

Finding Stability in an Unstable World

(Proverbs 24:23-34)

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Introduction

Every culture, society, nation wants peace and stability.

Chaos, war, and instability destroy cultures and nations...

But what are the keys to a stable society where people can live and work and prosper?

Well, history has taught us that stable societies are built upon the family, the economy, and law and order.

Families bring stability because people want peaceful conditions for the next generation to grow and succeed..

In cultures where the family breaks down, society soon follows..

We are seeing that in our nation right before our eyes....

Another key to a stable society is a stable economy...

People need to be able to work and to find work and to be productive in their work...

When a society is working, they are not only providing goods and services that others need, they are also keeping themselves busy and out of sinful activity...

I just read an article last week that Ohio is experiencing a shortage of workers...

The state has an abundance of jobs, but they lack workers to fill those jobs and the reason is that many of those workers are hooked on meth and other illegal drugs..

No company is going to hire someone who can't pass a drug test...

To put an addict on the job is to risk an accident or a lawsuit...

Therefore, many jobs go unfilled in Ohio and society suffers due to an unstable economy...

Another key to a stable society is a stable justice system...

Where there is a lack of law and order, societies collapse and fall into the hands of evil men...

In light of these truths about family, economy, and law and order being necessary for a stable culture, it should come as no surprise to see an emphasis on all 3 of these truths in the book of Proverbs...

Over and over again, the book of Proverbs speaks of the need to raise our children to know and fear the Lord...

Over and over again, the book of Proverbs speaks of the need to go to work and not be lazy..

Over and over again, the book of Proverbs speaks of the need for justice and honesty in dealing with others...

And when we a group of people, a society, a nation place an emphasis on those 3 things, -the family, the economy, the justice system,- generally speaking, that group, that culture, that nation finds blessing..

On the other hand, when a nation doesn't endorse marriage and the family, when a nation doesn't encourage work and productivity, when a nation doesn't have a system of law and order, generally speaking that nation finds trouble...

Tonight, we come to the end of Proverbs 24...

Solomon's collection of 30 wisdom sayings has ended...

But it appears that Solomon gives us a little addition to his original collection of 30 to finish off chapter 24..

And so let's look at 4 proverbs that are found in verses 23-34...

The first can be seen in verse 23-26...

I. Speak the Truth (23-26)

Verse 23..

23

These also are sayings of the wise.

Let me stop right there a minute to make a quick note..

This lets us know that the proverbs that remain in verses 23-34 are an addition to the 30 sayings that Solomon just gave us...

Maybe the 30 were from a different source or sources and these last 4 are Solomon's addition to the 30..

We really don't know, but we do know that God inspired Solomon to put a little break at the start of verse 24..

So, let's look at this piece of wisdom here...

The second half of verse 23...

To [k]show partiality in judgment is not good.

24

***He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous,"
Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;***

25

***But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight,
And a good blessing will come upon them.***

26

***He kisses the lips
Who gives [l]a right answer.***

There is a great injustice in calling evil good and good evil..

Yet, we live in a culture that does that on a daily basis..

The wickedness of abortion is called the righteousness of a woman being able to choose..

The wickedness of homosexual marriage is called the righteousness of love...

The wickedness of adultery is called the righteous of trying to be happy.

The wickedness of greed is called the righteousness of saving...

The wickedness of false religions is called the righteousness of letting people choose for themselves how they want to worship God..

In the book of Matthew, Jesus healed a blind and mute man, but the Pharisees said that Jesus was doing the work of Satan..

That is how fallen the human heart is..

It sees good but it calls it evil and it sees evil and calls it good..

In fact, Solomon says that people will do that will be cursed by their friends and hated by their nation in the second half of verse 24...

The sad reality is this..

Not only is our own country full of people like that...

Our own government officials are people like that as well..

We have folks in the highest offices of our land that couldn't find morality with two hands and a flashlight..

In fact, right and wrong no longer exist for most people in our culture...

Today, right is simply what you want to be right and wrong is simply what is wrong for you..

We live in the days of the Judges where people do what is right in their own eyes...

And when that happens, all justice and fairness and right and wrong are gone, and a nation simply rests on the mercy of God...

Now, how should you act in terms of law and order?

How should a nation view right and wrong?

Verse 25...

We are to rebuke evil...

In fact, rebuking evil brings a blessing from the Lord...

Man, that really is the opposite of what most people believe today...

We are such a timid society that we refuse to correct anyone or call out anyone in sin..

Yet the promise of this verse is that rebuke sin is blessed by God..

Now clearly, our rebukes are to be made in a spirit of love and restoration..

We are not called to be unloving or unkind or ungracious when we rebuke others, but we are to be clear..

I am under no illusion about my own preaching...

Some people will listen to what I say and see me as unloving or harsh as I raise my voice..

But none of that is anger at anyone..

It is anger at sin..

It is anger at the fallen nature of man..

It is anger at so much self-deception...

But I love the people I am pleading with..

I am rebuking their sin but I am inviting them to the grace of God in Christ Jesus...

WE must rebuke sin.

WE must sin evil.

We must call people to repentance...

We must speak of God's wrath and justice..

But we can do it all in a spirit of love and kindness and grace..

The world thinks that you can't say anything negative about anyone...

And in our society today, anyone who tries to do that is alienated by the culture...

Yet God says that if we call evil evil and good good, he will bless us..

And then verse 26 tells us another benefit of being a truth teller..

It is like a kiss on the lips...

Now what does this mean?

Well, nearly every translations uses the phrase kiss on the lips here...

And most see the benefit of truth telling compared to a kiss on the lips which is often a show of affection...

And so they reason that those who speak the truth are as kind as a kiss on the lips...

Now, the interesting note is the Hebrew phrase used here can also mean to shut your lips...

In fact, the same phrase is used in the book of Job, and the clear meaning their is that Job's mouth was shut and not kissed...

So, it is possible to translate verse 26..

He shuts the lips who gives a right answer...

And I think that actually makes more sense here...

Truth tellers shut the mouths of those to whom they speak rightly..

When no one speaks truth, there is a lot of noise..

When the mouth of someone who speaks truth opens, everyone else is silenced...

Stable societies need truth tellers and they need court systems that uphold the truth as well..

A second aspect of a stable society is found in verse 27...

II. Prepare the Fields (27)

27

Prepare your work outside

And make it ready for yourself in the field;

Afterwards, then, build your house.

The wisdom of verse 27 is fairly simple but also very important to a stable society...

And that is the value of work and preparation..

The clear instruction of verse 27 is to get your work in place before you build a house..

Some have seen this as the need to get a job before you start a family...

Some have seen this in the more literal sense of make sure your work is in order before you build a literal house for your family..

In other words, make sure you can pay for the house before you build it..

There is no big difference in either way of looking at it...

I prefer the second way personally...

It seems that Solomon is encouraging people to establish an income from the fields before they invest in the personal comforts of a home..

And though this may sound like common sense, it is sense that lazy people refuse to live by...

How many people do you know who got a job and bought a car the same day...

OR who got a job and bought a house...

Or who got married and built a house even before they had a job...

Lazy people want instant satisfaction without the difficulty of working to get it...

There are able-bodied people in our own country who are provided housing but never get a job...

That runs contrary to the wisdom of this proverb...

When a society provides the comforts of living to people who don't work, the society is doomed to failure...

And any nation that has more consumers than producers is on its way out...

If you want want to consume the joy of a home or family be willing to produce the income necessary to do it...

This is the wisdom of God and people and nations that ignore it are headed down a difficult road..

For a third piece of wisdom, we return to the the idea of justice...

III. Testify Accurately (28-29)

Verse 28..

28

Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause,

And do not deceive with your lips.

29

Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me;

I will [m]render to the man according to his work."

Though it is necessary for a nation to ensure that there is law and order, it is also necessary for people to protect law and order with their reliability as witnesses...

We realize that not everyone in a nation or a culture is a believer, but there is a need for the majority of the people to be honest..

So the wisdom of verses 28 and 29 is to a reliable witness in court..

First of all, don't be a false witness by making up a story and don't be a lying witness who deceives with his words..

Now the question is why would someone lie as a witness...

Well, there are all sorts of motivations...

They may lie due to a bribe..

They may lie to protect themselves.

They may lie for all sorts of reasons, but one of the reasons that witnesses lie is found in verse 29...

People lie out of revenge..

The false witness in verse 28 is lying because he is getting back at someone..

In his mind, he is sinning against the one who sinned against him..

And in case you didn't already know, this is the attitude of so many in society...

People are hungry for revenge at any cost..

I am even shocked at the number of Christians who seek revenge...

Man, politics for example turns Christians into unbelievers at times..

I have seen folks who said that since their political opponents acted in an evil that it was fine for them to act just as evil..

Yet, that is not the wisdom of God..

In fact, the Bible says that believers are not to return evil for evil..

Romans 12:14-21...

14 Bless those who persecute [m]you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but [n]associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. [o]Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but [p]leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

For a believer, the way to get revenge on someone is to do good to them...

Think of it this way in terms of a witness in court..

Let's say that your neighbor has been unkind to you..

He even took some land from you in the past..

Well, another person has accused him of violence..

In fact, they claim that he hit them in broad daylight..

You were actually at the scene and you know the charge against your neighbor is false..

Yes, he is an evil man..

Yes, he speaks angrily, but you know that he never hit the person who is making that claim...

Well, you are asked by the cops or asked in court if he hit the victim..

Look, this man is expecting you to lie.

He knows that he has treated you wrong.

He knows that he has acted unjustly toward you.

He knows this is your opportunity to get him back..

And in your mind, you got him.

You even know that if he was in your spot, he would probably lie against you...

But guess what, you are called to tell the truth and when you do the right thing, you actually get your revenge on him..

Because you prove to him that you aren't like him..

This is the revenge of doing the right thing...

It aggravates and agitates evil people who want you to join them in their evil ways..

And to be clear, society will not survive where everyone lies..

When the truth is no longer the most important thing, people, families, and nations fall...

A final wisdom saying of chapter 24 is found in verses 30-34...

IV. Get Out of Bed (30-34)

For the first time in while, the book of Proverbs breaks from the normal structure to give us wisdom in picture or example..

Verse 30..

30

*I passed by the field of the sluggard
And by the vineyard of the man lacking [n]sense,*

31

*And behold, it was completely overgrown with
thistles;
Its surface was covered with [o]nettles,
And its stone wall was broken down.*

As a person passes by the property of a lazy man and he notices fields covered in thorns and thistles..

He notices other areas covered in nettles or weeds..

And he sees a broken down wall..

What is the picture of?

It is the picture of deterioration...

When I drive to Whitmire, parts of the town are quite depressing...

Though Main Street and other parts of town have been maintained, many finer homes and yards are clearly neglected..

What used to be the homes of working folks are now the homes of drug addicts and folks who don't work..

And the laziness of their life shows in the condition of their property...

Well, that was clear to person passing by the lazy man's property in verses 30-31, but the picture of the property was a great lesson for him and us..

Look at verse 32...

32

***When I saw, I [p]reflected upon it;
I looked, and received instruction.***

33

***"A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest,"***

34

***Then your poverty will come as [q]a robber
And your want like [r]an armed man.***

Once again in the book of Proverbs, God's wisdom is clear...

Laziness leads to poverty...

Laziness leads to having less stuff and more needs...

In short, laziness leads to lack..

This is why work keeps people, families, and society stable..

First of all, it prevents greater poverty but it also prevents a run down landscape...

When fields are worked, when buildings are filled with employees, when towns are busy, the landscape is maintained and morale is good...

When thorns cover fields and workplaces are abandoned, when towns are less busy, morale suffers and society crumbles...

When a nation works, a nation is blessed and encouraged....

When a nation sleeps and slumbers, the nation is cursed and falls apart..

If you want a stable society, a stable family, a stable life, get out of bed and go to work...

Conclusion

As we end tonight, I think everyone wants stability...

People want stability..

I know that families certainly want peace and stability..

And it is clear that nations need stability...

Yet, a stable life and society don't come when justice is turned upside down...

A stable life and society don't come when laziness becomes a way of life and people feel entitled to things without working for them...

A stable life is also not the result when people are more given to lies than the truth...

Yet, the greatest instability in any life or any family or any nation is the instability that comes from uncontrolled sin..

When sin runs rampant, lives spin out of control..

And the overarching truth of this set of proverbs is that you can't make someone honest and hardworking unless they are made new by the power of the gospel..

That is why the gospel is the starting point for all reform whether personal or national..

Any other attempt to make people folks tell the truth and go to work will only last a while because the flesh is too strong...

Only saved people offer true testimony every time..

Only saved people can work and be disciplined for a lifetime..

And the reason for that is that only saved people are empowered by the Spirit of God...

I pray that is true of you tonight...

Because try as you might to find stability, you will never find it without salvation...

Let us pray.