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Proverbs: Rulers and Subjects



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines the biblical principles regarding the relationship between rulers and subjects. According to Gregg, a sovereign is answerable to no one and is responsible for executing orders that benefit the people. He emphasizes the importance of displaying respect towards persons of higher authority and remaining patient in communication. Gregg also discusses the limitations of a ruler's authority and the need for truthfulness in influencing those in power.

Transcript

In our examination of the book of Proverbs, we're going topically and we've covered a lot of topics so far, but right now we're in the overall category of what Solomon has to say about relationships, interpersonal relationships. We first looked at what he said about a God conscious life and then we talked about the inner life, the heart. And now we're looking at the relationships that we have with other people.

And we've talked about parent-child relationships, husband-wife relationships, and servant-master relationships. All of those relationships we said were hierarchical. They are relationships where there is someone who is by definition subordinate to somebody else.

Not all relationships are that way. Friendships are not that way. Being, you know, having a neighbor, having a friend, having a brother or sister, those are egalitarian relationships.

Those don't have any defined authority structure in the book. Parent and child, obviously. The parent is an authority over the child.

The husband-wife relationship, the servant-master, and also that which we'll be looking at today is the last of these relationships that has something of a hierarchical structure, the ruler and subject relationship. But, of course, Solomon was a king and therefore he was given a lot of thought to the subject of rulers. In fact, you might remember when Solomon was a young man, his father David died.

And God came to him and said, ask anything you want from me. And Solomon's answer essentially was, well, you know, the people are a great multitude. I'm just a child.

I don't really know what I'm doing. Give me wisdom so that I can reign over them wisely. And the thing pleased God.

So God actually answered his request and also answered requests that he had not made. For example, making him wealthy and powerful and many other things. But the wisdom that Solomon sought was the wisdom to be a ruler.

And we know that Solomon did not always rule well or wisely. The time came when his heart turned away from God and he became a ruler who was not good. He was an oppressor.

He actually oppressed Jeroboam and Jeroboam had to flee to Egypt. And eventually, of course, Solomon's kingdom was taken from him and part of it was given to Jeroboam. And so Solomon, because his heart turned away from God in the midst of his reign, also ceased to be the wise ruler that he had been before, because the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

And when he ceased to fear God, then he ceased to be wise. And yet he wrote the Book of Proverbs when he was still wise, when he's still fearing God, and therefore he had reflections about the relationship between subjects and the rulers. And one of the things he observed that probably anyone living under a monarchy would know and should consider is that people should seek the favor of their ruler.

Now, we live in a society where there are no kings. We haven't had kings in this country in 200 years or more. And so we neither we nor our parents, our grandparents or great grandparents have ever been under any kind of a monarch.

And we are independent people. We have certain assumptions about personal rights. We have constitutional rights in this country and no king, no ruler is allowed or can legitimately take them away.

We're seeing sort of at the present time, an erosion of those rights and a return possibly to somebody's attempt to create a monarchy. But the point is that this country has never known monarchy in the past 200 years. And we have assumed certain rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly.

There's all kinds of freedoms that we have had, which people throughout history generally did not have. The king was the absolute monarch. He was the sovereign.

Now, the word sovereign means one who is really answerable to nobody. However, in Israel, the king was somewhat a little less sovereign because he was answerable to God. In other pagan countries, the king was the supreme authority and even the priesthood

was subject to him.

But Israel was a theocracy, and although they had a king, the king had to answer to God. And therefore, he was subject to the prophets and the priests and those who represented God's interest. So, nonetheless, the monarch still had more power than any other human being in the country.

And people did not have the kinds of rights that we assume to be normal in any land, any country. And so, seeking the favor of the king was the wise course of action for people to keep the king happy with you. The king's anger toward you was definitely something you wanted to avoid because the king commanded armies.

He could actually order the execution of people. They did not have rule of law in most of the world. In ancient times, they had rule of a monarch.

And that's one great difference that the founders of this country sought was to set up a country that was ruled by laws rather than men. That is, rather than individual men and their whims, even the rulers were subject to laws which were made by representatives elected by the people. So, it's a very different concept that we have just taken for granted all of our lives from that which all nations, all societies had for thousands of years before.

And so, the idea of a monarchy is taken for granted in these passages. And now, one thing, though, that the Christian can say is that while we have lived in a country that has no monarch, the universe we live in still has a monarch. We are still under God as our king.

And as we have become believers in Christ, the thing we believe about him is that he's the king. He's the Lord. That's what makes us Christians is that we have acknowledged what God has declared about Jesus, namely, he is the king of kings and the Lord of lords.

So, while we do not, when we read these proverbs about kings, we can't relate directly toward the subject in a political sense so much. But we realize that Jesus stands in the place in our lives that a monarch or a king would stand in the lives of ancient peoples. So, in chapter 23 of Proverbs, in the opening verses, we read, When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you.

Put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies for they are deceptive food. Now, you know, I say, I'm not sure what this is actually saying, but it sounds very much like what is said a few verses later about eating the food of a greedy man, of a miser.

We have two scenarios here in this chapter in the first three verses. When you sit down to eat with a ruler, this might not be your king. It might be a local, you know, governor or something like that.

But he's a man in power. And in verse six, he talks about when you sit down, when you go to eat with a miser. Now, there's apparently there's different protocol when you're eating at formal occasions with powerful people than there would be if you're at home just with your kids around the table.

And he says, when you eat, sit down with a ruler, you need to watch your manners. And he says, put a knife to your throat. That's a strange statement is probably not literal.

But the idea would be that you need to govern your appetite and don't let too much food go down the gullet because you'll seem to be taking advantage of the ruler. You'll be seeming to just be there for yourself if you're just wolfing down all the food. You have to control your appetite.

If you go to be with a ruler, you need to have some manners. There's different protocol at a meal with a ruler than there is. And you may desire his delicacies.

You may be a person who, if you're at home, you just reach across the table and grab everything that looks good to you off the table. But when you're with a ruler, you have to control your appetite. His delicacies may appeal to you, but make sure that you're governing your behavior by something other than you're craving to eat.

And you show respect to the ruler rather than just saying, wow, there's a lot of food on this table and start grabbing it with both hands and shove it in your face. Instead, when you're eating with a ruler, there's usually some reason that you're there. There's usually some order of business.

There's something other than the food that is the real priority there. And keeping the ruler on your side, be careful not to offend the ruler by your manners or by what appears to be your selfishness. And that is what is recommended here.

You need to show proper etiquette in a proper setting when you're with somebody who has power. The reason you're with them is if you're not one of the people in power yourself, if you're not part of a king's cabinet eating with him, if you're just a citizen invited to eat with a ruler, then you display respect for the persons at the table because they are your superiors. And that is essentially, I think, what Solomon is talking about here in chapter 25 and verse 15.

He says, by long forbearance, a ruler is persuaded and a gentle tongue breaks the bone. There's an irony, of course, implied there that a gentle tongue, a soft tongue, the King James says, a soft tongue breaketh the bone. Well, a bone is the hardest part of a body.

And you don't break bones usually without a strong blow from an implement that's solid and hard. A baseball bat or something like that will break bones. But something like a tongue, which is flexible and soft and so forth, you wouldn't think you could break bones with something soft like a tongue.

But you can, figuratively speaking. You can break down a man's resistance. He may be stiffening himself against you, but your soft tongue can break that resistance by long forbearance, by long forbearance, by patience, by gentle and patient persuasion.

You don't change a ruler's actions, at least Solomon, I think, is suggesting. You don't do so by going in with a list of demands and making threats and so forth. You be patient, you forbear, you prevail by long and patient persuasion with your words.

And so he's saying it takes a while sometimes to get the king or a ruler to do what you want. And you may have to be patient, but it is possible if you persist. That you can actually persuade a ruler, though he's in power and you're not, you may end up being the one who ends up influencing the decision.

Your tongue, your ability to use your words wisely, diplomatically and so forth, can actually break down the resistance that a ruler initially has to whatever proposition you're trying to get past. In chapter 14 and verse 35, Solomon said, the king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame. So this is assuming the king is himself a wise man and recognizes virtue.

In Proverbs, a wise person is a virtuous person. It's not simply an intellect, not simply a smart person in the sense of just basic intelligence. It has to do with a person who is wise enough to conduct himself prudently and virtuously and to win a ruler over by the ruler's sin.

How wise one is. Think of how Daniel and his three friends were when they came into the court of the king of Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar captured them in Daniel chapter one, their wisdom was that which set them apart from the other captives and they were given special privileges and special diet and so forth.

Of course, they had to modify their diet as Jews, but the point is that they got favor from their captor, from the king, because they somehow demonstrated their superior wisdom. And Daniel, most of all, he was elevated above everybody else in the kingdom because of his wisdom. He was a foreigner.

He was a captive, but his wisdom elevated him through the favor of the king. The king's favor is toward a wise servant, Solomon says. So obviously.

Once again, like the soft tongue breaks the bone and long forbearance persuades a ruler. By wisdom, by discretion, by prudence, a person can gain the favor of a king, which is everywhere in Proverbs indicated to be a very desirable thing to have the favor of a king. In chapter 16 and verse 14, it says, as messengers of death is the king's wrath, but a wise man will appease it.

The king's wrath could be a death sentence for anybody because the king is not is not necessarily governed by laws. He is the law. And if you make him angry, then his wrath

would be like a messenger of death to you.

His anger will be the death of you. He can kill you. But favor is also a possible thing to derive from your dealings with the king.

A wise man will appease the wrath of the king. Now, this suggests that the wise man is facing a king who's already angry. To appease wrath means that there's some wrath already present and you have to be a peacemaker, a wise person facing an angry ruler is some of the precarious position.

But if that person is wise, they can calm down the ruler. They can appease his wrath and diffuse the situation in chapter 22 and verse 11. So if he who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, which means they're a smooth talker, grace is simply being gracefulness, a gracefulness of speech.

The king will be his friend. The king is looking for people who've got pure motives, not the opportunists who are just trying to sidle up to the king to get favors from him, as is always the case with many people. And Solomon observes that, too, is, you know, when you when you're in power, everybody wants to be your friend.

And yet there are people whose hearts are pure. There are people who are not there with us, all pure motives. They're there because they are honest people, good people.

What they say can be trusted. They're well-spoken. Those are the kind of people the king wants to have as his friends.

Those are the people that the king will confide in and will trust. He can't trust everybody. The king, anyone who's in power or rich or has something else that sets him above the average person in society is going to have people who want to come under that umbrella and benefit from that blessing that that man possesses by becoming a friend to him.

And Solomon often mentions that, especially about rich men. Everyone is a friend to him that's rich, he says. But true friends are hard to find, and they're especially hard to find if you're a powerful person, because you never know when you're in power who's really a friend and who's just wanting to get something out of you.

And so the king's always looking for someone who's pure of heart. That is, their motives are exactly as they appear to be. Rather than hiding some secret agendas in chapter 25 or six, it says, do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king and do not stand in the place of great men, for it is better than he say to you, come up here, then that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince whom your eyes have seen.

Now, of course, I'm sure that you recognize this is almost the exact same words of Jesus in Luke, chapter 14. Although Jesus is not talking about the context of being in the presence of a king or ruler, he's simply talking about when you're invited to a feast

where there are seats of honor and seats of less honor. Remember when Jesus talked about that in Luke 14, verses seven through 11, he says, when you're invited to a feast, don't don't speak the places of honor, the seats that are the high seats.

Where the most prominent and dignified people are expected to sit, the seats at the head of the table. Don't don't go and just immediately sit yourself there. He says, lest the host have to come to you and say, oh, I'm sorry, you have to step down to a lower seat because somebody more important than you has arrived.

And Jesus then was shamed. You'll have to in public just be demoted in that social setting. How embarrassing.

So he says, when you come, take the low seat and let them exalt you in front of everybody. Let them say, oh, no, come on higher. You deserve a better seat than that.

And of course, this is simply an illustration from a real life kind of scenario that Jesus and his public would face from time to time. They actually were seats of honor at a feast. And so he's just saying, whenever you're invited to a feast, don't speak the honor.

Don't don't put yourself forward as though you deserve, you know, some kind of respect. He that humbles himself will be exalted and whoever exalts himself to be humbled, Jesus said elsewhere. And and so that's what Solomon is saying.

Almost the same words here. He says that when you're in the presence of a king, don't try to impress him with how great you are. Don't try to boast about yourself and impress the king with pretense of being the great man.

The king is not impressed. Kings are greater than any man, at least their status in society is they they they're immune to being impressed by people's boasts about how great they are. King knows that he's greater than everybody else anyway.

And so don't try to impress the king with or give the impression to him that you are great. Just just be humble about yourself and let him exalt you. It's better for you for him to say, come up here.

That is that you're not really pretending to be anything great, but he he recognizes ability. He recognizes your wisdom. He recognizes your virtue and therefore he exalts you rather than that.

You've exalted yourself better that than for him to have to put you down lower than the position you've sought for yourself. So Solomon says this. Jesus obviously had this passage in mind when he applied it to a situation other than in the presence of kings.

So. Solomon has a number of bits of advice about keeping on the good side of the king. And of course, that's true with reference to being on the good side of God, too.

He gives grace to the humble. Christ is our king and he resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. It says in Scripture, and so that is essentially what Solomon is saying to about ordinary kings.

Now, kings are not always the best arrangement to have. Saul was the king and he was a tyrant. David was the king and he was a good king.

Kings can be good or they can be bad. Solomon kind of stood on both sides of that aisle. He was a good king initially, and then when he departed from the Lord, he was not a good king.

But he does have some things to say about the positive aspects of having a king. Now, in the book of Judges, it says in those days there was no king in Israel. Everybody did what was right in his own eyes.

And that turned out not to be as good as one might wish, although God didn't desire necessarily for there to be a king in Israel. Therefore, the fact that there is no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes was sort of a necessary thing. God had made no appointment of a king.

It wasn't God's desire that they have a king. And when they asked for a king, God was unhappy about it. It's clear that what God had in mind was that there would be no king in Israel other than God, who is their king.

But that's the point. He was their king. They were expected to do what was right in his eyes.

They didn't have a human king to crack the whip and make them subservient to him. They had God in heaven and he had given his law. And what he expected people to do was what was right in his eyes.

What was right that he had dictated in the law. And so they didn't need an earthly king. When men are governed by conscience before God, they don't need the accountability of someone to crack the whip and make them behave.

There are two kinds of people. People who have internal controls and people who don't. If people don't have internal controls, they have to be controlled by external controls.

That's how it is, of course, even raising children. Children are not born with internal controls. They can't even control their bladder, their bowels.

They can't control anything. They can't control their emotions, their pride. Just whenever they just feel like it, they just are lacking in internal controls.

And that's why they are given parents. Parents are required to control their children to make them behave. I've mentioned how annoying it is to be on an airplane.

And I've had this experience more times than I can remember because I'm on many airplanes. It seems like I'm hardly on a flight ever nowadays without this happening. That some baby or some young child who seems to me should be disciplined is making a fuss and disturbing the whole airplane for the whole flight.

But there are annoying screams and misbehavior. I think when my kids were traveling overseas, we never let them behave like that. I mean, it's a parent's responsibility to control their child and so that they become good citizens.

They become... I always say to the parents, are you trying to make everybody hate your children? You know, why don't you want people to love your children? Now, why don't you make your children lovable? That's what your responsibility is, not to make them necessarily lovable, but make them the kind of people that don't inspire resentment and anger from everybody in their environment. You know, and Timothy told me he raised six kids and there were three times when he and his family were in restaurants and strangers paid their bill because their kids were still well-behaved. And I've had the experience at least two or three times, too, when I was raising my kids, that we'd be in a restaurant and people would pay our bill for us.

We didn't even know we'd just go up to pay at the end. They said, oh, someone else paid your bill. They said your children were so well-behaved.

And Timothy had exactly the same experience several times. How about yours? You ever had that experience? You don't eat in restaurants, right? Yeah, you guys don't eat in restaurants, I guess. Your kids are well-behaved, too.

But, you know, children don't have internal controls. They have to be controlled by external authority. However, the desire of every parent is to bring their children to a place where they have internal controls.

They don't need somebody enslaving them. They don't need someone governed by laws. And that's exactly how God treated the human race.

That's in fact how that's the analogy Paul uses in Galatians 4 about the human race under the law is like children. But that when the father sent the spirit of his son to bring us to maturity, to be heirs, then he writes his law in our hearts and the law of Moses is no longer needed. This is the whole discussion of Paul in the first verses of Galatians 4. That a child, while he is a child, is no better than a servant in the home.

He's governed by tutors and so forth. He's got to be controlled by external controls. He said that's how it was for the human race under the law, because people did not have the law written in their hearts.

They needed the law externally imposed. He said that when the time comes appointed by the father, the child then moves to maturity and is given responsibility as a man

because the father recognizes that child has developed responsibility and controls himself inwardly. He doesn't need someone outside controlling him.

And that's how God has treated the human race. The new covenant has brought in a new phenomenon, not an external law imposed on an uncontrollable rebel, but a new phenomenon of the law written in the heart, a new heart and a new spirit so that the person internally desires to do it right. And they don't need external controls there to the degree that a person will be accountable in their conscience to God.

To that degree, they don't need to be accountable to men. You know, we hear a lot about accountability these days because there's so much misbehavior. Frankly, when a person misbehaves, they need to be accountable to people.

But ideally, a person should be accountable to God in such a way that it never comes up that they need to be accountable to people. There's a number of times in the Old Testament when it's talked about when the temple treasury, when David's collecting the money for the temple and also when Josiah was financing the, you know, the fixing up for the temple. Which is falling into ill repair.

It talks about certain men who are given charge of the finances that were brought in, it says, and they were not required to give any account of the finances because they were faithful men. It's a remarkable thing when you've got a large amount of money being handled and you don't even require them to give an account for what they're doing because you know them. They're faithful.

They don't have to be accountable to people because they're accountable to God, their conscience. They have the internal controls that make it unnecessary for other people to be breathing down their backs and monitoring their things and checking out whether they're doing right. And so the idea is that if you have internal controls, you don't need the external control in the book of Judges when there was no king in Israel.

People should have just been governed by God, their conscience before God should have kept them behaving and then they wouldn't never have needed a king. But because they didn't manage their conscience toward God, they didn't have the internal controls. They had to come under oppression from the Ammonites and the Philistines and the Midianites and somebody else.

God had to always bring in the whip to turn them around. And eventually a king was thought. And sometimes it is good to have a king.

God didn't really want there to be a king in Israel. And when they asked for a king, he gave them one that turned out to be a bad guy. But since now there was a monarchy, God eventually gave them a king after his own heart.

And a good king can be a good thing. Certainly it's a good thing to have Christ as your

king because he is not an oppressor. He's always just.

He's the model king. Once in a while, an earthly king can approximate that and that's can be just. He can be a good and he can be a good protector of his people.

In Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 8. Proverbs 20 and verse 8 says, a king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters all evil with his eyes. That is, if you've got somebody in authority enforcing the laws, sitting on the throne of judgment, then evil will be dispelled from the society. If the courts and the rulers cease to punish the wicked as they are supposed to do, then there will be no righteousness.

The evil will prevail. But if the king is righteously doing what a king is supposed to do, he sits and he judges criminal behavior. Well, that banishes criminal behavior from wherever he is overseeing.

And that, of course, is exactly what the New Testament says kings are for. They're not for much. You don't need rulers for much.

At least the Bible indicates that God hasn't delegated a great amount of authority to kings in lots of realms. But in a certain realm, God has ordained rulers. And in Romans 13, which everybody knows to be the passage for Paul discusses this matter most thoroughly.

In Romans 13, one, he says, let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. So there's no authority except from God and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority, resists the ordinance of God.

And those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Now, obviously, Paul is a little idealistic here because many times rulers are a terror to good people.

As, for example, in Adolf Hitler, you know, would imprison those who helped the Jews. You know, some rulers are, in fact, a terror to good people and exalt bad people. What Paul is talking about is what God has ordained to be the case.

Rulers don't always do what they're ordained to do. Just like men who are ordained to preach the gospel don't always preach the gospel. Just because you're ordained by God to do something doesn't tell whether you're going to do that thing or not.

But it does mean that if you don't, you're defaulting on your commission. It does mean that if you are ordained by God to do something and you do something different, then you're a criminal. You're in rebellion against God.

And like Saul was, you know, when he was ordained to do the right thing and he did the wrong thing. God said, OK, you've rejected the word of the Lord. I'm rejecting you from

being king.

What Paul is saying here is there's no authority but of God. Some people make the mistake of thinking he's saying, therefore, any king, anything he does, any ruler, he's doing what God wants him to do. No, he's saying that no ruler has any authority except what God gives him.

And therefore, he's subject to the one who ordained him. The king is subject to God and he is subject to he's ordained to do certain things. Some kings don't do those things.

And when they don't, they're acting outside their sphere of authority. They're not doing what God ordained them to do, and therefore they have no actual authority because there's no authority but from God. When a king does what God ordains, when a king is acting within the sphere that God has given him of authority, he has God's authority.

He's appointed by God to do that. But when he does what God has not appointed him to do, he steps outside his sphere and he has no authority. Because there's no authority except from God.

And if God hasn't authorized him to do a particular thing and he does it, he's doing it without any authority. He's just a man. It's an important thing to understand about authority in the Bible.

All authority is of God. Paul spoke about his authority that he has in the church, but he says we can do nothing against the Lord, but only under the Lord. You know, what the Lord has us do is what we're allowed to do.

There's no authority apart from from what God has ordained. So what has God ordained? Paul says here in verse four about the ruler, for he is God's minister, that means his servant to you for good. For if you do evil, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is God's servant and avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

So what God has done is ordained rulers to exercise wrath on those who practice evil. In other words, to punish criminals. That's what God has ordained rulers to do in first Peter, chapter two, Peter says the same thing in a somewhat more brief passage in first Peter to 13 and 14.

Peter said, therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to be to the king as supreme or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. God has ordained rulers to punish criminals and to encourage lawful and good behavior. When a king does that, he is acting as God's servant.

When he doesn't do that, he is a rebel against God. He is seizing an illegitimate authority that God has not given him. Whenever God ordains somebody to do something, gives

him authority, it's always within a sphere that's limited.

Even parents have authority over their children, but it's a limited sphere. They don't have the right to kill their children. God hasn't ordained them to that, has not authorized that behavior.

He's authorized them to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That's the command. That's the assignment.

And as long as they're doing that, they are acting as in the authority that God gave them. If they begin telling their children to do evil things, sinful things, or they begin to abuse the children there, they have no authority to do that. They're not authorized.

And for that matter, the sphere of their authority is limited in another sense. And that is that if I tell my children, you go to bed at eight o'clock, then they have to go to bed at eight o'clock because that is within the realm of my authority over them. If I tell my neighbor's kids to go to bed at eight o'clock, they can just ignore me.

You know, who are you? You're just the neighbor guy. You're not. You have no authority.

And it's true. I have authority over my children, but I don't have the same authority over my neighbor's children. Why? Because my children are within the sphere that God has authorized for me to rule.

He has not given me the neighbor's children. They're in somebody else's sphere. All authority that's not God's authority is not absolute.

Only Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth. Only Jesus has unlimited authority. Everybody else has delegated authority.

That's always limited within a sphere. The elders of the church, the parents in a home, a husband over his wife, a master over his servants, the ruler over his people. Doesn't matter what the hierarchical structure may be.

There's a limited sphere and those who possess authority from God have an assignment that is defined by God. And that assignment defines the perimeters of their sphere of authority. When they act within that sphere, they are acting as God's servants.

When they step outside and do what God has not authorized, they're acting as mere men having no authority and do not need to be taken seriously by those who are concerned to obey God. If a ruler punishes criminal behavior and they're not, you know, punishing innocent people, then Christians need to submit to them as unto the Lord. And so a king who sits on the throne of judgment, Solomon says, scatters all evil with his eyes when a king is actually doing what he's supposed to be doing.

He eliminates or at least minimizes the criminal behavior within his realm because he is

on the job. His eye is watching out for you. Like Bill O'Reilly, he's looking out for you.

But the king is actually doing so in a way that has some teeth in it. And in verse 26 of the same chapter, Proverbs 20 and 26, a wise king stips out the wicked and brings the threshing wheel over them. Figuratively speaking, the idea is that wise king sits out between the wheat and the chaff.

That's what threshing is. Threshing is dividing between wheat and chaff. And figuratively speaking, some people in the realm are wheat and some are chaff.

The wicked are the chaff and the king, by his wise administration, is there to see to it that the chaff is removed. In the same chapter, chapter 20 and verse 28, says mercy and truth preserve the king and by loving kindness, he upholds his throne. The idea being apparently that God will bless a king and keep him in power if he is following the laws of mercy and truth, the principles of mercy and truth.

Then his throne will be preserved. The implication is by God, although it doesn't necessarily say that. It could be saying that a king who practices mercy and truth will be loved by his subjects and will never be the object of or the victim of a revolution against him.

But I think the implication in the Proverbs is that God will bless a king who does the right things and operates as a king ought to operating in mercy and truth. In chapter 21, one, it says the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Like rivers of water, he turns it wherever he wishes.

This affirms that God is in control of history and history is often seemingly in control of more. Immediate authorities, obviously, history is shaped by national policies and national policies are shaped by rulers and therefore, for God to shape history means that he must exercise a sovereign providential control over rulers. Now, the extent of this control is not is not elaborated on here.

That is to say, one could take this to mean that the king never, you know, makes any decision about what breakfast cereal he's going to eat or anything else without God directing his heart that way. Or it could be less, you know, micromanaging kind of a situation where God allows the king to go his way until the king's decisions would go against or interfere with something God wants to happen and God steps in, turns his heart. There are times that God definitely complains about a king's behavior.

There are times when he also hardens the king's heart and in a sense, takes away the king's free will because God intends that a king's decisions should be a certain way so that history will go a certain way. And so it may be that, you know, we could picture it that that although the teenager is driving and the father is sitting in the like, like the driving instructor next to him with his own steering wheel and he's he's actually the kid

thinks he's steering. It's like these little kids that are in these little plastic cars and steering wheels that don't really work.

And it's got a handle on the back. The parents push him like a stroller and the kids think he's in a car steering, but the parents really do all the steering. Some people think that that's how it is with the rulers.

They think they're steering, but really everything they do, God is just directing the little car. But it's also possible to be like a father sitting next to his son who's learning to drive and the son is really doing the driving. But the father can jump in and grab the wheel when he sees the need to do it.

We don't know. I mean, Solomon's words don't tell us which way it is. Is God always everything the king does is just being steered completely or is it like rivers of water, which follow normally the course of that nature dictates? Although God can certainly change that course any time he wants to.

The rivers of water are directed as near as we can tell by laws of nature and erosion and hydraulics and things like that. Now, it's possible to see God is micromanaging every molecule and so forth. And some people feel better about seeing God that way.

But the Bible doesn't necessarily ever teach that anywhere. And it would appear that some things are left by God to follow the course either of nature or a person's decision making. But he always is sovereign.

He can always step and say, OK, I don't like the way this is going. I'm going to redirect this here. And of course, different people have different pictures in their mind of how God governs.

But one thing this says is that the rivers of water are certainly under God's rule and so are the decisions of the king. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water. He turns it whether so ever he will.

And I don't know that we are to suggest that every evil thing a king did, God had him do that. Although we can say that God didn't prevent it and when he could have, because if a man is going to do something that God absolutely does not wish to permit, God has the control to twist the king's heart a different direction. So the point here is that although kings appear to be sovereign, they aren't entirely sovereign.

They are under God's rule and God will step in whenever he has to do so in order to prevent something from going away that would be disastrous to his purposes. In chapter 25 and verse 5, Solomon said, take away the wicked from before the king and his throne will be established in righteousness. Now, take away the wicked from before the king.

I have a feeling he's talking here about counselors of the king. Kings always consulted

counselors and advisors, and there were certainly wicked ones among them. And Solomon believed that a king should use wise counsel with many counselors for safety.

With good counsel, make war, Solomon said elsewhere. He knew that a king depended not on his own wisdom, even though Solomon was the wisest king ever. He himself had counselors.

We know that because his son, Rehoboam, when he had to make a decision between two options, went to some of the older counselors who had counseled his father, Solomon. He ignored their counsel and took the counsel of young fools his own age. But the point is that there were older men that Rehoboam could consult who had been counselors of Solomon.

Solomon, the wisest man in the world, had men who gave him counsel. Every king needed counsel. No king who was wise would think that he should just govern unilaterally by his whims.

One that does that is what we call a tyrant. Not all kings were tyrants. Some were, and they certainly had the power to be, but a good king would not be.

This is something we have to remember, too, and this gets us off a little bit. But when we talk about the sovereignty of God and his being the king. There are certainly people who think that God micromanages every thought, word and deed that people do, and that he's ordained everything that happens.

And there's others who don't see it quite that way. But in talking to those who do see God as the one who is universally and providentially controlling everything meticulously. If you say, well, you know, kings don't do that.

I mean, God is said to be king, but kings don't generally do that. It is sometimes said, well, that's because they can't. But God is everywhere and God is all knowing and God is all powerful, so he can do what other kings cannot do.

But this suggests that every king, if they could, would take away all freedom from all people. That's not necessarily the way all kings are. Some kings are.

A king who will control every move that people make because he can is not necessarily a king that people will love. He's what we call a tyrant, a king who decides you don't decide who you marry. I'll decide who you marry.

I'll decide what you have for breakfast. I'll decide what you do for a living. I'll decide everything for you.

You don't make any decisions. I'll make them all for you. That's I mean, it's true.

Earthly kings don't do that and they can't. But to suggest that every earthly king, if given

that power, would do that is, I think, a mistake. I don't think most earthly kings who are humane and care about people would dominate the wills of their people that way.

A good king makes good laws and requires people to keep them and leaves a great deal of freedom to those people to do. What they wish under the within the permit of the laws and he punishes those who break the laws. That's what a good king usually does.

At least good human kings do. And there's not really any reason to believe that God governs that much differently than human kings do in that respect. Even though he can just to think that someone can be as that everything will be as tyrannical as they can be.

And that God can be because he's got all the power that it does not follow that because God can that he would. Do that. And it doesn't sound for me as I read the scripture that God does that.

In chapter 29, verse 14, says the king who judges the poor with truth, his throne will be established forever. Yeah, that's sort of like the same promise that was made about the king who removes the wicked from his presence. His his he'll he'll stand for his throne stand forever, too.

So it's a good king who judges the poor righteously, who defends the interests of the powerless. That's really what kings are supposed to do. Without a king, without government, the most powerful people simply prey on the vulnerable people.

Wicked people who are stronger will take advantage of decent people who are weaker. But a king changes that balance of power because the king who's who will govern in favor of the poor justly, that's who will stand by the poor, even though they can't bribe him as the rich people can. But he's concerned about justice.

He makes and upholds just laws that that brings security to everybody and people will want his throne to be established long term. But bad rulers are definitely bad news. And Solomon knew that, too.

There are bad rulers who are tyrants and they are not a good thing. In Chapter 28, verses 15 and 16, Solomon said, like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over the poor people. Now, a lion and a bear were fairly difficult to resist by human efforts in those days.

They didn't have high powered rifles, a charging bear, you know, not much you can do. Even today, a charging grizzly is a little bit difficult to stop, even if you've got a 50 millimeter elephant gun. You know, when I lived in Idaho and visit friends in Montana who actually, you know, have stories, true stories that they know of from people who've been in the presence of grizzlies and so forth.

I heard one story about a guy who was hunting grizzlies or just hunting. This must have

been before grizzlies were protected. And he had a 50 millimeter cannon, as it were, an elephant gun.

And there was a grizzly way over on another hill there. And he decided he was going to shoot it as a trophy. And he shot the thing and it went down and it fell down where he couldn't see it.

And then it got up again and started charging him. And he emptied his gun into the grizzly as it was coming at him. And I think his final shot finally made it drop within a few feet of him.

But it was it was charging him full of bullets in it. You know, a charging bear is a terrifying thing. A roaring lion, likewise, a lion generally has no natural enemies.

And so a king is like that. And if he's a bad king, he's he's something to be, you know, a terror to people, a wicked ruler over poor people. It's about as bad a situation as can be imagined.

Verse 16 says, a ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor. But he who hates covetousness will prolong his days. So a couple of things that can make a king really oppressive and undesirable is if he lacks wisdom.

And if he apparently can be bribed. A man who doesn't hate covetousness is an oppressor. But the man who does hate covetousness, a man who's not going to be bribed, not be able to be controlled by the person who is the highest donor.

That person is going to prolong his days. But a bad king is certainly a bad thing because people are vulnerable to the king if he's good or bad. I've often thought.

How what a blessing it is that the God who we all answer to happens to be a good God. What if he wasn't? What could we do about it? You know, what if what if the God who made us and who governs us and who will judge us and so forth, the God who cares about us and that we depend so heavily upon and that we're required to worship? What if that God was really more like the devil? What could you do? You can't overthrow him. You know, we're just so fortunate that the God who actually happens to be an absolute power is a good guy instead of a bad guy, that he is generous and kind and loving and forgiving.

He doesn't have to be any of those things. If no one could make him do it, that's what the word sovereign means. When someone is sovereign, no one can make them be different.

No one can. They don't answer to anybody. They are what they want to be.

And that's what they will always be. Because they don't they're not accountable, a

sovereign does not give account of his behavior to anybody else. God doesn't have to give account of himself.

If there's nothing keeping God good except himself, his own nature, he just is a good God. And that's good for us. Because if he was a tyrant, if he was an oppressor, if he was evil and cruel, if he was like some kids I knew who loved to throw cats out of the car on the freeway just to see them hit the ground, or little boys who like to just pull flies off of wings just to torment them.

Flies off wings, wings off of flies. You don't pull flies off of wings. I guess it goes both ways.

The thing is, there are some people who just delight in cruelty. And what if we had just been born into a universe where that's the God that was in place and we just had to deal with it? Well, it'd be an awful world, be an awful life. You know, it's amazing how many people who are atheists describe God as a God of wrath, vengeful and nasty and all that.

And yet they get away with it. He must not be as wrathful as they think. You know, that they could curse God and defy him and and criticize him and still live to tell the tale.

Means he must not be what they're describing him as or else they wouldn't be getting away with it. He must be considerably more generous than they're giving him credit for. But an evil ruler, you know, you can't really can't really get out from under him.

He's your ruler. Fortunately, the ruler of the universe is not this way. But there have been earthly rulers who are that way.

Evil. Chapter 28, verse 28 says, when the wicked arise, meaning when they arise to power like rulers, men hide themselves. When the wicked ones perish, the righteous increase.

There is something to be said for having good rulers. When rulers are good, then righteous people increase. The society becomes a better society because there's better laws and lawmakers.

A better government can make society generally better, not necessarily more godly because no ruler, however godly he may be, can make his people godly. But he can encourage godliness. He can at least not persecute it.

And where there's righteous rule, then righteous behavior is encouraged and increases. When a wicked ruler arises and persecutes righteousness, then good people have to hide themselves. They can't go out and influence society with their goodness.

The good people have to go underground. And this has been seen many times, even in biblical history. The prophets of Yahweh during the time of Jezebel had to hide in a cave

and a man named Obadiah had to bring them food and water because they were hiding for their lives.

They were the prophets of Yahweh and Jezebel was killing all the prophets of Yahweh. Wicked people in power cause good people to hide. And our society has not yet become so wicked that we have to hide, but it should not be thought that we are immune from this.

Many societies have had to do that in our own time, in much of Eastern Europe, in China, in North Korea, in Cuba, in many places like that. When believers have lived in those countries, they've had to hide. They've had to meet secretly underground.

Christians in Rome had to do that a lot. They had to meet in the catacombs. They had to hide because of wicked, oppressive rulers.

Bad rulers are bad news. Chapter 29, verse 2 says, When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked man rules, the people groan.

That's about all they can do. They can't overthrow him. They just have to groan.

They live a life of misery because of wickedness. Now, of course, we live in a society where if we have wicked rulers, we don't have to just groan. We can also do something about it, supposedly.

I'm not sure what you can do about it. Well, we can elect another man. Well, where is he? Where's that guy you can elect? You got two parties.

One of those guys is going to be elected. Neither of them are any good. What can you do but groan? You know, the time may come when there's actually a good option.

And then you can actually say something about it. Maybe people can get rid of the bad rulers. But a society that only has bad candidates is going to have bad rulers.

You ever wonder how it could be that in a nation that has, what is it, 300 million people? What do we got here in this country? 300 million? Is that right? Something like that? That when it comes to finding someone to be the chief executive of the country, we can't come up with anyone. That has any principles, can't come up with anybody who's got any sense, can't come up with anyone who's better than the candidates that they put forward. It's just to me, it's an amazing thing.

And I'm not saying this couldn't have any one party. I mean, obviously. If it was only one party that did it, the choice would be easy.

The problem is that no matter how many parties you have, you'd never get a good candidate, except maybe one of these little side backwater parties. You know, some guy who's who will never get elected. But somehow all the money and all the power is behind

who? Someone who you think, what is it about this person that anyone has ever admired? Why did this person get put up there? You almost got to believe the conspiracy theories, because I mean, if people are left to do things sensibly, you'd have there's got to be some good people around somewhere in a country this size.

Let's see, Heidi, chapter 29, verse four, the king establishes the land by justice, but he who receives bribes overthrows it. It's a repeat of a thought we had a moment ago about the ruler who hates covetousness, his throne reestablished. But the one who doesn't is the one who receives bribes.

He'll. He'll ruin, overthrow. His land by his wickedness, because he'll just he'll just rule for the highest bidder.

And the last verse we'll look at in this subject is verse 12, chapter 29, 12. If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked. A ruler who does not stand for the truth.

Will never have never put pressure on all the people under him. To be truthful. If he'll listen to lies, then the best liar is the one who gets his way.

Who wields authority and power in the country because he can deceive the ruler. And so all the servants of the king will become wicked liars if that's what the king listens to. The servants of the king and others will rise to whatever level the king's standard is.

If he requires truthfulness, then only those who are truthful will will have any influence of him. So people will be truthful because they want to have influence with him. If he listens to lies, then there will be no check on the morality of his staff and on his underlings, his servants.

So what this is saying is, of course, that the morals of the chief executive trickle down to the lesser rulers, the lesser governors and so forth. The man at the top who makes the appointments. If he stands for righteousness, then there'll be pressure upon those who want to have any kind of post in his administration to be righteous people.

If he doesn't stand for righteousness, then there won't be such pressure and all the wicked people will rise to the top like foam, dirty foam. And so he's saying that it's very important that the ruler, the top ruler, be a man of principle because his standards will be that which pretty much defines his whole administration. Everyone under him will conform to whatever it is he stands for.

And so this is what we're told about rulers and subjects. There's not a lot of advice there about how to deal with a bad ruler except to hide. The advice is, if there's a bad ruler, hide.

But if the ruler's not bad, then there is advice about how to stay on his good side, be a

wise person, show good manners in his presence and, you know, treat him with the kind of respect that he deserves. For his office, but at the same time, watch your P's and Q's, be wise. He's looking for people who are honest, who have a pure heart and not people who are just trying to connive to manipulate him into power, themselves into power through him.

So these are the things that Solomon observed. Some of them are not directly applicable to us because we don't have kings in our land, but they are in some ways. Some of them are certainly applicable to us because the rulers of our land aren't all kings, but they are rulers nonetheless.

And they, and the heart of the king, we might just say the heart of any ruler of any description is in the hand of the Lord. He turns it with or soever he wills. And of course, many things about kings that the Bible says can be applied to the kingdom of God and the king that we have.

And we can be very fortunate. We can see ourselves as very fortunate that our king is not the tyrant that some kings are. He's not like the kings of the pagans.

He's a very different kind of ruler of the best sort. And his rule is a guarantee of righteousness and a banishment of evil, ultimately. From our lives, who are currently ruled by him.

And from the church, if the church would let him rule that too. With proper discipline, the church would, you know, wickedness would be scattered from before the eyes of the king. And the church, if the church followed the king.

And ultimately of the world itself and the universe. Eventually evil will be banished from him as he takes charge of the whole thing, eventually. So, though we have never had an earthly king, we do serve a real king.

There really is a king that we serve. And in some ways, we may be a little disadvantaged in that we've never had an earthly king. Not that I want one.

But in a sense, people who had kings had a frame of reference by which they could understand the statement, Jesus is Lord or Jesus is king. People who had a Caesar who declared himself to be Lord. And who knew exactly what the prerogatives of a Caesar and a king were.

And then hearing that Jesus is Lord would be able to transfer what they knew about rulers to what they were now to understand about Jesus. We, however, living in a more democratic type of society, we think the kings are subject to us. We think the rulers are subject to us and they are under our system of government.

But then when we hear that Jesus is a ruler, we think of him as someone who is like an

elected official. He's got to keep me happy if he wants to stay in office. You know, the polls are not looking good for him right now.

But he better straighten up so that he can get back on the good side of his populace. But Jesus isn't running for re-election. And therefore, not having any king in our frame of reference makes it a little more unnatural for us to try to understand what it means to have Jesus as a king.

But we can still figure it out. And we need to because that's how we're supposed to live. With his rule.