

**Text:** Proverbs

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**Venue:** Living Hope Baptist Church

**Event:** Sunday Service

**Series:** Proverbs

**Title:** Resolved to Recognise Authority

## **Two Authorities that We Need to Recognise**

### **1) God, the LORD**

Four wise responses

- a) Fear the LORD God
- b) Obey the LORD God
- c) Trust the LORD God
- d) Repent to the LORD God

### **2) Our Government**

Three principles of wisdom

- a) Understand their power
- b) Moderate your actions
- c) Seek God's intervention

OPEN your Bibles to the book of Proverbs.

The joy of reading the Bible is that it addresses *all* matters of life as far as our godliness in this life is concerned. You might at times think that the Bible is only about, or at least *primarily* about, spiritual things like God, prayer, church, and Christian attitudes. But there is an entire group of books in the Bible dedicated to topics like this world's chaos, your work situation, legal rights, your family issues, corruption, government elections, and yes, even lock-down regulations. We call this group of books in the Bible the "Wisdom Books" because of the way they are written— it is mostly various forms of poetry, witty sayings, proverbs, and little gems of insight. However, they might better be called "World-view Books". "World-view Books" are books that don't address just *one* topic, but rather address *all* topics together like one big melting-pot of topics all common to daily life on this planet. Books like Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, are the most familiar "world-view books" in the Bible. These books deal with the issues of life, but mix them all together so you get both practical sayings to live by, *and* a changed way of thinking about it all. To be truly wise in *one* area of life, we need wisdom on *all* areas of life. We need more than just witty statements arranged topically; we need a change in how we view the entire world.

Today we are going to do a bit of a topical study from the book of Proverbs, but we will cover enough variations under that topic that I hope you sense how **your wisdom in one area of your life**, is affecting your wisdom in other areas of your life. We can state it negatively too. In Proverbs you find how **your lack of wisdom in one area of your life is affecting your lack of wisdom in other areas of life too**.

The book of Proverbs is going to address for us today, the topic of lock-down **regulations**. But it is not just going to be a handful of principles on lock-down regulations. Instead we are going to look at the big picture of lock-down regulations. We are going to see what God says about people like us living under the governance of rulers and authorities. Lock-down regulations are just one of the many applications of our topic for today.

In that sense then, our topic for today is **recognising authorities**. No individual person is self-sovereign. No individual person can do as he/she pleases. No individual person is living all by themselves with only themselves to deal with. No individual person is living in an "autonomous zone". No individual person is their own authority.

Each of us live among one another. Each of us have various levels of authorities over us. With some of those authorities we are in agreement, and we accept them without much thought. But with other authorities we are often in disagreement, so we, again without much thought, spout out our complaints, opinions, and other foolish rhetoric about them. If lock-down has taught us anything, it has taught us that we have no "world-view" about authorities. We have no objectivity. We have no convictions. We have only frustrations and opinions. We have only our self-verified supposedly-superior opinions.

I often think of the speed limit as an obvious exposé of our narrow-minded opinions on authority. Do any of you *always* agree with the posted speed-limit? You might be fine with 120 kph on an open highway; 100 on a regional road; 60 in town. But do you *always* agree with 40 past a school—even if it is school holidays? Do you *always* agree with 60 through a

highway construction zone—even if the crews are only working on the other side of the highway? Do you *always* agree with the somewhat random reduction in speed limit for no apparent reason?

In terms of the age-old proverb of individualism, "Every speed limit higher than what I would drive is reckless, and every speed limit lower than what I would drive is unreasonable." To our shame, we are like that are we not??

Forget the speed limit now and think of *all* areas of authority: mankind is quick to assume *self*-sovereignty, or, at least, *group*-sovereignty. You betray your sense of self-sovereignty in statements like "but that regulation makes no sense", not realising how that statement says more about you than it does about the government. Or you think that because everybody else is doing this and that, that you can too, as though group-sovereignty is the new authority. But mankind is not self-sovereign. Not one person—no, not any king, nor any peasant—has ever been autonomous.

To be human is to need authority. To be human is to live under authority. To be human is to **recognise authority**.

To be a *godly* human, therefore, is to have *God's wisdom* on **authority**. We need a world-view **on authority**.

Today, from the Word of God, we are going to create a world-view **of authority** for each of us, **recognising two authorities** that govern our lives every single day. We do not *always* feel the presence of these two authorities, but we must nonetheless **recognise** these two authorities. Our lock-down

situation helps us realise that we are under these two authorities, but I hope that after today, we will never again wait for circumstances to make us think about things that God has clearly spoken on. We need a world-view **on authority** simply because God has spoken to us about these authorities.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> and most important Authority that we need to recognise is:**

## **GOD, THE LORD.**

How does a wise person respond to the LORD, God? The first wise response of recognising God as an authority is to ...

### **Fear the LORD God.**

READ Proverbs 9:10-11. To **fear** the LORD simply means to believe in Him and know Him. You see that the parallel to "fear" in v. 10 is "knowledge".

Look at another term associated with "fearing God" in READ Proverbs 14:26. "**have strong confidence**" that God is Who He claims to be, that what He says is right and wrong, wise and foolish, is indeed right and wrong and wise and foolish.

How does a wise man respond to the LORD God? He fears God by knowing who God is, believing what God says, and having the strongest of confidence in God simply because He is God!

Proverbs 28:14 says: "Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always". We sometimes forfeit that blessing, because instead of having a strong confidence in what the LORD has said, we look at all our fellow sinners, and envy some of their freedoms, some of their lifestyles, and some of their temporary blessings.

That is why God added READ Proverb 23:17-18. God *is* an authority; fellow sinners are not an authority, in fact, they are not even supposed to be a standard for you! If you make other sinners an authoritative influence in your life, you *will* suffer harm, but if you recognise God's authority in your life and fear Him always, you will be *blessed*.

The next wise response of recognising God as an authority is to ...

### **Obey the LORD God.**

READ Proverbs 16:6-7. Pleasing God as a way of life is the right and wise response to God. He made you; He has the authority to tell you what to do, and expect you to do so! God has a right to your devotion and loyalty!

By **recognising the LORD God as an authority**, we recognise that sin is a *problem*, not a *pursuit*. By **recognising the LORD God as an authority**, we learn to *fear* the LORD and seek to *please* Him, instead of *fearing* other people and trying to *appease* them.

When you do *wrong*, then you are disregarding the LORD God as your authority. When **you recognise the LORD God as your authority**, you will turn away from evil. **Obedience** is the proof that you recognise the LORD God as Authority.

Another wise response of recognising God as an authority is to ...

### **Trust the LORD God.**

God and His Word is to be trusted more than anything else—yes more than your own insights and understanding. A wise man recognises that *God* is to be trusted, and therefore trusts God in

all things. READ Proverbs 3:5-7. These must be the most foundational world-view verses in this entire book!

Trust *God*, and do not be so opinionated about everything. Don't try so hard to get your best life now your own way, but affirm *God's* way is best. Don't think so highly of your thoughts, your reasoning ability, your common sense, and your opinions; Fear the LORD, and stop engaging in so much evil.

By way of application, those three commands in v. 7 address every single lock-down regulation conversation that you and I have had! In every single lock-down regulation discussion, "Do not be wise in your own eyes", "fear God" and "turn away from evil" are like three elephants in the room, trying to get a word of wisdom in, but being ignored as though they are completely irrelevant. Nobody is the wiser for spouting their "it is so wise in my eyes only" opinions, and still we fill entire conversations with them! The person who says "but God still says" is often instantly rebutted with "but it doesn't make sense to me", or "but others don't obey either"—as though that makes it right. And so we turn towards all kinds of evil. Even if we do keep the regulations, we do so with bitterness, with resentment, with self-justification, and we add to that all kinds of gossip and slander against those in authority.

We will get to the authority of government in just a moment, but already we see here in the verse about recognising *God's* ways, that these worldview-level proverbs have immense practical value for all kinds of situations.

**You need to decrease your trust in your own ways if you want to increase your trust of God's ways.**

In Proverbs 22:19 Solomon says that he has written down all this Divine wisdom "*that your trust may be in the LORD*".

How do you trust God? What is perhaps the most obvious practical expression of trusting God? READ Proverbs 16:20. The most obvious practical expression of trusting God is to take God's Word, the Bible, seriously! If, in a conversation, somehow says "But God says", then pipe down and exclaim "O good, finally some clarity!". The world is full of **worries**, *but God says* "Cast your burdens on the Lord and He will sustain you" (Ps 55:22). The world is full of **opinions**, *but God says* "Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." (Pro 30:5).

A truly wise man is wise, not because of his human advisers, counsellors or even preachers primarily, but because of his grasp of and obedience to God's Word. Proverbs 19:16 says "Whoever keeps the *commandment* keeps his life". To trust God is to take the Scriptures seriously.

The LORD God is the ultimate authority in all of life. He Created us, we exist for His purposes, and He has given us His Word so that we can know about Him, and no longer live as though we are self-sovereign, autonomous, and wise in our own eyes. We must add one more response of recognising God as an authority. One more response of recognising God as an authority is to ...

## **Repent to the LORD God.**

A wise person is a quick-to-repent person. READ Proverbs 28:13-14. A wise person has a soft and sensitive disposition to



God's correction. A wise person has a conscience that is informed by the Word of God so that every sin is quickly repented of and forsaken. *Calamity* comes to the one who hardens his heart; *blessing* come to the one who fears the LORD. *Calamity* comes to the one who conceals his transgression; *mercy* comes to the one who **repents** quickly.

How does a wise man respond to God's authority in his life? Fear, Obey, Trust, Repent.

1. **Fear** God by believing Him.
2. **Obey** God as a way of life.
3. **Trust** God by taking His **Word** seriously,
4. **Repent** to God before your heart gets hardened.

The verses we looked at are not merely some *spiritual* lesson for us during our Sunday sermon. Instead, these verses are scattered throughout a book that in the verses just before, and just after these verses about God, speak of common sense, earthly success, good and bad rulers, and a host of other daily realities. These are not mere *spiritual* truths, these are world-view truths.

**Ask yourself:** "Are you a wise man or a fool in your response to God's authority?"

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Authority that we need to respond to recognise is:**

## OUR GOVERNMENT

Proverbs is comprehensive enough to include the *perfect* authority of the *LORD God* over us, as well as the *less-than-perfect* authority of our *national government*. As I keep saying, Proverbs not only gives us witty sayings to live by, but Proverbs changes our entire world-view!

Proverbs gives **three wisdom principles** for a wise man's response to his national government. These three principles do not solve a nation's many problems, but they take care of pretty much every level on which we as common citizens interact with our government.

First,

### **Understand their power.**

Any fool can rush along with a protest 'demanding' that their right be granted, threatening the government with insurrection, violence, and boycotts. But a wise man takes time to **understand the power** available to the government. Irrespective of the honourable or dishonourable use of power, we as those who have been enlightened to God's perspective on life, must understand that the government has great power over our lives.

READ Proverbs 24:21-22. There are three groups of people in these verses. The first is the group of a wise father and his son who is growing in wisdom. The second group is the group of those with a position of authority: the Lord and the government are in this group. Then lastly, there is the group of those who have no regard for authority, they, the verses say, "do otherwise". Which group are you in? None of us are probably in

group 2, so are you in group 1, the wise father and increasing-in-wisdom son?, or group 3, those who "do otherwise".

The insightful implications for our lives is all of READ v. 22. Both the LORD and the King are in a position to bring sudden disaster to your life. They can ruin your life in a matter of moments if they so choose. So, to pick a more colloquial one-liner, don't poke the bear! Or to quote the implication of the verse, don't "do otherwise". Instead, fear—**understand**, with appropriate recognition and respect, **the power** that government has. It doesn't matter if the authority is the perfect LORD of all, or if the authority is the imperfect local government, at the very least, be in group 1 and **understand their power** simply because they are in a position of power. Sure, the LORD's judgement is always perfect, and the government's is often not, but that is not the point. The point is that just like you are not your own God, so you are not your own government. God has power over you—thankfully a power demonstrate in love, and compassion, and mercy. The government also has authority over you—they can control much more of your life than you might care to acknowledge. So be wise, recognise that, and "do not join with those who do otherwise". **Understand their power.**

The **next principle of wisdom in recognising the authority of our government** is to ...

**Moderate your actions.**

**Be moderate in your actions in front of the powerful.**

READ Proverbs 23:1-3. Knowing that politics are ridden with corruption, deception, and ulterior motives, we as Christians need to take this proverbs to heart. When the government does

you much good, grants you all kinds of rights, promises you wonderful things, and hands you many gifts, **be moderate** in your enjoyment of it all. As lock-down illustrates, the freedoms granted you by the government one day, can be revoked in less than a week's notice. As every election illustrates, the promises made by a prospective government are no reflection of that government's priorities or care for you.

And lest you think that Proverb's acknowledgement of a corrupt government justifies your slander, resentment and rebellious attitude towards them, look at what Proverbs suggest you do about it. v. 2 "put a knife to *your* throat if you are given to appetite". v. 3 "[*you*] do not desire his delicacies". The common fool thinks that if corruption in government abounds, he has a right to make his own voice heard. But the wise man thinks that since corruption in government abounds, *he himself* will need to apply greater self-control.

Presumption is not a virtue, and in relation to the government, it is foolish. Spend more effort on controlling *yourself* than on controlling your government.

But there is another side to this wisdom of moderation too. READ Proverbs 25:6-7b. Again the advice of **controlling yourself** is given. Don't give in to every impulse, don't haphazardly jump at every opportunity, don't insert yourself into every political fight.

This is summed up well in the virtue of 'contentment'. Jesus told the underpaid government soldiers in Israel to be content with their wages (Lk 3:14). Paul said he was content with a government who persecuted him, for it was for Christ's sake (2 Cor 12:10). Later Paul wrote to Timothy that "godliness *with*

*contentment* is great gain" (1 Tim 6:8). The author of Hebrews said "be content with what you have" because *God* is always with you (13:5). As our proverb teaches, it is better to be a *content* citizen than a *humiliated* citizen.

You see this Proverb in action on the road occasionally—the one who thinks he knows better than the traffic officer ends up with the higher fine than the one who submits to being pulled over for speeding. It is better to be *content* with your place in this country than to be *presumptuous*. Be a good citizen, pay your taxes, obey the laws, be courteous to the various representatives, but above all, be *content* with the fact that you are just a citizen.

Being as complete as it always is, Proverbs recognises the place that citizens have in producing change in a country. There is a *foolish* contentment that is passive and non-engaged, caring for nobody except self's care-free life. But there is this *noble Biblical* contentment that is *active*. It is content and not presumptuous, but at the same time it is zealous for fairness, justice, equity, and the well-being of everyone else. We are already in Proverbs 25, look down at READ Proverbs 25:15. Yes, this is the "Wise men don't throw rocks at policemen" principle of life. Even when you seek to change politics, do so wisely. **Moderate actions** is again the point. **Be moderate** in your *persistence* and *timing*. **Be moderate** in your *choice of words* and *tone of voice*.

You might **protest** against this principle, distrusting God's word and according to your own understanding object and say "But being patient and gentle doesn't work! It is those who protest, yell, shout, loot and destroy who are the only ones who ever

get their point across!" We are tempted to think that way because that is what makes the news. But hearing about how only the worst in society bring about change doesn't make it the recommended way to bring about change. **Trust God**, the best change is never brought about by ungodliness.

Our government is a valid authority in our lives. Our primary responsibility is to submit, not protest. Sure, our government allows for elections, unions, petitions, peaceful protests, and the like, and use them in a wise and godly way, but over all those things, the primary response to our civil government should still be **moderation**: self-control, contentment, patience.

And that is why the last principle is so important. The **third principle of wisdom in recognising the authority of our government** is to ...

### **Seek God's intervention.**

Recognise God's authority over even our government's authority. READ Proverbs 29:25-26. That settles it doesn't it?! An unhealthy *fear* of the government, or an unhealthy *expectation* from the government will trip up your life.

**Understand the power** that government does have, **moderate your actions** as you live under their rule and interact with them in various ways, but then go home, and **pray**. **Pray** that *God* will intervene. **Pray** that *God* will let justice come to you—even through an unjust government. **Pray** that *God* will provide in your needs—even through a corrupt government. **Pray** that *God's* will be done—even in a lawless government. **Be a good citizen, and an even better Christian.**

God can change governments very easily. My favourite Proverb about the government is Proverbs 21:1 which says that "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." That is nothing new to us who know the rest of the Bible. According to 2 Chronicles 33, God turned the heart of the most notorious King Manasseh and brought about a revival in Judah. According to Daniel ch 4, the powerful pagan Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar experienced God's mighty works of turning his heart around, sending an evangelistic letter through his entire empire. More stories can be told, of mighty kings bringing about the ruin of their nations, then having their heart steered by God to produce blessing to God's people.

**Understand humbly the power** government wields. **Moderate your interactions** with government, especially in seeking change. But above all, a wise man will **seek supernatural intervention**.

**Ask yourself:** "In all your thoughts, conversations, and actions, are you a wise man or a fool in your response to the government that God has given you?"

We are not self-sovereign, autonomous beings. We are made as beings under authority. God is the supreme authority over us. The government is also an authority over us. We need to wisen up and give due **recognition to these authorities** in our lives.

We have been given some witty sayings and picturesque proverbs to adopt as our own personal one-liners. But I trust that your world-view today has also been revised somewhat. I

hope we have addressed not only our daily frustrations and concerns, but also our general attitudes and disposition.

If you want to stand as a witness to God and His Word, then now is your opportunity! Not everybody watches the parliament channel, reads the government gazette, or loves politics, but now lock-down has put politics on the lips of every citizen. What that means for us as wise Christians, is that every presidential speech, every new regulation adjustment, and every lock-down conversation, is an opportunity to put your world-view on full display.

The way you *talk* about the **authority** of the **government**, is a showcase of what you believe about the **authority** of **God**.

AMEN