

## Proverbs 14 – Wound Up in this World

We live in a noisy world-constantly bombarded with things to get our attention, including social media, twenty-four-hour news cycles, endless sound bites from any and everyone. So giving focused attention to the vast issues that come with pursuing everlasting wisdom for everyday life is a challenge. We're wound up by opinions, decisions, and life events, often finding it difficult to turn our thoughts off long enough to actually hear from Jesus. But what if the Word of God was the first thing we heard each day? What if the Word of God was in our hearts as those sound bites bombard us? What if in our conversations with people, we also listened to what God might have to say to us?

Proverbs 14 says this would result in our being slow to anger. Hearing the wisdom of God's Word informs the way we hear and respond to others. As we become filled up with God's wisdom, we're less prone to get wound up by the world. The more we pause and seek to listen to God, the more our hearts are ready to do that with other people. As verses 17 and 29 teach us, patience makes way for wisdom and understanding, but a quick temper makes way for foolish schemes.

### A. Wisdom or Foolishness

Proverbs 1 -10 contrasts wisdom and foolishness. While the verses are individual in nature – they are loosely tied together. The verses also speaks to how what in our heart is demonstrated through our action.

***<sup>1</sup>The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.***

A wise woman is frugal and saves. She is industrious. She is religious and giving. She causes God to bless and favor her and her family. “But a foolish woman plucketh it down with her hands.” She demolishes or tears down the very thing she has taken the time to build.

***<sup>2</sup>Whoever fears the Lord walks uprightly, but those who despise him are devious in their ways.***

Most people pretend to the fear of God, but their actions tell a different story. A true believer has an affectionate reverence to the Most High. A man whose faith does not have sincere heart and obedience, is a dead faith, with no evidence of spiritual life. The good man not only receives Christ, but walks in him.

***<sup>3</sup>A fool's mouth lashes out with pride, but the lips of the wise protect them.***

Pride is bitterness and rudeness in the mouth of the foolish. But the lips of the wise will keep them from the disciple and from vengeance that overtakes the proud. The humility of their hearts controls their mouths in meekness and kindness, and their holiness and righteousness preserve their lips from speaking evil.

***<sup>4</sup>Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox come abundant harvests.***

You need an ox to plow the field and bring in the harvest, but oxen are dirty and messy. Success doesn't come without a little mess. Very little of value is created without some mess, chaos, or disorder. You can't cook a meal, build a house, or raise a family without a little mess. People who are learning new things and aiming for growth aren't perfect, so their journey will have some disorder in it.

This principle also applies to churches that want to grow, develop new leaders, and don't want to stagnate.

***<sup>5</sup>An honest witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.***

Deuteronomy 19:15; 2 Corinthians 13:1 ***In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*** The witnesses must be men of honesty, otherwise twenty witnesses are no better than

one. A faithful witness is one that will not lie; but a man who has no principle of honesty will, on the smallest temptation, tell lies without remorse.

***6 The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning.***

A ridiculer may seek wisdom, but he never seeks it with right views. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the ridiculer seeks wisdom to feed his pride cannot find it. He does not value wisdom from God. He does not align his understanding to the instructions of God, nor can his pride allow him to receive with meekness the instructions and correction that gives wisdom.

***7 Stay away from a fool, for you will not find knowledge on their lips.***

We must not willingly enter into the company of fools, but if, through ignorance of their character, we happen to do so, we must walk away. We may be influenced by their foolish conversation. We become like those whose company we frequent. It also demonstrates inability to discern sin. Lukewarm persons, who are perhaps the least dangerous of bad companions, will, if we stay in their company, transfer their lukewarmness into us. Revelations 3:15-16

What does this scripture tell us about choosing the people we associate with?

***8 The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.***

When men know everything except what they ought to know, they are only fools. If we had hearts large as the sand on the seashore, and filled with a world of things, we would still fall short. We are travelers to another world, and our wisdom lies in knowing the way that leads to the world of happiness. There is no way to heaven but Christ; and any man, wise about salvation, who does not value the knowledge of a crucified Savior falls short. We seek the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. We recognize the difficulties and enemies in our way, and how to overcome them.

***9 Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.***

Foolish men make light of their own sins, when they ought to be humbled by them. They think that punishment will never come. But if we take hell seriously – we would not be indifferent to sin. “But among the righteous there is favour.” They have too much good-will to one another, and to all men, to make light of sin. A man of spiritual discernment understands sin to be dangerous to all.

***10 Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.***

It is hard at times for a man to express the bitterness and grief he feels as well as the joy in his heart. We must not be critical of the grief others experience. There are some who do not express grief in the way we think they should. Their grief may be deep. Sorrow may fill their hearts, though they may have a smile on their face. God is the true judge of our repentance for sin and the grief we bear. As fellow believers, we should be compassionate.

**B. Understanding the Heart**

Proverbs 14:11-21 touches on understanding one’s own spiritual conditions as well as being aware of the different results of foolishness and wisdom. Solomon teaches that the heart in its natural state without God is not a reliable guide.

***11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.***

The upright man is far happier in the toughest circumstances, than a sinner in his greatest moment. Though a sinner may be in a magnificent palace, the storms of life will beat him down. But the righteous man will grow like the cedar in Lebanon. His home shall flourish, prosper, and grow into a palace. However, it is better to dwell in a cottage with the blessing of God and where the melody of joy and praise reside, than in a palace which lies under the curse of the Lord.

***12 There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.***

The wisdom of the wise is to understand his way. The Jews in Isaiah's time thought their way right. They tried to please God with their actions instead of through the change of their heart. They walked in the way of self-deceit and in keeping with the traditions of the elders and by the works of the law.

There are many who expect to please God by serving him, not according to his word, but according to the inventions and commandments of men. People believe they are living a life that pleases God even though they've never asked Him or gone to the Bible to find out. We downplay their sins, assuming we can do a few good deeds to make up for them. This contrasts with God, to whom sin is an eternally serious matter.

**Can we and should we trust our own judgment?**

***13 Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief.***

The joys of this world cannot make a man happy. They are often false and end in grief. Men put on a face of joy while their heart grieves. Some have the appearance of joy to cover a guilty conscience. It would surely be better to own up to sins, and to seek forgiveness and rejoice in God through the atonement.

***14 The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good rewarded for theirs.***

A true saint may slip in his ways, but his heart is aligned with the Lord. The backslider in his heart is the lover of sin, who walks apart from God and his laws intentionally. Such a man is never filled with sin, but takes so much pleasure in it, that he rejects God more and more. He shall, however, be filled with sin, either in this world or the next when he realizes that God has marked all his steps, and will not forgive his sin.

But a good man finds satisfaction in God. His pleasure is not in comparing himself to those worse than he, but finds rejoicing in himself and not in another.

***15 The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps.***

Readiness to believe what people say is regarded a small fault. Daily experience shows that many have ruined their lives by giving credit to what others say. History is full of examples of men who have lost their lives or robbed of their comfort because they gave credibility to the words of another. Some have been betrayed into the worst of sins, by believing groundless reports of others, as Saul in the case of David.

A prudent man will therefore call no man on earth master, but knows Christ as Master. He searches the Scripture and seeks wisdom from God through prayer.

***16 The wise fear the Lord and shun evil, but a fool is hotheaded and yet feels secure.***

A wise man will see apparent dangers, and will guard against them. Nehemiah saw the danger he was in from the enemies of the Jews, and used every means to prevent their invasions. A wise man trusts in God's mercy; but this trust is consistent with the reverence of God. Paul was a noble believer who triumphed in Christ. He lived and kept his body in subjection, when he had preached the gospel to others, so that he would not lose his way.

**What dangers was Nehemiah up against and how did he handle them? Read Nehemiah 4**

"But the fool rageth and is confident." Some think it a bravery to live without fear. Fools despise the correction of the Bible. They are filled with rage at those who would check them in their sin. Their prideful spirits will be tamed when the rocks and mountains fall on them, and hide them from the face of the Lamb.

*17 A quick-tempered person does foolish things, and the one who devises evil schemes is hated.*

Rash anger is a fruit of recklessness. Because another man has caused an injury, should you cause greater harm by not controlling your temper? He who angers quickly speaks and does many foolish things. A wicked man is far worse than a passionate man, for he harbors malice in his heart. A wicked man follows Cain and is hated by God and men. God may keep him, through fear, from having his brother's blood on his hands but in his heart, he commits murder, and cannot have eternal life in him. Simeon and Levi received correction from their father for their evil deeds and heart while the other tribes received blessings.

**How does reading the word of God slow our anger towards people?**

*18 The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.*

Foolishness is hereditary to men that come from Adam, who lost himself and future generations that excellent wisdom of God. Folly is like a field that produces nothing but weeds and brings forth grapes of bitterness. This is the inheritance of the simple who love simplicity, and will not listen to counsels of wisdom.

The prudent have a royal heritage. They shall inherit glory, and their knowledge is a chain to their necks. It makes them honorable as kings, and prepares them for the possession of those heavenly glories. The sinners are fools and the fruit of folly are the prudent's inheritance.

*19 Evildoers will bow down in the presence of the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.*

Bad men follow the wrong path and find sadness because of it. Good men, through the blessing of God, are favored. The Egyptians bowed down before Joseph, and Moses, and the Israelites.

Men who do not believe the scripture and reject it are shameful. God is the King of nations, and those that honor him he will honor, but those that despise him he will despise.

*20 The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.*

The poor man's neighbor is one that lives in his neighborhood, or one that is obligated by the ties of relationship to love him. All our neighbors of the human race should have our love. If the poor are connected with us by vicinity or relation and we despise or hate them, or are indifferent to their happiness, it is sinful. Our love to our neighbor because of his riches; poverty, or distress, should draw us into action. It is easy to love to persons during prosperity, and not their distress.

The rich man should not boast about the number of his friends, for many of them are pretenders, who want to enrich themselves at his expense. The friendship of Christ is necessary for him as well as the poor man, and so that he may rejoice and triumph at all times.

*21 It is a sin to despise one's neighbor, but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy.*

However common it is for men to hate or despise the poor, it is a great sin. A man's poverty should not deprive him of a relationship with others or with our Saviour. Nor does it weaken the obligation to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We should not show contempt for the poor, by trampling upon them, overlooking them, or withholding help when they are in distress. The Levite and the Priest that declined to give assistance to the wounded traveler on the way to Jericho, were breakers of the law of love. The good Samaritan was the only man who performed the duty of a neighbor.

C. Labor and Leadership

The first theme of Proverbs 14:22-35 is labor and speaks to the connection between wealth and poverty. God's people are to labor for this is God's way of meeting the material needs of mankind. God usually works through means and not through miracles. The second theme is of wise leadership

***22 Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.***

Individuals who commit wrongful acts will face consequences. Those who devise harmful schemes often anticipate success and personal gain; however, such expectations are wrong. Their plans may be stopped by the wisdom, authority and sovereignty of God. Even if their schemes materialize, they will not benefit from them. Instead, any attempt to harm those aligned with God's purpose will ultimately serve to glorify God and support the well-being of His people.

Those devoted to righteousness may become discouraged when their efforts seem to yield minimal impact. Nevertheless, there is assurance that those who act justly will receive a reward granted by the Lord. While no individual can claim merit before God, mercy remains accessible through divine grace.

***23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.***

Some men, if they cannot obtain easy employment would rather be idle than take a job they feel is below them. All useful work should be embraced because you find profit in good work. It benefits a man and his family. However, men must not expect success in their labor without the blessing of God. We rely on the providence of God. It is not the man who speaks, but the man who moves to action that proves his sincerity. It is not the man who talks about work but the man who labors, and does all his work, that has reason to expect the blessing of Providence.

***24 The wealth of the wise is their crown, but the folly of fools yields folly.***

Riches grow in the hands of a wise man. He is like a city set on a hill, and his wisdom shines and gives light to those around him.

Abraham and Lot could not have shown proofs of their hospitality, had they been poor men. Solomon was wise enough to choose wisdom, rather than mines of gold and silver; but without riches his wisdom could not have executed plans of God, nor built a temple so celebrated. When men have riches, it will soon be known whether they have wisdom or not by how those riches are shared.

***25 A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.***

Some oppose appearing as witnesses in a court of law. However, it is men's duty to bear witness when they asked to do so. By bearing witness, God may be glorified, and the lives and properties of the innocent preserved.

But we must never lie. Neither the preservation of our own life, nor a regard to the life of our neighbors, is a sufficient motive for us to dishonor God, by violating the law of truth. Rahab was approved, not for her hiding of the men of God, but for her faith and her good works. We may redeem the life of our brother, in some cases, with our own life, but a lie is too big a price for it.

***26 Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.***

Riches serve as a crown to those who are wise, representing honor and dignity. However, the fear of the Lord far surpasses all material wealth. The grace that comes from revering God is one of the greatest aspects of religion, being inseparably linked to every holy and virtuous disposition. Godly individuals find safety from every danger, and they can be assured—that they are protected. No force on earth or in hell can destroy them, for their refuge is as secure. They are the children of Jehovah, whose all-powerful presence serves as both sun and shield for them. Even death cannot harm them; rather, it ushers them into the eternal dwellings prepared by Christ for their welcome into their Father's house.



*27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.*

The fear of the Lord encompasses faith in Christ, for those who believe in the Redeemer possess within themselves a well of living water that springs up into everlasting life. Such individuals experience true life that is not only enduring but also filled with every joy and comfort. They are safeguarded from temptations and sins, which ensnares and ruins those who do not fear God.

*28 A large population is a king's glory, but without subjects a prince is ruined.*

Wise kings offer valuable guidance not only to their fellow rulers but to all people under their governance. A kingdom led by a ruler lacking wisdom becomes a source of widespread suffering and hardship, whereas a well-instructed monarch, with the reach and capacity to impact many lives, serves as a minister of good to countless individuals. This passage emphasizes the duty of kings to govern with the happiness and well-being of their subjects in mind. By doing so, rulers ensure their people are not driven to seek freedom and opportunity in other lands but are instead encouraged to raise families who serve and strengthen their nation.

*29 Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.*

Anger stands as a force even more untamable than the mighty leviathan (monster), requiring not only the strongest restraints but also the wisdom and repeated warnings provided by Solomon. Throughout his teachings, Solomon consistently urges alertness against the sudden and destructive attacks of anger, recognizing how easily it can overtake the soul.

There is a common misconception that meekness equates to weakness or lack of intellect, and that a fierce, unyielding sense of honor signifies true strength of character. However, the inspired wisdom of Solomon seeks to correct these misunderstandings. He teaches that genuine wisdom is found in the individual who holds their emotions in check, guided by reason that is shaped and sanctified.

*30 A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.*

Many people agree that religion is beneficial for the soul, yet the body often takes precedence in their concerns. There is a misconception that religion and holiness are detrimental to physical well-being and comfort. Solomon asserts that holiness is a source of health for the soul and the body, whereas sin is disease of the soul.

Envy was the cause of humanity's downfall through the devil, led the Pharisees to crucify the Lord, and remains a source of ruin and spiritual decay for all who harbor it. Envy brings not only physical suffering but also spiritual condemnation. May the God of love deliver us from this destructive passion.

What are some ways that we are envious and jealous? How does envy and jealousy hurt us and lead to other sins? How do we guard against it?

*31 Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*

Oppressing the poor, whether by exploiting their vulnerable state for personal gain or by withholding compassion, represents a moral failing. While taking advantage of their poverty is a sin against your brother, refusing them mercy is also a significant wrongdoing and carries the weight of condemnation.

Those who mistreat the poor—through insults, harm, or neglect—ultimately show disrespect to their Maker. God created humanity in His image and, through providence, assigns each person their place in life. What if God's generosity towards us was proportional to our generosity to the poor? Would we be getting any blessings from God? Or would we feel the pain of our own stinginess? When we help the poor, we mimic the nature of our Maker. When we withhold assistance to the poor, we insult Him.

*<sup>32</sup> When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous seek refuge in God.*

It is a certainty that all must eventually face death; however, there exists a difference between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked. This distinction may not always be apparent, but it is as real and as vast as the gulf between heaven and hell.

For the wicked, death is a transition from the world where all their hopes and pleasures were confined, into a realm of unrelenting misery and despair. Having lived and died in sin, their sins accompany them into the grave, becoming an everlasting source of torment and suffering. Even if the wicked meet their end peacefully, misery still awaits them; merely delayed for a brief moment. False hopes of heaven, clung to until the last breath, cannot prevent the inevitable descent into hopeless anguish.

*<sup>33</sup> Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning and even among fools she lets herself be known.*

Wisdom is not hidden away in the heart of the wise, only to be kept for personal benefit. Rather, a wise person uses their words to share wisdom with others whenever the opportunity arises, seeking to help and uplift those around them. Yet, wisdom is also guarded carefully, treasured as something more valuable than gold or silver, and protected from those who would misuse or diminish its worth.

The truly wise do not seek admiration or applause by displaying their knowledge for all to see. Unlike those who value reputation above genuine understanding, the wise refrain from offering instruction to those who are better suited to teach them and choose learning over boasting. They do not cheapen their wisdom by offering it where it will not be appreciated, avoiding the mistake of casting pearls before swine or sharing sacred truths with those who will not respect them.

*<sup>34</sup> Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.*

The truth of the proverb—“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people”—is evident throughout the entire history of Israel. The promises and warnings delivered to the nation were repeatedly fulfilled in the events that came upon them, demonstrating the reliability of divine principle in shaping a nation’s destiny.

*<sup>35</sup> A king delights in a wise servant, but a shameful servant arouses his fury.*

Throughout history, many kings have made grave mistakes in choosing whom to trust, often favoring those who prove to be harmful while overlooking loyal and faithful servants. One vivid example is King Ahasuerus, who, by trusting Haman—a man of wicked intent—brought trouble upon himself. He neglected the faithful service of Mordecai, only to later recognize his error. Ultimately, Ahasuerus destroyed Haman, the very one who had received undue confidence, and exalted Mordecai, the true preserver of his life.

How does verses 27 and 34 speak to your role in God's Kingdom purposes? How does anger impact these intended effects?