

Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 24:23-26

Many Bible principles are so plain and obvious they don't need the spot-light of a lesson or sermon. But that might be only in the mind of the preacher – or perhaps in your mind. We sometimes forget there are younger Christians and children of Christians who don't have the background the rest of us ought to have. Everyone needs to be instructed – even in the obvious – even if you have already had it burned it into your soul.

The primary lesson of this scripture is so obvious and common that fear I won't be able to keep your attention. So I am going to try to insert a tangent thought now and then in hopes of maintaining your interest. In fact, let's start with one of those tangents.

Despite what Solomon says, it is good to have respect for people.

There are a number of Greek and Hebrew words translated “*respect*,” and there are a *variety of meanings*. Or maybe I should say, there are *different DEGREES* of respect. The word used here in **Proverbs 24:23** begins with “*discernment*” – to look at someone attentively. When you meet someone for the first time, you look at him and begin immediately to form opinions. You like or don't like the way he is dressed – the way he cuts or combs his hair – his facial expression. But how often has your first impression been wrong? You didn't like his natty clothes and you judged that he could never be your friend. Or you looked at his smile and decided that he's likely a good man, but later you found out otherwise.

Every person you meet, no matter how he looks, talks, behaves or smells, is an eternal soul. He came from the hand of God through many, many generations, just as you did. Yes, he has a foreign accent, and he's hard to understand, but so did your great-grand-father when he first came to this country. That stranger deserves your respect until he proves that he doesn't. That stranger, no matter how wicked he appears to be, deserves to hear your explanation of the gospel. Everyone deserves some degree of respect as simply one of God's creatures.

But Solomon says, “It is NOT good to have respect of persons in judgment.”

Here we are *asked* to form an opinion, or we are on a jury adjudicating some legal question. But the warning is – while attentively looking, don't frame your opinion, before you hear all the facts. Just because he wears a nice suit of clothes, that doesn't mean he isn't a thief or cheat. Even worse, don't pass judgment based upon what it appears he might be *able to DO* for you some day. The Lord Jesus said, “*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*” – **John 7:24**.

Solomon refers to one kind of misjudgment, but there are actually two. “*He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him.*” The wicked judge and the corrupt juryman may look at someone recognizing his wealth or his power, and pre-determine to take his side in the case. Or conversely, they may look at a poor man and decided to reject his right to justice, because it can't benefit the decision-maker. Both are an abomination to the Lord.

Proverbs makes it clear what the Judge of all judges thinks of this: **17:15** – “*He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.*” It isn't just a law of Moses and Israel, it is one of God's moral laws – applicable to everyone. **Leviticus 19:15** – “*Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.*” “*Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear*” – **Deuteronomy 1:17**.

Solomon is apparently thinking about legal matters, but don't judge *anything* by way of outward appearance. For example, what about religious matters – doctrine and faith? **James 2:1** – “*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*” And remember – it is in this context the next verse says, “*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*”

Rather than approval based on inappropriate “respect,” sometimes rebuke is the real need.

Even a negative *“word fitly spoken is like apples of God in pictures of silver.”* *“But to them that rebuke (the unrighteous man) shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer.”* The honest judge will have the respect and love of all those who love and respect justice. That judge on the bench, or in the case of Israel, that judge sitting in the gate of the city, is expected to render honest judgment. The sentence should fit the crime – perhaps jail time, or hard labor, or restoration of property with interest. But sometimes perhaps nothing more than severe rebuke is necessary. Hopefully, there will be others taking to heart the judgment and the rebuke, learning the lesson.

But when it comes to rebuke you and I have to be careful. We have not been elected to the bench, and we have not been made judges per se. Even the Lord Jesus acknowledged that His responsibility was not always to judge. So don't you be too **quick to rebuke** and don't be **delighted** in the opportunity to chew out another person. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* A very real part of this giving undo respect to people involves the undo respect in the other direction – that which we afford to ourselves. Who are you to render judgment against another? *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, be slow to rebuke him, considering thyself, lest thou also be caught up in the same sort of situation some day.”*

These are rather obvious moral and spiritual lessons.

Now let me throw the bus into reverse and drive in the opposite direction for a moment.

Solomon is talking about people judging ordinary people. But there is One who is far from ordinary, and people are constantly judging Him. When it comes to the Lord and the things of God, **RESPECT** of **His person** should be prominent. When we look towards Christ Jesus it should always be with firm and unbendable prejudice. Christ *“did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”* Jehovah, *“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”* When that child died of some terrible disease, or that land-slide buried a village, God was good. When that man robbed us of something precious – like our good name, the Lord did nothing wrong in permitting it. No matter what takes place in the world or in life, God is without iniquity; he is just and right. *“It is ALWAYS good to have respect of persons when we are talking about the Lord.”* And also *“The law of the Lord is perfect”* – every word of God is honest and accurate. When God speaks; when we read His word through the pages of the Bible, we must have respect of His person and be pre-determined to believe what He says, ready to put it into practice. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* David may have spent years of study before concluding, *“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”* Or – David may have pre-determined, just as we should – *“The entrance of thy words (always) giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”*

Sunday morning, a family that I only glimpsed, came into the foyer at the bottom of the stairs. I saw a couple of the children, and I had respect unto them based on their appearance – I was cautiously excited. But then the father of the family asked what our sign meant saying we believe in *“sovereign grace.”* When Bro. Berg gave a simple Biblical answer, the family reversed direction and left the building. What a mistake to make a doctrinal judgment without fully examining the case. That decision, quickly made based on superficial, pre-judged information, will come up before that man at the judgment seat of Christ. *“It is always GOOD to have respect of persons when we are talking about the Lord.”* The Lord always does right. And *“it is good to have respect when we are talking about the Word of God.”* The Bible **ALWAYS** tells us the truth.

When it comes to judging people, be slow, cautious and observant. *“It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.”* But when it comes to the Lord and the things of God, you can be sure, they are always right – even when in our haste we might initially think otherwise.