

Dr. Daniel J. Treier, Proverbs, Session 4

Proverbs 30-31, Final Words

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This is Dr. Daniel J. Treier in his teaching on Proverbs for Christian Living. This is session number four, Proverbs chapters 30-31, Final Words.

In the previous two lectures regarding reading Proverbs for Christian Living, we've surveyed the moral teaching of Proverbs in terms of seven virtues and seven capital vices, finding affinity between these frameworks and the major priorities of Proverbs.

Affinity doesn't entail exhaustive overlap. What else then do the proverbial collections offer? There are certainly myriad observations regarding the social order, from families to friends to neighbors to kings, and these we will discuss in a little while with respect to Proverbs 30 to 31. To begin with, though, a remaining moral emphasis needs further discussion since the virtues and vices address it only indirectly, speaking and listening, which are incredibly prominent throughout.

In Proverbs, speech acts. That is to say, we are accountable for and formed by the practices of our mouths and our ears. Proverbs' focus on speech acts is consistent with the larger framework of nature and grace that has been implicit throughout the treatment of virtues and vices.

We can summarize it explicitly here. First, the focus of Proverbs is moral formation, profiling the consequences of specific acts and the ways that they reflect and enhance wisdom or folly for the sake of promoting righteous character. Belief, belonging, and behavior are integrated, but Proverbs particularly and directly addresses the wisdom or folly of numerous behaviors.

Second, though, Proverbs addresses behavior in order to foster belonging to a community that fears the Lord. Proverbs is realistic about unredeemed attempts to reform behavior. Because true wisdom begins and ends with the fear of the Lord, moral formation ultimately involves right belief and requires redeeming grace.

Third, simultaneously, true spiritual formation requires moral formation because humans pursue wisdom as embodied persons in communities. Right belief is not genuine fear of the Lord apart from belonging and behavior. The heart involves the whole of the person, not just an inward set of feelings.

In the case of speech and listening, as we shall see, attempts to speak in the right quantities and with the right qualities will eventually degenerate into partially successful self-management unless we fear the Lord because we will be unable to

keep what is in our hearts from leaping out of our mouths or shutting down our ears. As we address speech acts, then, keep this perspective on creation and redemption in mind. Partial morality possible for pagans, but the full pursuit of genuine wisdom is only attainable for God's people by grace that transforms the heart and opens the ears.

After addressing speech acts in this way, we'll return to the social contexts for wisdom in Proverbs. Mirroring the complex tensions regarding divine sovereignty, grace, and human freedom throughout Proverbs is chapter 16 and verse 1. The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. The juxtaposition of mind and tongue signals that human character comes to expression in speech.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks, according to Jesus in Matthew 12, and the intertwining of human and divine action expresses considerable tension from our limited perspective. But eventually in God's providence, from Proverbs' perspective, our real intentions come forth even if we plot otherwise. Of course, the answers of others to our speech lie within the Lord's ultimate purview as well.

We ought to plan prudently, yet we have to acknowledge the limits of human control over the results, both the social consequences of our speech and the personal control we have over our hearts and the way they shape our speech. Many Proverbs align speech with prudence or other virtues. Therefore, the treatment here can focus on additional categories that haven't already surfaced prominently in our treatment of the various virtues and vices.

First of these is the prohibition of gossip. 11:13, a gossip goes about telling secrets, but one who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a confidence. 17:4, an evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.

18:8, repeated in 26:22, the words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body, and that description is not by implication a positive one, but a warning. Note the character of one who listens to gossip in these passages.

Its strong temptation is acknowledged, but the communal disruption is such that one should avoid even associating with a known gossip. Chapter 20, verse 19. That has a lot of implications, by the way, for what we modern people call social media and news and how we approach it.

Second and obviously related is the prohibition of lying. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. Chapter 12, verse 19.

The righteous hate falsehood, but the wicked act shamefully and disgracefully. Chapter 13, verse 5. And the list of passages could go on. Beyond comparing the long-term success of truth and falsity, Proverbs confronts particular forms of lying.

After the proverb regarding delicious morsels of gossip in chapter 26, verse 22, here are the following verses. Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are smooth lips with an evil heart. An enemy dissembles in speaking while harboring deceit within.

When an enemy speaks graciously, do not believe it, for there are seven abominations concealed within. Though hatred is covered with guile, the enemy's wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling.

A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin. In part, the message here is that flattery will get you nowhere. Whereas a man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps.

Chapter 29, verse 5. Parental wisdom, by contrast, is willing to say what is unpopular rather than sugarcoating uncomfortable realities. Parental wisdom is willing to speak the hard truth. However, the passage also beckons people who are vulnerable to flattery to be cautious about a speaker's true intentions.

Third, speech has power. Chapter 13, verse 17, a bad messenger brings trouble, but a faithful envoy brings healing. 15:4, a gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

15:23, to make an apt answer is a joy to anyone, and a word in season how good it is. 16:24, pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. Yet, 16:27, scoundrels concoct evil and their speech is like a scorching fire.

Jesus shares the realism of Proverbs about the power of speech when he tells us not to cast our pearls before swine. Proverbs 23:9, do not speak in the hearing of a fool who will only despise the wisdom of your words. So, speaking and listening are two sides of the same coin, character.

The power of speech isn't magical or automatic, it's rooted in the freedom of human action as an expression of our character. Over the long haul, both listening and speaking reveal and reinforce who people really are, thus having significant communal consequences. Power per se is not corrupt, but the corruption of our communication reveals how dangerous its power can be.

Fourth, therefore, speech shapes and is shaped by social contexts. Concerning the home, chapter 20, verse 20 says, if you curse father or mother, your lamp will go out in utter darkness. Meanwhile, a continual dripping on a rainy day and a contentious

wife are alike to restrain her as to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in the right hand, chapter 27, verses 15 and 16.

Whereas you can't select your parents, and Proverbs tends to assume their faithful stewardship of authority, at least generally, for the sake of instruction, you can try to avoid selecting the wrong spouse. Outside the home then, 16:10, inspired decisions are on the lips of a king. His mouth does not sin in judgment.

Yet there is room for political critique too. It is the wise king who is portrayed as making such determinations, which becomes evident three verses later in chapter 16, verse 13. Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves those who speak what is right.

More generally, with patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones, 25:15. Such advice is appropriate whether the king is wise, in which case the advice centers more on how to contribute wisdom, or the king is tyrannical, in which case caution becomes the order of the day. Proverbs is not naive about the power of speech and authority figures.

Despite the social effects of human sin, however, there is hope. In listening to parents and others who can foster fear of the Lord, we embrace wisdom, and as many in a community do so, we embrace the possibility of shalom. Proverbs prioritizes character.

In its program of general education, we might call it, one need not learn methods of speaking so much as habits to avoid and hopes to cultivate. Then communication can be an occasion for personal delight and communal edification. Proverbs 30 to 31 then puts a closing bracket around the proverbial collections, corresponding to Proverbs 1 through 9. The two oracles in these chapters apparently arrive from outside of Israel.

First, the words of Agur in 30 verse 1. Second, the words of King Lemuel in 31.1, which he learned from his mother. These oracles do not present alternatives to Yahweh's revelation. Notice Agur's prayers in 31 through 6 and 7 through 9, along with allusions to other canonical books that my friend Richard Schultz has detailed.

The oracles actually recapitulate major themes of Proverbs, relating wisdom even more closely to the cosmos, the community, and the household as spheres of activity ordered by Israel's God. In fact, Agur pleads for the proper knowledge of Israel's God which is the essence of full humanity. In chapter 30 verses 2 and 3, two confessions of inadequacy introduce two kinds of rhetorical questions, who and what in verse 4. There is a tradition of reading Proverbs 30 in verse 4 as Trinitarian.

The last question, what is his name or his son's name, surely you know, as the New American Standard Bible renders it, teases Christian readers regarding Jesus Christ, as do the mention of ascent and descent earlier on. Furthermore, the verse refers to the wind associated with the Christian tradition of the Holy Spirit. Now, in the first instance, the son must be Israel or her king.

Of the incarnation, it could not be said to earlier readers, surely you know. Nevertheless, the verse manifests the logic of divine revelation that Trinitarian theology will ultimately fulfill. No mere human being can ascend to gain knowledge of God and descend to distribute revelation to others.

Only the name Yahweh answers the question, who is the creative power behind everything else? Yet Israel has been uniquely chosen to represent the creator in the world. And as the divine son in the fullest sense, Jesus Christ is going to fulfill this vocation on Israel's behalf. The confessions of inadequacy here are balanced then by two scriptural counterstatements affirming divine revelation in verses 5 and 6. The first scriptural adaptation comes from 2 Samuel 22:31 or Psalm 18:30, which in the near context alludes to the name Yahweh, for who is God except the Lord? The second scriptural adaptation alludes to Deuteronomy's prohibitions in chapter 4 verse 2 against adding merely human words to the covenant revelation.

Suspicion of human understanding here mixes with a strong reliance on God's word. Poetic balance becomes even more pronounced in the following sections, especially given their considerable reliance upon numbers. Rejection of false speech and greed continues famously in verses 8 and 9 which we've already talked about.

Notice how ardently the poet pursues moral rectitude in these matters according to verse 7. Echoing the God-fearing contentment that's called for here is the Lord's prayer. If all that one seeks is our daily bread, then our speech will concern prayer, praise, and pleading for forgiveness, not power-grabbing by means of lies and deceit. In chapter 30 verse 10, there is a specific instance of false speech to reject regarding servants.

In verse 11 comes another instance of speech to reject regarding parents, before a series of verses connects the underlying pride that's the problem with both verbal violence and greedy oppression in verses 12 through 14. As these themes expand, avarice and insatiable desire appear unflatteringly as leeches in verses 15 and 16. The proud scorner of parents is depicted as a victim of birds in verse 17.

And while there may be mysteries to male-female relationships as verses 18 and 19 note, the insatiable and incorrigible way of the adulteress accompanies other ways of destabilizing the community in verses 20 to 23 that Proverbs so consistently is keen to warn against. Positively then, we can look at the non-human creatures God has made and discover the incredible power of wisdom even in tiny animals, verses 24

through 28. There are great animals too, of course, with which kings compare in their majesty, verses 29 through 31.

But what they actually share is wisdom that fosters humility. Folly exalts the self and plots self-interested evil, producing communal strife, verses 32 and 33. The point of this quick tour is to show that Augur's oracle interweaves seeking and receiving divine revelation by rejecting certain vices, avarice, falsehood and slander, lust, and ultimately pride.

The created order climactically reinforces the fear of Yahweh that Proverbs calls for. Outsiders long for a virtuous and harmonious culture that arises from the knowledge of Israel's Holy One. The royal status of Lemuel in Proverbs 31 affirms even more clearly his status as a foreigner.

Nevertheless, he learns wisdom from his mother, as the Israelite learns from his parents throughout the rest of the book. The content of the teaching is similarly consistent. Rejection of lust for women, 31:3, rejection of gluttony when it comes to strong drink, verses 4 through 7. A king ought to represent God in defending the powerless and the destitute, providing justice even for them, verses 8 and 9. The famous ode to the Proverbs 31 woman follows in verses 10 through 31.

The ode begins with a general affirmation of her value as far more precious than jewels, verse 10. Verses 11 and 12 offer initial reasons for this estimate. Her husband trusts her and she is a boon to him.

Starting with verse 13, there's more detail. She is industrious. She takes clever initiative, verse 14.

She plans and provides ahead, verse 15. She pursues diverse enterprises, verse 16. She is strong and works to grow stronger, verse 17.

She keeps working rather than quitting at the first convenient moment, verse 18. By now you should be hearing themes that you are very familiar with throughout the book being recapitulated. There appears to be a chiasm, an X shape to verses 19 and 20, forming a transition between subunits.

Hands reaching out to the distaff in verse 19A matches hands reaching out to the needy in verse 20B. Hands holding the spindle in verse 19B match, yet contrast with, the hand opening to the poor in verse 20A. In the aggregate, verses 13 through 20 not only contain the emphases we've mentioned, but they also depict the production of income, especially via textiles.

This is an attractive way of life that is healthy, productive for the community, and generous to others within the community. In verses 21 and 22, as a result, the wife's

household is well-adorned. As one would expect, her husband has a good reputation among leaders of the land, verse 23, and her clothing is desirable beyond the threshold of her household, verse 24.

Using clothing as a metaphor, verse 25, expresses how the wife's strength enables her to face the future confidently. According to verse 26, the wife is a wise teacher in her own right, and she teaches kindness. The wrap-up in verse 27 reaffirms the wife's industrious provision.

The conclusion in verses 28 through 31 summarizes the praise that the wife receives from her family. Her children and her husband recognize her unique excellence. She is the opposite of the adulteress, as her excellence makes her winsome to her husband and the entire community, being grounded in her fear of the Lord.

The praise continues in verse 31, where a better translation than many would be, extol her for the fruit of her hands, according to Bruce Waltke. Her works speak for themselves regarding her excellence in the community. The poem in verses 10 through 31 of this final chapter is an acrostic, each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

This intricate design suggests a stylized discourse conveying a climactic point. The ode surely works at a literal level, and therefore, influenced as it is by Lemuel's mother, no less, it has profound implications for assessing Proverbs' portrayal of women. Many a fundamentalist patriarch runs aground here, or should anyway, when setting forth a simplistic vision of the post-industrial nuclear family, claiming that it's unbiblical for wives to work outside the home or the like.

To the contrary, the Proverbs 31 woman is industrious in multiple senses, even as this household does not neglect children. Whereas here we see the practical embodiment of Lady Wisdom's teachings, her earlier foil, Dame Folly, promoted not only literal license but also spiritual adultery, offering no viable home within the community. By contrast, Proverbs 31 portrays the ideal covenant partner, as not just a husband, but probably of what all of us are supposed to be in relation to God.

Thus, what we enjoy and become if we embrace the wisdom that has pursued us. The conclusion regarding works that manifest the fear of the Lord reinforces this broader function of the ode. Thus, those who embrace Proverbs' wisdom will bless others, being industrious, taking clever initiative, reflecting strength, caring for the needy, planning and preparing, enjoying a good reputation and results, teaching wisdom to others, as well as ultimately embodying right devotion to God.

Proverbs 30 to 31 fits the broader emphasis of the book then upon harmony between the cosmic, social, and familial contexts of wisdom. Many passages have

previously surfaced regarding these themes. On numerous occasions, a feature of the animal kingdom or the cosmos illuminates God's design for human flourishing.

Behind this proverbial practice stands commitment to creation's divine ordering through intersecting spheres of activity, familial, social, and cosmic. Remains here to make more explicit the cultural implications of this basis for Shalom. First, Proverbs clearly affirms the sapiential value of friendship.

Charity is an obligation for everyone, toward everyone, yet without negating particular loves, which are essential both to give and receive. Proverbs does not specify calculating criteria for selecting which neighbors to develop as friends. Instead, as in other areas, the book sets down basic moral parameters within which wise choices are possible and particular choices are permissible.

These moral parameters include the truism that bad company ruins good character, 1 Corinthians 15:33, along with the realistic recognition that some people are willing to offer friendship for self-interested reasons, not sticking with a person through thick and thin. Communal character operates on these local but also larger scale levels. When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked prevail, people go into hiding, Proverbs 28:12. Similarly, in verse 28 of that same chapter, when the wicked prevail, people go into hiding, but when they perish, the righteous increase.

Proverbs addresses kingship. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan, chapter 29 verse 2, because righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people, chapter 14 verse 34. Thus, ideally, next verse, a servant who deals wisely has the king's favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.

In verses like 28:2, the king's authority is similarly affirmed, yet Proverbs expects that the king will genuinely mediate divine justice to the people and order their lives with wisdom. Hence, it is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness, 16:12. The danger of power in the hands of wicked kings is severe. If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked, 29:12. That probably has implications for Twitter.

Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people, chapter 28 verse 15. Kings are to care for others rather than themselves. They have no legacy without their people, 14:28. These treatments of friendship and kingship are consistent with what we have already encountered in a third category, household relationships, spousal and parent-child relationships.

Spousal affinities bring great joy. Conflict and folly bring unhappiness and danger. Parental authority brings wisdom to bear on particular lives and promotes communal health.

Misuse of authority brings oppression, while rebellion brings disintegration. Regarding some of this material, Michael Fox provides an important theological context. I quote, what made the contentious wife's sayings sound to the sages like wisdom rather than like wisecracks or grouching was that the collective enterprise that shaped the Proverbs repeatedly warns about the baleful effects of contentiousness.

The large number of verses on this topic, 31 in all by his count, shows just how important this issue was to the sages. They knew that disharmony in marriage was grievous because they knew that harmony was purpose. This vitality extends beyond spouses and parents with children to subsequent generations.

Chapter 17, verse 6, grandchildren are the crown of the ages and the glory of children is their parents. Thus, fourthly, we should not be surprised to see the theme of discipline. Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent in discipline.

Train children in the right way and when they are old, they will not stray. Chapter 22, in verse 6, although this verse is notorious, it very well may not address the discipline of young children. And you can find out various possible views on that from a certain author I cite in footnotes, Ted Hildebrand, of this website.

In any case, a wise child loves discipline, but a stalker does not listen to rebuke. These texts raise difficult questions today concerning whether or not to use physical means of discipline in light of child abuse and other contemporary sensibilities. Read as a whole, though, Proverbs can provide adequate theological and moral boundaries for the application of its teachings.

Number one, the importance of discipline as an act of parental love cannot be gainsaid. God's loving discipline is our model. Chapter 3, verses 11 and 12, which are reaffirmed in Hebrews 12.

Number two, the selflessness of wise parents, most notably their avoidance of acting wrathfully, should moderate any physical forms of punishment quite considerably. Number three, the priority in texts regarding discipline is not physical punishment, but rather verbal correction. Getting the young person's attention regarding the importance of this correction is necessary for memory and proper commitment to follow.

Yet there may be adequate or even better ways of getting such attention in cultures that are not oriented to physical discipline, while some forms of punishment could actually fail to meet Proverbs' loving standard of God-like discipline. So, I think the kind of teaching we have in Proverbs is consistent with the kind of teaching we have in the household passages in the New Testament. For instance, in Colossians 3 and 4, Ephesians 5 and 6, and other household passages.

The reader who expects Proverbs to revolutionize the social context of its original historical setting or settings will be disappointed. But readers will not be disappointed who, more realistically, expect the Bible to moderate abuses and avoid theologically justifying permanently illegitimate practices, thereby the Bible makes a space for subsequent change over the course of history, redemptive history, and otherwise. The theological exegesis of this type of material doesn't entail neglecting historical differences between religious and non-religious people, naively transporting textual paradigms from back then into contemporary times without discrimination.

On the contrary, theological interpreters read Scripture with hermeneutics of trust in the Bible's divine nature, but also with healthy suspicions of the human context into and through which God speaks. I don't think then we should see Proverbs as generically and permanently arguing for deep-seated patriarchy, but rather we should see it assuming elements that are relevant to its context and working within those to convey divine teaching. Proverbs itself isn't going to say everything about how to place its provisions in its context within the larger context of salvation history.

We're going to have to discern from the rest of its canon as part of the context of Proverbs how to follow what Jesus does in a passage like Matthew 19 in distinguishing between God's original design for creation and various accommodations addressing subsequent sin-cursed history and particular communal practices. What I think we can say briefly about Proverbs with this kind of approach runs something like the following. Number one, Proverbs heartily affirms traditional Jewish and Christian sexual ethics and sees them as not optional for a healthy communal wise life.

Number two, Proverbs heartily affirms the importance of parenting children carefully, and it doesn't minimize but its fatherly involvement. In other words, its preoccupation is not distant lordly patriarchal status, but rather intimate, humble, paternal shepherding. Number three, Proverbs rarely, if ever, denies that the shoe should fit the other foot with respect to gendered materials such as contentious wife sayings.

Contentious husbands wouldn't. Number four, Proverbs heartily affirms the wisdom of women for teaching children. Proverbs 31, having the ode at its apex as one instance of permanence.

The personification of wisdom is another. And number five, if we are to follow the book's phenomenological tendencies of speaking within phenomena as its audience needs it, we would not treat long-standing widespread cultural patterns as either utterly irrelevant or absolutely given, and we wouldn't fail to reflect upon the significance of biological differences between male and female. So, on the one hand, when we allow for contextual assumptions and differences, reading Proverbs still allows for considerable cultural division between the five.

Yet, on the other hand, reading Proverbs ought to provoke questioning our own cultural prejudices alongside what we think are interesting. Proverbs challenges modern men and women alike to rethink notions of the good life, particularly in light of the profound importance of parenting, along with the blessings of a stable community and a well-ordered cosmos in the book's worldview. If, following Jesus' pattern then with respect to marriage and divorce, we were to focus our commitment on the core divine design that is expressed in Proverbs material, then we would be outdoing each other in seeking to give of ourselves in faithful love that simultaneously is the true realization of created freedom and genuine blessing.

Finally, then, reflecting upon social concerns in Proverbs underscores again that household life is an analogy of covenant fellowship with God. Of course, with any analogy, there are points at which the parallels break down. They're limited.

Yet, this analogy involves not just a likeness, but participation of the one reality in the other. In other words, the household is not only like the spiritual life, the household is a spiritual analogy, and it is one of the metaphors of the spiritual life in Proverbs. Rejecting Proverbs' teaching is therefore akin to rejecting the foundations of traditional Christian faith.

In this regard, Karl Marx himself has commented in volume 3:4 of his *Church Dogmatics*, The book of Proverbs, which can be read as a large-scale commentary on spiritual life, is not in any sense an unspiritual book. In it, we are not prescribed, ordered, or commanded, but persuaded and advised and invited to make a personal trial and well-considered decision, and this decision always with an appeal to the court which stands above the fatherly teacher and advisor. Yet, it also cannot be denied that in the Old Testament, the problem of the relation of the fifth with the first is concealed under patriarchal modes of thought, and the spiritual nature of the penitent, although it is a fact, is not yet manifestly so, but we always grow unrecognized." Not affirming everything Barthes says to you, but I think this concern is helpful to place honor thy father and thy mother in a more fundamental context, we must obey God rather than any human authority, Acts 5:29. When Jesus remains

in the temple, going about his father's business to the distress of his earthly parents, the narrative in Luke 2:42-43 is not a case of his not obeying God.

To the contrary, the proper orientation of all earthly parenting is to inculcate in children growing wisdom for the sake of freely offered obedience to God. God's precedence places both proverbial patriarchy and healthy parenting in the proper context. What Proverbs ultimately teaches about parenting and teaching is the tremendous privilege involved in imitating God at a creaturely level.

We participate in bringing forth, providing for, protecting, and nurturing life on behalf of the Creator so that each precious child grows in wisdom. This process brings delight to family members and neighbors who watch them embrace their heritage in line with their individual gifts. Even those who never become parents may share in this joy through various modes of teaching.

The Blessed Trinity is so gracious that her fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit spills over into the parenting of other children, who in turn may enjoy parenting of their own. At each level of human life lies tremendous mystery and conflict between the parents, leading us to fear the One who gives us all. At the same time, eliciting our faith and seeking to understand the element amid all the mystery, the giving and receiving of love.

With this look at the final words, we have now reached the end of Proverbs in chapter 31. We have realized how fundamental the activities of listening and speaking are to the character formation of Proverbs. We have recognized how blessed God's people are to have the revelation that invites and enhances their covenants and growth in wisdom.

In a concluding addendum to this lecture, we return to Proverbs 8 and its profile of Lady Wisdom, and consider how, if at all, we might relate it to Jesus Christ. Throughout these lectures, I've tried to show how Christians might read Proverbs in light of an analogy between human parenting and God's pedagogy for guiding people into wisdom. Having reached the apex of this analogy and its wisdom in the ode of Proverbs 31, it's appropriate to return to the apex of Proverbs 8, verses 22 to 31, which ties Lady Wisdom comprehensively to God's rule of the cosmos.

Without having the time or the space for an exhaustive defense, I want to outline, to briefly sketch, how we might be able to see Jesus Christ related to this depiction of wisdom. I'll try to do that in five basic steps. First, the meaning of the verbs in 8:22 through 26.

The first of the passage's debated verbs is *qanah* in 8:22. Its normal usage in the Old Testament involves acquiring or possessing, as is frequently the case elsewhere in Proverbs. The Septuagint, the Greek name for the Old Testament, wound up taking

this not in the sense of just acquiring or possessing, but in a particular sense of creating. And that led to all sorts of controversy with Arian Christology.

The temptation was to read Jesus in this passage and to see the Son as being created by God, and therefore not being fully divine. Partly, I think, that was generated by relying upon the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, rather than dealing straightforwardly with the Hebrew. A contemporary parallel to the range of the Hebrew term, Tremper Longman suggests, would be the pair of get and beget.

And here, I think the mode of acquiring or possessing that the verb is trying to convey is more specific. It's bringing forth. It's begetting.

Begetting is a way of getting in this passage. This begetting of wisdom can be inspired at the beginning of the Lord's Word. Following that way would align the wise and pristine thoughts of God from the very outset.

There are a few temporal markers in 8:22, such as the beginning, but it will be important to note their points of comparison. First of what? First of anything. As we proceed, instead of quickly assuming wisdom as a creature, what I'm trying to suggest is wisdom is not spoken of as created here, but metaphorically spoken of as begotten.

That makes much more room for an orthodox Christological fulfillment or appropriation of this text. The second of the verbs in 8:23 is unclear regarding its root. And so, there's a question of exactly what we're to see at stake here.

Do we have the installation of a king in the background? Do we have weaving? Do we have a metaphor involving gestation and so forth? So, there are options. But here's what I think 8:22 and 23 together have Lady Wisdom claiming, in my view. The Lord acquired or possessed me by bringing me forth, by begetting me at the beginning of his way, which you can follow before his other earliest works.

From everlasting I was woven together, sticking with the begetting imagery, from the very beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. So, if this is right, we don't have a Christological complication with wisdom being made a creature here. We have a metaphorical speaking of wisdom in terms of being begotten.

Now the second issue is in chapter 8 and verse 30, the meaning of Amon and exactly how are we... Now in between, the pattern of verses 27 and 29 means in the opposite direction from verses 24 and 25, from up to down. The point of this down and up is that God is wisely making the entire cosmos fit for human habitation. The chaos associated with water, so feared by the ancients, cannot escape the boundaries marked out by the same Lord whose commands in the Torah also set boundaries for human life.

Temporal clauses lead up to the claim in chapter 8 and verse 30 that I was on his side, Among the translation possibilities here, artisan or master worker was in the lead for quite a while, but the related meaning in Jeremiah 52:15 is disputable. And I don't think Proverbs 33:19 offers clear support for this. That's based on amending the Masoretic text following the Torah.

Some opt for the second possibility, child or nursing, because they view the first possibility, artisan or master worker, as theologically troubling, introducing a second creator, so to speak. Despite the apparent progression from preoccupation with birth earlier in this section, I find that little child not the best choice that Proverbs could make for wisdom-having gravitas due to involvement with creation in intervening verses where God is wisely making the entire cosmos fit for human habitation. So recently, a third, more promising possibility surfaced for treating chapter 8 verse 30.

Bruce Waltke translates the first phrase of the verse, beside him constantly, taking the root of this word in terms of being firm or faithful, rather than in terms of the artisan or master worker. Stuart Weeks similarly highlights this lexical background, translating the term as faithfully, according to which wisdom is either existing as a faithful one or in faithfulness. The fidelity involved may transcend merely temporal presence to connote religious piety as well.

In that case, the possible allusion to Proverbs 8:30 in Revelation chapter 3 and verse 14 would make more sense. There we read about the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation, which seems to be a Christological allusion in the New Testament, back to a reading. Now, if we opt for this interpretation of Proverbs 8:30, I was beside him constantly or faithfully, then the verse raises new questions about the timing of the states and events described in the past.

According to the usual understanding, Proverbs 8:30 places wisdom beside God during creation, with the delight of verse 31, presumably being subsequent to this act of Proverbs of creation itself. However, against that interpretation, the when clauses introduced by Bate in 8:27 through 8:29 could already go with the statement, I was there in 8:27, rather than with the statement, I was beside him in 8.30. And there are catchwords linking verses 30 and 31 together, which renders a temporal shift between them less likely. So is to a beast.

The day-by-day dimension of the light in chapter 8.30b more naturally fits with chapter 8:31, subsequent to creation. It's preferable, therefore, to view 8:27 through 29 as depicting wisdom's presence during creation, with 8:30 and 31 depicting her delight in the divine presence ever since. Quoting Leece, the passage is not merely a statement that wisdom was with God early on, but a declaration that she has been with God throughout the history of the world and still is.

This comprehensive presence qualifies her all the more to be the principle by which kings rule and humans find shalom. Now if this treatment of 8:27 to 31 is possible, or even right, then it remains to work backward, addressing the manner in which wisdom precedes the cosmos in verse 29 and 26. There is repeated verbal emphasis on her being begotten, 2, 3, 4, and 25 on the way.

Each of the latter three verses makes clear that prior to wisdom, some feature of the cosmos did not exist or had not yet transpired, which in terms of a Christological appropriation of the wisdom material would be consistent with the claims of John's Gospel, and later Christian Orthodoxy, about the Logos, through whom all things were made, and before or without whom nothing was made. So, the most challenging question that seems to be wisdom personified in this passage and to be somehow or fulfilled ultimately in Jesus Christ, the most challenging question to that appears back in chapter 8, verse 22. I've already suggested wisdom is not necessarily a creature according to the first clause.

The verb, as we saw above, means either less than created, acquired, or most likely it means more than created. It means begotten in this specific metaphorical sense. Metaphorical usages are frequent for the concept of being a creature, and after all, this text is poetry.

Begetting is an issue in terms of the poetic or metaphorical usage, and so what we need to address theologically concerns the nature and the timing of the begetting and what significance that may have for the personification. It seems to me that a non-literal understanding of begetting is entirely consistent with the poetic nature of the passage and the symbolic force of household imagery throughout Proverbs, as well as what Proverbs wants to say about wisdom. It doesn't want to say that wisdom, either in terms of the content of the teaching or as some kind of metaphor, goes from non-existence to existence.

It wants to say that it comes from the eternal God into the created order. So, I think classic Christian theology rightly highlights this text's metaphorical establishment of wisdom's divine pedigree. In some respects, then, the most challenging clause in 8:22 is the second one.

It says that the first of his acts of long-ago place wisdom's begetting at the beginning of a series of cosmic, temporal, or historical works, as in heretical Aryan Christology. Not necessarily. The term rendered first conveys remoteness in time, yet it can further point to the divine spirit, as in Habakkuk 9:12. Are you not from of old, O Lord my God, my holy one? You shall not die.

And the addition of long ago at the end of 8:22 calls to mind Psalm 92. Your, that is the Lord's throne, is established from of old. You are from everlasting.

The phrasing gives every appearance of trying to convey wisdom's everlasting distinctiveness, not her fit within creaturely patterns. Now, to be sure, the vocabulary is not precise enough to rule by itself on any technical, theological, or Christological questions. But if we want to relate the text to Christ in some way, our options, I think, remain open here, because the language could be used to convey eternity, and association with the creator, rather than the beginning of temporality.

So, what is the literary function and identity of wisdom? Of course, wisdom's personification is a literary motif in the midst of a passage taking poetic likeness. There is no claim being made here about a hypostasis or person in wisdom, divine or otherwise, as the parallel with James' following is here. Jesus Christ is not directly in the author, and certainly not in the mind of the human author or editors.

Yet the wisdom that is gestured at here goes beyond simply a divine attribute. It makes little sense, even metaphorically, to the personification. Proverbs 8 is not suggesting that there was a time when the divine attribute of wisdom was not, and then it came into being.

By definition, the divine attribute is not brought forth. Nor, I think, can we settle for wisdom's distinctly personifying of the prophetic process itself, if it's treated as a solely creaturely reality. Proverbs 8-9 likely is focused on preparing for Proverbs 10-31, true.

But it's highlighting that such divine teaching comes through strikingly personal divine self-revelation, not merely human wisdom writ large. The text is associating wisdom's personal invitation with the creator, from the very beginning, as it were. As Richard Brockham and others have underscored, Old Testament texts from Isaiah and elsewhere anticipate fuller divine self-revelation in the future, tied to the fulfillment of Israel's promised redemption.

Then they will know that I am the Lord. For Christian readers, it's understandable that Old Testament hints of mysterious relationality within the divine life and condescension from God to us through wisdom might come into a fuller revelatory light with the advent of Jesus Christ. The Christian appropriation of wisdom texts and themes and passages like Colossians 1 is therefore understandable.

Here, Richard clearly goes beyond just another creative literacy, on the one hand, while not being solely identifiable with the life of Jesus Christ. Hence, I think the eventual debate between Athanasius and the Arians is perfectly appropriate to the subject matter of Proverbs 8, even if, at a technical level, Jesus Christ is clearly not present directly on the text's surface. And on any number of exegetical matters today, we might reach different conclusions than earlier Christian interpreters.

If wisdom here can't solely be a feature of creation or a divine attribute, then its mysterious origin begs for exploration. And the text itself, in its original context, may be poetically perfected by the mystical authority that isn't even claiming to have a full answer, by divine providence. Wisdom has a mediating role between God and the world, particularly between God and humanity.

As I noted in the first lecture, Yahweh is the first word of this text, and Adam is the last. In the context of Proverbs 8, part of the text relies on the fact that wisdom is not simply the king, the monarchy, or the temple. Wisdom serves as the link between God and humanity, between heaven and earth.

Wisdom is God, present, teaching, and ruling through not only kings and priests, but also parents and non-human creatures. The resulting challenge lies in discerning the nature of this mediation. Whether wisdom is quasi-divine, but ultimately a creature of some kind, as the Arians held, or indeed fully divine in some form of personal condescension that's not spelled out in the text, as the Orthodox came to hold when they related it to Jesus Christ.

Such an interpretive challenge takes particular shape in writing Christ as the Son of God, yet it stems from a mystery already latent in the text itself, I would say. If wisdom has some kind of creaturely connection that is chronologically and otherwise distinct from everything else in the cosmos, then the begetting metaphor, far from subordinating the Son to the Father as creature to Creator, actually indicates the continuity of divine life and character. In other words, wisdom here is a chip off the oldest possible cross.

Therefore, I want to suggest that Jesus Christ presents the resolution of a mystery latent in the text, though not always clearly recognized. That's what the Incarnation gives us, a kind of contact to us directly, direct contact with human life, and explore the New Testament connections in the way that I've hurried through here. I think that this treatment of Proverbs 8 is obviously a theologian's minority view against the weight of a ton of evangelical Old Testament scholarship, and I don't want to deceive you on that point.

And I think that you can read the book of Proverbs the way that I have in the rest of these lectures without believing that Jesus Christ fulfills the kind of personification of wisdom that we have in Proverbs 8. I do think that if you read Proverbs 8 in this fashion, where the human author is gesturing at a mysterious character to divine condescension and revelation that's not fully and completely understood until we see the apex of its fulfillment in the Incarnation of Christ, I think if you read Proverbs 8 that way, it's quite consistent with what the rest of the book is trying to do with respect to God's loving pedagogy for coming into contact with us, not just using officials in Israel's life, but using parents and ordinary life throughout the cosmos to try to inculcate wisdom in one and to try to bring us healthy, harmonious covenant

relationships of shalom. At the heart of Proverbs, I want to suggest, is a divine pedagogy that incorporates human parenting, winning us over to the way of wisdom. The way of wisdom is at the heart of how God is ordering his cosmic household and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ mysteriously but ultimately fulfills that pedagogy to which Proverbs is pointing and in which it is participating.

Thank you for listening.

This is Dr. Daniel J. Treier and his teaching on Proverbs for Christian Living. This is session number four, Proverbs chapters 30-31, Final Words.