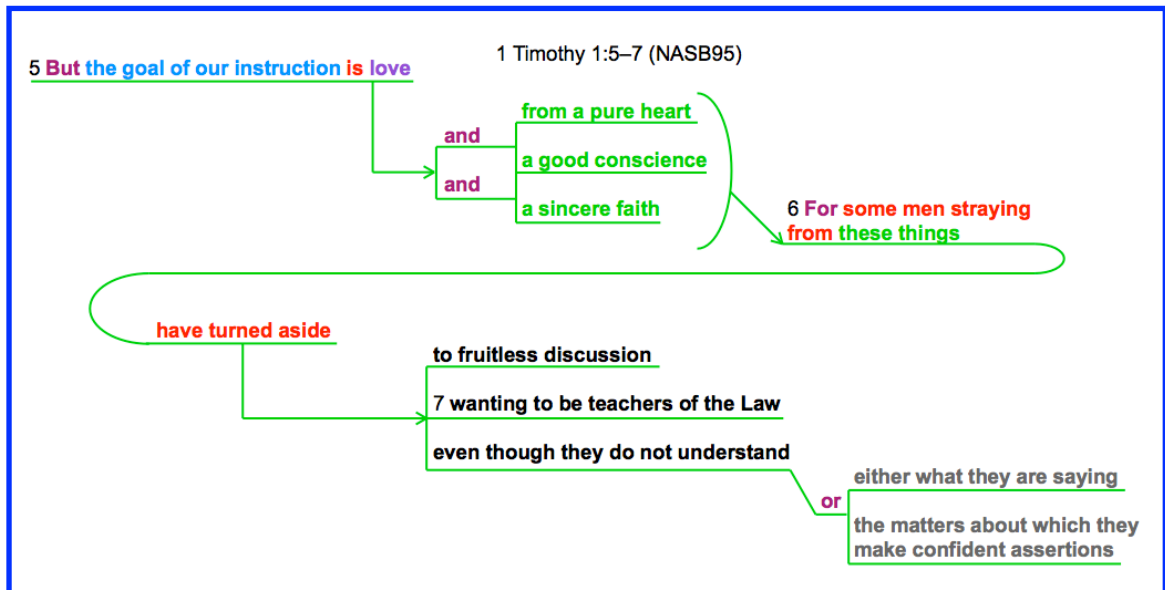


# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## How to Study Proverbs

### Lesson #8

*“Sins against illumination and conviction make deep wounds in the soul. Other sins fetch blood; these are a stab in the heart. Every little hole in the roof lets in rain, but a crack in the foundation endangers the fall of the house. Every sin of weakness is prejudicial, but sins against illumination crack the conscience and threaten the ruin of the soul. To sin in this matter makes sin the heavier and hell the hotter.”<sup>1</sup>*



**Title: “THE BULL’S-EYE OF BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION”**

**Outline:**

- I. **SHOOT FOR LOVE**
  - a. Driven by a pure heart
  - b. Driven by a good conscience
  - c. Driven by a sincere faith
  
- II. **DON’T TURN ASIDE TO OTHER TARGETS**
  - a. Don’t engage in fruitless discussion
  - b. Don’t lust after being a teacher
  - c. Don’t teach in ignorance

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Watson, *Mischief of Sin*, p.94.

Proverbs are tidbits of wisdom from God to help us live wisely. If God's wisdom in the book of Proverbs is heeded, it will spare us from a life of sin and misery. Yet, many people don't understand how to study proverbs. Most know that the book of Proverbs teaches us wisdom, but they don't know how to go about studying Proverbs in an organized and systematic way. In this study we will take some time to consider some of the characteristics of the book of Proverbs and how to study this unique portion of God's Word.

## I. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROVERBS

- A. **Remember That Proverbs Are Wisdom Statements, Truths Or Truisms.**  
They are not magical formulas that produce absolute predictable outcomes. They are easy to remember statements that remind us of how to apply God's wisdom to our lives. They show us the way we should live. They often give us the normal, but not guaranteed, outcome of applying God's wisdom to our lives.
1. Prov. 22:6 -- Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
  2. Prov. 23:9 -- Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.
  3. **WARNING:** Just because Proverbs are general axioms of truth that does not mean we can ignore their teaching. It is always best to take the advice of Proverbs, but remember, they are not formulas for instant predictable results. They are words of wisdom which should always be applied and which will usually bring success.
- B. **Remember To Watch For Parallelism.** There are three major kinds or types of parallelism found in the book of Proverbs - synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic.
1. *Synonymous parallelism* comes in two types i.e. "Identical" or "similar." The key word to look for is "and" at the beginning of the second line.
  2. *Identical parallelism* states the same thing twice but uses different words.
    - a. Prov. 14:13 -- Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, And the end of joy may be grief.
    - b. Prov. 16:16 -- How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver.
  3. *Similar parallelism* states two things, which are similar and have some things in common.
    - a. Prov. 16:20 -- He who gives attention to the word shall find good, And blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.

- b. Prov. 17:27 -- He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
4. *Antithetical parallelism* provides sharp contrast between two different things. Usually something good is contrasted with something bad. The key word to look for is "but" at the beginning of the second line.
- a. Prov. 5:3-6 -- For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, And smoother Than oil is her speech; 4 But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of Sheol. 6 She does not ponder the path of life; Her ways are unstable, she does not know it.
  - b. Prov. 12:18 -- There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
5. *Synthetic parallelism* is accumulative or climatic, building repetitiously the same truth. Each line builds upon the same subject matter expanding the previous line a little further.
- a. Prov. 19:17 -- He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, And He will repay him for his good deed.
  - b. Prov. 27:15-16 -- A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike; 16 He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.
- C. **Remember To Watch For Groups Of Proverbs That Have A Similar Theme Or Address The Same Truth**
- 1. All of Proverbs 7 has a unified theme – how to escape from the adulterous woman.
  - 2. Proverbs 31:10-31 has a unified theme – what it means to be an excellent wife.
- D. **Remember That To God, Knowledge Doesn't Become Wisdom Unless It Is Applied Knowledge.** Wisdom is the art of right living, not the knowledge of knowing about right living. There are many exhortations in Proverbs to walk, obey, listen (so as to obey), do, do not, heed, etc., which emphasize the application of wisdom.
- 1. Prov. 1:15 -- My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path.
  - 2. Prov. 19:20 -- Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.

## II. **STUDYING PROVERBS**

### A. **You Can Study Individual Proverbs**

1. Prov. 17:12 -- A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.
2. Prov. 29:1 -- A man who hardens his neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

### B. **You Can Study A Series Of Connected Proverbs That Have A Unifying Theme**

1. Prov. 25:11-15 -- Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances. 12 Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear. 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters. 14 Like clouds and wind without rain Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely. 15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.
2. Prov. 27:13-16 -- The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!" 14 As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed. 15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

### C. **You Can Study A Collection Of Proverbs Which Speak To The Same Theme**

1. Prov. 12:1 -- Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid.
2. Prov. 13:18 -- Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored.
3. Prov. 15:32 -- He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.
4. Prov. 19:20 -- Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.

### D. **You Can Study Verse By Verse Through Proverbs Even If Each Proverb Teaches A Different Truth.** Notice that each of the proverbs below addresses a different truth but all of them have identical structure. First an obvious parallel truth is stated as an illustration, then a more obscure and not so obvious truth which the author is trying to communicate is stated.

1. Prov. 27:18 -- He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit, And he who cares for his master will be honored.
2. Prov. 27:19 -- As in water face reflects face, So the heart of man reflects man.
3. Prov. 27:20 -- Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.
4. Prov. 27:21 -- The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, And each is tested by the praise accorded him.
5. Prov. 27:22 -- Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, Yet his foolishness will not depart from him.

### III. INTERPRETING PROVERBS

Many proverbs are clear in their meaning and the application jumps off the page. We know exactly what we need to do. Yet, there are other instances where it might not be clear what exactly the proverb is teaching. Below is an example of a proverb that some have used as a proof text to say that borrowing is sin. Notice how principles from this lesson as well as other principles already learned are used to examine what this particular proverb means and how it applies.

Text: Prov. 22:7 – *“The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower becomes the lender's slave.”*

- A. **Preliminary observations:** Proverbs 22:7 may seem to tell us that borrowing is wrong. We can first observe that there is an "and" at the beginning of the second line. By looking at the contents of the parable we can conclude that it is synonymous parallelism (both lines saying something similar). This means the first line teaches something similar to the second line.
1. By examining the first line we learn that rich people rule over poor people (as a general truth)
  2. By examining the second line we learn that in a similar way (since it is synonymous parallelism) borrowers become slaves to lenders. If you wanted to rearrange the second line so that it matches the first line you might say that lenders (the rich who have money) become masters over those who borrow from them (the poor) in that the debtor must repay the debt.
  3. Notice also the word pictures "slave" and "master". One who borrows does not literally become a literal slave, neither does a lender become a literal master over the borrower. The borrower bound to repay the debt and in

that way only is he “enslaved” to the lender. The lender is similarly like a master in that he has a right to expect repayment of the debt from the borrower.

## B. Word Studies

1. The word “*rules*” is a Hebrew verb, which can be understood to describe something which has occurred in the past, or something which is still continuing or progressing from the past but hasn’t been completed, or it can describe a future condition which might happen. Here the continuing progression of what is true, but which is not completed, is probably in mind. The word might be paraphrased in the first line as, “the rich have been and continue to be ruling over the poor.”
2. “*The borrower*” is an active participle, which expresses continual action. It might be paraphrased in the second line as, “the one who is continually in the process of borrowing.”
3. “*The lender*” is a causative active participle. This might be paraphrased as, “the one who is continually in the process of causing himself to lend.”
4. If we were to write an amplified, paraphrased translation we might write it in these words, “In the same way that rich people have been in the past and will be in the future ruling over the poor, so the one who habitually borrows from the one who continually causes himself to lend, will be in a continual state of obligation to repay his indebtedness.
5. Notice how word studies make the meaning of the text clearer. More observations lead to a better, more accurate interpretation
6. Notice the lender is voluntarily and continually lending i.e. “causing himself to keep on lending” to the borrower.
7. Notice that the borrower being spoken of here is one who has a continual pattern of borrowing.
8. Since both lines are similar we need to ask ourselves, “Is it evil that the rich rule the poor? And the answer is, “NO.” There is nothing wrong with rich people ruling poor people.
9. The proverb never says that borrowing is evil or sinful, or that it should be avoided. If it was you would also have to say it is morally wrong to be ruled over by the rich since borrowing is paralleled with being ruled over.
10. The proverb is not saying that by borrowing you become a literal slave any more than having someone rule over you makes you poor. The borrower is like a slave, in the one respect, he is obligated to pay back his debt to

the lender. He is not “free” to be delinquent, but is “bound,” figuratively speaking like a slave, in that he must pay back the lender, who in this one aspect has a right to expect repayment, like a master who expects obedience from his slave.

11. It is saying that by borrowing you become indebted to the lender but only in the matter of having to pay back the debt. You must be his "servant" in the sense of working to repay what you owe.
12. It is saying that those who voluntarily lend money to others have the right to expect repayment according to the contract.
13. Timeless truths or “Wisdom” to apply from this proverb.
  - a. Realize that the rich will usually rule over the poor because money can be a form of power.
  - b. Realize that if you are one who borrows from another you will be obligated to pay your debt to the lender and he has a right to expect you to do so.
  - c. Realize that if you continually borrow you will be under continual obligation to repay.
  - d. Realize that if you lend to someone you have the right to expect repayment according to the contract.

#### IV. **HOMEWORK**

Without looking at any commentaries, using only your sharpened hermeneutical skills from this lesson and previous lessons, seek to observe, interpret, and give practical applications of the three proverbs listed below.

- A. Prov. 6:28 -- Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?
  1. Helpful observations of what the text does and doesn't say
  2. Interpretation of what the author meant by what he wrote
  3. Application ideas for how this proverb might apply to every Christian's life

- B. Prov. 15:8 -- The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.
1. Helpful observations of what the text does and doesn't say
  2. Interpretation of what the author meant by what he wrote
  3. Application ideas for how this proverb might apply to life
- C. Prov. 30:15-16 -- The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give." There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, "Enough": Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire that never says, "Enough."
1. Helpful observations of what the text does and doesn't say
  2. Interpretation of what the author meant by what he wrote
  3. Application ideas for how this proverb might apply to life