

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Control of Self

Readings: *Proverbs*

By topic:

Control of Self:

- Self-control – 25:28; 29:11
- Rashness – 20:25; 21:5; 25:8; 29:10
- Temper and Oatience – 12:16; 14:16-17, 29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11, 19; 22:24-25; 29:8, 22
- Drunkenness and Gluttony – 20:1; 23:19-21, 29-35
- Adultery – 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; 22:14
- Prostitution – 23:26-28; 29:3

Reflections:

- This entire section really addresses issues around self-control. Within these various topics we see a recurrent theme of encouraging the reader to exercise self-control. Here the wisdom aligns closely with the overarching focus of this period, the Law. Most of these insights or challenges are basically trying to help the reader experience self-control and keep the Law.
- Now having said this, in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus, we discover that no amount of self-will can ultimately help us have self-control. The Apostle Paul is clear when he writes, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on

doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” (Romans 7:14-20) We discover that it is not the Law or trying harder that result in self-control. It only comes through the love of God working in us through his Spirit that gives us self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

- In this section on self-control we may be tempted to think that Solomon is giving us wisdom to apply and miss out that this is coming from the part in God’s redemptive story where we are discovering what doesn’t work. In the end, even though Solomon has these big sections on self-control and particularly sexual self-control, that is his downfall with his many foreign wives. In Christ, you can summarize this wisdom with one simple thought. Allow Gods Spirit to fill you, his love to overflow in your life, and he will grow self-control in you.
- The teaching on adultery/prostitution is a part of a larger theme being developed. The prostitute/adulterous wife is contrasted to the wife of noble character just as folly is contrasted to wisdom (Sophia feminine). In Israel men could have multiple wives and even concubines and so it was not sex that God was opposing here. It was sex outside of some form of covenant. It was prostitution that was often associated with pagan worship of the fertility gods.
- In this case here, Solomon is warning men against becoming consumed with lust and leaving the women they were in covenant with to seek out prostitution. God wants sexual intimacy not to be passed around lightly with strangers who meet on the street corner and have no real relationship. He desires for it to be anchored in covenant so that intimacy is rooted in committed relationship. Again, in this time period we discover what doesn’t work. And so in the end all of these encouragements, as helpful as they sound, can do very little to transform a person’s heart. It is only the Spirit of God changing someone from the inside out that can ultimately enable them to walk with integrity and according to God’s leading.