

## PART 151 ~ SLOTHS AND SCOFFERS

Proverbs 19:24

*A slothful man hides his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.*

The sluggard is the man who is caught in the horrible condition of perpetual slothfulness. He is held down by velvet chains in a sea of cushions, and it has become almost impossible for him to extricate himself from this horrible predicament. Once a person is caught in the trap of slothfulness, he will find that every minor effort requires gargantuan willpower to accomplish. From Proverbs 26:13, we know that the sluggard is intimidated by lions in the street, and there may be real lions that prohibit him from getting his work done in the fields. But now that he is intimidated by the obstacle of lions, he soon finds it hard to distinguish between real lions and harmless kitty cats. Every responsibility becomes a burdensome task because he is a sluggard, and sluggards are intimidated by everything! Therefore this verse presents the awful scenario of a sluggard who considers basic tasks, such as feeding oneself, an intolerable inconvenience!

A poor wretch like this does not turn into a sluggard overnight. When a little boy fails to make his bed for two hundred days, despite his mother's constant reminders, or when he drags his feet everyday when doing his chores, he works his way toward a life of slothfulness. If he will not repent of this sin, and if his parents will continue to allow it in his life, he may be sentenced to the miserable existence of the sluggard for the rest of his life.

Proverbs 19:25

*Strike a scoffer and the simple will learn prudence; reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.*

What does a family do with an incorrigible teenage rebel? Unfortunately, this question is common in counseling situations today, where families must deal with a generation

who curses their fathers and whose teeth are as swords (Prov. 30:11–14)! The civil magistrate tolerates these out-of-control youths, while at the same time disallowing families from emancipating them. This puts families in a tight spot. Too often, these scoffers turn the home into a tumultuous, chaotic, miserable place, and present a terrible influence to the rest of the children. There is only one thing to do: strike the scoffer. According to the important principle in the present verse, striking the scoffer will more than likely do nothing for the rebel himself. But the striking of the scoffer is not for his benefit, because you must remember this young man is (at least for the time being) beyond correction. Rather it is for the benefit of all the other children around him. In a powerful object lesson, they witness the force of punishment. They see the hardness of heart, and they fear the curse of rebellion and sin! In short, they learn prudence.

Quite opposite to the scoffer, there is the young man of true wisdom and godly character. He will not need the rod, but he may need an occasional reproof. When he is reproofed, he eagerly receives it for the wisdom he can find in it. Oftentimes, a reproof may not identify the true problems with perfect accuracy. Yet a man of understanding will still carefully examine the reproof for the wisdom he can find in it. It may be that the criticism was somewhat misdirected, but he does find in it a kernel of truth that pointed to another problem of far more relevance and import. You can see that it takes a humble heart to carefully consider any critical feedback directed toward him.

### **Family Discussion Questions:**

1. Is the slothful bug growing on you right now? Are you faithful in performing the simple tasks around the house? What sort of jobs do you perceive to be too difficult? Do you drag your feet at certain challenges? Give examples.
2. What is the best way to overcome slothfulness?
3. Why would a parent strike a scoffer (or a “teenage rebel”)?

## PART 152 ~ WICKED SONS AND UNGODLY TEACHERS

Proverbs 19:26

*He that wastes his father, and chases away his mother, is a son that causes shame, and brings reproach.*

Sadly, there are parents who are afraid of their sons. Chances are the rebellion began when he was nine years old. His rebellion was ten times worse in his tenth year, and ten times worse again in his eleventh year, and so on. It would take your breath away if you saw the extent to which a man may rebel, to which he might dishonor his parents, and to which he might engage in violence toward others.

As a police officer pulls over some young man on the highway for speeding, what would you say if the young man were to pull out a .22 rifle and start taking pot shots at the officer? You would have to conclude that he has little respect for the officer, and certainly no fear of the power of the state, the courts, the prison systems, and the entire police force of that jurisdictional authority! Likewise, a young man who refuses to honor his father and mother has little or no respect for the God Who deputized those parents and demanded honor for His deputies. If a man refuses to honor God and his own parents, it is doubtful he will honor anybody else. He is, in the true sense of the term, a dangerous man.

One Sunday morning, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, a young man killed five people in a murderous rampage across the state of Colorado. But months before this happened, the same young man issued a post on his web site bearing some of the most hateful and vile curses ever recorded toward his Christian parents. A man's relationship with his own parents is a good gauge by which to assess his relationships in other social contexts. A man who curses his father and who has earned the severe disfavor of his mother will one day doubtless find his mug shot prominently displayed in a regional news outlet.

## Proverbs 19:27

*Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causes to err from the words of knowledge.*

If the beginning of knowledge is the fear of God, what would you do if you came across somebody who was trying to teach a form of knowledge divorced from the acknowledgement of God? What would you do if somebody was trying to teach history without any recognition of God whatsoever? Or what should you do if some university professor was trying to teach chemistry without trembling a little before the God Who created chemistry? If you were to accept Proverbs 1:7 as having anything to say about knowledge, it seems that this is a man who is not qualified to teach true knowledge. The good father here warns his son not to sit at the feet of an instructor who would cause his students to err from the path of true knowledge.

For many centuries, Christian parents considered education as those things taught by the intellectuals—the pagan Greeks, the transcendentalists, the Unitarians, and other humanists. So they gave their children books written by the great humanist thinkers. In this way, they set their children at the feet of the greatest humanist writers, thinkers, and teachers. Then, they were surprised when their children rebelled from the faith through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As millions of professing Christians in Europe and America sent their children to humanist high schools and colleges, they couldn't understand why their children turned out to be homosexuals like Walt Whitman, or socialists like Karl Marx, or godless evolutionists like Charles Darwin. Of course, they chose the wrong teachers for their children—the wrong schools and the wrong textbooks! How tragic to think of the hundreds of millions of children in public schools, private schools, and home schools that turned away from the faith through the generations, because their teachers in the classrooms (and in the textbooks) were intellectuals who refused to conform their thinking to a biblical worldview. It would have been far better

if they had heeded the words of this little Proverb, “Cease my son, to hear the instruction that causes to err from the words of knowledge!”

### Family Discussion Questions:

1. How is the honor of parents tied into the honor of the civil magistrate?
2. What would be the signs that one of our children was beginning to walk down the path toward rebellion?
3. In what ways might a young man be taught by those who do not fear the true and living God (in our day)?
4. Name some people who have rejected the truth of Scripture and have written the “great literature” that is used by humanist schools today.

## PART 153 ~ DANGEROUS FOOLS

Proverbs 19:28

*An ungodly witness scorns judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.*

There are men in this world who will take nothing seriously because they will not take God seriously. As evidence that they refuse to fear God, they see little importance in anything they do in their lives. Eventually, these turn into dangerous men. They feel they can do anything without suffering any consequences. Generally, men like this are the ones who rob liquor stores in the slums of New York, but more often today, they go to college and get advanced degrees. And the destruction they bring upon society is far greater than the thug who takes down liquor stores. One of these characters shows up in Fyodor Dostoyevski’s famous book, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Assuming there is no God, the young man, Ivan, concludes that “Everything is permitted.” One would shudder to think of what Ivan might do, if he began to act on that premise! Would you want this man to serve as a witness in a

murder trial, for example? Would he come down on the side of what is right and true? When such men serve in positions of responsibility in the government bureaucracy, social services departments, or in the judicial arena, justice becomes a haphazard affair. In the end, this man scorns judgment because he doesn't take God's law seriously and doesn't take God seriously.

The verse gives us more insight into the life of the wicked. As a rule, wicked men get worse and worse over time. They turn on the faucet of evil and gulp down everything they can get. Even as a moth can't help but fly into the flame, their hearts are drawn to evil. What holds them back from being as evil as they could be, and becoming destructive to themselves and to others? Sometimes the restraints of whatever righteous civil government is left in a society can prevent them from playing out their evil intentions. But the only thing that will stop them from their strong draw toward evil is a change of heart.

Proverbs 19:29

*Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools.*

Those who live quiet and peaceable lives and those who honor their parents and the civil magistrate will generally not run into problems in a well-run society. This is the thrust of passages like Romans 13:1–8. But those young fools who refuse to honor their parents and think nothing of firing a rifle at a police vehicle, will run into the most trouble with the law.

For a time, young rebels may get away with their refusal to obey their parents. They may enjoy slothful lifestyles where they live off the good graces of others, and appear to do well for a while with their well-to-do, decadent lifestyles. But as the years go by, they will find themselves without jobs, sloughing along with the dregs of humanity. At one time in history, men were reduced to slavery and beatings if they refused to work. Today, they live with women on welfare until they are arrested for drug possession or petty criminal activity. Then,

they serve time in slave camps called “prisons.” It is interesting that a nation like America who prides itself for its “freedom” maintains the highest incarceration rate in the world. Without character, without a willingness to honor authority and work hard, men will inevitably subject themselves to prisons and sound beatings (either from the magistrate or a slave owner or even other ruffians with whom they associate).

### Family Discussion Questions:

1. Why would it be a risk to put a man who didn't fear God into a witness stand?
2. What happens to wicked men over time?
3. What happens to men who refuse to work in this country or other countries?

## PART 154 ~ THE ALCOHOL TRAP

Proverbs 20:1

*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*

The social consequences of alcohol abuse around the world are immeasurable. Over thousands of years, the abuse of alcohol and drugs has brought unspeakable misery to untold billions of people. For example, the number of children born with fetal alcohol syndrome has exploded in recent years, and it is now the “leading known cause for mental retardation.” Between 40 and 60% of automobile accident fatalities are alcohol related. Child abuse, family disintegration, economic distress, and deleterious health conditions are just a few other sad consequences of this cursed sin. Recently, nations like Russia have faced drunkenness at epidemic proportions, where the average man or woman drinks a quart of Vodka every week. Incredibly, some of their cities have lost a quarter of their population to alcohol-related illnesses and accidents over just the last fifteen years!

Outfitted with attractive labeling like “Southern Comfort,” a bottle of hard whiskey lures the hapless victim in for the kill. The first sip seems to provide a little comfort, so why not a second? As soon as the poor wretch embraces the bottle, it then proceeds to beat him senseless. Promising more sweet comfort the following day, the drunkard swallows the hook again, only to repeat the same process. Thus, alcohol always promises something that it cannot deliver. Those who are deceived by it will eventually find their families in shambles, their children suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome, and their bodies ravaged by cirrhosis of the liver and other diseases. Often this sin of drunkenness leaves a generational curse on a man’s children and grandchildren. The sad stories told of Noah and Lot in their drunkenness remind us of how incredibly damaging this sin can be—as it opens the door for the visitation of other sins and curses upon future generations.

Hard liquor is raging like a storm. It has the potential to do much damage, especially if it is ingested by a human being in large quantities. Alcohol is also a deceiver, and in this sense it can be dangerous. But so is parachuting out of an airplane or rappelling down sheer mountain cliffs. Obviously, one must be very careful when feeding lions in the zoo, or swimming with sharks. Even the most accomplished lion tamers have been mauled by their big cat “friends.” While Paul does remind us that “all things are lawful,” this is not to say that all things are equally “safe” and “profitable.”

Proverbs 20:2

*The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provokes him to anger sins against his own soul.*

Christians are counter-cultural. When we bring the Gospel to a foreign country, it is important that we not go out of our way to pick a fight with the government. While He was here, Jesus paid His tax to the authorities at the time, “lest we offend them.” Paul encourages us to, as much as lies in us, live at peace with all men. Yet, both Jesus and Paul were executed

by the Roman magistrate. For a time, we may be able to “fly under the radar” as we attempt to replace the kingdoms of the devil with the kingdom of God. Indeed it is a delicate game to play. It would be easier to avoid confrontation altogether, but God calls us to disciple the nations. Should a household, a city, or a nation utterly refuse to hear the Gospel, it may be better to leave and take the message elsewhere, where it would be better received. These verses are placed here to give us wisdom as we interact with the world around us.

*For related commentary, reference Proverbs 16:14 and Proverbs 19:12.*

### Family Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the sort of destruction that alcohol can bring to a family or to a society. Would it be better to stay out of the lions’ cages altogether? Would it be better to stay away from alcohol entirely (except for medicinal purposes, cleaning purposes, etc.)?
2. How can we best maintain a friendly relationship with our governments, without compromising our message?

## PART 155 ~ HOW TO DEAL WITH STRIFE

Proverbs 20:3

*It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.*

Strife is evil. As cancer and as auto accidents are evil, so strife is evil. Though not necessarily sinful, these evil consequences are practically inevitable in a sinful world. But how must we deal with evil? Of course, medical doctors seek to relieve the evil of disease and suffering, and we must do our level best to bring strife to an end wherever it occurs.

Strife seems to be as inevitable in this world of sin as is the curse of sickness and pain. Thus all of us should strive to be peacemakers, working our way out of the labyrinth of each conflict in which we happen to find ourselves. There are many ways in which to work through conflicts. Unfortunately, it is

rare to find truly honorable men who have the character, the desire, and the wisdom to bring conflicts to an end. But this is what we must learn to do. Here are several ways in which conflicts are brought to an end.

1. *Stop talking.* In the multitude of words there is no lack of sin, and gossip always fans the flames of conflict.

2. *Confess your own sins, and ask for forgiveness.* Often this is a good way to bring conflict to a quick end.

3. *Submit to the counsel of reconcilers.* Those who love strife will hate the idea of reconciliation, and by this they prove their hatred for God. But if there are disagreements in the family, children should quickly submit to the counsel of their parents, accept the consequences for their behavior, confess the sins that were raised in the counsel, and work to restore relationships.

4. *A gift in secret may appease wrath.* Although not usually effective at resolving deep-rooted conflicts, it is something that can soften the heart of your enemy.

5. *You might also let yourself be defrauded to some degree, especially if the things being argued about are minor.* You must be careful not to lend support to your brother's sins. But if his sins are unclear and your relationship is such that you cannot clearly understand his issues, then it's always best to err on the side of letting yourself be defrauded.

6. *Separate the protagonists.* Occasionally, church communities are plagued by a divisive, schismatic person, but proper church discipline should result in the separation of these troublemakers from the flock (Prov. 26:20; Titus 3:10).

One way or another, we must take active steps to bring strife to an end. We cannot allow it to continue indefinitely or it will destroy our families and communities.

Then, in contrast to the honorable man is the fool who sees no need to put an end to the strife. In fact, he revels in the strife.

For some reason, he cannot understand the fact that there is no profit in the strife itself. But the reality is that there is only profit in *working a way out of strife!* If after some counsel with those with whom you strive, you conclude that one or both of the protagonists have no desire to end the strife, you have to conclude that you are dealing with fools.

Proverbs 20:4

*The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.*

There is always a reason why the sluggard cannot do his work. In all of his years of sluggishness, this young man has learned to do one thing exceptionally well—come up with creative excuses as to why he didn't do what he was supposed to. So he will starve to death along with all of his excuses.

But we will teach our sons responsibility. They must learn that responsible people do not make excuses. Responsible people take responsibility for their mistakes. When they are given responsibilities, they make sure they're done. They double check their work to make sure that it was done completely and that they met or exceeded expectations. If a mother expects the bed to be made each day, the child will make the bed and do it to his mother's expectations. (Of course, parents must be careful not to place unreasonable expectations on their children, and thereby provoke them to wrath.)

Obstacles are not excuses for us. They only force us to work harder and more creatively in order to overcome them. We must resolve in our minds that our dominion work will always entail obstacles, and it will be by the sweat of our brow that we will bring forth fruit out of this land. Without this mindset, people starve to death. Those that procrastinate and fail to sow seeds in the present will not reap in the future.