

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverb, Lecture 11, Proverbs 11:22 – Gold Ring Pig

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This is Dr. Knute Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 11, Proverbs 11.22, Gold Ring and a Pig Snout.

Welcome to lecture 11 on the biblical book of Proverbs.

Throughout these lectures, I have been arguing that the biblical book of Proverbs is a prime example of an imaginative text that needs to be written with imagination. I have also built a case in the last two lectures or so for a contextual reading for most of the Proverbs as proverb clusters in chapters 10 to 29 of the book. But what I want to focus on in this lecture is just one particular individual proverb, a particularly interesting and provocative one, I believe, that is by and large standing on its own and needs to be interpreted in its own right with some reference to the context around it.

But I do not believe that Proverbs 11:22 actually belongs to a cluster, a proverbial cluster, like for example 10:1-5. I really like this proverb because it's snappy, it's imaginative and it's funny. And I want to share with you how a diligent, imaginative reading of this particular proverb arrives at a rather unusual, perhaps, interpretation at first glance. But I hope to show you that an imaginative interpretation that pays close attention to biblical parallelism and works on the basis of new metaphor theories will actually uncover a meaning of the proverb that has largely escaped most readers through the centuries, including our own.

So, here's the proverb, chapter 11, verse 22. I am going to read from the New Revised Standard Version, although in this lecture we will also be very closely be looking at the Hebrew of this verse. And my translation in particular will be slightly different from the New Revised Standard Version when I finished with the interpretation.

So here goes. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without sense. Let me just let that sink in and repeat it for you.

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense. So here we are. This proverb seems to equate a certain kind of woman with a pig.

Certainly, the interpretations in the standard academic commentaries on the Book of Proverbs make it look that way. In what follows, I will try to show that this is, however, not the case. I will first present a review of recent scholarly literature,

which has sent the trend for the very few popular sources that I was able to locate on the proverb.

The argument will then look at the whole Book of Proverbs as the context for interpreting Proverbs 11:22, particularly other materials about women in the book. After that, I will consider the syntactic structure and the poetic parallelism of the proverb itself. And finally, I will suggest an interpretation of the proverb which takes all of these aspects into consideration.

So, I begin with a review of the literature on this proverb. Two commentaries from the end of the 19th century have set the tone for modern scholarship. Franz Delitzsch in 1873 identified the proverb as what he called an emblematic proverb, in which the first and second lines relate like a picture and its caption.

And I quote from the English translation of his commentary. If one supposes such a ring in a swine's snout, then in such a thing he has the emblem of a wife in whom beauty and the want of culture are placed together in direct contrast. Such a woman's guilt, according to Delitzsch, is implied by the verb sure, to turn aside.

We will come back to Delitzsch's idea of a picture and its caption, but for now, it is important to note that Delitzsch equated the whole of the first half-line of the proverb with the image of the woman described in the second. This move is taken by almost all later interpreters, as we shall see. So Delitzsch is basically describing the poetic impact of the proverb as if we had a picture of a woman that actually is a pig with a gold ring in her snout, and then a caption underneath which says, a woman without sense, or something like that.

The other commentary is by C.H. Toy from 1899. He recognized that Proverbs 11:22 made the following equation. A golden ring is a fair woman.

In his interpretation, however, he made the same identification as Delitzsch, that is, between the pig and the woman. I quote, There is as great incongruity, it is said, in the union of the beauty of person and deformity of mind and character in a woman as in the presence of a rich ornament on the coarsest and uncleanest beast. So although he recognized something that's actually quite important, and I will focus on this later on in this lecture, that it is a golden ring that is equated with a fair woman when he actually interprets the proverb, he does not do that, but he interprets a woman with certain faults with a coarse-based beast, a pig.

He equated, again I quote, the union of beauty of person and deformity of mind and character, end quote, with the golden ring of the first half-line, and the woman of the second half-line with the coarsest and uncleanest beast. In the basic equation of the woman and the pig, then, Toy made the same interpretive move as Delitzsch.

What is distinct about Toy is his interpretation of the combination of outward beauty and lack of character with the golden ring.

Delitzsch's and Toy's two basic ideas marked the beginning of an interpretive tradition, as we shall see. Perhaps I should just take a step back here for a moment and go back to something that I've said in earlier lectures before, that often proverbs are read without a sense of need for elaborate interpretation. Many people, including many scholars, assume that the proverbs are just what they are, they just say as it is, and they say it in a straightforward, simplistic manner, and all we need to do is just listen to the words, take them at face value, and not much interpretation is needed.

This is true both for scholars and for many ordinary readers, both Jews and Christians, of the proverbs. As we shall see, however, I think this is not the case here either. William McKane, in 1970, claimed that, quote, His statement suggests that he, too, made the equations already proposed by Delitzsch and Toy, and this is confirmed by the following sentence, I quote, In other words, the gold ring represents physical beauty.

The pig's snout represents the woman who lacks taste and discrimination. For McKane, the point of the proverb is that it is, quote, I thoroughly disagree with that, and I will argue, make a case for that disagreement in a few minutes. For Ploeger, in 1984, the proverb is not about natural beauty, but about additional or adornment.

In contrast to McCain, Ploeger believed that neither is censured. Rather, the point of the proverb is that fashionable adornment must not be in contrast with character and lifestyle. Quote, Although Ploeger is not explicit about this, it appears that he generalized the proverb.

Its point is about inner values and outward appearance, which might apply to human beings in general, rather than to women in particular. It appears that Ploeger was the first commentator among those reviewed here who was sensitive to the potentially offensive nature of the proverb, although he did not draw attention to the matter. But by making it more generally applicable, it could be applied to men as well, and it could be applied to a variety of drawbacks.

But mostly it was about decor and outward appearance, rather than inner faults. Now this attention to gender sensitivity continued with Derek Kidner's commentary in 1985, who rather quaintly would want to say, put the matter like this, I quote, The proverb puts it more forcibly than we might. Where we would have spoken of the lady as a little disappointing, Scripture sees her as a monstrosity, end quote.

In true gentlemanly fashion, he quietly dissociated himself and his modern readers from the gender insensitivity of the language of the proverb as traditionally

interpreted. While at the same time indirectly affirming the value of Scripture. With Meinhold's commentary in 1991, the awareness of the apparent gender problem created in the proverb became more verbalized.

The proverb is sarcastic, grotesque, and exaggerated. It is not taken from real life. Der Wirklichkeit ist dieser Vergleich nicht abgesehen. Er stellt eine Überspitzung ersten Ranges dar. Meinhold's sensitivity to the gender question, however, did not release him from the gathering momentum of the interpretive tradition. He explicitly equated the woman and the pig.

Quote, Not the beautiful woman as such has been compared with a pointlessly decorated swine, but one which lacks taste. And so, his attempts gently to dissociate himself from the proverb are not surprising. Garrett, in 1993, followed Toye's concern with the inappropriateness of beauty.

And highlighted the woman's responsibility for her less than complimentary treatment in the proverb. Quote, The point of the comparison is that in both cases beauty is in an inappropriate place. Note that the woman has actually abundant discretion.

An immoral way of life is implied. End quote. The most recent commentaries contain a number of new insights.

Firstly, Whybray in 1994 not only commented on the proverb as being rather crude but also stressed that it belongs to a category of proverbs that claim to give advice about the choice of the right kind of wife. He pointed out that beauty is not a reliable guide in the matter referring to Proverbs 31.30 and noting that the whole of 31.10.31 might be seen as an extended commendation of a wife who has discretion or good sense. We will return below to these two points.

The advice about choosing the right kind of wife and 31.10.31 as an extended commentary or commendation of such a wife. The following part, in the next few minutes, I want to treat the contribution of three female scholars in chronological sequence and then follow some other comments on the contributions of female scholars out of sequence but added here for ease of reference. First, A. Brenner in 1995 noted that, quote, a worthy woman is her husband's pride and joy as in 31.10.31, but an unworthy one is his disgrace.

11:16a and 22 and 12:4, end quote. I will develop the point that such a woman is her husband's disgrace in my own conclusion later on. Judith McKinley in 1996 stated that, quote, the salient point is that outward attractiveness does not indicate an equivalent inner discrimination, end quote.

And went on to say, I quote again, however, the simile not only has the effect of aligning the gold ring with the attractiveness or beauty but also inevitably connects a woman with the pig, regarded as the most unclean of animals, end quote. McKinley then did not think that the proverb itself equates the woman and the pig. Her claim is that it inevitably connects the woman with the pig.

And this seems to be borne out by the present review of scholarship. As I will suggest in a few minutes, however, it is, I believe, not the proverb itself that creates this inevitability, but the male-oriented reading tradition, a tradition that holds sway even over some female readers. Fontaine in 1998, Carol Fontaine, did not comment on Proverbs 11.22 specifically, but she included it among a list of verses from Proverbs that contain what she calls, quote, frivolity against most or all of womankind.

In a one-line comment elsewhere, she pointed out that, quote, beauty is worthless without knowledge of one's place in a patriarchal society, end quote. The latter phrase is her interpretation of the word *taam*, normally translated as discretion, in Proverbs 11.22. Comments by other female scholars are too brief to contribute significant insights to the discussion. Further works on Proverbs by female scholars that I have consulted do not make reference to Proverbs 11.22. Some helpful comments from Claudia Kamp, using Proverbs 11.22 to illustrate the notion of performance contexts, which I will come back to in a minute, will be treated in my conclusion.

Raymond van Leeuwen in 1997 noted that the shock of a pig's snout ornamented with gold provokes insight. Namely, quote, without good sense, beauty in a wife, a woman, is out of place, end quote. Presumably, it is as out of place as a gold ring in a pig's snout.

Murphy's comments in 1998 present a mixed bag of traditional interpretation and new insights, as the following quotation demonstrates, quote, the saying is grotesque in that an ornamental ring should not be in the snout of an animal. The sarcasm is obvious since the women of the Bible wore such rings. The comparison is not between a beautiful woman and swine but between one who lacks good sense and the decorated swine.

Beauty without wisdom is the height of incongruity. See also Proverbs 31.30, end quote. So Murphy followed Whybray's insight about the relevance of Proverbs 31 and was careful to point out that a beautiful woman as such is not compared with a swine.

Nevertheless, the highlighted parts of, or the emphasized parts in my quotation earlier show that in his opinion, lack of sense does turn even a beautiful woman into a swine, albeit a decorated one. Clifford in 1999 also noted the Proverb's potential as

marriage counsel, quote, the point is the priority of wisdom over beauty in assessing a woman, perhaps a future wife, end quote. He noted that the comparison to a pig was probably made on the basis of sound as well as humorous incongruity, for the consonant z is repeated several times in the first half line.

A king of gold in the snout of a pig is translated, transliterated, nezem zahav baav hazir. You can hear z, z, z, z. Almost like z, z, z, z. In contrast with most commentaries, commentators, I have in an earlier publication from 2001, attempted to interpret the proverb in its immediate literary context. Stressing the paradoxical nature of the proverb, I suggested that, quote, the picturesque irony of the illustrative comparison in verse 22 sets the tone for what follows in verses 23 to 31.

I saw Proverbs 11, 22 to 31 at that time as a proverbial cluster. What seems to be advantageous at first, a woman's beauty, is really ridiculous and useless, like a golden ring in a pig's snout, if not accompanied by inner values, namely discernment, end quote. At that stage, I did not see the proverb as equating the woman and the pig.

Rather, it equated a woman's beauty with a golden ring. I also suggested that the apparent advantage of both was rendered useless through accompanying circumstances and that it was these that constituted the point of the comparison. That is, the beautiful woman lacked sense, and the golden ring was in the wrong place in a pig's snout.

Below, I will suggest an interpretation that will develop some of these points. Waltke in 2004 mentioned that, quote, the indiscreet beauty in 11, 22 has as much honor as a ring of gold in a swine's snout, end quote. He detected sarcasm and, with Delitzsch, emblematic parallelism.

The emblematic parallels, quote, draw an absurd comparison between an adorning gold ring in the snout of the unclean pig, which roots in mud and swill, and a beautiful woman who lacks discretion and implicitly immerses her beauty that adorns her in evil, end quote. In describing the metaphor, Waltke pointed out that it is, that it, quote, involves the pig's obnoxious habit of eating swill and rooting in dung and its insensibility in wasting and tarnishing the precious ornament, end quote. He also continues to say the verb sur qualifies the woman as, quote, an apostate from that which is normative, end quote.

Waltke graphically illustrated his equation between the pig and the woman. I quote again at length. Having left whatever sensible judgment and moral behavior this woman once cultivated and or had it, that is the proverb, implies that she has turned herself into a bullish animal in her dress, speech, and behavior.

In fact, she is worse than a pig. The show by nature is bullish, but this woman turns aside from her dignity. The misplaced ornaments, instead of enhancing her beauty, make her look foolishly wasteful, grotesque, and repulsive.

Instead of gaining honor by her natural gift, she wins ridicule. The proverb instructs youth to give priority to inner grace, not outward beauty. Wow.

With the mention of, quote, emblematic parallelism in Waltke's exposition, which signals his conscious dependence on Delitzsch, we have come full circle and find ourselves back with Delitzsch's idea that Proverbs 11.22 is an emblematic proverb in which the first and second lines relate like a picture and its caption. What Delitzsch seems to have had in mind is illustrated on page 27 of a book of humorous illustrations inspired by the book of Proverbs. The image of a bloated pig in a woman's attire and a gold ring through its, her, nose is provided with a capture at the bottom in the form of Proverbs 11.22. But is this really what the Proverbs says? I think not.

A look at the whole book of Proverbs as the context for interpreting Proverbs 11.22 and a consideration of its syntactic structure and poetic parallelism will prepare us for a different interpretation of the proverb. Before, however, I go into this, I just want to stress why I spent or explain why I spent so much time on this review of literature and the reception history of the proverb. Virtually all of the commentators and interpreters that I've quoted are very well-qualified, very able interpreters of scripture in general.

However, I think every one of them, to be honest, has fallen into a, from my present perspective, superficial reading of the proverb precisely because I think so many people think that these proverbs are straightforward and that they, it is fairly obvious what they actually mean, when in fact, I believe, many of these proverbs are incredibly nuanced, sometimes ironical, sometimes deliberately misleading at first reading or first hearing of them, and then undermining the very perceptions of those who read or hear the proverb without further thought. But now let me talk about the Book of Proverbs as an interpretive context. At first sight, the intriguing and vivid comparison between a woman and a gold ring in 11.22 may appear isolated in the Book of Proverbs, which appears so male-oriented.

A woman, for example, claimed, quote, that proverb, which elsewhere has little to say about women and some of that little far from complimentary, should conclude with such a eulogy, he's referring to Proverbs 31, 10 to 31, is surprising, end quote. Once readers have cleared a pathway through the jungle of male-dominated readings of the past, however, an interesting panorama unfolds, a scenery populated by a variety of fascinating females dotted about the landscape. Every one of the seven collections in the book contains significant statements by women or about women.

In my count, collection one, that is Proverbs 1 to 9, has 151 proverbs concerned in some form with women. That is 59%. Collection two, chapters 10 to 22, 16, has 19 verses, 5%.

Collection three, 22, 17 to 24, 22, has four verses, 6.7%. Collection four, 24, 23 to 34, has one verse, 8.3%. Collection five, Proverbs 75 to 29, has six verses, 4.3%. Collection six, Proverbs 30, 1 to 33, has eight verses, that is 24.2%. And in collection seven, that is Proverbs 31, 1 to 31, all 31 verses are either uttered by a woman, verses 2 to 9, with verse one introducing a queen mother as the speaker of the oracle, or are about a woman, verses 10 to 31. 100%. The first and last collections contain by far the highest proportions of statements by or about women.

Proverbs 1 to 9 is, which by, sorry, Proverbs 1 to 9, which by common consent furnishes the introduction to the whole book, is populated with a range of remarkable women, most of whom compete for male attention. And the last collection, Proverbs 31, is ostensibly spoken by a female authority figure and sports the most remarkable woman of them all, the valiant wife of 31, 10 to 31. The book of Proverbs then is literally sandwiched by attractive women.

Most commentators conclude from this that Proverbs 1 to 9 and Proverbs 31 form a hermeneutical frame around the book. Leo Perdue's statement is representative. Quote, the presence of didactic poems in Proverbs 1 to 9 and 31 provides the overarching inclusion for the entire book.

This feature represents more than mere literary enhancement, end quote. Surprisingly, however, in the process of the actual interpretation offered for the materials in Proverbs 10 to 30, including Proverbs 11:22, as we have seen, the impact of this supposed hermeneutical framework in scholars' interpretations is rarely, if ever, visible. Why is there so much material about or by women in the book of Proverbs? In fact, as much as 219 verses, 23.5%. Why such a preoccupation with women, female personifications, and female metaphors? I see three reasons.

Firstly, the editors of Proverbs have used the tendency in Hebrew grammar to render abstract nouns such as wisdom, hokmah, with the feminine gender to create a range of appealing female figures that hold the male reader's interest. Secondly, since the main addressees in the book are young males, instruction in gender relations is an interesting topic for the target audience. Thirdly, education about healthy and legitimate relationships with mothers, wives, sisters, and other women for young males who are being prepared for leadership roles in their society is in that society's best interest, as it promotes the family as a key social institution and contributes, so we hope, to the integrity and happiness of its future leaders and thereby society as a whole.

A detailed study of this large amount of textual material by and about women in Proverbs from the perspective of these two reasons, or three reasons, is urgently needed. I have not got time to do this now, but one of my PhD students, the reverend, well, now reverend Dr. Jeanette Hartwell, has just concluded a PhD thesis on this very topic. For now, however, it is sufficient to point out that Proverbs 11.22 responds to the two reasons just outlined.

It is both highly topical for the young male audience of the book and it is in the interest, so I will argue, of the common good. In the next few minutes, I will try to show that the proverb is concerned with warning young men against choosing their spouses on the basis of outward appearance alone. To appreciate how the proverb achieves this aim, it is now necessary for us to look at its syntax and poetic structure.

So one of the issues raised in McKinley's interpretation, which we discussed earlier, was the possibility that it is actually not the woman that is compared with the pig in Proverbs 11.22. In order to verify this, we need to look more closely at the individual items that make up both halves of the equation. In Hebrew, the proverb consists of only eight words. The poetic line reads as follows.

Netzem zahav ba'av chatzir, Isha yafa va' sarut ta'am. The brief pause that I made as I read this marks the Masoretic accent, the Adnach, in the Hebrew script, which divides the proverb into two halves of an equal number of words for each. And a similar number of consonants, 12 in the first half line and 13 in the second.

At first sight, two considerations seem to favour the equation pig equals woman. Firstly, in Hebrew, the words for pig, hatzir, and woman, isha, are juxtaposed at the center of the proverb, facing each other at the end of the first part and at the beginning of the second part of the verse. Secondly, the pig and the woman are the only animate beings mentioned in the proverb, suggesting a categorical similarity that threatens to outshine other points of contact.

My next few statements, however, favor a different equation. A literal translation of Proverbs 11.22 may indicate more clearly how the various parts of the proverb fit together. A golden ring in the snout of a pig, a beautiful woman who has turned from discretion.

Commentators generally note that the proverb draws a comparison. Although there are no comparative particles in the proverb, it is best seen by the majority of commentators as a simile. A simile does not have to be specially marked by means of such comparative particles since the comparative nature of a line of Hebrew poetry can be conveyed through parallelism, as Adele Berlin has pointed out.

I have not found an indication in the literature as to the nature of the parallelism of the proverb, probably because it does not fit into any of the neat categories of

synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic parallelism proposed by Bishop Robert Louth all that time ago. If one were to follow Louth's now outdated classification, one would have to call it synonymous parallelism. But the individual words that correspond to each other in the two halves of the proverb are not synonymous in the strict sense of the word.

A better way to proceed, I think, is to acknowledge with Berlin that parallelism is activated by all aspects of language. We will take the lead from Michael O'Connor's insight that the half line, that is, the line in his nomenclature, is the basic unit and begin our analysis with a look at the syntactic make-up of each half line on its own. The first half line consists of the four words *Netzemzahav ba'av chatzir*, translated a gold ring in the snout of a pig.

It naturally falls into two parts, each in turn consisting of two words. The first part begins with a noun, the word ring, which is then qualified by an adjective, the word golden. The second part consists of two nouns also, the first of which is introduced by the inseparable preposition *ba'in*.

On its own, the half line is simply a description of an object, a ring, by means of an adjective that highlights its beauty or value. It is golden. This is then followed by an adverbial phrase that gives the object's location in the snout of a pig.

A location that devalues it because its inappropriate position renders it grotesque. I now turn to the second-half line. It equally consists of four words, *Isha yafa v'sarat ta'am*, translated a beautiful woman without discretion.

Again, the half-line falls naturally into two parts consisting of two words each. The first part again begins with a noun, the word woman, which is then qualified by an adjective, the word beautiful. The second part, in a slight variation from the first half line, consists of the conjunction *the, and*, which introduces a particle that is followed by a noun.

On its own, the half line is a description of a person, a woman, by means of an adjective that qualifies her as beautiful. This is then followed by a participial relative clause that describes a past action of the person she has turned from discretion. An action that devalues her because she has rejected a virtue that is considered a valuable asset for human beings in various social interactions.

On the basis of the syntactic analysis of the two half lines and a comparison of the semantic and pragmatic functions of the words in each, we can now determine what parts in each are compared. As in any successful comparison, equal should be, and is, compared with equal. A ring is compared with a woman.

The point of the comparison being that both are valuable because of their outward appearance. One is golden, the other is beautiful. Both, however, have a secondary characteristic which devalues them.

One is an ornament located in an inappropriate location, in the snout of an unclean animal. The other is a female person who has rejected a virtue that would have made her a valuable member of society. She has rejected discretion.

In sum, it is not the pig to whom the woman is compared, but the ring. The woman is experienced and understood through a comparison with her metaphorical counterpart. They share characteristics.

One is made of valuable and beautiful material. The other is physically attractive that make them comparable since they facilitate a metaphorical correspondence which works via the experiential basis of a human value system that could be expressed by the simple statement, beauty is valuable. Interestingly, however, this comparison goes hand in hand with a reification.

A person is treated like a thing. A ring. Not an animal.

The statement that a woman who is valued mainly for her outward appearance is a certain kind of thing, albeit a valuable one, exposes the underlying value system as one that turns the woman under consideration into a commodity considered for acquisition. I now turn to my conclusions. The statement in Proverbs 11.22 does not have a meaning independent from the contexts in which it is read and heard.

Contexts, among Proverbs scholars, are called performance contexts. Depending on the particular situations, including literary performance contexts, a given proverb can have various meanings. Four possible performance contexts for Proverbs 11.22 with repercussions for its pragmatic impact are mentioned in the following quotation from Claudia Kamp in 1985.

This proverb could be used effectively to discourage a young man from consorting with such a woman or to encourage a beautiful woman to maintain discretion in a particular situation. Once, something hard had actually been done to someone else by the indiscretion of a beautiful woman or once she had thus disgraced herself, the proverb could be used evaluatively to explain why things came to such a pass. Against the background of the whole book of Proverbs, the first and third of these form possible situations envisaged by the literary performance contexts for Proverbs 11.22. The proverb envisages a young man who prefers a beautiful woman although she lacks discretion, clearly a key virtue in the eyes of those who coined the proverb.

Why would he do that? In some social contexts, her beauty would make her a rather decorated asset for a young man. She might attract other males' admiration or envy

and so promote his status among peers. A good wife is the crown of her husband as Proverbs 12.4 tells us.

This proverb, just 12 verses away from 11:22, describes a certain kind of woman as an ornament for a man. The two proverbs employ the same basic metaphor woman equals husband's adornment. Eventually, however, a man with an indiscreet wife will find himself shown up and disgraced by her inappropriate behavior in public.

Since she does not care about discreet behavior, the very foundation of the kind of social skills that would truly enhance her husband's social position is suggested in Proverbs 31.10.231. Interpreted against the background of the whole book of Proverbs, in which the advice to young males about suitable spouses is so important, Proverbs 11.22 takes its place alongside other proverbs that warn against women with vices. The proverb a beautiful woman without sense is like a gold ring in a pig's snout belongs in the context of marriage preparation. In the book of Proverbs, it is addressed to young men and warns them not to make fools of themselves by marrying a socially inept woman simply because of her good looks.

Lack of discretion does not imply lack of intelligence. The translation of the word ta'am by the word discretion, general as it is, seems appropriate as it refers to a virtue that implies social skills. Fontaine's comment that it refers to knowledge of one's place in a patriarchal society is not wide off the mark but needs to be widened to include an understanding of and commitment to appropriate public behavior by females and males which would lead to social interactions based on civility, politeness and mutual respect.

Discretion then is a virtue expected in women and men. To conclude, if a beautiful woman is a golden ring and if her lack of discretion is comparable to a golden ring in a pig's snout, and if the proverb is addressed to young men who then is the pig? A possible answer, of course, lies in the metaphorical equation wife equals husband's adornment see Proverbs 12 verse 4. The image of a golden ring through a pig's snout evokes two kinds of rings that in reality are quite different. One is the decorative gold ring that women wear through the nose.

The other is the utility ring made from cheap metal put through the snouts of unruly animals in order to control them mostly uncastrated male specimens whose virility makes them more difficult to manage. The ingenuity of the proverb is that it evokes both images at the same time even though they are incomparable in the real world. It conflates them sarcastically and evokes two images simultaneously the first is the image of a young male trying to show off with a beautiful woman the male equivalent of wearing a gold ring through the nose the second is a picture of the ultimate effect which the choice of looks over inner values has.

The young man will be shown up for what he really is a pig whose beautiful but indiscreet wife leads him by the nose.

This is Dr. Knut Heim and his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 11, Proverbs 11:22 Gold Ring in a Pig's Snout.