

# OpenTheo

## March 15th: Proverbs 14 & Colossians 3:12-25

March 14, 2021



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Wisdom as not living by sight. The appropriate behaviour of Christians.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Proverbs chapter 14. The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down. Whoever walks in uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.

By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them. Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox. A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.

A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding. Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge. The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving.

Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance. The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy. The house of the wicked will be

destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief. The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.

The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps. One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless. A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.

The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. The evil bow down before the good, the wicked at the gates of the righteous. The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends.

Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor. Do they not go astray who devise evil? Those who devise good meet steadfast love and faithfulness. In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.

The crown of the wise is their wealth, but the folly of fools brings folly. A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful. In the fear of the Lord, one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life that one may turn away from the snares of death. In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined. Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. The wicked is overthrown through his evil doing, but the righteous finds refuge in his death.

Wisdom rests in the heart of a man of understanding, but it makes itself known even in the midst of fools. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.

Proverbs chapter 14 begins with a proverb that might remind us of Proverbs chapter 9 verse 1. Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. We should remember that the book of Proverbs is largely written to the young son. The choice of wisdom is seen in the choice of the right woman.

This is particularly seen at the very end of the book of Proverbs in Proverbs chapter 31 verses 10 to 31. The house of the woman is her household and her standing within the community. The foolish woman is the opposite of such a wise woman.

She will bring to ruin everything that is left in her charge. The wrong woman will be the ruin of her husband, but the right woman will be his glory. You can discern people's fear of the Lord by their integrity or their lack thereof.

This is the claim that is made in verse 2. In many ways, it's an application of a principle that our Lord teaches us. By their fruit, you will know them. If you see someone walking in uprightness, you know something about their character.

They are someone who fear the Lord, someone who is devious and deceptive. You know something about who they are within. They despise the Lord.

The fool's careless words in verse 3 come back to haunt him. Not having guarded his lips, his rash vows, his inciting words, his lies, or whatever he speaks that is false and foolish comes back and ends up causing him trouble. The wise man, by contrast, is greatly strengthened by his speech.

He speaks wisely and prudently, and so as a result, his words empower him. There is no manger to clean when there are no oxen, but nor will there be abundant crops. Verse 4 makes the point that out of unwillingness to undertake the unpleasant task of cleaning the manger, a man cuts himself off from a great source of wealth.

The fool and the sluggard's desire for easy money is related to this. They don't want to undertake responsibility and unpleasant tasks, and so they're always looking for the quick fix, the quick way to get rich. The diligent and the responsible and the wise, however, know that taking up responsibility and challenge and difficulty brings true and lasting wealth.

How is a judge to discern the character of a witness? Mostly through consistency of character. Lying is like breathing to the false witness. He breathes out lies.

He can't help but speak lies. Even when he does not need to speak lies, he will speak them nonetheless. It's become second nature to him.

The faithful witness, by contrast, will consistently speak the truth, even when it is difficult, unpopular, or might cause him some severe disadvantage. A common theme in the Book of Proverbs is that one's posture of heart is determinative for whether one will receive wisdom or not. The person who is a fool or a scoffer is inured to wisdom.

Even if he wanted to find wisdom, he will not be able to find it. His heart is not apt for the receiving of wisdom. Verse seven warns people to move away from the presence of fools.

If you encounter fools who are settled in a particular context, you have a good indication that you are not in a place where you are likely to encounter wisdom. By their fruits, you will know them. This applies to contexts as well as to persons.

If, for instance, you want to know if a church is a good church, pay attention to the people who have been there for many years. See what character it has produced in them. If you want to know if a pastor is a good pastor, pay attention to their family.

Do they have a happy wife? Do they have faithful children? Do they have a calm and peaceful home? Or is it a place of conflict and discord? Dwayne Garrett suggests that verses eight to 15 function as a concentric or chiasmic pattern, beginning with the shrewd and the fools in verse eight. Then that's paralleled with the gullible versus the shrewd in verse 15. Making amends for sin in verse nine is paralleled with being repaid for sin in verse 14.

Secrets of the heart in verse 10 parallel with secrets of the heart in verse 13. And then at the heart, the destruction of the wicked versus the prosperity of the upright in verse 11, and the deceptive way to death in verse 12. The focus of this section is upon walking by faith, not by sight.

There's an inexact antithesis in verse eight. The wisdom of the prudent matches with the folly of fools, but the one is associated with discerning his way and the other with deceiving. Perhaps the suggestion is that the folly of fools is self-deceiving.

Alternatively, the insight of the prudent in his way is something that brings light and insight to other people who are around them. Fools don't take sin seriously, and as a result, they mark at the guilt offering and the need to make reparations for trespass. However, the upright are very mindful about the dangers of sin, and as a result, they enjoy acceptance.

No one truly knows what another person is experiencing. The heart cannot be discerned merely from outer circumstance. You can see someone's smile, but you do not know where the great sorrow may lie behind it.

It is both difficult to discern and difficult to communicate the true state of people's hearts. As a result, we should beware of presuming by outer circumstance or outer appearance to judge people's inner state. The warning not to judge by outward appearance continues in verse 11.

The house naturally looks much more secure than the tent, but yet a house of wickedness is much less secure than the tent of the upright. By outward appearance, it may look often as if the wicked are truly flourishing and the righteous are failing. But yet, with the eyes of faith, we can see that this is not the case.

We should appreciate the importance of living by faith within the Book of Proverbs. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing the Book of Proverbs as a book of living by a sort of sight, yet here and elsewhere, we are reminded that there is more to the picture than meets the eye. Living by faith and not by sight is also a subject of verse 12, things may

seem right to the man by his sight, but yet that way can lead to death.

It's only the person who lives by faith and follows the law of God, accepting in the fear of the Lord his commandment, that will know the true way that leads to life. We must not merely judge by the outward appearance. Verse 13 is like verse 10.

We should not judge by present appearances. The laughter that the person may have may disguise an aching heart. In addition to recognizing that the present appearances are not the full picture of the present reality, we should also recognize that they do not give us a full indication of the long-term outcome.

The person who is experiencing joy now may find that joy turned to sorrow in the end. Both the backslider and the good man will receive the consequences of their ways. You reap what you sow.

This, like principles such as by their fruit you will know them, is a common theme in the Book of Proverbs. The prudent person is mindful and does not judge by surface appearances as the simple man does. The prudent person is led by the fear of the Lord and as a result gives thought to his way and does not merely judge by the outward appearance.

Folly is recklessness. The fool does not give thought to the future. He is allergic to reflecting upon where his actions are leading him.

He will squirm in discomfort whenever forced to think about future consequences. By contrast, the wise man is circumspect. He does not merely fixate upon present pleasures, trying to dismiss from his attention the way that things might be headed to consider the harvest that the seeds of his present action might be sowing.

An example of the reckless person is the impetuous and quick-tempered person. But alongside this figure, there is also the conniving schemer. The wise person contrasts with the impetuous and hot-headed man.

He is cool and level-headed. However, there is a cool-headed form of evil, of the schemer. But he is also doomed on account of his wickedness.

The simple receive a destructive inheritance, but the prudent gain the honour of knowledge. The evil and wicked persons will ultimately come under the dominion of the righteous. If you cannot exercise good rule over yourself, you will ultimately come under the rule of others.

The dangers of both poverty and riches with respect to friendship are described in verse 20. The poor person is cut off from friendship. No one wants to be the poor person's friend because the poor person will be dependent upon them.

But the rich has many friends. All these people are gathered around them, wanting what they can give. Those friends are fair-weather friends and they would rapidly abandon them were they to lose their wealth.

This is not a justification for an attitude of indifference to the poor. As verse 21 makes plain, the righteous person shows concern for their needy neighbour. Verse 22 contrasts the devising of evil to the devising of good.

The former think that they are crafty, but they end up going astray, losing their way. However, the righteous should devote shrewdness to the task of doing good, and they will receive steadfast love and faithfulness as a result. There are certain people who are all talk and no labour, but the person who really prospers will be the person who engages in true labour.

This relates to the planning of verse 22. The wise are rewarded. They enjoy wealth, honour, social status and authority.

However, the folly of fools has its own natural consequence, which is folly itself. What else would we expect it to bring? The effects of truthful and dishonest witnesses are described in verse 25. Truthful witnesses courageously deliver lives from death, whereas false witnesses will deceitfully condemn the innocent to death.

The action of the false witness was previously described in relationship to his character. Now it is described in relationship to his consequences. The fear of the Lord is at the centre of verses 26 and 27.

The fear of the Lord grants confidence and enduring security. It is the sustaining source of life and delivers one from the traps that lead to death. We can see a parallel between verse 27 and verse 14 of chapter 13.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that one may turn away from the snares of death. This parallels the fear of the Lord with the teaching of the wise. The king is the highest example of the leader.

A great leader finds his glory in the people around him, in the character that he has formed and encouraged in them, in their loyalty and in their love. The prince's glory can be easily lost if he loses his people. By extension, the glory of a man is a happy and holy household with a loving wife and faithful children.

To enjoy this glory, he needs to recognise the value of those around him for his own honour and to treat them accordingly. Slowness to anger is contrasted with hastiness of temper in the verse that follows. The understanding person is not reactive, but patient, self-controlled and the master of his own spirit.

The fool, by contrast, can easily be incited to rash action. And the next verse presses this

point further. The well-governed heart is at peace.

It's calm, it's content. However, the fool's heart is unsettled by envy, by passion, resentment and all these forms of bitterness and it eats away at him from within. The Lord is concerned for the poor.

He's the protector and the patron of the poor. And the way that people treat the poor expresses either honour or dishonour towards him. The poor person is utterly dependent on the goodness and the generosity of others, much as we are utterly dependent upon the Lord.

The way that we treat those who are dependent upon us should reflect the way that God has treated us. And if we treat them with cruelty, we are making a statement about God by implication. We might think here of the parable of the unforgiving servant.

He is forgiven an incredible debt, but then he goes on to treat the man who has a debt to him with incredible cruelty. The wicked man comes to ruin through his own sin, but the righteous will be assured of a good end. Verse 32 suggests that Proverbs sees its principles resting in part upon post-mortem blessings and judgements, not just upon blessings in this life.

Wisdom rests, it is settled peacefully, in the heart of the understanding man, but it still makes itself known in the midst of fools. We might think of wisdom calling out to the simple earlier in the book, or the way that the wise person is revealed by contrast with fools that might surround him. Ideally, we want to move towards the position where wisdom is at rest within us, not merely trying to make itself heard above the hubbub of folly.

The true source of a people's greatness or decline is moral, not military, not political, not economic or scientific. If a people want to prosper, they must give themselves to righteousness and wisdom. The great illustration of this, of course, is the story of Israel in the books of the kings.

The ideal in such a society is the elevation of righteous officials and the judgement of shameful, treacherous, wicked and unfaithful ones. Here we might consider what happens when the opposite occurs. King David, when he gives himself to sin in the story of Uriah and Bathsheba, ends up elevating treacherous and unreliable servants.

He elevates Joab and other servants who do not obey his commandments exactly, who do not deliver his messages faithfully. If we want our people to prosper, whether that's our nation, whether it's our church or our family, there must be righteousness in the hidden place. And that righteousness must spread out in the way that we treat and appoint and reward and encourage others around us.

A question to consider, how might we, in our current situations, move towards something

of the glory of the king as it is described in verse 28? Colossians chapter three, verses 12 to 25. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged.

Bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service, as people please, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ, for the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

In Colossians chapter three, Paul has been talking about the ways that we should regard ourselves in the light of our participation in Christ, and how we should put off the old self, condemning to death those aspects of ourselves that are earthly. Now in the second half of the chapter, he turns his attention more fully to the alternative patterns of life that we must adopt, patterns of life that are characteristic of the new self. These are the new garments, as it were, with which we must clothe ourselves.

As God's chosen people, we must be marked and distinguished by particular graces. Speaking of Gentile Christians as God's chosen people is to refer to them in ways previously reserved for Israel. In place of the vices that Paul has mentioned earlier, as things to be put off, we must positively clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.

These are the sorts of behaviours that would have been perceived as weak and servile by the surrounding Greco-Roman culture, lacking in honour, spiritedness, power, dominance, and generally unmanly. A real man stands up for his honour, avenges himself, he's proud and tough, and effectively asserts his dominance. While the Christian faith still has a substantive account of masculinity, which can also require defence from



challenges of a rather different kind in the contemporary context, it is imperative that we appreciate how much of a revolutionary departure from cultural norms the vision of virtue in the teaching of Paul actually was, and that we resist the calls to return to such pagan norms, especially in the context of masculinity, that we hear from various quarters.

Such traits of meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness will distinguish us as people of Christ, making us stand out from the people who are around us. Paul's teaching here concerning forgiveness recalls that of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, verses 14 to 15. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. For Paul, love is the quintessential Christian virtue. It's the virtue that holds everything together.

It runs throughout the whole. Love is the white light that is refracted into the various virtues that he speaks of here and elsewhere. Elsewhere, when Paul speaks of love, he speaks of it as the fulfillment of the law.

In Romans chapter 13, verses eight to 10, owe no one anything except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are summed up in this word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. In Jesus' teaching also, love to God and one's neighbor summarizes and unites the entirety of the commandments. Once you understand the centrality of love, the unity of everything else becomes apparent.

Love is also that in which everything else reaches its glorious height. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 13, so now faith, hope, and love abide. These three, but the greatest of these is love.

Love is also that without which everything else is vain or empty. 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verses one to three. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. The peace of Christ should rule in the hearts of his people.

Paul makes a similar point back in Philippians chapter four, verse seven. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in

Christ Jesus. If the Colossians are to avoid the wrath, the envy, the malice, and the anger that drives most people, they need peace to reign in their hearts.

When others around us are stirred up by anger, resentment, antagonisms, fear, anxiety, and all these other things, how do we know the calm that enables us to think clearly and act wisely? It's God's peace that guards our hearts and minds in situations of conflict. On occasions when there is conflict without, if this peace reigns within, our hearts and minds will be protected from being caught up in it. We will be able to think and act with wisdom and grace.

When others are losing their composure, their wits, or their clarity of mind, we will call to such peace as one body. The peace isn't just to be internal to us as individuals, but characteristic of Christian community more generally, enabling us to exist at peace with each other as one body, rather than as a fractious set of warring factions. The peace of Christ is a mark of his rule.

It's a mark of his assuaging the fears and subduing the passions and the antagonisms that assail us. The peace of Christ is the result of his conquest of our rebellious spirits, his stilling of the boisterous waves of our souls. And when such peace reigns within us, it should be expressed in the giving of thanks.

Paul calls for the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts to God. Paul's teaching at this juncture follows the pattern that we see in Ephesians chapter five verses 18 following, where he moves from teaching about the word of Christ dwelling in us to teaching a code of behavior for the Christian household. And do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In both of these places, Paul talks about the indwelling of Christ as something manifested and realized in the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. In scripture, the word of God is often given to us from outside. When we read the word of the law, it comes to us first and foremost as words from outside of us that we hear.

However, we are supposed to take the word of God into us to make the word of God part of us through memorization and also through song. Singing the psalms is a way in which the word of God becomes part of us. It conscripts our emotions.

It arises from within us. It is something that appeals to the loves, the desires, the affections, and it calls us forth in delight and love for God's truth. In the singing of psalms, the word of God becomes richly part of us.

They are not just words that we are sent to outside of ourselves. They are expressed in the first person. They are an expression of the heart that has been warmed by the truth of God and now declares that truth with transformed affections.

The word of God having been hidden in our hearts by memorization and meditation and now springing forth in delightful song and worship. Everything that we do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, under his authority and for his glory. And we give thanks to God the Father through him as creatures of God's handiwork and as tokens of his redemption.

Everything that we have and are is a gift that we have received from God's hand. And the purpose of our lives should be a rendering back of ourselves in word and in action to God in thanks. From this, Paul turns to the behavior that should characterize the Christian household.

The Christian household in the relationship between husband and wife, between parents and their children, and between servants and their masters. Paul's teaching on these matters is not just a knee-jerk conservatism, a desire for social conformity and respectability from Christians that will avoid them becoming scandalous in their society. No, the practices that he advocates are related back to the Lord.

Wives are to submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord. This submission is a form of behavior that is appropriate to the new realm of life into which we have been brought by God's grace in Christ. The relationship between husbands and wives is not a symmetrical one.

Wives are instructed to relate to their husbands in a way that differs from the way that husbands are instructed to relate to their wives. This is the same in other parts of the New Testament, both in the teaching of Paul and in the teaching of Peter. However, it should be noted that Paul does not say, husbands, you have authority over your wives, and wives, you must submit to that authority.

Paul's teaching is not founded upon a male prerogative. Rather, both husbands and wives are instructed to give priority to consideration of the other and their well-being. The asymmetry is important though.

In Paul's teaching elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, and Ephesians 5, verse 23, he speaks about the man as the head of his wife. As such, the man should be given a special honor. The nature of headship is not primarily seen in the face-to-face relationship between the husband and the wife, but more particularly in the way that the husband leads the way out into the world.

The husband stands for his wife and family in the wider society, and he is particularly responsible for setting the tone and maintaining the foundations and boundaries of his

household. As his wife submits to him, she is not acting as a doormat, but rather making this task joyful and pleasant for him, one in which the weight of the responsibility that he bears is not experienced as one subjecting him to constant blame, but rather as one that honors him with a particular and important task, his wife acting as his counselor and encourager and supporter, not his constant critic. For his part, he is called to love his wife, especially seen in not being harsh with her.

He has to be gentle, kind, meek, forgiving, and forbearing with his wife. His position in the family is not one that is given to him for self-aggrandizement, but rather for the building up of the entire household in a way that glorifies God. This is particularly important when he's raising his kids.

A father who's overbearing, a father who tries to dominate his household, can be a great cause of frustration and discouragement for his children. The Christian father, by contrast, should be one that encourages and builds up his children. He must use his own strength in a way that builds up the weaker people around him, in a way that enables them to rise to their own full stature.

Rather than provoking his children, he should be kind and gentle, encouraging them in their growth by his careful instruction. Many Christians would find themselves in a position of slavery. Slavery was a common position for people in the ancient world, and it could feel alienating, as if they had no agency whatsoever.

But even for the bond servant, there is a way in which they can find dignity in their labors. They can work as to the Lord, not just for the eyes of their masters and for what they see, but for what the Lord, their true master, sees. In recognizing that their true master is the Lord and not primarily their earthly master, the mindset that they take to their labors can be one governed by the dignity that they find in work that is ordered towards the approval of Christ.

From him they will receive not meager payment, but a rich inheritance, one belonging to the sons of God. Knowing the justice of their true master, they can also act with patience and fortitude in situations of oppression. They know that the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong that he has done.

Oppressive earthly slave owners will one day be judged by the Lord, whereas those who have faithfully sought the Lord's approval will be rewarded. A question to consider, how, looking at Paul's teaching concerning the proper behavior of Christians, can we see that Christ is absolutely integral and indispensable to the entirety of it?