

Proverbs: Work and Wealth

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Abstract

In Session 22 of his Proverbs series, Dr. August Konkel examines the biblical perspective on work and wealth by synthesizing insights from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. He explores how human labor, though ordained by God as a fulfilling responsibility in creation, is experienced as painful toil (etzev) and relentless busyness (inyan) due to human fallenness. Konkel warns against the deceptive pursuit of wealth as an ultimate goal, demonstrating that riches are impermanent and insatiable, whereas finding daily satisfaction in one's labor is God's true gift. Ultimately, he challenges modern cultural notions like retirement, affirming that labor remains a purposeful, lifelong endeavor when aligned with divine wisdom.

Outline

I. Introduction to Work and Wealth

- A. Context within the Proverbs series
 - 1. Final meditation in the series
 - 2. Method of gathering thematic sayings scattered across Proverbs
- B. Integration with Ecclesiastes (Kohelet)
 - 1. Association between time, effort, and wealth ("time is money")
 - 2. Complementary perspectives of Proverbs and the Preacher

II. The Human Experience of Labor: Toil and Busyness

- A. Core Hebrew terminology
 - 1. Etzev / Etsebon: Pain, struggle, and frustrating toil
 - 2. Inyan: Endless busyness and occupation
- B. Biblical reflections on fruitless effort
 - 1. Psalm 127: Inadequacy of human building and guarding apart from God
 - 2. The gift of restorative sleep for the faithful worker
- C. Root causes in Genesis 3
 - 1. Human choice to define good and evil independently
 - 2. Consequences of the Fall on childbirth, agriculture, and labor

III. The Mystery and Limitations of Human Effort

- A. Kohelet's experiment with wealth and desire
 - 1. Accumulation of riches fails to improve quality of life
 - 2. Inability of humans to control or comprehend life's seasons (Ecclesiastes 3, 8:16–17)
- B. Geopolitical and social realities
 - 1. Persistent failure of human treaties to eliminate war and conflict
 - 2. Brief span of human life and mortal limitations (Psalm 90)

IV. The True Purpose and Inherent Value of Work

- A. Creation design for labor (Genesis 2)
 - 1. Humanity placed in creation to cultivate and keep the ground
 - 2. Labor as a fundamental aspect of human purpose
- B. Proverbs on diligence and slothfulness
 - 1. Contrast between diligence yielding wealth and laziness bringing poverty (Proverbs 6, 10)
 - 2. The ruined field of the sluggard (Proverbs 24:30–34)
- C. Inherent merit in labor (Proverbs 14:23–24)
 - 1. Merit exists in work regardless of external outcome
 - 2. Highest human good: Enjoying daily work and sustenance as gifts from God

V. The Fallacy and Hazards of Pursuing Wealth

- A. Honorable wealth vs. dishonorable gain (Proverbs 8)
- B. Labor driven by insatiable desire turns work into slavery (Proverbs 16:26)
- C. The impermanence and instability of material riches
 - 1. Riches unexpectedly taking wing and flying away (Proverbs 23:4–5)
 - 2. Vulnerability of accumulated wealth to misadventure, war, and destruction
- D. The trap of endless accumulation (Ecclesiastes 6:7–9)

VI. Reassessing Modern Concepts: Work and Retirement

- A. Biblical framework: Work is appropriate across every stage of life
- B. Historical origins of modern retirement
 - 1. Emergence in the 19th century and expansion during the Great Depression
 - 2. Economic motivation to open employment opportunities for younger workers
- C. Balanced view of retirement
 - 1. Financial pensions as helpful social structures
 - 2. Danger of treating retirement as a mandatory religious or spiritual obligation

VII. Conclusion: Wisdom's Call to Contentment

- A. Work as a good and meaningful end in itself
- B. Rejection of work as a vehicle for greed, prestige, or control
- C. Finding peace, daily sufficiency, and divine purpose in present labor