in Jesus.

[7 : 30] If we do that, then we get a new nature. We get a new heart. We get new power that is spirit from God that allows us to overcome that sin. So as children of God, we can fight against those sins, and we help other Christians fight against those sins.

And lastly, we proclaim that power to others to help break them free from that power of sin. So that's why the primary mission of the church is to spread the gospel.

You're probably thinking about right now, Matt, I think you're a little off topic because it's not what we were reading. But I bring it up this morning because I didn't think it was going to be a sermon that was really going to be emotional.

As I read verse 23, partiality and judging is not good. What came to my mind was the problem in our country with racism.

It probably came to mind because there's a lot going on right now in the area of racism. It's hard to miss. It's hard to see the problems. It's hard not to want to do something about it.

[8 : 54] It's something our nation is struggling with. The hatred, the violence, the partiality that happens in our sinful system.

That affects our country. Partiality when dealing with people and making judgments is not good. When those who do wrong are not called out on their wickedness and they are allowed to continue with their biasness and their hatred, it causes harm.

And as verse 24 points out, it's abhorred by nations. We see this. We feel this. So as I was reminded of this, and it came out so strongly in this verse, it just seemed like we should take a moment since we're dealing with it as a country to just briefly talk about it.

What are we to do with that? What actions are we to do? Now, those are going to look different based on the individual.

What kind of connections you have? What kind of influence you have? Where you live? How old you are? But the main things are this. We are to live like Christians.

[10 : 10] We are to share the gospel. And we are to pray like Christians. I pull prayer out, even though it's part of how we live as Christians, because I wanted to draw attention to prayer this morning.

See, I think it's an area that as Christians, we often overlook the power that we have that we can get from prayer. It's not the act of just saying request to yourself or out loud to someone else.

But get this, it's an opportunity for us to sit down at the table before our king and lay a request in front of him to ask him for his help.

Knowing that we lack the power and the resources to fulfill that request, we bring it to our king, our savior, our creator. We come asking him to act in ways we can't, to go to places and reach people that we can't reach, to change hearts we can't change, to supply needs we have no resources for.

Prayer is the strongest weapon that we have available to us as Christians. Don't underestimate it. Don't take it for granted. I say this because when we're talking about racism, then I want you to realize the importance we have as Christians to pray about that sin problem in our country.

[11 : 44] When we come together as the Church of God on Sundays and we do prayers of the people, this is serious power time. This is Elijah calling down power from God to defeat the prophets of Baal.

This is praying to God to fix our broken neighborhood and our lost city and our hurting nation. We pray for salvation. We pray for the sin of racism and hatred to be fixed.

When we lift up individuals, politicians, and our prayers of the people, we do pray that they lead well. We do pray that they would be able to do their job as best as they can to their ability.

But we pray that they would make decisions that are wise and impartial, not show partiality. We pray that they would serve the people in a way that would help and not hurt.

And most importantly, we pray for their salvation. We pray for the nations. That while they're being torn apart by all kinds of wickedness, we pray for our God to move in and change hearts.

[13 : 01] To fix the brokenness. To change the things we can't change. That's why we pray. So verse 23 and 24 tells us that partiality is not good and people hate it.

Why? Because it's an injustice. It's not truth. Verse 25 says, There is blessing and favor that comes to those who rule honestly and fairly.

Those who aren't swayed by the wicked who try to influence them with power and money. They find true blessing. Verse 26 says, Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.

Now this phrase in Hebrew means either a kiss given out of respect or one out of affection. Not affection like between a husband and wife. But respect and affection for those who give an honest answer.

It's one of appreciation. As we continue with this theme of honesty and not being partial.

[14 : 25] Let's jump down to verses 28 and 29. Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause.

And do not deceive with your lips. Do not say I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay. Sorry. I will pay the man back for what he has done. We are to be committed to honesty in our speech.

And that includes not saying things for the sake of seeking vengeance. The example here in these verses is that a neighbor has done something to you in the past.

And you feel you need to avenge that. You were wrong. And you want that person to pay, get paid back. But in order to do that, you need to lie to make it happen.

You need to speak bad about your neighbor. Or you need to be deceptive when you're with your words about what he's done. So that they get what's coming to them.

[15 : 35] At least in your mind. But here we are told that that is not how we are to act. Not to pay them back for what they did. In addition, we are called to seek and not to find vengeance.

Romans 12, 18 and 19 says this. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.

For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. So don't seek vengeance. And don't drift from your honesty in your words by going after it.

As we look at these verses dealing with partiality and honesty, even though they are focused towards the courts and the judicial system, they're applicable to us as well.

They call us to build up with our words and not to tear down, which is exactly what partiality and dishonesty does. Think about what that might look like in your life.

[16 : 46] If you're a teacher, a parent, a student, an owner or an employee, what would honesty and impartiality look like for you?

That's the first subject in our passage. The second subject in our passage this morning deals with wisdom in our work. So we had wisdom in our words and now we have wisdom in our work.

Verse 27. Prepare your work outside. Get everything ready for yourself in the field. And after that, build your house. Essentially, do the first things first.

Take care of the necessities before the luxuries. Make provision for yourself and those you are responsible for before seeking personal comfort.

Secure your income before you build your house. Makes sense. See, in an agricultural society, the first requirement was to establish your field, if you were a farmer in that way, or your flock.

[17 : 52] You needed crops or you needed herds in order to eat and to provide for yourself. So it was common in these days to live at home with your family or maybe in a tent in the field as you establish your livelihood.

Once that is done, then you could worry about building your house. If we look back at verse 3 of this chapter, chapter 24, it says, By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established.

It's knowing the order of what should be done first so that you were able to establish yourself in the future. Don't have the mindset that you deserve luxury or get stuck with the thinking that comforts are owed to you because they are not.

If you obtain these things before you have worked for them, you'll find that they become weights that pull you down. See, Americans struggle with this a lot in the area of debt because they're not satisfied with what they have, and it's far too easy for us to get those things that we can't yet afford.

Now, this isn't a sermon on money, so I don't want you to get too worried about that, but it is on wisdom and on establishing your home wisely, and that involves how we spend our money.

[19 : 28] So the wisdom here is to plan before you build so that you can establish yourself for the rest of your building of your home.

So work using the abilities God has given you and then use wisely the resources that come from that. Next, we're going to look at verses 30 to 34.

This is our last section for today. They're going to take us a little deeper into the issue of working, and these issues we're going to find have warnings about laziness.

But before we look at that, I want to draw your attention briefly to another aspect of these verses that sometimes can get missed, and that is in the area of wisdom. It's not just saying or acting in a wise manner, but it also includes the observance of things, seeing situations that are not good, recognizing the causes of those things, and then using the wisdom of God's word to avoid them.

In these last couple of verses, we'll notice that they are broken up into three parts. First, we're going to see the effect of the problem.

[20 : 49] That is going to be laziness. Then we'll see the cause of the problem. And in the middle of the two, we're going to see how a wise person observes that and tries to avoid it.

So, verse 30 gives us the setting for this. It says, I passed by the field of the sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense.

So, we have an unwise, lazy person who owns a vineyard. Back then, the vineyard would have been the source of income for that individual, his livelihood.

He owns a vineyard, so the implication is that he's responsible to work it or to manage it. And from that, he earns his living. In this setting here, we have a lazy person with a job.

The problem here, though, is not the person. And contrary to what some people like, work is not the problem. Work is what God has mandated humans to do.

[22 : 01] We're not called to play or to do what we feel like, but rather, we are called to work. God gives each one of us a responsibility, and he calls us to that. We're going to talk about that a little bit more in a minute.

So, the problem is not the person. The problem is not the job. Rather, it's the laziness. If laziness is the problem, then let's look at verse, excuse me, verse 31, as we look at the effect of that problem.

Describing the current state of the vineyard, verse 31 says this, And behold, it was all overgrown with thorns. The ground was covered with metals, and its stone wall was broken down.

This property had value at one point. It was once a source of income, but it has been neglected and not cared for. Work is required to keep something nice, to keep it functioning, to maintain it.

So, all the blessings that we've been given whatever they are, the jobs we have, the relationships, the possessions, even our own bodies, they require work to maintain. They require effort to keep working right.

[23 : 17] In these verses, neglect of the vineyard has brought thorns, and weeds, and a wall which no longer serves its purpose. Notice also in these verses that there's no mention of grapes, or grape vines, which is what is supposed to be growing here.

If they're already left, we can imagine they're struggling to survive because they're being choked out by the thorns. And if any do make it, what grapes are left will be eaten from the animals, not being kept out by the wall that's fallen down.

Now, as we think about this work, and as we think about the thorns that are growing up, it's important here to see the distinction between work that we're given and the curse that was placed on us from our sin back in the Garden of Eden.

Why is that important? It's important because work sometimes can feel like the curse, but it's not. Work is what God wants us to be doing.

In the Garden of Eden, before sin, God gave Adam a job. He gave Eve a job. Genesis 2.15, it says, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

[24 : 47] This is before they sinned. Sometime after that, Eve is created, serpent comes along, they're tempted, they sin, they disobey what God told them to do.

God curses the serpent, God curses the woman, and he curses the man, and they're kicked out of Eden. Genesis 3.23 says, therefore the Lord God sent them out of the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

So before sin in the Garden and Paradise, they're giving work. After they're kicked out, after sin, they're still giving work. So it's a responsibility given to us by God, not a curse.

But that doesn't say that the curse did not make it harder. It did. From a spiritual standpoint, because we are sinners, it's harder.

It makes us lazy. Right? We want to do other things for ourself and not what the job calls us to. And also from a physical standpoint, Genesis 3.18 says, curse is the ground because of you.

[25 : 59] In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles, it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. So it's made work harder for man.

So these thorns and these thistles that we see growing up in this vineyard is because of the curse. And the man, the sluggard in this case, has allowed them to grow.

Now as we think about thorns and thistles and weeds, it's interesting that we don't have to go to a store and buy seeds for those. We buy seeds for things that we want to grow, things that are pretty, things that bring food.

We, a couple years back on the side of our house, we had a drainage problem. So we had a few people from the church come out and help us and we dug a big hole and we laid some pipe to help with the drainage and we covered it back up and it was a job that fixed the problem.

But what we were left with was a side yard that was just horrible. It was just dirt. There wasn't anything left. And I meant to put grass on it at some point.

[27 : 15] It just came a little lower on the priority list. But interestingly enough, what happens is you don't have to plant anything for the crap to grow. The thorns, the ugly stuff, the weeds, that grows without anybody doing a thing.

And that is what we see taking place here in this story where laziness takes in, then weeds come in.

Where once was something flourishing and lively, we have death. If we leave it to itself, the nice things don't happen.

We have to work for those things. The vineyard did not get cared for and so the fruit died. The money stopped coming in. The land that once sustained life and generated income now was worth nothing.

That's the end result. That's the effect of laziness. Verse 32 teaches how we can grow in wisdom and it gives us a method for doing it.

[28 : 30] See, I talked about there was the effect and we'll get to the cause in a minute. But in the middle, in verse 32, it teaches us something that is helpful for us.

Here it helps us avoid laziness. But not just that in other areas as well. It says this in verse 32. Then I saw and considered it.

I looked and received instruction. We are called to observe, to think about it. And lastly, to receive, that is be open to instruction.

If we want to avoid the pitfalls of laziness, we need to look at the pitfalls of laziness. Notice, he came into the field and he saw it. He observed it.

It's like he looked closer to it and he realized what was its cause. Lastly, we come to the cause of the problem.

[29 : 36] We saw the effect. We see a piece of wisdom to help us observe it. And lastly, we come to the cause of the problem. Verse 33 and 34.

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. laziness can easily put us to sleep with the soothing sounds of excuses.

I work on that next week when I feel like doing it. The chair and my phone, they just feel so comfortable right now. The dishes, they're not going anywhere.

I'll do them tomorrow. Let me watch a little TV. Maybe I'll finish my homework this weekend when I'll probably have more time. Just a little more sleep. Just a few more minutes of a game.

Just a few more, one more news article to read. How about at work? There's a task to do. There's a call to be made. There's a project to finish.

[30 : 47] But wait, let me, I just need to check social media one more time. Or there's just a little bit of the election news I want to check up on. Or maybe the COVID status changed from yesterday and I need to check it.

Now, I'm not getting down on those things too hard. Some of those are good and helpful, but they have their place. And we need to keep them there. If we don't protect the time, the limited time, and the resources we have that we've been given, then laziness will take them from us.

verse 34 has some strong language. It was repeated back in chapter 6 of Proverbs and we see it again. And poverty will come upon you like a robber.

No one plans to run out of time. No one sets out wanting to miss an opportunity or not take care of something so that it loses value. The slugger in this passage had no plans of letting his vineyard become destroyed.

But at the same time, he didn't have a plan to protect it. Or if he did, he didn't follow that plan. So poverty came upon him slowly, and yet he never saw it coming.

[32 : 07] The last part of that verse says, and want like an armed man. I've never been robbed by an armed man. Hope I never am.

But I have been robbed. I know what that feels like. When I was a teenager, someone stole my moped. A few years back, when we were at amusement park, someone stole Cheryl's purse from our van.

And I'm sure a lot of you have similar stories about how you've been robbed. One thing that you can be sure of is that an armed man goes after what he wants forcibly.

He plans. He doesn't act slowly, and he doesn't announce himself. That would be stupid. Right? We could see him coming. We could guard.

It's unexpected when it happens, but it is avoidable. Not speaking of being robbed, I'm speaking of laziness. So guard yourself against laziness, because if you don't, it will rule over you.

[33 : 16] It will take over your resources and your time. Now these verses talk about physical laziness and physical poverty, but as we know, wisdom and Proverbs has connections that go way deeper.

They're connected to our spiritual lives. So if there's dangers with laziness that are true on a physical level, how much more are they true on a spiritual level?

So guard your spiritual lives against laziness. As we look to Jesus and we see how he came to earth for the purpose of bringing salvation, to fix the sin problem that separated us from God, he knew the work that he had to do.

He was honest. He was diligent. He was sinless. And even though he was judged unfairly, in every way he did not avenge.

He continued on, and for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and suffered the shame to make our freedom from sin and rightness with God possible.

[34 : 35] That's what Jesus did for us. So we need to remember that as we are called to be wise with our words and wise with our work.

So as we looked at our words, are you wise? Do you help build up and not hurt others? How about with diligence or with your work?

Are you wise with your work? Do you guard and take care of your spiritual life? Do you guard your work ethic, the things that you do?

If you do not, if you struggle with where you spend your time, then I suggest that you take guidance from verse 32. Then I saw and considered it.

I looked and received instruction. So look and consider and receive instruction. Instruction from the word of God. Pray and use that instruction to lead you in the right path.

[35 : 46] Let's take a minute just to think about that before we pray together.