

The Book of Proverbs

“Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord: Proverbs as a Book on Faith”

Week 21: Proverbs 31, “The Words of King Lemuel and the Faithful Woman”

I. Proverbs 31:1-9, “King Lemuel’s Proverb”

1. The name Lemuel is probably a pseudonym, perhaps belonging to Hezekiah, Josiah, or another of Judah’s faithful kings. Whose instruction does he regard as prophetic revelation?

2. What are her three pieces of advice?

v. 3

v. 4-7

v. 8-9

3. Although we do not know the content of the vow, who else made a vow with God regarding children? See 1 Sam 1.

4. Although v. 3 could be misconstrued as a warning against women in general, how is sexual promiscuity a danger for kings especially? Which OT king’s life is a warning of this?

5. What does liquor or wine do according to v. 5 that makes its abuse particularly dangerous to rulers? To whom instead should alcohol be given, and why? How is alcohol here neither forbidden to all nor the abuse of it encouraged for all?

6. St. Chrysostom says, “Wouldest thou know where wine is good? Hear what the Scripture saith, ‘Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul.’ And justly, because it can mitigate asperity and gloominess, and drive away clouds from the brow. ‘Wine maketh glad the heart of man,’ says the Psalmist. How then does wine produce drunkenness? For it cannot be that one and the same thing should work opposite effects. Drunkenness then surely does not arise from wine, but from intemperance. Wine is bestowed upon us for no other purpose than for bodily health; but this purpose also is thwarted by immoderate use. But hear moreover what our blessed Apostle writes and says to Timothy, ‘Use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake, and thine other infirmaries.’”¹ What then is the chief problem for an alcoholic?

¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians*, 19.

II. Proverbs 31:10-31, “The Woman Who Feared the Lord”

7. Firstly, this poem is well-known for its “acrostic” structure. What does this mean, and how would the poem look if we did that to the English text?

8. “Excellent” is probably not the best translation. The Hebrew word means “strength or valor,” probably referring to the wife’s strong character. It is also mentioned in v. 29, “Many women show strong character...” How does the godly woman show strong spiritual and moral character?

9. Noting our theme for Proverbs, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” how is this extended to faithful women in this poem?

10. How is this faith lived out in her accomplishments?

11. What are the striking characteristics of this woman? What does the poem not focus on?

12. How should this guide young men when looking for a wife?

13. How is this wife also a metaphorical picture of the Church, the Bride of Christ?

Memory Verses for Today:

Proverbs 31:10, “An excellent wife who can find? She is more precious than jewels.”

Proverbs 31:30, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”