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Proverbs

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"The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2)

Introductory Notes by Arno C. Gaebelein

The Title

The title of the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible is *Mishle*, which is derived from the verb *mashal*, "to rule"; hence *Mishle* means "short sayings that are given to govern life and conduct." The word also has the meaning of "a resemblance"--that is, "a parable." Many proverbs are concentrated parables. Our English word "proverbs" comes from the word *proverbia* used in the Latin translation.

The Authorship

Traditionally the authorship of the whole book is attributed to Solomon. Though the book itself does not claim this, there can be no question that he is the author of the major portion. In 1 Kings 4:32 we read that Solomon uttered "three thousand proverbs"; in these, the unique wisdom given to him was well illustrated, and many of them were included in the *Mishle*.

The book begins with "The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel." In 10:1 we read again: 'The proverbs of Solomon." Then 25:1 introduces chapters 25-29 with this statement: 'These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." This pious king must have had a great interest in compiling and preserving certain portions of the Word of God. He evidently commissioned certain scribes to add to the previous collection other proverbs that up to that time had remained uncollected.

The last two chapters are different. In Proverbs 30 we find "the words of Agur the son of Jakeh" and in chapter 31 "the words of king Lemuel." From these two facts, which appear in the book itself, it is clear that the composition of the entire book of Proverbs cannot be attributed to Solomon. We can conclude that only chapters 1—29 contain the proverbs of Solomon. In all probability the scribes of Hezekiah who copied out the proverbs of chapters 25—29 added the last two chapters to the collection.

The Person Addressed

One feature of this book is that numerous times a person is addressed as "My son," and the personal pronouns such as "thou," "thee," and "thy" are often used. See Proverbs 1-9; 19:20-24:34; and 27-29. Who is the person addressed? Does Solomon address someone or is it Solomon himself who is addressed? J. W. Thirtle in his *Old Testament Problems* distinguished between proverbs written *by* Solomon and those that were written *for* him. Those that are addressed to "My son" and those in which personal pronouns are used, he claimed, were given to Solomon by wise men or teachers who taught him these sententious sayings to fit him for rulership. But this interpretation produces other difficulties: The proverbs written *by* Solomon would be few in comparison with the size of the book; furthermore we do not know who the wise men and teachers were who Thirtle said wrote words of wisdom *for* Solomon.

There is another way the sections containing the personal address and the personal pronouns might be explained. When the Lord appeared to Solomon in Gibeon, He said, "Ask what I shall give thee," and Solomon asked for "an understanding

heart to… discern between good and bad." The king's prayer was answered, for the Lord said, "Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:5-15). Then the Lord must have spoken to him by His Spirit and given him the instructions he needed as the king over His people Israel. It is more than probable that the sections in which "My son" and the personal pronouns are used contain those heavenly instructions given to the young king by the Lord Himself in the beginning of his reign.

One cannot be dogmatic about this, but if such was the case, the difficulties disappear. There is no need to put these proverbs for Solomon into the mouths of unknown wise men. It was the Lord who spoke to Solomon as "My son," and Solomon, guided by the Spirit of God, penned His words.

The Law of Moses

Certain of the instructions that I believe were given to Solomon by the Lord in answer to his prayer for an understanding heart, correspond to commands in the Law of Moses. These instructions, which relate to Israel' s kings, we find in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Of special interest in this passage is the command, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away." Corresponding to this statement are the repeated warnings in Proverbs against the "strange woman." The strange women against whom the Spirit of God spoke to Solomon in his youth were the women of the Gentile nations. Anticipating the sad end of this great and wise king, the Lord pictured the strange woman for him as a harlot whose ways ensnare, then end in death.

But the heavenly wisdom was not heeded. It is written, "King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love" (1 Kings 11:1-2).

Then followed his downfall: "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4). He worshiped Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and other idol gods. The words of wisdom the Lord gave Solomon were not heeded and his succumbing to the allurements of strange women, of which his inspired pen had warned, became a mournful fact in own history.

The Literary Style

Most of the proverbs are in the form of couplets. The two clauses of a couplet are generally related to each other by what has been termed *parallelism* according to Hebrew poetry. Three kind of parallelism have been pointed out:

(1) *Synonymous Parallelism.* Here the second clause restates what is given in the first clause.

> *Judgments are prepared for scorners,*
> *and stripes for the back of fools.*

(Proverbs 19:29)

(2) *Antithetic Parallelism.* Here a truth that is stated in the first clause is made stronger in the second clause by contrast with

an opposite truth.

> *The light of the righteous rejoiceth:*
> *but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.*

(Proverbs 13:9)

(3) *Synthetic Parallelism.* Here the second clause develops the thought of the first.

> *The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion:*
> *whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.*

(Proverbs 20:2)

The Teachings of Proverbs

The proverbs, speaking generally, give moral teachings relating to human conduct. Since they often contrast the righteous and the wicked, many of the proverbs can be illustrated by the lives of the godly and ungodly characters described elsewhere in the Bible.

But besides this, there is much that goes deeper. Many of these short sayings can be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the gospel. Proverbs 8:22-31 speaks definitely of the Son of God, our Lord, who is Wisdom. When we read Proverbs 13:7 —"There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches"— we can well think of Him who was rich and became poor for our sake, that we by His poverty might be rich (see 2 Corinthians 8:9). When we read Proverbs 18:24 ("There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother") or Proverbs 17:17 ("A friend loveth at all times"), we can well think of our Lord, who is the friend of sinners.

In spiritual instruction and application, the book of Proverbs has an inexhaustible wealth. The Spirit of God quotes from it in the New Testament: Romans 3:15 quotes Proverbs 1:16; Hebrews 12:5-6 and Revelation 3:19 quote 3:11-12; James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 quote 3:34; Hebrews 12:13 quotes 4:26; 1 Peter 4:8 quotes 10:12; 1 Peter 4:18 quotes 11:31; Romans 12:20 quotes 25:21-22; and 2 Peter 2:22 quotes 26:11.

The book of Proverbs ought to be studied by believers as diligently as any other portion of God's Holy Word. The prayerful searcher will soon be rewarded in finding many nuggets of divine truth.

Author's Introduction

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the royal preacher graphically related the story of his weary search for happiness "under the sun." Its disappointing result led to the oft-repeated lament, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity and vexation of spirit." He then directed those who would escape the devious paths he had chosen in life to consider the collection of proverbs that he had "sought out and set in order."

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:8-14).

These last seven verses of Ecclesiastes form a fitting introduction to the book of Proverbs even though it precedes Ecclesiastes in our Bibles. These verses give the divine reason for the collection of wise sayings. God would save all who heed the wisdom that is recorded there from the heartbreaking experiences and aimless wanderings of the man who was chosen to write them.

There are two ways of learning the emptiness of the world and the true character of sin. The most common way is to tread the thorny path oneself and thereby taste fully the bitterness of departure from God. The more desirous way is to accept His Word regarding the character of sin. This enables the obedient disciple to say, "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psalm 17:4).

The bitter disappointments, the skeptical darkness, and the weary heart of Solomon, a result of trusting his own wisdom, are strongly delineated in the record of the tempests of his soul. This confusion need never be the portion of the child of God who orders his steps in the truth.

Human collections of wisdom and instruction are only the thoughts of men like ourselves. However, as in all Scripture, in the wisdom literature of the Bible we read the very breathings of the Spirit of God. The high and lofty One who spoke worlds into being, who redeemed fallen man, and who will eventually bring in a new heaven and a new earth stooped in grace to give instruction for the very details of His creatures' lives. This amazing grace is cause for worship and admiration forever.

All that I do takes on new importance as I realize that the God who created me and redeemed me does not consider it beneath His notice to instruct me concerning my behavior in the family, in society, and in my methods of business. All are under His eye, and if I act in accordance with the book of Proverbs, I will "behave myself wisely, in a perfect way," in every relationship of life.

To some the practical commonplaces of Solomon's wisdom may seem a far cry from the heavenly truths of Paul's Epistles.

But to the balanced Christian the teachings and warnings of Proverbs will have their place alongside the precious truths of Ephesians.

The "ribbon of blue" on the border of the pious Israelite's garment represented the heavenly character of the believer's habits. The book of Proverbs is such an azure ribbon when the light of the New Testament revelation shines upon it, illustrating the behavior suited to the one who is dead, buried, and risen with Christ. True, these glorious doctrines of salvation will not be found stated in the Old Testament; they belong to the special unfolding of truth revealed through the apostle Paul. But as "the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," so the newly created soul will most appreciate the instruction of this wonderfully practical book of the Old Testament. Like all other Scripture, it has been "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have arrived."

The book of Proverbs did not attain its present structure until the days of Hezekiah—that is, though the entire book is God-breathed, it did not exist in the form of one book until that date (Proverbs 25:1). The main divisions would seem to be as follows:

Chapter 1-9: Wisdom and folly contrasted.

Chapter 10-24: A collection of proverbs written by Solomon and set in order by himself.

Chapter 25-29: "Also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out."

Chapter 30: The sayings of an otherwise unknown sage named Agur the son of Jakeh.

Chapter 31: Instruction given to king Lemuel by his mother.

This is the arrangement of the book we will now study. As a part of “all Scripture,” we may rest assured we will find it “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness,” helping to perfect the man of God unto all good works.

Proverbs 1

The first four verses of the book of Proverbs would seem to justify the title given to this remarkable collection of sayings —"The Young Man's Book." There are nine words used in this brief introductory portion that recur throughout the book. These words should be considered in beginning this study since they are not mere synonyms used pedantically or idly. But as "every word of God is pure," so these terms are employed throughout this passage with admirable precision.

1:1-4

Wisdom is "skillfulness"—the ability to use knowledge correctly. It occurs thirty-seven times in this one book.

Instruction is used to translate a Hebrew word which occurs twenty-six times in Proverbs. It means "to teach by discipline." This word is also translated "chasteneth," (13:24) and "chastening" (3:11; see also Job 5:17 and Isaiah 26:16).

Understanding is a word seldom found in Scripture and has the force of "to bereave," or "to miscarry." The "sayings of bereavement" might not exactly express the thought, but it conveys the idea of learning through the unhappy experiences of others, or of oneself.

Justice refers to conduct and might be rendered "right behavior" or "righteousness."

Judgment is equivalent to "decisions." It is the ability to "try the things that differ."

Equity refers to principles, rather than conduct. It is uprightness, or moral integrity.

Subtilty (frequently translated "prudence") is "craftiness" in the original. As used here it conveys the ability to detect that in others. When Christ commanded His disciples to be "wise as serpents" He may have had the concept of subtilty in mind.

Knowledge is "information of a sound character."

Discretion is "thoughtfulness." The young generally lack this characteristic, but it is displayed by one who feeds on the Word of God.

These nine words describe a well-rounded character produced only by the study and practice of God's truth. Therefore this part of Holy Scripture especially appeals to the young man, fully equipping him for his path through the world.

1:5-6

The truly wise are characterized by a readiness to learn. It is only the self-confident blusterer who considers himself superior to instruction. That which is worthy of our contemplation is not always expressed in simple terms. God would have the senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Were it God's desire just to impart information to His creatures concerning the way to Heaven and Christian responsibility He could have chosen a much simpler way to give us His truth. But this would have eliminated that exercise which is both for our blessing and for His glory. We are exhorted to, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). "Dark sayings" become luminous when the child of God studies them having eyes anointed with the eye-salve of the Spirit of truth.

1:7

On the threshold of this treasure-house of wisdom we are presented with one of the sharp contrasts which characterize the book of Proverbs. There is no true knowledge apart from the fear of the Lord. All that pretends to be wisdom and ignores God is folly. "The young man" should bear this in mind when meeting the many pseudo-scientific theories now abroad. Philosophers and scholars have cast to the winds the fear of the Lord and ruled Him out of His own creation. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). As a result abounding absurdities are readily accepted by the ignorant as science and true philosophy. The word *science* implies exact knowledge. To call the wild guesses of evolutionists and infidel biologists *science* is word-prostitution. Hypotheses, however original and erudite, are not science. There never has been, and never will be, a conflict between the Bible and science. The conflict comes between the Bible and unbelievers' vain theorizing or between unscriptural religious notions and scientific facts.

1:8-9

Throughout the Bible obedience to parents is coupled with subjection to God. Those expositors who see in the ten commandments four precepts dealing with our relationship to God and six dealing with our relationship to man would seem to have missed the mind of the Spirit. The correct view assigns five ordinances to each table. "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" is the last of the first series (Exodus 20:12). This commandment is the recognition of divine authority and the position of dependence belonging to the

creature. The responsibility to obey this commandment still applies to those that "are not under law, but under grace." In Ephesians 6:1 we read, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." And immediately attention is drawn to the preeminent character of this precept in the law; it is "the first commandment with promise." Colossians 3:20 is similar: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."

Believing children should be patterns of filial obedience, that they may adorn the doctrine of Christ. Young people who profess allegiance to the Lord, but are impudent and disrespectful to those over them in the home are a sad reproach to the name of Him whom they are supposed to serve. To hear a father's instruction and to cleave to a mother's law are the ornaments that beautify the young saint.

The apostle classifies disobedience to parents among the evidences of the last-day apostasy (2 Timothy 3:1-5). It is the crying sin of the present lawless times, and presages the awful hour of doom soon to strike. The Scriptural "Children, obey your parents" has almost universally been superseded by "Parents, obey your children." It is a sowing of the wind and the whirlwind will yet be reaped. The human will disdains being bound in any way. The outcome will be terrible when, having cast off all parental authority, men will also throw aside every vestige of allegiance to divine authority.

1:10-19

In these verses the young man is solemnly warned against two things: evil companionships and "covetousness, which is idolatry."

The line of demarcation between the children of God and the children of wrath is sharply drawn in the inspired Word. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," is the command of the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:17). If sinners tempt, appealing to the lust of the human heart, turn away from them. Their entreaties are only defiling. Nothing pleases them better than to have the young man cast in his lot with them, all sharing one purse. But the believer can have no part in this ungodly fellowship. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united" (Genesis 49:6).

"Walk not thou in the way with them" (Proverbs 1:15).The only safe course is to part company at once. Clean-cut separation from the world in all its forms is the path of blessing. Many a young Christian shipwrecks his life by dallying with the world in the hopes of improving it. Such a course is folly and a great mistake. "Refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil" (15-16). If you venture first to "walk" in their way, you will soon be "running" with them.

Nor can you plead ignorance in the day of your spiritual and moral breakdown; for God's Word casts a light on your way, revealing the trap and warning you against the treacherous wiles of the devil.

1:20-23

Contrasting with the call of the wicked, the next section gives the cry of Wisdom. Throughout the first nine chapters of Proverbs Wisdom is personified. She is ever seeking to turn the steps of the young man from the door of folly and ignorance to the temple of knowledge and blessing. In these

verses she is presented as one crying in public places, eagerly seeking to attract the attention of the passersby. In the marts of commerce, at the gates of justice, in the centers of population, among the idlers on the streets she pleads with the simple to obey her voice. She is not always met by positive refusal, but by what is far more common and equally as dangerous: procrastination. She cries, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" But there is no response.

Others definitely refuse to listen to Wisdom's voice. Scornfully rejecting her testimony, they delight in their fancied independence of mind and demonstrate their true character by their hatred of knowledge.

1:24-33

To those who reject her cry, Wisdom addresses a warning of coming calamity, when it will be too late to heed her gracious invitation. It must be evident to all how similar this call of Wisdom is to the gospel call, with its attendant warning of coming judgment if it is rejected. It is the Old Testament way of saying, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7-8). The principle abides whether applied to sinners or saints. But surely in Wisdom's cry the "ministry of reconciliation" may be readily recognized. It is "God beseeching, man refusing / To be made forever glad." And what must the inevitable result be?

The words of Proverbs 1:32-33 will always possess a tender and precious interest for me. It was through having learned them

as a lad in the Sunday school that I was, when fourteen years of age, truly awakened by the Spirit of God to see the awful result of rejecting the call of the gospel. Unable to shake off the vivid impression of God's righteous wrath if I continued to refuse His grace, I fell down before Him confessing myself a lost, undone sinner. I found in John 3:16 the solace my conscience needed: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It was a night to be remembered forever!

If you are reading these pages but are not saved, you should remember there is not only a world in which you can say no to God, the God of all grace; there is also a world in which He will say no to you, if you meet Him as the God of judgment. There is not only a world in which Wisdom's cry can be despised; there is also a world where your cry will be despised if you reject the message of grace. There is not only a place where you, in your folly and carelessness of heart, can laugh at the entreaties of Wisdom; a day will come swiftly when Wisdom will laugh at your calamity and mock your bitter anguish. Notice that God will not laugh at the grief of one of His creatures, however abandoned and iniquitous. In these verses Wisdom speaks. That Wisdom which you now despise will then mock your hopeless wails.

What can be worse for a lost soul than to have to remember, in the abyss of woe, the gospel messages once listened to indifferently and the Word of God once taken lightly? That soul will cry in despair, "Jesus died, yet I'm in Hell! He gave Himself for sinners. He provided a way of salvation for me, but I was foolish, and spurned His grace till grace was withdrawn.

The door of mercy was closed, and now I am to be on the wrong side of that closed door forever!" Thus will Wisdom laugh at your calamity if you go out into eternity in your sin.

Nor can anyone blame God for the result of their foolishness. All must admit that it was because they hated knowledge and chose not Jehovah's fear. Turning away with the simple, they are slain; prospering in their folly, they are destroyed. So shall it be with all who despise Wisdom and ignore her entreaties.

But all who heed will dwell safely, forever quiet from fear of evil. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about" (Psalm 32:10).

Nor must we think only of the warning to the unconverted. Paul the apostle wrote to those who are secure eternally: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). It is true of saints as of sinners that we reap what we sow. The believer cannot take his own way with impunity. If he turns away from the house of Wisdom to pursue the path of folly, he too will hear the mocking laugh of that Wisdom which he had dared to despise. The chastisement of the Lord must invariably follow departure from the ways of Christ.

It is important to remember that the moment a poor sinner trusts the Lord Jesus as his Savior, his position as a criminal before the Judge is over forever. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). But the moment he is saved his responsibility as a child having to do with his Father begins; and that Father, "without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work" (1 Peter

1:17). His new responsibility springs from his new relationship. Henceforth he is to "reckon [himself] dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). If he fails to do this and allows himself to become indifferent to the will of God, he will know the rod of His discipline.

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9). The Christian is dealt with for his failures in this world. The unjust will be dealt with in that day of wrath, though even in this world sin may bring them suffering as well.

Let us remember then that "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17-18)

Proverbs 2

In the opening verses of Proverbs 2 the secret that so many have sought in vain is revealed: how to find the knowledge of God. After all, there is very little mystery about it. The Christian need not be scholarly and profound to understand the Scripture. It is a certain condition of soul, rather than a well-equipped mind, that is required. God has given His Word. He exhorts us to search it in dependence on His Holy Spirit, who guides us into all truth.

2:1-5

These verses do not suggest a careless reading or cursory examination of the Scriptures. The soul is exhorted to "receive" these words. The sayings of God must be received into the heart where they are to be stored. The ear must be inclined to wisdom; the heart applied to understanding; the mouth crying after knowledge; and the voice lifted up for spiritual intelligence. The whole being is thus devoted to the search for the truth. The earnest seeker must dig into the Word of God as a man searching for silver or hidden treasure. He will not be content with surface findings. When God's words are valued more than our necessary food, the result is certain: "Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (5).

Diligent Bible study is on the decline even among those who value precious truth. Reading books about the Bible is very different from searching the Word for oneself. Notes and expositions may be helpful. But these works of uninspired men must not be permitted to take the place of the sure Word of God. Such one-sided study will cause men to draw their

thoughts from one another instead of from God. This will result in dry intellectuality rather than fresh, vigorous spirituality.

2:6-9

Searching for truth must always be followed by walking in the truth that is found. God will defend those who earnestly desire to live in the power of His truth. He will guard them and preserve their way. By diligently seeking His truth they will daily increase in the knowledge of every good path. This is very different from merely holding to a certain theological system or school of Biblical thought. It is not so much "holding the truth," as being held by that truth. There is a vast difference between the two states.

There are many "vain talkers and deceivers" who boast of their knowledge of prophetic and dispensational teaching. Yet their unguarded ways and careless life bring shame on these solemn and precious truths. As they continue in this life their conscience is seared and their heart is hardened until the most searching ministry fails to make any impression on them.

2:10-19

The proper attitude for one who really holds the truth is set forth in these verses. When wisdom and knowledge are embraced they give discretion that preserves from evil and guards from false ways.

Two enemies are seen attacking the young man: the evil man and the strange woman. "The evil man" is the man who walks in the pride of his heart and in independence of God. This way of life seems very attractive to the young, appealing to their natural mind. To follow the evil man is to leave the straight

paths of righteousness and to walk in the ways of darkness (13). But when one receives the truth of God and allows it to control his life he will be delivered from the perverse paths of the evil man.

The Word of God is also given to deliver the young man from "the strange woman" ("adulteress" in NIV). Again and again we catch glimpses of this strange woman flitting in and out of the book of Proverbs. Who is she? Does she speak of anything more than impurity and uncleanness? The primary meaning is clear on the face of the passages that concern her. As the enemy of morality and virtue, she seeks to ensnare the young and unwary. Forsaking the guide of her youth and forgetting the covenant of her God, she gives herself up to impure pleasures and soul-destroying lusts. Those who have been ensnared by the strange woman must live with the consequences of their unclean ways. Even sincere repentance will not erase the shameful memories.

Could there be a secondary meaning in these many warnings concerning the strange woman? In the evil man we saw independence from God—rationalism gone wild. Whereas the strange woman represents false religion that eventually will be headed up in "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots" (Revelation 17:5). How devious are her ways! How subtle and deceptive her solicitations! And how truly can it be said that "her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead."

2:20-22

Only the Word of God can preserve the soul from her corruptions and keep one's feet on the paths of life. These verses, like the rest of the Old Testament, speak of earthly

rewards since the heavenly rewards were not revealed yet. Here we read of the earthly hope of the godly Israelite: He will dwell in the land when the lawless Gentiles and the transgressing Israelites will be rooted out of it.

Ours is a far better portion. We have an inheritance reserved for us in Heaven where Christ the forerunner has entered for us. How much greater is our responsibility to see that our steps are ordered according to the Word of the living God!

Proverbs 3

The exhortation of Proverbs 3:1 is important to all of us. Many see long life as an evidence of the special blessing of the Lord. “Let thine heart keep my commandments,” is a much needed admonition.

3:1-2

These verses speak of far more than submission to duty. They suggest loving devotion to the will of God. The Psalmist said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). And Ezra “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). This preparation of the heart of man is truly from the Lord. It is sadly lacking in many who profess the truth while their outward ways testify otherwise. Love is the motivation for true service to the Lord. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15) are Jesus’ words; and He goes even deeper when He says, “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14:23). This is the heart that delights to follow God’s ways when His mind is revealed.

3:3-4

Lovingkindness will commend the truth, but an acrimonious, judging spirit will turn the timid away. Both lovingkindness and truth are to be bound around the neck, in this way displayed in the sight of man; they should be written on the heart, thus finding favor with God.

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The law was truth, but it was truth without grace. Since truth with grace has come by Jesus Christ

the believer is exhorted to be "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). "Speaking the truth" is a one word participle in the original. J. N. Darby suggested coining a word to express it—*truthing*. the word implies more than merely speaking the truth. It suggests being characterized by the truth; but all must be in love. A hard and fast intolerant spirit makes the truth like a series of legal enactments. This spirit is harshly critical of those who differ and thus is far removed from the Spirit of truth.

3:5-6

These verses hold both a solemn admonition and precious assurance for all who would be guided in the way of peace. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26), but happy is the man whose trust is in the Lord. Self-confidence is like leaning on a broken reed. God has given His Word to guide in every detail of life so our sanctification might be by the truth. It is therefore inexcusable to lean on our own poor finite intelligence.

If we acknowledge Him in all our ways, He who is faithful has promised to direct our paths. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22).

3:7-8

To be wise in our own eyes is the very opposite of not leaning on our own understanding. Where the Lord is truly feared, evil will be hated. "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). So strength and freshness will characterize the soul. It is impossible to have fellowship with God while walking in that which His word condemns. The path of blessing is the path of obedience. If He

has spoken, the submissive soul will not stay to question but obey implicitly.

3:9-10

The Lord becomes the object of the heart that has departed from evil. He is not merely given first place. It is a poor thing when Christ only has the first place in the soul. He must have all if one is to walk with Him in holy joy and unhindered communion. The Israelite brought the first fruits as an acknowledgment of Jehovah's sole ownership of the land of Canaan. He had said, "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine" (Leviticus 25:23). So, by honoring God with his substance, the believer gladly admits that all is the Lord's to be used as He directs.

But God in His great goodness pledges that a steward who honors Him will not lack in barn or wine press. Many a saint goes on in comparative poverty because of his indifference to the principle here laid down. All comes from God; yet He graciously receives from His redeemed and delights to be the greatest giver. No one will find Him in their debt.

3:11-12

These words form the text for the apostle's exhortation in Hebrews 12 on the Lord's discipline. The writer of Hebrews expounded them by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; so we turn to that precious portion of the Word. We need not trust our own thoughts, however much we seek to be subject to Scripture, when we have the mind of the Spirit fully revealed.

After having traced the path of faith through the pages of the Old Testament, the apostle admonished us to lay aside everything that would hinder our progress. This enables us to

overcome sin that attacks our steps while we run with patience the race set before us. Christ Himself is called faith's "author and perfecter" (Hebrews 12:2, NIV). God would have the heart occupied with Him whose own path of shame and suffering is over and who is now "set down at the right hand of the throne of God." To "consider him" is the antidote for weariness and faintness (3).

The apostle goes on to show that trial and difficulty must not be considered a strange thing. All are but a part of our discipline. He cites the passage we have now come to in the book of Proverbs. The difference of wording results from his quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek version generally in use at that time. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loyeth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Hebrews 12:5-6)

In the book of Job a similar verse is found, credited to Eliphaz the Temanite, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17).

It is not a new truth that the Lord exercises discipline among His saints. In fact, it is because they are His own that He does chasten. This word does not necessarily mean "punish," though chastening is often directly retributive. But the primary meaning suggests discipline. God is a God of order. His family must be under His discipline. Therefore the apostle says, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7) Affliction is not an evidence that the heart of God is not towards me. All is part of that discipline which an all-wise

Father sees to be necessary. In fact, if I am not the subject of this disciplinary training, I am not one of His at all! "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all [that is, all sons] are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons"(8).

Nor is the Lord's discipline selfish or uncertain as ours often is in regard to our own households.

> *We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure [or, as seemed good to them]; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness (Hebrews 12:9-10).*

Earthly parents do not always have the direct good of their children in view when they discipline them. Often we may be motivated more by the disturbance of our personal comfort than by the child's need of correction! In such a case we chasten after our own pleasure. Our God and Father never deals this way with us. He always has our good before Him. Even so, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

May God give us grace neither to faint beneath His chastening as though it were some strange thing nor to despise it, ignoring the Lord's sovereignty. May we rather be exercised by it so we may bear the peaceable fruits of righteousness and be partakers of His holiness.

3:13-18

Men will brave untold dangers and exhaust human ingenuity in their search for precious metals and sparkling jewels; but treasures of far greater value can be found by following Wisdom's ways. She offers length of days, riches, and honor to those who find her. Coupled with these, she gives what earthly treasures often detract from: peace and quietness of soul. The ways of Wisdom are the ways of Christ—the paths on which the Word of God guides the feet of the obedient soul. Such ways are indeed "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace"(17). To find true wisdom is to feed on the tree of life. The pleasures that worldly men enjoy cannot be compared with the pleasures of Wisdom's ways.

3:19-20

Surely it is immeasurable grace that the One who upholds all things by the word of His power concerns Himself with the steps of His creatures. He offers us that wisdom by which He founded the earth to guide us on our pilgrim pathway. The Word of God is but another expression of this wisdom that spoke worlds into existence, and it is "written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

3:21-24

Someone has said, "It is not enough that one hold the truth, if the truth hold not him." We must take hold of what God has revealed so that it controls the heart and life. Thus, to "keep sound wisdom and discretion" helps one lay hold on what is really life. Wisdom and discretion ornament the neck with grace and guide the disciple in the way of truth so that his foot

will not stumble. Rest and refreshment also become the portion of all who esteem the Word of God above all the thoughts of men.

3:25-26

Only the obedient soul can lay hold of the precious promises of Scripture. The willful and disobedient have no such right. Those who walk obediently do not need to fear disaster or the ruin of the wicked. Jehovah will be their confidence and will keep them safe.

3:27-28

To owe no one anything but love is a command that is binding on every child of God (Romans 13:8). To withhold another's due when able to pay shows that covetousness is in the heart and is gaining control over the life. The poor look forward to payments to supply the necessities of life. Real suffering results when these payments are needlessly deferred by those more materially blessed. This often leads to bitterness and hatred. Such conduct on the part of a Christian is in every way to be deplored. Money owed to another is not mine. To use it for my own purposes is dishonest. God's eye sees every such action, and He has said, "Be sure your sin will find you out!" (Numbers 32:23)

3:29

The abuse of trust is an abominable thing in the sight of the holy God. Misplaced confidence has ruined many. What a dreadful testimony when the one who has abused that confidence professes to be a Christian! This hypocrisy furthers

skepticism in the unbeliever and ruins the influence that the faithful might have had.

3:30

Even if someone has harmed me, Christ said, "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Matthew 5:39). Under law, it was a sin to strive with another without adequate ground; but under grace I am to deal with my debtors as God has dealt with me.

3:31-35

Asaph was envious of the prosperity of the wicked until he went into the sanctuary of the Lord. There he was given to understand their end. Then his heart was grieved, and he admitted his folly (Psalm 73). Seeking to satisfy their souls with the evanescent things of earth, the wicked remain ignorant of the counsels of Jehovah, which are known only to the righteous. Their end will be anything but enviable, for the curse of the Lord is in their houses, and He scorns their haughty pretensions. His blessing abides on the habitation of the just, and He "giveth grace unto the lowly." Those who are content to abase themselves and walk in the steps of Christ will be despised by those who are wise in their own conceit. But the humble will inherit true glory at last, when the false glitter of worldly fame has faded away forever, and "shame shall be the promotion of fools."

Proverbs 4

Solomon's early training is touchingly alluded to in the first four verses of this chapter.

4:1-4

As his mother's only son, Solomon was tenderly loved and cared for; as the object of his father's heart, he had been carefully instructed in the law of the Lord, and had profited by it.

The unhappy history of Solomon's half-brother Adonijah shows how indebted Solomon was to his mother's counsel and his father's instruction. David had never intervened in Adonijah's activities by asking him, "Why hast thou done so?" (I Kings 1:6) The value of parental discipline cannot be overestimated. To be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is a blessing beyond appreciation. It is sad that David treated these two sons so differently! But it is the responsibility of the children that is dwelt on in these verses rather than that of the parents. Solomon, despite his aberrations, knew well the value of wise and godly instruction.

4:5-7

The soul not only needs knowledge, but the wisdom and intelligence to use it correctly. This is the principal lesson Solomon impresses on the young. Wisdom will preserve from folly and guard those who truly love her.

4:8-9

In the previous chapter it is stated that "shame shall be the promotion of fools" (35). Even in this evil world wisdom leads

to honor and true promotion. But among the children of God how valuable is a man of wisdom! Mere knowledge may inflate pride and render its possessor contemptible; but the word of wisdom is always in season. Even though it is often rejected, it is at least appreciated. Often the unspiritual man's conscience assents to the wisdom even though he may be determined to refuse it.

4:10-12

The book of Ecclesiastes, as noted in our introductory chapter, portrays the wrong paths into which the royal writer had wandered. He temporarily forsook the Word which had been the guide of his youth and selfishly sought his own pleasures. It is not necessary to follow him in paths of folly to learn their end. The book of Proverbs marks out right paths—the way of wisdom. All who walk in these paths will find their steps unhindered and will be able to run without stumbling.

4:13-17

The principle in these verses is of prime importance and cannot be repeated too often. The child of God is called to separation from all evildoers. He who knows what is in the darkness has described their unholy ways. We are called to holiness and are to avoid the evildoers' path. To trifle with them is most harmful and will greatly hinder spiritual progress. The true pilot may not know every rock or reef, but his wisdom consists in taking the safe channel. So the Christian need not make himself aware of all the evils of the day, but simply take the safe path as described in verses 18-19.

4:18-19

There is a marked difference between the two paths presented in these verses. The path of the righteous leads upward to that city lit by the glory of God where the Lamb is the only lamp needed. This way shines brighter and brighter as the uncreated glory from Heaven illumines it with splendor. Who would not cry, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Numbers 23:10)? A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory is at the end of that path.

How great the contrast when we turn to the way of the lawless. As their road nears the pit of woe, darkness begins to envelop it. Even the light of nature and revelation are obscured so that men stumble on blindly without knowing what causes them to fall. The end we well know—eternal banishment from the presence of God. With two such paths from which to choose we do well to heed the admonition of verses 20-22.

4:20-22

The Spirit of Christ in the psalmist could say, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). The heart controlled by Scripture assures a walk in the truth. God desires truth and wisdom to control our innermost being. This is when the words of knowledge indeed become life and health to the one who keeps them.

4:23

This verse displays a scientific knowledge and accuracy far beyond Solomon's times. Harvey's great discovery of the circulation of the blood revolutionized medical thought. Yet here it is calmly taken for granted and used to illustrate a

spiritual truth. The heart is the center of the physical system out of which flow the issues of life. The heart, or soul, is also the moral and spiritual center. It must be jealously guarded so only that which is edifying comes forth.

4:24

The mouth and heart are intimately connected for out of the heart's abundance the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). A perverse mouth indicates one who is not in subjection to God. When God's Word has its place in the soul, the lips reveal it.

4:25-27

It is not only the mouth that shows the state of the heart. The feet likewise will walk according to the condition of the soul. Forgetting the things behind, we are exhorted to press on to the prize of the calling of God on high. The eye should be fixed on the goal, looking straight ahead. For us, this goal is Christ. The plowman cuts a straight furrow when his eye is on a distant point directly before him. In the same way the Christian's path will be true when the eye of the heart is fixed on the Lord Jesus in glory. But this involves earnestly establishing one's ways in accordance with the truth. Evil is to be judged and departed from, the foot turning neither to the right nor the left. Once the mind of God is known it is to be faithfully acted on, irrespective of self-interest or the unenlightened thoughts of others.

To walk with God means to be misjudged and misunderstood by those who are ignorant of the power of God and the value of His truth. But if one has God's approval the opinion of others should not influence him. The Christian need only be concerned with implicitly obeying God's Word.

Proverbs 5

Additional instruction is given in Proverbs 5 concerning the strange woman warned against in Chapter 2. It is a solemn subject if this dangerously seductive woman pictures false religion with its snares and allurements. Even in its simple, primary meaning, this admonition is of great importance. If any are entrapped, it is not for lack of warning, but for willful neglect of instruction.

5:1-2

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the need for more than casual attention to the words of wisdom is enforced. To hear with no intention of obeying, is not what is contemplated; but rather to bow the ear in order to regard discretion and keep knowledge. The servant that knew his lord's will and did not do it was to be beaten with many stripes (Luke 12:47). When God stoops to make His will known, it should be considered a privilege to obey, not merely a duty.

5:3-6

Fair and plausible are the words of the stranger-temptress; dark and terrible the ending of association with her. She practices her awful avocation today as well, and thousands become her victims. Like the harlot-church described in the book of Revelation, she seduces and deceives. She turns the heart away from the simplicity of the paths of truth and leads it to death and Hell. She has many devices to delude the unwary; her ways are devious so their evil direction will not be known. Nothing is more attractive to those who refuse

Wisdom's words than the specious pleas of this deceptive system. The only safety is in clinging to the words of God.

5:7-14

To learn by painful experience, if the Word of God is not followed, is a bitter and solemn thing. God is not mocked; what is sown must be reaped. The unsteady hand, the confused brain, the bleared eye, premature age, and weakened powers, regretful days and nights of folly that can never be forgotten: these are a few of the physical results of failing to heed the advice of wisdom. In the spiritual realm parallel results may be: lack of discernment, weakened spiritual sensitivities, undependable behavior, wasted time, and loss at the judgment seat of Christ. These are some of the sad results of refusing the path of separation from apostate religion in this day of Christ's rejection.

Throughout this collection of Proverbs, the strange woman is looked on as an intruder from the outside. She is not seen as a daughter of Israel who has strayed from the path of virtue. The law declared there was to be no harlot among the women of the chosen people. The temptresses entered from the surrounding countries to seduce the young men of the separated nation. Therefore the strange woman was not strange in the sense of peculiar; she was a stranger who plied her tawdry arts to deceive those who should be holy to the Lord. But the moral state of Israel had become so low that even the daughters of the people of God had fallen into the degradation of the heathen (Proverbs 2:17). They had forsaken the guide of their youth, and forgotten the agreement they had made with God. So they were viewed as outsiders, having no place in the congregation of the Lord.

5:15-19

These verses picture sanctified wedded love in contrast to the godless ways presented in the previous verses. For us, marriage represents the mystical union between Christ and the church. Every Christian home should be a little picture of the relationship of our glorified Head with the members of His body. How holy then is that earthly association which speaks of such exalted heavenly mysteries. “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). How much precious teaching in the New Testament, particularly in the Epistles, flows from this truth. Husbands and wives are urged to dwell together according to knowledge so their prayers will not be hindered (1 Peter 3:1-7). What a test this is! When husband and wife can kneel and pray together with joy and confidence, the home will be what God desires; but there is something radically wrong when their actions hinder this communion with each other and the Lord.

5:21

This fact is just what the soul needs to realize the solemnity of being in this world for God. His eyes are on all our ways. Nothing escapes that holy gaze. All is naked and open before Him. He weighs and ponders every thought and word and action. Nothing is too insignificant for His notice; nothing too great for His attention. At the judgment seat of Christ He will make known His estimate of it all. In that day how many of us would give worlds, if we possessed them, to have been more faithful on earth!

5:22-23

Certain retribution will follow the disobedient. The very sins he delights in are the links of the chain that will bind him forever. Having refused instruction in life, he will die without it; he will be left to go astray in the folly his soul loved. Dying in his sins, he goes out into the darkness, where the light he refused will never shine on him again!

Proverbs 6

Even the unregenerate would avoid many failures if they followed the instruction of this chapter in their lives and their businesses.

6:1-5

Pledging security for another has been the downfall of many who might have been comfortable and prosperous otherwise. In these verses the one trapped in this way is urged to deliver himself if possible, before the penalty has to be paid.

Unlikely as it may seem on the surface, pride is generally the incentive to offering security. A desire to be thought well of or considered financially secure has led many a man to offer security— even to one who was quite unable to assume such a debt and still meet the needs of those dependent on him. An easygoing disposition leads some to make thoughtless pledges that could lead to their ruin. However one becomes entrapped, the command in these verses should be heeded; one must humble himself and confess that he has undertaken more than righteousness and foresight would advise. Far better a little temporary embarrassment and misunderstanding, even ill will, than to find out later that others have to suffer for the maintenance of a foolish and sinful pride.

6:6-8

Prudence and forethought (not to be confused with anxiety) are commendable virtues that may be learned from observing the ant. Carelessness is not faith; it is a gross presumption to be a sluggard and then to expect divine provision in the hour of need. In this as in all else reaping follows sowing. Diligence

and carefulness are commanded and commended by the Lord, and both virtues honor Him; slothfulness on the part of a Christian is a reproach on His name.

Some critics sneer at "Solomon's grain-eating ant" who stores her food in the harvest for future use. Solomon is supposed to have mistaken the eggs of the ant for grain. But it is now fully demonstrated that he was wiser than his critics. In Palestine there is a species of ant that is not carnivorous. It feeds on grain and does indeed store its food in harvest-time as Solomon declared. Scripture here, as always, is correct and exact. Short-sighted man should accept his limitations and at least take for granted that the Bible is right until proven otherwise!

6:9-11

Sleeping when one should be working is inconsistent with the command to eat bread by the sweat of one's face (Genesis 3:19). No one has a right to count on God to provide for his daily needs when he has not been characterized by diligence. Poverty follows laziness; likewise in a spiritual sense, endless misery follows the one who refuses to be awakened to the things of God in this age of grace. Judson said, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber and thou shalt wake in hell to sleep no more forever!"

6:12-15

The one who is careless in his own affairs is likely to interfere too much in the lives of others. Having nothing to do, he becomes a lazy busybody occupied with foolishness. His mouth is perverse; his eyes disguise the words his lips speak; his feet and hands call attention to things better left

unnoticed; for in his heart are perverse and mischievous intentions. He becomes a sower of discord. He scatters evil words that yield a harvest of sorrow that can never be fully destroyed. There were people like this among the Thessalonian saints. The apostle Paul warned the godly to keep away from them so these evildoers would be ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:11-14).

6:16-19

Jehovah's judgment of the evil speaker is set forth in no uncertain terms. Seven things are abominable; six he hates in addition to the one already noticed. That one is put in as though it were the worst of them all.

God always detested a proud look. The one who has learned at the feet of Christ, who is meek and lowly of heart, does not have haughty eyes. The twelfth Song of Degrees gives the words of one who has been discipled in Christ's school: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me" (Psalm 131:1). This is the attitude that is well-pleasing to the Lord who says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor [or, lowly] and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

A lying tongue is contrary to God who is truth and who desires truth in the inner man. False words indicate a deceitful heart.

God links a prideful nature and a lying tongue with "hands that shed innocent blood." The slanderer who uses his tongue to destroy the good name of another is similar to the murderer who uses wicked hands to kill.

An evil scheming heart is the root of all the evils mentioned. All unholy words and doings proceed out of the heart. So feet that rush to mischief are mentioned immediately. They follow where the heart has already gone.

The last two are often found together: a lying witness and one that stirs up dissension. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) The Lord abhors the talebearer who mars that happy unity by spreading evil insinuations.

The only way any of us can avoid these hateful ways is to earnestly cleave to God and His Word, that we may be sanctified by truth.

6:20-22

Obedience to parental discipline is obedience to God. When godly parents seek to bring up their children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4) they are laying a solid foundation for eternity. Their wise instruction becomes practical and precious. In any place or any activity, the word of wisdom will be sweet and will keep one from stumbling.

6:23-29

The young man’s particular snare is referred to again in these verses. The purifying influence of the Word of God will protect him from the flattering lips of the strange woman. This false stranger would lure him from the path of truth and virtue to falsity and ruin. The young man is earnestly warned to beware of her fascinations.

We are reminded again that the heart must be guarded in order to keep the feet from forbidden paths. Any tampering

with impurity will lead to both spiritual and physical sorrow and poverty. The adulteress will endeavor to entrap with her fascinating glances. The one whose heart is not protected by the sanctifying truth of God will be overcome.

Sinful thoughts should not be entertained. How many upright lives have been damaged by what started as a thoughtless familiarity. The relationship was allowed to develop step by step into adultery and ended in lifelong sorrow. No other sin, except murder, leaves such a dreadful stain. See David's case in 2 Samuel 11-12.

6:30-35

In clear language God faithfully warns us of the awful consequences of the sin that brought the flood and will bring the fire! Men may forgive and forget other wrongs. This one is never forgotten. No one hates a thief stealing to satisfy his hunger. Both the law of Jehovah and the law of man demand restitution if the thief is arrested. But at least it is possible to make amends, even if it takes all he has. But the adulterer can never make amends to the wronged husband or the partner of the sin. Repentance toward God will not erase the reproach. The marks of the wound and the dishonor will remain to haunt one through the years. The rage of the rightly jealous husband will not be appeased by gifts however great, or apologies however earnest and sincere.

He who ignores these warnings and deliberately goes on trifling with sin is without excuse. The only safe course is to discipline the mind to bring every sinful thought into subjection and allow the truth of God to control the heart (2 Corinthians 10:5). This is the only way to "flee.. .youthful lusts,"

(2 Timothy 2:22)—those "fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). This is how Joseph resisted in circumstances far more tempting than those in which David fell. He responded "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9) May we also be preserved from temptation by allowing God's Word to control our lives.

Proverbs 7

Only God can correctly estimate the depravity of the human heart. He knows its perverseness and the need for continued warning. Therefore this entire chapter continues with the subject that we have been considering. The strange woman's ways and behavior are graphically delineated to save the youth from her snare. If he chooses to follow her now, he does so with his eyes fully opened.

7:1-5

Constant dwelling on the Word of God preserves from sin. Notice that the Word is to be bound and written on both hand and heart. This involves far more than cursory reading of the Scriptures. It is making God's Word an integral part of one's life by daily feeding on it that preserves the soul.

Satan's most powerful weapon against the young is flattery. Wisdom and understanding can preserve the youth from this snare by teaching him to mistrust flatterers and to judge himself correctly. Then he can discern the lying words of any who would seek to ruin him by means of insincere praise.

7:6-23

This portion of the chapter requires little comment. An eye-witness clearly describes a scene that has been duplicated millions of times. It is as relevant today as in the days of Solomon. The young man should consider it carefully, and be warned of the dangers of trusting in his own heart, and departing from the living God.

The strange women described here can be seen as an illustration of the false, apostate church. She is loud and stubborn, and her devious ways ensnare those who otherwise would never seek association with her. The vision of Revelation 17 may well be studied in connection with this chapter.

Finally, the author of Proverbs reveals the dreadful fate of the youth who foolishly followed the strange woman. Shameful death will be the sad result of refusing instruction and listening to the words of the flatterer.

7:24-27

With enduring patience God continues to instruct all who hear and desire to have an understanding heart. In this passage, as in all Scripture, we hear the very voice of God and find every word profitable. Happy the youth who keeps these instructions. He will be preserved from the bitterness of remorse that so many have suffered when ignoring God's warnings.

Proverbs 8

This meditation on Wisdom's ways is a welcome relief from the folly and sin described in the previous chapter. This is especially true when the anointed eye discerns that wisdom as the uncreated Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God! Although the feminine form is used throughout, it is clear that in the latter part of the chapter it is Jesus who is before us.

8:1-7

Wisdom does not wait for men to seek her. She seeks to draw the simple from paths of error to the temple of knowledge and understanding. With yearning heart she takes her stand in the marketplace, the paths of pleasure, the courts of judgment, and the schools of learning. Anywhere and everywhere men are found, she is there— her cry and entreaty sounding above all the bustle of life. (See 1:20-23.)

Wisdom incarnate is to be found in our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word. Similarly the instructions of Wisdom are to be found in the written Word. The only true and lasting wisdom and knowledge are contained in this precious volume which "holy men of God [wrote] as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). Only true and right things are recorded there. Even when the sins of men and women are sharply delineated in all their grossness it is so we may learn from them.

Man may quibble; infidelity may sneer; pseudo-scholarship may reject; but He who cannot lie has declared, "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). It is an unhappy man who

turns from this perfect wisdom to the vagaries of the human mind!

8:8-9

These verses are faith's answer to the critic who prates of contradictions and errors in the inspired Word of God. Modesty alone should suggest that the fault might be in the reader—not in the Word. But man's vanity and pride will not admit such a conclusion. Yet it will soon be proven to be true; for "one jot or one tittle [the smallest letter, or vowel-point] shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). How soon difficulties vanish when faith is exercised! Seemingly insurmountable objections are swept away in a moment when the light of Heaven shines into the soul and on the Scriptures. Jesus opened both the Scriptures and the understanding of the two with whom He walked to Emmaus. Difficulties vanish like mist before the rays of the sun when understanding is enlightened by the Word. "They are all plain to him that understandeth," (Proverbs 8:9) for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Psalm 25:14).

8:10-11

Incomparable treasure is found in the sacred Scriptures, which are relentlessly attacked by supercilious and unspiritual critics. The best writings of the best men can not compare with Scripture, for it is the very breathings of God. In Job 28 we have the account of the patriarch's search for wisdom. All the precious metals and jewels of earth can not equal it, "for the price of wisdom is above rubies" (Job 28:18). Job finds it when he turns from everything on or under the earth to God Himself.

8:12-13

As noted earlier, wisdom is looked at as an essential part of deity. It is the very character of God—that character perfectly displayed in Christ. Evil, pride, and folly are all hateful to Him who is light and cannot abide the darkness.

8:14-16

These verses do not indicate that rulers always act according to understanding, but that none rule at all except by God's appointment. "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4:17). This gives the man of faith perfect rest in the midst of all the changing political scenes of earth. He can submit to any form of government or any character of chief magistrate because "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1).

8:17-21

Wisdom delights to reward those who seek her early in life, as in Solomon's case. It is important to bear in mind that it is wisdom— and not God as such—that is referred to here. God also "is a re-warder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). But it would be incorrect to limit His love only to those who return that love. Verse 17 refers to the active love of Wisdom.

In verses 18-21 we see the treasures Wisdom gives to the one who loves her. The gifts bestowed are unspeakably precious and beyond all human valuation. She gives them lavishly to the diligent seeker who has learned to love her for her own sake. Apart from her the feet will stray in folly's paths.

8:22-31

From this point on, the anointed eye loses sight of all else and is fixed on Christ; for it is He who is now presented for the contemplation of our souls. We see Christ as the uncreated Word, yet the begotten Son by eternal generation—titles admittedly paradoxical, but after all distinctly Scriptural.

Some have suggested that the term *only begotten* implies a period, however remote, when the Son did not exist. John's Gospel clearly refutes this, for "the same was in the beginning with God" (Johnl:2). He was begotten, not in the sense of beginning life, but as being of one nature and substance with the Father. There was never a moment in the past eternity when He was not with the Father. The apostle himself declares that the mystery is impossible to explain.

The Spirit carries us back beyond the beginning of Genesis 1:1 to that beginning described in John 1:1. The Word who had no beginning was the Wisdom of God from eternity past. Proverbs 8:22 is a scene of fellowship—Jehovah possessed Him. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Wisdom was the object of Jehovah's delight from everlasting.

"No man knoweth the Son, but the Father" (Matthew 11:27). This is why the devout heart can rest and adore where the skeptic seeks in vain for rational explanations of a mystery beyond human understanding.

This picture of creation implies the unity of the divine nature. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). God's thoughts are above ours. Our best human language is a poor vehicle for the expression of such wondrous truths. Christ is eternally the Son, yet truly the Begotten.

Creation is ascribed to the Son elsewhere: "Without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). "All things were created by him, and for him…and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17). He is superior to all creation because by Him the Father brought all things into being. Daily His Father's delight, He shared in that display of power, always rejoicing in His presence (Proverbs 8:30). It is amazing grace that His delights were with the fallen sons of men. The love of His heart was set on those who did not deserve it (31). He speaks of the fallen sons of Adam—lost and guilty sinners.

> *Ere God had built the mountains,*
> *Or raised the fruitful hills;*
> *Before He filled the fountains,*
> *That feed the running rills;*
> *In Thee, from everlasting,*
> *The wonderful I AM*
> *Found pleasures never wasting,*
> *And Wisdom is Thy name.*
>
> *When, like a tent to dwell in,*
> *He spread the skies abroad, And swathed about the swelling*
> *Of Ocean's mighty flood,*
> *He wrought by weight and measure;*
> *And Thou wast with Him then:*
> *Thyself the Father's pleasure,*
> *And Thine, the sons of men.*
>
> *And couldst Thou be delighted*
> *With creatures such as we,*
> *Who, when we saw Thee, slighted*
> *And nailed Thee to a tree?*
> *Unfathomable wonder!*

> *And mystery divine!*
> *The voice that speaks in thunder*
> *Says, 'Sinner, I am thine.'*

(Cowper)

8:32-36

The earnest request of these verses is based on Wisdom's declaration of love for men. Those who refuse instruction and spurn understanding trample on divine affection and harden the heart against divine grace.

We are given strong incentives to heed the voice of Wisdom. They include blessing, life, and the loving favor of the Lord. The one who refuses to listen sins against his own soul and seals his own destruction.

Proverbs 9

A final contrast between Wisdom and Folly is described in this chapter. The figure of the previous chapter is still used. Wisdom is likened to a prudent woman inviting the traveler to enter her home, where true knowledge is given to all who sincerely seek it. Folly takes her stand in a similar way, urging all to turn in to her. She offers "the pleasures of sin for a season" to those who yield to her entreaties.

9:1-2

The Word of God as a whole, and Proverbs in particular, is Wisdom's temple. Abundant provision has been made for the instruction and blessing of those who enter. All that man requires for his guidance through the mazes of his life on earth can be found here. A well-furnished table is spread before all who desire spiritual sustenance and cheer. Millions have feasted there, yet the supply is still inexhaustible.

9:3-6

Nor does Wisdom wait for men to seek her out. In the present dispensation of grace God is using His ambassadors to beseech men to be reconciled to Himself; He does not wait until they begin to pray, but actually condescends to implore them to turn from their sin to His beloved Son. So, here, the handmaids of Wisdom are found in public places, entreating those who lack true character to turn in and partake of the bread that strengthens and the wine that cheers. The happy man who obeys the gracious invitation and forsakes the way of the foolish lays hold of true life.

9:7-9

Only the truly exercised will heed the call of Wisdom. It is useless to plead with the empty, pompous, and self-satisfied scorner. He pursues his own way until the judgment he ridiculed falls at last, and he is crushed beneath it.

The more shallow and empty a man is, the less willing he is to listen to godly counsel; whereas, the truly wise are glad to learn from any who can correct and instruct. As a rule, the less a man knows, the more he thinks he knows. The more he really does know, the more he realizes his ignorance and his limitations. Hence the value of godly counsel from those who seek to be exercised by God's Word. Reproof will only be wasted on the scorner. He will delight in ridiculing all who endeavor to turn him from his folly, however pure their motives.

These three verses would seem to be parenthetical, explaining the reason why the invitation of Wisdom's maidens meets with such opposite responses.

9:10-12

In these verses we read the continued call of Wisdom. The scorner may idly boast of advanced knowledge because he is free from godly restraint. But true wisdom can only be found in the fear of the Lord and true understanding in the knowledge of holy things. (The word *holy* is in the plural.) This alone makes for what is really life. Apart from the knowledge of God, life is mere existence at best, with eternal darkness beyond it.

Men do not put God in their debt by answering the call of Wisdom, as though they were condescending to do so. If they

are wise, it is for their own advantage—not His. He is seeking their happiness and blessing. God finds joy in the gladness of His children; nevertheless, it is for their own good that men should heed the call of Wisdom.

Nor will God be the loser if the scorner persists in his senseless and foolhardy course. Both in this life and the next, the folly of this foolish one will be made known to himself and others.

9:13-18

The unhappy contrast to the call of Wisdom is described in the rest of the chapter. Folly also has her temple, and many are devoted to her. Men are so ready to give heed to Folly that she does not need anyone to entreat them to enter her house. She is represented as sitting at the entrance, enticing passersby to turn in to her abode of sin and shame. Many guests enter but few return: for her house is but an entryway to the pit. "The dead are there; and… her guests are in the depths of hell" (18). Illicit pleasures charm for a time and ensnare the simple. Yet in the end the anguished soul must bow in bitterness that will never be alleviated. He will be forced at last to confess his dreadful mistake of turning from the call of Wisdom to seek the deceitful allurements of Folly.

One who tried the way of Folly wrote before he died:

> *My days are in the yellow leaf;*
> *The flowers and fruits of love are gone;*
> *The worm, the canker, and the grief*
> *Are mine alone.*

(Byron)

Proverbs 10

This chapter begins the second division of the book, which is strictly proverbial. Previously we have been listening to Wisdom's exhortation to enter her house. She called us to heed the instructions gathered together for our enlightenment regarding suitable behavior in all circumstances. The seductive voice of Folly would turn us aside from this right course.

Happy the man who refuses Folly and, attracted by Wisdom, conscientiously seeks to follow her words. This is particularly true of the young man, for this is the book for the direction and guidance of youth.

Scripture itself abounds with illustrious examples of almost every proverb before us. A reference will generally be given in the notes to some person or circumstance demonstrating the truth of the saying in question. These references show the fullness and richness of the Word of God and the remarkable way in which every part of it is linked up with the book of Proverbs.

10:1

The keynote struck in this verse is referred to throughout the book of Proverbs. The son who is characterized by wisdom brings joy to his father as in the case of Solomon himself (1 Chronicles 22:12; 2 Chronicles 1:7-12). On the other hand it is the mother who feels most keenly the folly of her child. See the record of Esau in Genesis 26:34-35; 27:46.

10:2

God has not abdicated His throne as the moral governor of the universe; therefore reaping follows sowing, as surely as night follows day. “As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool” (Jeremiah 17:11). On the other hand righteousness, however much one may be called on to suffer for it in this world, “delivereth from death,” when that death (as in the case of the flood) is an evidence of God’s judgment. In the book of Esther, Haman illustrates the first half of this proverb and Mordecai exemplifies the righteous.

10:3

Whatever his outward circumstances are, the soul of the righteous is lifted above them all and finds cause to rejoice in the midst of tribulation. The lawless have no such confidence. Their desire is often taken away in a moment, just when they are beginning to feel comfortable. The triumphant song of Habakkuk (3:17-19) fitly illustrates the first clause of Proverbs 10:3, and the fate of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21) the second.

10:4

Scripture never commends slothfulness; instead it commands the Christian to be zealous. The disorderly among the Thessalonians had evidently forgotten this command (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12). The apostle wrote urging them “that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.” Faith and laziness do not mingle. What is sometimes miscalled faith is really presumption. Diligence is the fit companion of faith. The Moabitess Ruth demonstrated both qualities. She took the

place of the poor and the stranger among the gleaners in the fields of Boaz, but was exalted in due time (Ruth 2-4).

10:5

The principle abides whether in relation to time or eternity. The hour of opportunity if used profitably indicates wisdom; if neglected tells of present folly and future shame. It is of the utmost importance that one set a proper value on the God-given present; "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). Let the laborer in God's harvestfields heed the word of Proverbs 10:5. Now is the time to gather precious sheaves that will be cause for rejoicing in the day of the soon-coming harvest home. He who sleeps in the present reaping season will suffer shame and loss at the judgment seat of Christ. Paul was an excellent example of the diligent laborer throughout his life of ceaseless activity and concern for a dying world. Demas was one who, charmed by the love of the present world, went off to sleep and left the service for other hands. His shame abides to this day (2 Timothy 4:10).

10:6-7

The memory of the righteous and the wicked after their death is the same as the esteem in which they are held in life. In 2 Timothy 4:17 we find Paul standing for judgment before Nero. Paul calls him a lion from whose mouth he was at that time delivered. Despite his loneliness and his apparently despicable condition, this bold servant of Christ experienced the blessings of God. On the other hand, violence covered the mouth of his oppressor, leaving him without excuse before the judgment of man and of God. Both have long since passed

from this world. Let the centuries witness whose memory has rotted and whose is still cause for thanksgiving!

10:8

As we have seen, wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. Those so exercised are ready indeed to bow to His Word and obey His commandments. This is the way the Christian shows his love for Christ. The babbling fool, who is too wise in his own conceit to require instruction, must learn by coming to grief. In Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar we see the wise and the fool contrasted (Daniel 5:18-23).

10:9

To walk in integrity is to walk with God. Whatever misunderstanding there may be at times, the one who lives honestly will be shown to have walked securely. Men of the world confess that "Honesty is the best policy." For the man of God, uprightness is not policy, but the delight of his heart. Even wicked men acknowledge that the ways of the upright are above reproach. Joseph displayed this integrity after being so severely tested (Genesis 40-41). On the contrary, he whose ways are perverse, though he may cover them for a time, must inevitably be discovered. See Ziba's case (2 Samuel 16:1-4; 19:24-30).

10:10

Winking has always been construed as indicating a lie in what the lips utter. He whose words and intentions are opposed brings grief to others and failure to himself. The kiss of Judas was an action of this nature. Note the last clause here is the same as is in verse 8.

10:11

When a person's life is ordered by righteousness, his words will be a blessing and refreshment to others. Carelessness in speech leaves many who attempt to minister the gospel powerless and barren in their service. The testimony of their lips is not backed up by the testimony of their life. Consequently, power and usefulness are lacking. Mere good words are not necessarily used in blessing. But if they come from a heart in touch with God, as evidenced by Christlike actions, they will be a well of life to thirsty hearers. Such was the ministry of Samuel in the dark days after the death of Eli. Notice that the last clause of this verse is the same as the last clause of Proverbs 10:6.

10:12

The latter part of this verse is quoted in 1 Peter 4:8: "and above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." This does not mean that kindness on the part of one otherwise guilty before God will atone for his transgressions. Benevolence will not cover those sins in the day of judgment. I am called on to cover other's faults, not my own. I am not to be indifferent to evil, but to faithfully and lovingly show my brother his sin. As he confesses it and repents of it, the sin is covered. Where love is lacking, it is a common practice to be a talebearer, which only tends to add to the evil; for the repeating of sin is defiling and often leads to life-long unhappiness and misunderstandings. In Doeg the Edomite we have a sample of the hatred that stirs up strife; Nathan's dealing with David is a lovely exemplification of the love that covers (1 Samuel 22:9-19; 2 Samuel 12:1-14). See the notes on Proverbs 11:13.

10:13

None have exhibited the contrast of this verse so markedly as Solomon himself and his son Rehoboam. The former, having been under God's training, had been given a wise and understanding heart (1 Kings 3:5-28). Rehoboam trusted his own wisdom and the counsel of the companions of his youth. He found a rod for his back in consequence (1 Kings 12: 8-19).

10:14

None perceive their own limitations so clearly as the truly wise. They are characterized by humility and a willingness to learn from all who can instruct them. The conceit of the foolish knows no bounds. With their own mouths they proclaim it in the ears of all men of sound judgment. Their boasting invites destruction. From childhood Timothy followed the ways of the wise man (2 Timothy 3:14-15). The magician Elymas is an illustration of the boasting fool (Acts 13:6-11).

10:15

This proverb only applies here on earth and in an era of peace. For "riches profit not in the day of wrath" (11:4); neither does temporal poverty affect future glory. See Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

10:16

This verse is an Old Testament way of stating the truth of Romans 8:6, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." The righteous man is the spiritual man. His labor is in accordance with the mind of God, and consequently leads to life. Everything the wicked produces is sin in the sight of infinite holiness because the

sinner is polluted. He is like a poisoned well that may produce cold and sparkling water, but it is to be dreaded in the end. The first two offerers, Cain and Abel, exemplify the truth here stated (Genesis 4:3-8).

10:17

As man learns to mistrust himself and to rely only on the unerring Word of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit, his feet will walk in the way of life. It is not a question of eternal life or final salvation, but following God's chosen path. God's children cannot afford to refuse reproof. The greatest kindness another saint can show me is to point out any portion of God's truth that I am not following. Let me gladly receive correction to keep me from dishonoring the One who has redeemed me to Himself. Saul refused reproof and lost his kingdom (1 Samuel 15:23). David, even though he failed at times, was characterized by keeping instruction and walking the path of life.

10:18

Hypocrisy and tale-bearing are alike detestable. To make a false show of love and friendship while the fire of hatred bums in the heart, and to spread evil stories are most reprehensible.

In God's Word over and over again He expressed His abhorrence of evil-speaking in unmistakable terms. Christians today do not often enough display that same hatred of that sin. In the law it is written, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people" (Leviticus 19:16). The tales might be true; but that could not excuse the bearer of them. If a brother or sister had sinned, there was a far different way to deal with the matter than to spread the story of his or her shame through the camp of Israel. The following verse

delineates the godly way to deal with such a case: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." (17)

This command is most searching and solemn. I am bearing false witness if I repeat evil that is untrue. If it is true, I am defiling others and injuring the soul of the wrongdoer, who might be delivered from his error if I went to him in the spirit of meekness. It is "an ungodly man [who] diggeth up evil" (Proverbs 16:27). A man of God will seek to cover it by leading the sinning one to repentance and self-judgment.

The first clause of Proverbs 10:18 is exemplified in Joab's dealing with Abner (2 Samuel 3:27); the accusers of Jeremiah are described in the last clause (Jeremiah 37:11-15).

10:19

It is remarkable how much of the Scripture God has seen fit to devote to His creatures' speech. Being quick to speak often leads to sin. To refrain the lips is difficult, but it is truly wise. The entire third chapter of James is devoted to the tongue, that small but most unruly member. The man of God will weigh his words, remembering that he must give an account for every idle word. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37). See also Ecclesiastes 5:1-7.

10:20

Tongue and heart seem to be used here almost synonymously, for the one is controlled by the other. The tongue of the just indicates a heart in subjection to God. Therefore the words uttered are valuable. The heart of the lawless is revealed by his idle and perverse conversation. It was so in the case of Simon

the Sorcerer, while his reprover displayed the opposite (Acts 8:18-24).

10:21

The righteous man's conversation is not only without foolishness and slanderous statements, but it is profitable. When he speaks, it is for edification. Others are blessed; his lips feed many. Not so with the fool. His speech is worthless, and he lacks the heart to learn from those who could instruct him. Samuel and Saul again come to mind. Samuel's words were a means of blessing to thousands, but the unhappy man he had anointed failed to profit by them. See also verses 31-32.

10:22

It is great foolishness to reject eternal pleasures and imperishable riches. They are untainted by sorrow, whereas the vain trinkets offered by the world and Satan leave only pain and disappointment! The blessing of the Lord is found in the pathway of obedience. Even Christians often miss it by laxity and indifference to moral and doctrinal evil. Walking by the light of their own fire they have only themselves to blame when their life ends in sorrow.

It is not that the blessing of the Lord ensures freedom from tribulation in this world; but whatever the trial, all can be received as from a loving Father's hand. Habbakuk and Paul, in large measure, had entered into the blessing spoken of here (Habbakuk 3:17-19; Philippians 4:11-13).

10:23

The wise man shrinks with horror from the mischief the fool practices with complacency and fiendish delight. The man of

understanding, whose heart and mind are controlled by the fear of the Lord, will behave himself wisely in a perfect way. Such a fool was Balaam; and Phinehas was a man of understanding, whose wisdom stayed the vengeance of the Lord (Numbers 31:16; 25:6-13).

10:24-25

The two proverbs are really one, contrasting the expectation and end of the righteous and the wicked. The lawless, however bold he appears, has a gnawing fear of impending calamity. He should dread the future, for it holds unsparing judgment for him. The desire of the righteous will as surely be granted—even eternal blessing.

As the whirlwind passes, the wicked will pass away and be in this world no more. It is not a question of extinction of being. He will be gone from earth into a dark and grief-filled eternity. But God's imperishable truth is the everlasting foundation of the righteous. Daniel and his accusers illustrate the two sides (Daniel 6:4-24).

10:26

A strong acid sets the teeth on edge and smoke inflames the eyes. In the same way it is irritating to place confidence in a man who is really indifferent to the success or failure of his commission. How often have the Lord's messengers proven to be sluggards. They dally with the world, turning aside for any trifle, instead of pursuing their path with purpose of heart! See the unfaithful servant in Luke 19:20-26.

10:27-30

Though each is a distinct proverb, these four proverbs contrast the righteous and the lawless regarding both their present and their future condition. In this world the fear of the Lord prolongs life; whereas the indiscretions and iniquities of the lawless break their physical strength and shorten their days. In eternity, gladness will be the fulfilled hope of the righteous; while the expectation of the wicked will perish and his reward will be endless judgment.

Strength is found in the way of Jehovah. Those who tread the paths of sin find destruction and woe. In the age to come, the portion of the righteous will abide; he will never be removed. The evildoer however will have no inheritance in the glorious kingdom. In both worlds the lawless are not gainers, but losers, because of their willful rejection of the Word of Life; while "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

There are many examples that confirm these solemn truths: Cain and Abel; Noah and the antediluvian world; Abraham and his idolatrous kin; Isaac and Ishmael; Jacob and Esau; Joseph and his accusers—all in the first book of the Bible. The remaining books of the Bible also tell of a vast number who give witness to this great contrast that has been confirmed through the ages.

10:31-32

The chapter closes with two additional proverbs on the tongue. We have noticed the way and end of the two classes of people mentioned in these proverbs. Again we are instructed

as to the difference in their speech, which reveals the state of their hearts. Wisdom and acceptable words proceed from the lips of the righteous, like clear streams from a pure fountain. Perverseness pours out like a filthy torrent from the mouth of the wicked. It soon will be silenced in judgment. Jezebel is a solemn beacon, declaring the truth of this proverb in regard to the wicked. Elijah, whom she hated, may be cited as an instance on the other side.

Proverbs 11

Chapter 11 of Proverbs continues to delineate the contrast between righteousness and lawlessness. God, in His wonderful grace, uses every opportunity to warn the young and inexperienced of the dangers and sorrows of rebelling against His Word. He puts before them the physical and spiritual blessings to be found in obedience to wisdom and truth.

11:1

Our God would have earthly scales regulated by heavenly standards. He delights in absolute integrity. A deceitful balance indicates lack of uprightness in heart. Man may never be cognizant of the error; but those who fear God will consider Him and conduct every transaction in His presence. It is a solemn thing when Christians follow the world in the slipshod business methods of the day. The name of Christ is dishonored when shams and false weights are discovered among Christians. It is good to remember what is written in the law:

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Deuteronomy 25:13-15).

This was God's standard for His earthly people. How shameful when His heavenly people fall below it! It may seem trivial that what is measured by a yardstick is slightly short or a pound weight not up to the standard; and one may try to ease his

conscience by saying that it is customary and that people know what to expect. But these are the things that indicate character, and tell of a seared conscience. The example of Zaccheus should cause dishonest people to be ashamed (Luke 19:8).

11:2

Nothing is more detestable in God's sight than pride on the part of creatures who have absolutely nothing to be proud of. This was the condemnation of the devil—self-exaltation. We instinctively see it to be hateful in others; but in ourselves, it is readily and almost unconsciously tolerated! In any case, it indicates a lack of brokenness and self-judgment before God. Humility is an indication of true wisdom. It characterizes the man who has learned to judge himself correctly in the presence of God. In Nebuchadnezzar we have a striking illustration of the two opposite states exhibited at different times in the same person (Daniel 4).

11:3

The Spirit of God will guide and direct the one who purposes in his heart to walk in the truth. When the heart is treacherous, destruction will assuredly follow. The principle in this verse is far-reaching and of vast importance. It enters into every detail and ramification of a believer's path and service. It is not so much intelligence that is lacking among the mass of saints as real integrity of heart. Often we see a person with true devotedness to Christ coupled with very little knowledge of Scripture. Yet with a remarkable ability to examine different aspects of the faith he uses what little knowledge he has for the glory of God. On the other hand, great intelligence has

frequently been found coupled with gross carelessness and treachery of heart. This eventually leads to a moral and spiritual breakdown. The great requirement of a Christian is a tender conscience, obedient to the guidance of the Word and Spirit of God. Contrast Obadiah and Ahab (1 Kings 18:3-4; 21:25).

11:4

The wealthy person's confidence in uncertain riches will prove empty and vain in the day of wrath. God could allow such a day to overtake men on earth, or wait until the full outpouring of His wrath on the wicked dead! See Revelation 6:12-17; 20:12-15.

Only righteousness delivers from death: righteousness that man is lacking in his natural state. The believer is declared righteous by faith when He believes God's testimony. Practical righteousness flows from the new nature received when one is born again. Noah is an apt illustration of this truth. He was found righteous when the rest of the world had lapsed into violence and corruption (Genesis 6).

11:5-8

The great lesson of these verses is that retribution is an obvious law of God both in this world and the next (See Proverbs 10:27-30). "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—whether of the flesh unto corruption or of the Spirit unto life eternal (Galatians 6:7-8). "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Samuel 2:3). Nothing escapes His notice. All will receive a just recompense of reward. The path of righteousness leads to endless glory; the way of lawlessness ends in sorrow and woe. He who seeks to ensnare the upright

will fall into the meshes of his own trap. The entire book of Esther is one of the best examples of the instruction of this section. (Those who have not studied the moral instruction of Esther might find profit in the commentary on Esther, by the same author and publisher.) Daniel's experience with his accusers, as noted earlier, emphasizes the same principle. God's retributive justice is swift and sure. It is futile to seek to change His holy and righteous administration.

11:9

The hypocrite's only thought is to cover his contemptible character, whatever the consequences to others. He is always ready to falsely accuse and destroy the peace of the innocent in order to maintain his own mask of righteousness. But the upright can afford to leave all in the hands of God. He trusts God to vindicate His servant in His own way and time. The case of Potiphar's wife and Joseph might have been in Solomon's mind as he penned these words (Genesis 39-41).

11:10-11

Whatever their individual evil propensities, collectively men realize, in some measure at least, the value of righteousness in their government leaders. Therefore they acclaim rulers who are wise and good for they build up a city; while evil rulers are detested because of the obvious unhappy results of their oppression. This is why men rejoiced over the downfall of Abimelech (Judges 9:53-57) and later, in the exaltation of David (2 Samuel 19:14).

11:12

Answering bitter speech and unkindness with contempt or anger, however well deserved, only fuels the flame. A troublemaker should always be met by one who is following the example of Christ "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). The course of wisdom and blessing is to go on quietly committing all to God. This is what David did when cursed by Shimei. See notes on 20:22.

11:13

Telling tales, even if the tales are true, is very harmful. If there is a fault, one should lovingly admonish in private, and then conceal it from all others. This is in accordance with the mind of God.

There is an instructive word in this connection in Exodus 37:17-24. These verses relate to the making of the candlestick, or lampstand, for the tabernacle. Among the accessories to it, Moses "made his seven lamps, and his snuffers, and his snuffdishes, of pure gold" (23). There is something here that is intensely interesting and precious when applied to the subject of tale-bearing.

No lamp will burn well for long without occasional snuffing. God has made provision even for such an apparently insignificant matter as this. It might not seem important how a light was snuffed and what was done with the black snuff afterwards. But in God's eye nothing is trivial that concerns the glory of His Son or the welfare of His people.

The snuffers were made of pure gold—that which symbolizes divine glory and perfect righteousness. It may often happen that some saint of God is losing his brightness and no longer shining for Him as he once did. The priest with the golden tongs is entrusted with the delicate task of trimming the charred end of the candlestick. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). In this way the "snuffing" of evil is accomplished God's way and the restored brother's light burns all the brighter.

Is the evil then to be spread abroad and made a matter of common knowledge? There were not only the snuffers, but the snuff-dishes, which were also made of pure gold. The priest was to put carefully the black, dirty snuff which he had removed from the wick in these golden receptacles. To have spread the filth on the spotless garments of other priests would have been to defile them all. It must be hidden away in the presence of God! Is not this where we often fail?

How much grief and sorrow might have been prevented in many an assembly if the golden snuff-dishes had been used to carry away the evil. So much strife and discord are brought about through evil speaking; and it is remarkable how ready we are to listen to that which we know can only defile. Oh that there might be more "angry countenances" among us when the backbiter tries to blacken the white garments of God's holy priests! See Proverbs 25:23.

In the New Testament the divine way of dealing with a brother's fault is clearly defined: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee

and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matthew 18:15). Much evil speaking would be eliminated if Christians would sternly refuse to listen to complaints against others until this first condition has been followed. Many a brother would be won if approached by one who in godly humility carried with him the golden snuffers and the snuff-dish.

But what if he refuses to hear? Then take one or two more with you and if he still is not repentant tell it to the church. But this is only a last resort after the other means have failed.

By obeying God's Word in this way innocent people might be spared much shame and misery. And many wandering ones might be recovered who otherwise would be driven deeper into sin. God, too, will be glorified, and the Lord Jesus honored; for He has said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet... If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:14,17).

11:14

To depend entirely on one's own judgment is the height of folly. Even the wisest and godliest are often given to blunders and errors of discernment. No one is infallible. To weigh a matter in the presence of God and to invite the spiritual counsel of those who are able to discern differences is the course of wisdom. Rehoboam lost the major part of his kingdom by neglecting this important truth; and many have suffered grievous loss for the same disdain of counsel and help.

11:15

This proverb was written centuries before the cross to warn men of what is still a very common ground for failure and ruin in business. It is a most dangerous thing to pledge security for a stranger, as thousands have learned to their sorrow.

But there was One who knew fully the consequences of His action, yet, deigned in grace to become the security for strangers. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was the stranger’s surety.

A surety is one who accepts liability for another’s debts. Many a man will do this for a trusted, long-time friend, but no wise man will do so for a stranger. Yet Jesus became our surety when we were strangers and foreigners, “alienated and enemies in [our] mind by wicked works” (Colossians 1:21). He died, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

All we owed was exacted from Him when He suffered on the tree for sins that were not His own. He could then say, “I restored that which I took not away” (Psalm 69:4). Bishop Lowth’s beautiful rendering of Isaiah 53:7 reads, “It was exacted, and He became answerable.” This is the very essence of the gospel.

He fully proved the truth of the words of Proverbs 11:15 when He endured that cross of shame. How He had to suffer when God ‘s awful judgment against sin fell on Him! But He wavered not. In love to God and to the strangers whose surety He had

become, He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

His sorrows are now forever past. He has paid the debt and met every claim in perfect righteousness. The believing sinner is cleared of every charge and God is fully glorified.

> *He bore on the tree the sentence for me;*
> *And now both the Surety and sinner are free.*

None other could have met the claims of God's holiness against the sinner and have come out triumphant at last. He alone could atone for sin. Because He has settled every claim God has raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in highest glory. This glorified One administers grace and blessing to all who see Him as the stranger's security and trust Him for themselves.

11:16

Physical strength enables a man to retain his wealth against those who would attack it. Similarly a woman evidences strength of character by graciously yielding, rather than standing for what she thinks are her rights; in this way she retains honor. Many are fearful of losing the admiration of others by showing kindness and humility. So they wrap themselves in a haughty, chilling dignity which actually makes them the objects of scorn and disgust. Nothing is as lovely and admirable as a gracious, conciliatory spirit, whether in the home, the assembly, or in the world. How brightly does this shine out in Abigail (1 Samuel 25)!

11:17

A kindly, forgiving spirit is again praised in this verse. Not only others, but one's own self, will be blessed and helped by this attitude. Hardness and cruelty will inevitably come back on the one who acts mercilessly. He can only be unhappy in his own soul; and then, with the measure he uses, judgment will be measured to him again. Joab was a man of cruelty (1 Kings 2:5-6); in Isaac we see the opposite (Genesis 26).

11:18-21

Sin and righteousness are set in sharp contrast again. Deceit and lawlessness go together. They will be the eternal undoing of those who practice them, because they are an abomination to the Lord.

He delights in the upright, therefore their reward is sure. It is useless for men to attempt to avert the coming judgment by joining together to defeat the justice of the Almighty. Vengeance inevitably will follow their evil course; but deliverance will come in due time to the righteous. Sennacherib and Hezekiah are the central figures in a solemn scene that illustrates this great and important principle (2 Chronicles 32).

11:22

The picture in this verse is utterly incongruous! Beauty allied to virtue is incomparably lovely, but without discretion, beauty is sad indeed. See Jezebel's melancholy history.

11:23

"Thoughts of peace, and not of evil" (Jeremiah 29:11) fill the heart of the righteous. His desire will be more than met; for

"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). The only expectation of the wicked is judgment. He heaps up wrath for himself against the day of wrath. Note Proverbs 10:28 and see Jeremiah and Zedekiah (Jeremiah 17:16-18; 34:1-3).

11:24-25

Bunyan's quaint rhyme is in itself a suited commentary on these verses. It was propounded as a riddle by Old Honest and explained by Gaius.

> "A *man there was, though some did count him mad,*
> *The more he cast away, the more he had.*"

* * * * * * * * * * *

> "*He that bestows his goods upon the poor*
> *Shall have as much again, and ten times more.*"

These verses give us the divine plan for increase. The Egyptian farmer scatters his seed on the retreating waters of the Nile to reap a rich harvest after many days. Likewise the one who is touched by the philanthropy of God will find true increase later by scattering now. While he who greedily seeks to keep all for himself will find his course has led to complete ruin. In 2 Corinthians the Holy Spirit uses these verses in Proverbs as a divine principle that applies to the grand subject of Christian benevolence.

> *But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also*

> *bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work* (2 *Corinthians* 9:6-8).

These verses assure us that God notes all done for His glory. He will minister abundantly to those who freely use what He has given them for the blessing of others. The Philippian assembly had tasted of the joy of ministering to the Lord in this way (Philippians 4:10-19). In Nabal we learn the folly of greed and self-occupation (1 Samuel 25:10-11,38).

11:26

One who withholds food from starving people in order to make a profit later deserves the curses his actions invoke. The story of the medieval bishop of Rouen who so acted has made his name detestable for centuries. We saw this in Nabal, who, living in prosperity himself, refused to share with David and his followers when persecuted by Saul. Joseph was the manager of Egypt's resources for the good of the famine-stricken world. In him we see the type of behavior that is commended in the last clause of verse 26.

If in this world the curses of the dying will fall on those who refuse to share physical bread, what will be said of him who refuses to share the Bread of life. He has the knowledge of the precious grace of God and yet is quite unconcerned about the need of the vast multitudes who are going on to the second death, the lake of fire. It is not enough to plead that they know but do not heed. The Christian is responsible to warn, to

preach, to entreat the lost to be reconciled to God. We are debtors to all men because of the treasure committed to us. Sad indeed will be the accounting for those who live to themselves, withholding that spiritual food which alone can meet the dire need of the spiritually starving. Blessings will be on the head of those who seek to offer to men the free grace of God, as earnestly as businessmen seek to sell their goods.

11:27

Again our attention is turned to God's just rewards. The seeker after good will be rewarded according to his faithfulness in endeavoring to bring joy and cheer to others. But the mischief-maker, who rejoices in iniquity and desires the undoing of his neighbor, will be undone himself. The confession of Adoni-bezek is a striking case in point (Judges 1:5-7). Caleb well illustrates the first clause (Joshua 14: 6-14).

11:28

Those who prosper in this world are very apt to "trust in uncertain riches" (1 Timothy 6:17); therefore the need to be continually reminded of the evanescent character of all that this world offers. See the rich fool of Luke 12:16-21.

The genuine riches are moral—not material. It is the righteous—not the man with money—who is truly wealthy. See the blessed man of Psalm 1.

11:29

To trouble one's own house is to walk so as to leave an evil example for succeeding generations. Jehovah visits the iniquities of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:5). It is not merely physical ills handed

down in judgment, as in the case of the alcoholic's child being born with an inherent tendency to disease; but the father's ways are copied by the children. This is what is so prominent in the case of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, "who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 14:16).

The fool, though superior in position, will be the servant to the wise in heart. It is not the outward trappings and insignia of office that make a man truly great. When Daniel and Belshazzar met face to face, or when Paul and Festus confronted each other, who were the superior persons?

11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life to those who perish. Refreshment and gladness are produced so that those who weaken may enter into blessing. So he who is wise will win souls. It is not merely that "he that winneth souls is wise"; but all who are truly wise according to God will be channels of blessing to others—winners of souls. There is a searching truth stated here. Wisdom consists not in the knowledge of Scripture, precious as that is, but in the ability to live in the power of the Word. True wisdom is being able to so minister to men, women, and children that they will be won for Christ and His truth. Tested by this standard, how few are the wise!

It is evident that soul-winning is not the slipshod business many would make it out to be—the mere hit-or-miss ministry that is so common today. On the contrary, it is a divine science, requiring sincere preparation of the heart in the presence of God. It requires careful study of the need of men's souls and of the truth of the Scriptures that can meet that need. Of all human soul-winners, Paul is the great example

"made all things to all men, that (he) might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). This is the wisdom so much needed in turning men from the power of Satan unto God.

11:31

This is the passage quoted by the apostle Peter (though from the Septuagint version). He said:

> *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* (1 Peter 4:17-18)

Much light is shed on this quotation by comparing it in its transposed form with the proverb itself. The righteous being scarcely, or with difficulty saved, refers to their salvation on earth, not their entrance into Heaven. Here on earth the righteous and wicked are subjects of God's authority. If the godly will be recompensed here for the evil they may do when their heart turns away from the Lord, what about the wicked? Their judgment will be dire indeed. In a national way, we see this in the case of the righteous nation of Israel, who was punished in measure for its sins. Edom, the proud, defiant persecutor, who had cast off all fear of God was also punished. See the prophecy of Obadiah.

God never spares His children when they willfully follow their own ways. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). How irreverent the thought that the wicked can defy Him as they please and go unpunished! Judgment may linger, but it is

certain to be executed eventually. “They shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Proverbs 12

The man who loves instruction for its own sake values true knowledge, whatever channel it may come through.

12:1

Whoever welcomes discipline desires the truth, not the ability to display his acquired knowledge. The vain scholar hates reproof and, like a senseless animal does not value correction (10:17). He prefers his own unbridled will, however contrary his thoughts and ways may be to sound instruction. This was the great characteristic of the world before the flood (Job 22:15-17). Josiah, the godly young king of Judah, is a fine example of the opposite (2 Chronicles 34).

12:2-3

The face of the Lord shines on the good man. His root will be firmly established. "He shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). But that same divine character which makes Him delight in uprightness necessitates His condemnation of a man of wicked devices. That man will never be established. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" (Psalm 1:5). See Hushai and Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:32; 16:15-17:23).

12:4

It would be a serious mistake to limit the word *virtuous* (KJV) to the thought of chastity. The virtuous woman is one in whom all noble qualities shine, as fully described in Proverbs 31. Such a woman is indeed a crown to her husband. The foolish and lazy wife who makes her husband ashamed is like the sudden

coming on of old age. Contrast Sarah (Genesis 18:12 and 1 Peter 3:1-6) with Job's wife (Job 2:9-10).

12:5-7

Right thoughts result in right words and actions and will be rewarded by Him who delights in righteousness. But evil thoughts produce the fruit of evil words and deeds. They too will receive their reward. The judgment of God is established in truth, as every soul will acknowledge in the end. Contrast Absalom and David.

12:8

Wisdom is commended among all men, while a vain and foolish spirit is contemptible. The world appreciates sobriety and spiritual intelligence, though it may refuse or even persecute the one who possesses these traits. But to pretend to have spiritual wisdom, while lacking it elicits the disgust of all reasonable men. Note the difference in the estimation formed by others of Gideon and Abimelech (Judges 7-9).

12:9

The Douay version renders the final line somewhat differently: "Better is the poor that provideth for himself." The verse evidently refers to one who is looked down on as lowly, but whose needs are met. He is happier and more to be envied than one who delights in making a pompous display while feeling the pinch of hunger and distress. See Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:27-34).

12:10

A truly righteous man cannot act inconsistently with his character even in regard to an animal. The creature's total

dependence on him will stir his compassions, so that he will treat it with kindness. The wicked, on the other hand, becomes more brutal as he recognizes his own power to control the lower creation. Cruelty and unrighteousness go hand in hand. Contrast Jacob with Balaam. See Genesis 33:13-14 and Numbers 22:23-31.

12:11

The diligent farmer is abundantly rewarded for his toil. The frivolous, idling companion of reckless fools shows his lack of intelligence. This is a challenging word for young Christians. God's Word is a field well worth cultivating. The apostle urged, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Those who obey this injunction are invariably repaid for every hour earnestly devoted to the consideration of this precious field. Many waste much time in idle folly, keeping company with empty, frivolous, worldly people, neglecting their Bibles to the serious detriment of their spiritual life. They often wonder how other Christians can discover so much that is new and edifying in the Scriptures. They see no such lovely lessons and helpful suggestions, because they do not really work the land. If they did, they too would be satisfied with the bread of God's Word.

The loss by those who do not study the Scriptures is incalculable, both here and in eternity. This neglect of the Bible is the root of much backsliding, coldness of heart, and departure from God. The believer must make it a daily practice to dig into the Book for himself. When he seeks to walk in the truth learned by the Spirit's power, he will grow in grace and in the knowledge of the things of God. Timothy is a fine pattern

for all young saints on this point (2 Timothy 3:14-17). The ungodly Jehoiakim is a warning beacon for all in danger of taking the opposite course (Jeremiah 36:22-32).

12:12-13

The wicked seeks to surround his very soul with evil, while hoping to escape in the day of judgment; but he is snared with the words of his mouth, and is exposed to worse calamities than those which he tried to avoid. Refer to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27).

The righteous places his trust in God with holy confidence and bears fruit to His glory. In the day of his trouble he has a Deliverer near at hand. See Elisha (2 Kings 6:17).

12:14

Once again in the book of Proverbs we see the principle of divine government that no man can change: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Every man will be repaid according to his doings. The Christian is not above this law of the kingdom of God. He rather bows his head and acknowledges God's justice. See the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:24-35).

12:15-16

Two things are stated in these verses as being characteristic of the man who is designated a fool—that is, one who lacks divine wisdom. He is proud and self-confident, refusing to accept correction. On the other hand, he is intolerant of others' faults. He readily shows his indignation and makes the wound worse instead of binding it up. The wise and prudent man contrasts this in every way. He is hardest on himself and readily accepts

counsel, willingly admitting that others may be wiser than he; and he is always ready to cover the shame of another, rather than to spread it around. It is the same contrast that existed when Ham unblushingly related the tale of Noah's shame, as though himself superior to his father; while Shem and Japheth went backwards to cover their dishonored parent (Genesis 9:20-29).

12:17-22

The six verses are all occupied with the same general theme — lips of truth contrasted with a lying tongue. The latter is an abomination to Him who is Himself the Truth. He delights in truth because it is in accord with His own nature.

Honest speech reveals integrity of heart; falsity reveals deceit of the heart. The one who does not hesitate at deliberate lying scatters pain and sorrow everywhere. His poisoned words pierce the hearts of gentle souls like a sword. The tongue of the wise is beneficial and uplifting to these sensitive ones. But the day of reckoning is coming, when truthful lips will be established forever and lying tongues go into oblivion.

It should be remembered that it is intentional deceit that is here in question. It is sad to hear good men recklessly charge others with lying because they have uttered an untruth in the innocency of their hearts. A statement may be false as to fact, but true in its intent; just as a statement may be true as to fact, which was uttered with the intent to deceive. It is the deceit in the heart that causes the lips to utter a lie. None should be so charged unless the evidence makes it clear there was intention to prevaricate.

The just will be preserved from evil, even as they have sought the good of others. But the disobedient will be judged without mercy; for God cannot but demonstrate His hatred of that which is false and His approval of truth and righteousness. Contrast Nehemiah and Sanballat (Nehemiah 6:5-9).

12:23

The man who has least worth saying is generally the man who says the most. The prudent man is not forever displaying his knowledge; the fool loses no opportunity to proclaim his empty folly. See Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:1-11).

12:24

It is not ability only that causes one to succeed and advance in life. There must be earnest endeavor, otherwise talent and brilliancy count for nothing. The slothful, however great his natural gifts and intelligence, will be inferior to the patient plodder in the end. This is what someone has called "the gospel of work." It is all-important, both in the natural and the spiritual sphere. Contrast Gideon and Barak (Judges 6:11-12; 4:4-9).

12:25

"How forcible are right words," (Job 6:25) bringing comfort, cheer, and encouragement to those in grief of soul and bitterness of spirit! See Nehemiah and Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:2-8).

12:26

The man with clean ways and a clear conscience will be able to edify and restore his wayward brother to God. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things" (1 Corinthians 2:15). The words of

the disobedient man are tempting and ensnaring. He does not have his brother's good at heart, but rather his undoing. Nathan illustrates the first; the woman of Tekoa is an example of the second (2 Samuel 12:1-14; 14:1-20).

12:27

Some men can exert themselves for a time, but soon fall back into their customary slothful manner. Many hear the ministry of the Word but fail afterwards to meditate on it and make it their own. They are like a hunter who spares no pain in the excitement of the hunt but afterward does nothing good with his prey. The way of the diligent is very different. He uses his resources well and so more is given to him. See the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Ruth is a striking illustration of the diligent. She gleaned all day and in the evening "beat out that she had gleaned" (Ruth 2:17).The servant who hid his pound in a napkin pictures the slothful.

12:28

The way of righteousness is that path of the just that shines more and more unto the perfect day (Proverbs 4:18). Passing through a scene of death, the path goes on to the land of life. Eternal life is now the precious possession of all who have entered it by the straight gate. Death, although real and true to those on the path of sin, for the just it is the entrance into the gladness and glory of the Father's house. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even *over* [not, as in the KJV, *unto]* death" (Psalm 48:14). Happy are all who walk the path of holiness through a world of sin up to the city of God!

Proverbs 13

The truly wise person acknowledges that learning from the experiences of others may save him from much trouble. Others can teach him about the road they have already traveled, which is all new ground to him.

13:1

In the first verse of this portion we are again reminded that it is the wise who are grateful for counsel and help; the foolish scorner will not accept rebuke. In his self-confidence he passes on, indifferent to the words of the wise. He must learn by bitter experience of the snares and pitfalls he might have avoided had he humbly accepted counsel from those competent to teach. Contrast Isaac (Genesis 26) with Simeon and Levi (Genesis 34:25-31).

13:2-3

The evil speaker is only laying up trouble and sorrow for himself in the future; and the one whose mouth is full of grace will surely find grace when he is in need. To control the lips is to keep the life. The mature man is the one who controls his tongue. He who lacks wisdom in this respect will bring sure destruction on himself. Shimei is a solemn warning of this principle (1 Kings 2:8); while David, when tempted greatly to speak for himself, illustrates the opposite (1 Samuel 17:28-29).

13:4

The New Testament reiterates the principle declared in this verse: “if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It is as true of spiritual things as of

physical. The diligent seeker of the precious truths in the Word of God is the one who rejoices over that Word as one who finds great spoil. The sluggard's lot in life is leanness of soul and continual dissatisfaction. Contrast Ezra 7:10 with the returned captives (Haggai 1:2-6).

13:5-6

A heart committed to truth is the secret of practical righteousness. The one who is following the way of holiness hates what is false. He has judged iniquity, and he desires to live before God so as to glorify His name in this world, where it has been so terribly dishonored. The disobedient man makes himself loathsome and is destroyed by his own sin. He is put to shame even in this life and his future portion is to be cast into outer darkness for eternity. Contrast Jehoiada and Athaliah (2 Kings 11).

13:7

It is the nature of fallen man to be hypocritical. The poverty-stricken will often pretend to be wealthy and the wealthy will feign poverty. He who has nothing desires to be esteemed as one who has much; and he who has great riches feels it is safer to be considered one who has little or nothing. The first is proud and vain; the last, mean and miserly. The one attitude was exhibited by the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:17). The other attitude we see carried out by the wily Gibeonites to deceive Joshua and the army of Israel (Joshua 9).

13:8

The verse is confessedly ambiguous. Various renderings give little help. The thought seems to be that riches are the

confidence of their possessor. He therefore can haughtily scorn the one who would reprove him. But the indigent is crushed by a rebuke, having no spirit left to stand against it. Apparently both are worldly men.

13:9

The flame of testimony burns brightly when fed with the oil of grace, which only the righteous possess. The lamp of the wicked may flare for a moment, but their true state of affairs will soon be evident. He lacks the oil, so the light must fail. Compare this proverb with the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

13:10

The many bitter quarrels among saints meeting in the name of Christ are a dramatic commentary on the danger of pride. Strife comes only by pride. This solemn warning should be kept in mind. If the sin of pride were confessed and judged frankly before God, the reason for contention would be seen in its true light as contrary to Scriptures and opposed to the spirit of Jesus Christ! It is an old saying that "it takes two to make a quarrel." Contention begins when the effort to maintain a foolish dignity prevails, or the heart covets what belongs to another. The strife soon ceases when the offended one meets his offender in lowliness and grace. Wisdom enables the well-advised to give the soft answer that turns away wrath. In the matter of the strife between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot, we see how pride was at the root. Abram solved the conflict most effectually when he offered first choice to Lot who had no title whatever to the land which Jehovah had given to Abram (Genesis 13).

13:11

That which comes easily, slips away easily. One highly values and is careful in the use of the treasure for which he has toiled. The principle abides when applied to the true riches, the precious truth of God. Some, like a sponge, readily absorb, but as readily give out under pressure. That which is valued is what has been won by labor. "*Study* to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, italics added). Wealth such as this is surely worth the self-sacrifice and devotion required to obtain it; and when so obtained, it will abide and increase. See Ziba (2 Samuel 16:4; 19:29), as contrasted with Caleb (Joshua 14:6-14).

13:12

The unsatisfied longing of a hungry soul results in faintness of spirit and sickness of heart. Such is the *hopeless* hope of those without Christ. How blessed the contrast in the case of the Christian! He, too, at times is sick with longing: longing to behold the Beloved of his soul. But soon his desire will be accomplished, and its fulfillment will be precious as the tree of life. David once was sick with yearning desire. He wanted to taste the water of the well of his childhood. But when his desire was met and the water was brought, it was too precious for him to taste. He poured it out before the Lord (1 Chronicles 11:15-19).

13:13-15

The word of instruction brings favor with God and man, as was so abundantly proven by Joseph, Daniel, and a host of others. To despise this law of the wise is to expose oneself to shame

now and loss in eternity. But he that fears the commandment, recognizing in it a fountain of life, will be preserved from the sorrowful way of the transgressor and the darkness of eternity. Pharaoh despised the word and fell beneath the avenging hand of the Lord. Saul despised the word and was put to grief before the Philistines. The last three kings of Judah despised the word and learned too late the terrible mistake made. The solemn example of these and many more in sacred and secular history should speak loudly to those bent on taking their own way and ignoring the Lord's commands. The Lord has said, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

13:16

A discreet person would take to heart the wisdom of the book of Proverbs. Only fools refuse it, thereby showing their folly. How sad that so many who are wise as to this world, should be fools as to the next! And yet, true wisdom for this life is demonstrated by obedience to God and dealing with the knowledge His Word imparts. It is the sinfully foolish one who turns a deaf ear to the voice of truth. Contrast Moses and Aaron with Korah and his company (Numbers 16).

13:17

The messenger who runs ahead, without waiting for his commission will only encounter and produce mischief. The one who faithfully goes forth as the ambassador of another carries health and blessing. This is all-important in the work of the gospel. We live in a day of great restlessness and activity. But few are the servants who wait to get the mind of the Lord

as revealed in His Word. The result is much mischievous teaching and faulty instruction that bewilders and perplexes the hearers. Precious is the message of the faithful ambassador as he goes forth imploring men to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20).

13:18

Men may foolishly consider it beneath their dignity to bow to instruction and learn from those competent to teach. But lasting honor comes to the one who is humble enough to receive help from whoever can impart true knowledge; while shame and poverty will be the portion of the self-sufficient soul. See Johanan and the captains (Jeremiah 42. Also compare with Proverbs 12:1).

13:19-20

The soul rejoices when the heart's desire is attained. But the only desire of the fool is the gratification of his unbridled passions. He refuses to believe that iniquity should be avoided. "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Association with the wise tends to wisdom. Companionship with vain people leads to further vanity and results in moral and spiritual ruin. Contrast Rehoboam with the young king Josiah (1 Kings 12:8; 2 Kings 22).

13:21-22

Throughout this book the principle of retribution is insisted on even in this life. The sinner pursues evil, only to find evil pursuing him; while the righteous man who extends his goodness to others is repaid by kindness. When the good man dies, whether he leaves a fortune in material things behind him

or not, he bequeaths to his descendants an honored name and a holy example—an inheritance of incalculable value. That which the evildoer has laid up is soon dissipated and passes into hands better able to use it properly. Contrast Jonadab the Rechabite (Jeremiah 35:6-11) with Coniah (Jehoiachin in NIV, Jeremiah 22:24-30).

13:23

The poor farmer, if diligent, will use every corner of his little plot. He produces an amount and a variety of food that is often astonishing to his wealthier neighbor. However, this same wealthy neighbor allows his acres to lie fallow and much of his crop to be carelessly wasted and destroyed.

The man of small opportunities often makes the most of what he has, while the one of large privileges becomes slothful and neglectful.

We can see an important spiritual lesson here. Frequently we see a gifted brother or sister with much leisure for study and prayer and boundless opportunities to enjoy the ministry. Yet he often will be careless and lazy, gaining very little real food daily and giving out little to others. On the other hand, we may see one whose daily toil occupies most of his waking hours and whose talents and education are average. Yet he devotes himself earnestly to using what he has and scarcely lets a moment slip by wasted. He gathers regularly much food for his own soul and constantly imparts refreshment and blessing to his brethren!

The lack of spirituality is not the result of a lack of time to cultivate the things of God; rather it indicates one's failure to use the opportunities presented.

We have heard of a blacksmith blowing a bellows, with a page of God's word before him on the wall, that he might gather a little strength for his soul as he attended to his forge; and of a cobbler pegging shoes with his Testament in front of him, from which now and then he snatched a precious morsel for his spiritual upbuilding. It was the work of the poor, but it was filled with satisfaction.

"No time for God" generally means "No heart for God," if the full truth were told. The diligent soul will make time. He often proves that a small portion of Scripture or a few minutes of prayer bear rich fruit, when heart and conscience are truly exercised. See the prayer of Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:9-10).

13:24

Family discipline should be patterned after the divine discipline of Hebrews 12. It is not love, but the lack of it, that allows a child to go undisciplined. He is allowed to develop unchecked tendencies and inclinations that will result in future sorrow. Ours is a day of great laxity in discipline. The coming generation will reap the bitter fruit of the absence of restraint and the evident aversion to discipline in the majority of homes. A sickly sentimentality, supposedly wiser and more compassionate than God Himself, has made it fashionable to denounce the use of the rod as a relic of a barbarous age. But the difference in the character of disciplined children and the well-ordered home certainly proves the truth of Scripture.

It is even worse when control is ignored among Christians on the plea that grace is reigning. Grace never sets aside restraint. The two principles are not opposed. In the divine ways, grace and restraint work side by side, as they should in

the home. Contrast Eli (1 Samuel 3:13-14) with Abraham (Genesis 18:19).

13:25

The portion of the righteous may be small, but it is enjoyable because the heart and conscience are at rest. But the wicked, though he lives riotously in pleasure and plenty for a time, finds no real satisfaction; his recklessness will bring him to want at last. How much happier the portion of Lazarus at the gate of the rich man, with Abraham's bosom awaiting him, than that of the disobedient prodigal of the previous chapter (Luke 15:11-32 and 16:19-31).

Proverbs 14

The wise woman and the foolish woman are brought before us in vivid contrast in the opening verse of this chapter.

14:1

The wise woman will lead her household in the right way by counsel and example. She directs their steps in accordance with the Word of the Lord. Consequently her house is established on an immovable foundation of righteousness. The foolish woman through her evil behavior and unworthy instruction, lays up sorrow for herself and grief for her children. Contrast the mothers of Moses and of Ahaziah (Exodus 2; 2 Chronicles 22:2-3).

14:2

The manner of life proves whether one is really walking with God or not. The testimony of the lips is worthless if contradicted by the behavior. The one who fears the Lord will be characterized by godliness and faithfulness. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6).

Perverse ways opposed to His revealed will prove that God is really despised and not feared; He wants reality. To talk of reverence while obeying the dictates of a selfish, carnal nature is hypocrisy. This was Saul’s snare. Samuel summarized the issue of obedience when he said, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). The testimony of the people themselves proved that the prophet Samuel had walked before them in the fear of God (1 Samuel 12).

14:3

The fool condemns himself with his own mouth by his vain boasting. The words of the wise declare the state of their hearts. They are able to give the soft answer that turns away wrath and are slow to speak and swift to hear. Their conversation reveals the wisdom that is in them. See Goliath and David (1 Samuel 17:41-49).

14:4

It certainly would be a drastic measure to kill the oxen in order to have a clean stable. The purpose would surely be attained, but at what a cost!

The strength of the ox adds to the wealth of the farm. It is therefore well worth the time to regularly clean the stall. "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written" (1 Corinthians 9:9-10). It is sad how quickly assemblies sometimes resort to getting rid of troublesome saints. This cuts off much increase and blessing that might have ensued had patience and grace been exercised. Too often it is taken for granted that the great object of discipline in the house of God is to get rid of the offender; whereas the truth is just the opposite. Our first priority should be to earnestly endeavor to recover the erring one. If our attitude is right before God we will cry to God and identify ourselves with the sinner. Finally, if all is in vain, and the evildoer persists in his sin, refusing to repent, excommunication is the last sad acknowledgment that the case must be left in the hands of God.

To bring the matter before the saints and take quick action, before every effort has been made to heal the offender may

indeed cleanse the assembly; but it will be to the loss of all. We need one another. Blessing and increase of the body results when there is an effectual working of every part. How much better is it to cleanse by leading an erring brother to repentance, thus covering his sin, than by excommunicating him before all possible means have been exhausted in seeking his restoration to God! (See Judges 20:35-48; 21:1-3.)

14:5

The words of the one who bears a faithful testimony are truthful and controlled. A false witness cannot be depended on, for he has committed himself to speak lies. The Christian is called to be a follower of Him who is preeminently "the faithful and true witness." Refusing to handle the word of God deceitfully, he is to speak what he knows on the authority of divine revelation. To boastfully speak of the idle speculations of the human mind will be to utter lies instead of truth. See Paul before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:25); and note the sad contrast in the case of Peter in the corridor of the council-room (Luke 22:55-62).

14:6

The scorner may inquire after the truth, but he does not set his heart on the answer. Therefore he fails to find wisdom. The discerning are motivated by a sincere desire to know the truth, even if they must judge themselves and their ways by it. To them, knowledge comes easily.

This principle of the importance of sincere desire is preeminently true regarding the understanding of the Scriptures. The mocker is continually finding cause for objections and foolish quibbles in the Word of God. The

devout and upright soul sees only light where the other sees darkness. If a man has difficulty in accepting the truth of the Bible, almost invariably it is because he is clinging to some sin that the Word condemns. When that sin is judged and iniquity repented of, all becomes clear. Pilate once asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) But he was not concerned enough to wait for a reply, though Truth incarnate stood before him. Daniel had proven long before that all is plain to the spiritually discerning person.

14:7-9

When it becomes evident that a man is bent on folly with no concern about righteousness, it is best to leave him to himself. To argue or reason with such a one is useless. It is defiling to the wise and only gratifying to the pride of the fool. "From such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:5).

The prudent is given wisdom to guide him well. The fool has no desire for this wisdom. His heart is false and his lips are deceitful. He mocks sin and does not realize its heinousness. He has never realized the need for repentance. Consequently it is useless to try to turn him from his disobedient course. The righteous find acceptance because they have judged themselves and bowed to God's just and holy sentence. Acknowledging their true estate, they find a better one. Walking in obedience to God, they are acceptable to Him.

This does not imply that Scripture teaches that acceptance by God resulting in salvation is on the ground of legal works. Far from it. As Abraham's example showed, not until a man is justified by faith are his works declared righteous. Good deeds

are not the procuring cause of justification and new birth, but the result of these great and important blessings.

For an example of the fools who make a mock at sin and refuse instruction, see Jeremiah 44:15-19. There we read of the remnant in Egypt who defied the word of the Lord spoken through His prophet.

14:10

Every heart has its secret joy or sorrow that no other ever shares. Griefs or joys too great for words are often hidden deep down from the sight of others. How truly was this the case with our blessed Lord Himself! Who ever measured the depths of the anguish of His soul, or who can rightly estimate His joys?

To such a High Priest we can go with our own heaviest sorrows; with Him we can share our inmost thoughts of exultation and delight.

14:11-13

If the young man who reads the wisdom of Solomon still misses the path of life and finally perishes, it will not be for lack of warning or insufficient instruction. Clearly and unmistakably, the wicked and the righteous are often contrasted.

In these verses we read first of the house of the lawless and the tent of the righteous. The house might seem by far the more stable, but it will be overthrown; its foundations will be destroyed because they are built on sinking sand. The upright pilgrim lives in his tent as he journeys through this world that

is foreign to his new nature. This tent will abide and flourish until tenting days are over.

Man naturally chooses his own way—a way that seems right to himself. But it ends in death, for it is opposed to the truth of God. "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city" (Ecclesiastes 10:15).

There is a city that even the most sinful and vile must long to enter if they believe in a future life at all. That city was anticipated even by Abraham (Hebrews 11:10). It was described by John as the new and holy Jerusalem, where the Lamb who died is the center and lamp from whom shines all the glory of God. He Himself said, while on earth, "I am the way" (John 14:6). His name alone is salvation proclaimed to lost and guilty sinners. There is no other name and no other way that will lead to the city of light.

There is *a way*—yes, many ways; but none can rightly be designated *the way* except Jesus. The end of a way that seems right is death—moral, spiritual, eternal death, yet conscious forever!

Those who refuse *the Way*, to tread *a way* of their own choosing, find no true joy or confidence. "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3). Therefore their way is one of doubt and uncertainty. Though they laugh, the heart is not at rest, and their mirth is destined to end in madness. See Micah in Judges 17 and 18:14-26.

Happy are those who refuse man's devices and turn to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life!

14:14

This is the only verse in which the word *backslider* occurs in the Bible (KJV). The few times that the word *backsliding* is found in our English version, occur only in the books of Jeremiah and Hosea. It is used generally as an adjective, though also as a participle and several times as a noun. It should be noticed that neither form of the word occurs in the New Testament.

A backslider is one who has given up ground once taken for God. Many a soul gives up in heart long before it is seen in their life. The conscience becomes defiled and if self-judgment does not follow, the truth begins to lose its power over the heart. The sad result of a broken-down testimony soon follows until the backslider is living for himself. It is important, however, to distinguish carefully between backsliding and apostasy. The backslider is one who fails to carry out the truth of his profession into his life. The apostate, on the other hand, gives up the truth entirely, even denying the Lord; this proves his falseness, whatever his previous profession may have been. John refers to apostates (1 John 2:19), as does Paul in Hebrews 6 and 10. Needless to say, no true believer ever becomes an apostate.

The good man is controlled by a sincere testimony and his life is in harmony with his testimony. He truly lives for God and this brings satisfaction to him.

Peter was a backslider in heart long before he fell; so, we may rest assured, was David. In the faithful stand of Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego, we see men whose hearts were committed to divine principles when in seclusion. Therefore they overcame in public (Daniel 3).

14:15-19

Wise and *simple* are relative terms. They refer not so much to mental condition as to the fear of the Lord on the one hand and indifferent self-sufficiency on the other.

The simple are ready to believe anything said by men as foolish as themselves. Yet they stumble over the clearest truths of God's revelation. The same man who quibbles over the truth of God has strong faith in the greatest absurdities. The unbeliever can believe unhesitatingly that he is the descendant of a long line of lower animals ranging all the way from protoplasm to ape. Yet he sneers at the Christian who receives by faith the divine record that "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). The prudent man mistrusts himself and trusts the Word of the living God. Ordering his steps in the Word, he looks well to his paths.

Fearing the Lord, the wise man departs from evil. The fool heeds no one and is led by his lustful desires. He rushes on in conceited self-confidence to his own destruction. If opposed in his foolishness, he rages in anger. But he finds himself the object of other's hatred, because of his wicked devices. In searching for wicked pleasures he will inherit folly. When his wild race is run and his years of recklessness are past, in his feebleness and poverty he will bow to the wisdom of the righteous. He will be forced at last to acknowledge that they had chosen the better part. The good devote themselves to the

acquisition of wisdom. They are crowned with knowledge and honored, when the simple are despised. Contrast Saul and David.

14:20-22

In this world, where covetousness rules, the rich will always have many to laud and admire them; while the poor will be despised and oppressed. It is wrong to act this way; for God often chooses the poor of earth to be rich in faith (James 2:5). God sees all, and He will reward those who are gracious and kindly in their dealing with the lowly. He will see that lovingkindness and truth are given to the merciful in return. Contrast the princes of Judah with Ebed-melech (Jeremiah 38:1-13; 39:15-18).

14:23

Labor is profitable because of what is produced and because it fills the hands and occupies the mind. This greatly lessens the danger of giving way to a corrupt nature. But mere talk and empty boasting of oneself result in material and spiritual poverty. How suited the prayer for fallen creatures, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3)! See the parable of the two sons. One labored in the vinyard and profited; the other said he would work, but did not: it was the talk of the lips alone (Matthew 21:28-31).

14:24

Whether poor or wealthy in this world's goods, the wise are always rich because they possess treasure that can never fade away. The fool, whatever his possessions, is only filled with folly, and nothing will profit him in the end. Of Nabal, Abigail

had to say, "Nabal [a fool] is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Samuel 25:25). And these words are true of all that are like him. Amnon is a fit illustration of this unhappy company (2 Samuel 13:13). For the lasting reward of the wise, see Daniel 12:3.

14:25

In Proverbs 14:5 we had a faithful witness (KJV); here we have a true witness. Such a one will deliver souls. Our Lord presents Himself in the double character of the "faithful and true witness" to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14). In a day of lukewarmness and laxity, He remains both the faithful testimony-bearer, maintaining the truth, and the true witness, delivering all who bow in repentance. A deceitful witness is in every way the opposite of this. He plays fast and loose with the teaching of the Scriptures, to the eternal loss of those who believe his unholy speculations. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). Contrast Moses with Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8).

14:26-27

The object of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Solomon to pen the Proverbs was to teach the fear of Jehovah. He who has learned this lesson finds strong confidence and a place of refuge. It is not the slavish fear of an abject bondsman, but that filial reverence of loving children. Such rejoice to have found a fountain of life and instruction for their earthly path, so that they may avoid the snares of death. *Children* is used in verse 26 in a moral sense. Relationship to God, as we now know it, was not revealed before the Son of God came into the world to make known the Father. But those who truly feared the Lord were seen as His children though they had not received the

Spirit of adoption, enabling them to cry, "Abba, Father." See Cornelius (Acts 10).

14:28

The rank and title of a monarch mean nothing if there is no one to acknowledge his authority. When the Lord Jesus "in his times… shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15), all redeemed creation will bow before Him. David and Ish-bosheth illustrate the verse (2 Samuel 3-4).

14:29

The man of God will have the ability to rule his spirit. By controlling himself, he demonstrates great understanding; he who lacks self-control is not able to profit others. A hasty spirit just exalts folly and hinders the understanding of true wisdom. Bad temper is always a sign of weakness. The man who knows he has the mind of God can afford to wait quietly on Him. See Micaiah and Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah (1 Kings 22:24-25).

14:30

A sound heart is the heart of one who is broken before the Lord and has learned not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Envy reveals a lack of self-judgment. In a Christian, it indicates an impending breakdown of his discipleship if he fails to humble himself in secret. This was the hidden cause of Asaph's unhappiness until he went into the sanctuary of the Lord (Psalm 73).

14:31

To deal harshly with those in poverty is to reproach God who made both rich and poor. His inscrutable wisdom permits some to be in affliction, while others have more than heart can wish. He who honors God will view the needy as left to test the hearts of those in more comfortable circumstances. Also he will value the privilege of ministering to them as he is able, thus showing them the kindness of God. See the case of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9).

14:32

The deaths of the wicked and the righteous stand out in vivid contrast like their lives. The wicked is taken away in and by his iniquities. He goes out into a hopeless eternity to face his guilty record at the bar of omnipotent justice. The upright in heart has faced his sins during life in the presence of the Holy One. He dreads no judgment after death, so he leaves this world with trustful hope of coming joy and bliss. Balaam wished for such a death but found the opposite (Numbers 23:10; 31:8). Stephen knew of this confidence. He could kneel down and die with a prayer for the forgiveness of his murderers on his lips (Acts 7:59-60).

14:33

The intelligence and insight of the man of understanding reveal the wisdom that is in his heart; while the senseless behavior of fools tells all too plainly what is within their hearts. See note on verse 24.

14:34

History is the perpetual illustration of what is declared in this proverb. Nations, like individuals, are judged according to their ways. No country that forsook the path of national righteousness has prospered long. When pride and vanity, coupled with greed and cruelty, have been in control, the hour of humbling was not far away. Israel will ever be the great object-lesson for all people. When the Word of God was esteemed and His will honored, they prospered. When sin and neglect of God triumphed, they became a reproach. He was right who said, "Israel is the pillar of salt to the nations, crying to all people, 'Remember!'"

14:35

When an ambassador displays wisdom and discretion the king values his services. But let his advice prove disastrous and the king's indignation will know no bounds. May those who seek to serve a greater King be characterized by the wisdom that will make them of real value in the work He has committed to them. See Darius and Daniel, in contrast with Ahasuerus and Haman (Daniel 6:3; Esther 7:7-9).

Proverbs 15

It is impossible for man to estimate correctly the power for good or evil that lies in the tongue. A kind and gracious word will often disarm a most ill-tempered and wrathful man. A sharp, cutting remark has frequently separated friends dear to each other for years; some trivial circumstance arose which should have been lovingly turned to an occasion for grace and forbearance on the part of each.

15:1-2

It is considered unmanly by many not to resent an insult and to allow wrathful words to pass unchallenged. But it takes far more true character to meet an angry man in quietness of spirit, and to return cool, calm words for heated, hasty ones. The man who controls his tongue shows that he has his personal feelings in subjection. The man who returns malice for malice reveals that he does not yet know how to rule his spirit. Grievous words only add fuel to the flame; a gracious demeanor will go far towards cooling the angry passions of another.

The wise man knows how to use knowledge profitably; he also knows when to speak and when to be silent. The fool is always ready with a retort, whether it is fitting or not.

In Gideon's answer to the men of Ephraim we have a precious example of the soft answer that turns away wrath and the wisdom that uses knowledge correctly (Judges 8:1-3). In Jephthah's reply to the same people we see a sad illustration of the folly of using the grievous words that stir up anger (Judges 12:1-6).

15:3

How comforting the truth of this proverb is to the weary heart. Like poor Hagar in the desert, one may feel abandoned by everyone but God; however, one can say with assurance, "Thou God seest me" (Genesis 16:13). To know that His eyes are on all our ways is sweet indeed when there is confidence and hope in Him. But for the wicked to know that he can never hide from those all-seeing eyes is perhaps the most terrible thing he has to face. This is not surprising when it is remembered that He who sees all is the Holy and the True! It is unrepented sin that makes it so dreadful to be under the eye of God. He who acknowledges his guilt and bows in repentance before Him, need no longer fear. Sin confessed is sin removed through the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. David's musings in Psalm 139 form a precious commentary on this verse.

15:4

The perverse tongue is much more common than the healing tongue! The deceitful tongue separates brother from brother and divides relationships. The wholesome tongue binds together with cheer and gladness and is as a tree of life to those who meditate on its utterances. The healing tongue is the tongue of the peacemaker. The perverse tongue belongs to him who scatters discord among brethren. May we covet the former and flee the latter.

Abraham possessed the tongue of healing when he said, "Let there be no strife,... for we be brethren" (Genesis 13:8). Sheba the son of Bichri by his hasty tongue caused division and dissension in Israel and brought judgment on his own head (2 Samuel 20).

15:5

The young man is very apt to consider his knowledge superior to that of his father, forgetting that you cannot ignore years of experience. It is foolish not to learn from one who has walked the path before you. To give attention to reproof and thankfully accept correction is an evidence of true wisdom. Contrast Manasseh with his father Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-21).

15:6

See note on Proverbs 14:24. The true riches are found in the house of the righteous. Whatever revenue the evildoer may accrue, he will have trouble and sorrow in large measure. See Achan (Joshua 7:19-26).

15:7

In place of idle jokes and unkind speeches, the words of the wise bring profit and blessing—the true knowledge that edifies the hearer. The foolish can only utter what is in his heart and benefits no one, only harms. Paul and Elymas at Paphos fitly illustrate both sides (Acts 13:6-12).

15:8-9

"They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). The sacrifice of the wicked, together with all their ways, is evil in His sight. Before He can accept anything from the sinner, there must be repentance—a bowing of soul before God and seeking His face in sincerity. He will demonstrate His favor to the honest and upright of heart for He delights in those who follow righteousness.

It is important for the sinner to realize that he is altogether unprofitable. The Lord asks nothing and can accept nothing

from him until he first receives the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He has been received by faith the whole life will be changed. Loving service to God will then be most acceptable and very precious in His sight because it will be the fruit of the new life, not the labor of one toiling for that life.

These verses show how contrary to Scripture it is to ask unconverted men to support the work of the Lord or to make sacrifices for Christ's sake. All they can do or give will be stained with sin and unfit for His holy presence. See Psalm 66:18.

15:10-12

"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). And He "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The unseen world, which is dark and hidden to man, is all open before Him. He alone searches the hearts of men and judges their motives. When they refuse correction His eye observes their perversity and He will see that they are judged according to their works. The scorner resents correction and reproof, therefore he avoids the wise so his evil ways will not be called in question. But he cannot avoid God. He must deal with Him whether he wants to or not. It will be solemn indeed when the wicked must account for opportunities refused, instruction neglected, and grace despised. See the wise and foolish builders of Matthew 7:24-27.

15:13

The happy man is the one who has a heart at rest and who can therefore rejoice at all times. He has found in Christ a Savior and a daily satisfaction. He who casts all his cares on Him and

has learned to commit all his affairs into His hand will always have a glad heart and a cheerful countenance. The portion of the one who tries to carry his own sorrows and daily cares is a burdened heart. He fails to turn all over to Him who so delights to bear our cares for us. Nothing breaks the spirit like hidden grief; but this need not be the condition of the saint who will allow the Lord Jesus to be not only his sin-bearer, but his burden-bearer too. See Paul in Philippians 4.

15:14

Our food has much to do with making us what we are. The same is true of us morally. We become like that on which we feed; and we feed on what our hearts crave. The man of understanding values knowledge and devotes himself to its pursuit. The fool does not care for that which would build true character and draw him away from his evil ways. Instead he feeds on folly and vanity, becoming more empty and foolish than before.

Let the young Christian ponder this well. Have you learned to know Christ? Then leave behind forever the carnal pleasures of the world. Do not attempt to feed the new life on the world's trashy literature and its sinful pleasures. If you do, there will be no real growth, and a moral and spiritual breakdown is sure to follow. But if you set the Lord before you and find your food in His Word and what is edifying, you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. Imitate David (Psalm 119:103-104), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 15:16), and Job (Job 23:12). Do not allow yourself to fall into the ways of the mixed multitude (Numbers 11:4-9), who lost their appetite for angels' food by lusting after Egyptian delicacies.

15:15

This verse closely connects with the thirteenth verse. One who is depressed and gloomy himself sees every day full of causes for grief and dismal foreboding. It is a wretched way to live and indicates lack of confidence in God. When the heart is cheerful, all days are bright, and the soul has a continual feast. This is not frivolity, but that holy joy which results from tracing everything that comes into my life back to God. Habakkuk entered into this joy in large measure (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

15:16-17

The one who has found his joy in the Lord can well understand the dear old saint who spread his table with a bit of bread, an onion, and a glass of water, and then joyfully thanked God for "all this and Jesus"! It is far better to have little on earth and to know Jesus and abide in His fear, than to have great treasures and varied luxuries, coupled with trouble and hatred. Consider the attitude of Daniel and his companions when they refused to defile themselves with the king's meat (Daniel 1).

15:18

The first verse of this chapter has already reminded us of this truth; but we may well have it brought before us again, for we take so long to learn. A wrathful man is of necessity a proud man; otherwise he would not be so easily angered by what affects him. A humble man will be slow to anger, for he has learned not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Therefore he will not quickly resent insults and offenses. Contrast the spirit displayed by Saul and David (1 Samuel 20:30-34; 24:8-22).

15:19

Difficulties abound in the mind of the slothful man. His life seems surrounded by thorns. He has many excuses for not acting at once according to what he knows is right. The upright, learning his duty, presses on and finds his way made plain before him as he takes one step after another.

If God commands, I must simply obey. He takes the responsibility of clearing the obstacles from my path or giving me the ability to overcome them. Hear David's notes of triumph in Psalm 18:29 and 2 Samuel 22:30. How unhappy the contrast in the case of the ten spies (Numbers 13).

15:20

Compare with Proverbs 10:1. A wise son gladdens the heart of his father by heeding instruction and practicing virtue. A foolish man considers himself superior to his mother and ignores her loving advice and helpful counsel. See 30:17.

15:21

The fool plunges on, rejoicing in his folly. He delights in iniquity and is determined to have his own way despite every warning and entreaty. The man of integrity submits himself to the fear of God and walks in uprightness. He refuses to be decoyed by sinful pleasures and fascinations. See notes on Proverbs 14:16 and 18.

15:22

See the note on 11:14, and compare with 24:6. He is a wise man indeed who counsels with men of intelligence and experience concerning important matters. This is particularly true where

others are likely to be widely affected. See the behavior of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15.

15:23

The appropriate answer spoken at a suitable time leaves no regrets. True words are not necessarily timely ones. Many a sorrow and heartache has been caused, both to the speaker and others, by repeating what in itself was true enough, but which should never have been passed on to a third party. But a word in season is precious and helpful. It is refreshing to the hearer and gives joy to the one who utters it. After the idle speculations of the three friends of Job, how seasonable was the answer of Elihu (Job 32).

15:24

The Hebrew word *Sheol*, or the *grave* (NIV) refers not only to the place of future punishment, but to what was before the cross, even to the children of God—an unseen land of darkness beyond the grave. Inasmuch as long life was a blessing promised to the faithful Hebrew, an early death was a calamity to be dreaded. Hence the way of life could be said to lead away from Sheol beneath. Those who walked on the way of life would be preserved to an honored old age in the land given by God to His earthly people. Hezekiah's case aptly illustrates the state of mind regarding death which was common among truly pious persons in the past dispensation (Isaiah 38 and 2 Kings 20).

15:25

"Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off" (Psalm 138:6). His face is

ever set against those who exalt themselves; but He has always been the support of the fatherless and the widow who confided in His love and care. God's needy people may trust His grace implicitly, assured that His heart is ever towards them. But the haughty and self-inflated have no right to His consideration and lovingkindness. Their house will fall and their pride will be withered up. Contrast the judgment on Coniah's house (Jeremiah 22:30) with the Lord's care of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:10-16).

15:26

Already we have considered the Lord's estimate of the sacrifice and way of the wicked. We now learn that the very thoughts of the evildoer are also an abomination to Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Habakkuk 1:13). But the conversation of the pure is pleasant in His sight, as being the outflow of a heart exercised to godliness. We see both classes in John 6:68-71.

15:27

Those who sit on the judicial bench and those who are called as witnesses have always been exposed to the snare of taking bribes. Greed and covetousness have proven the undoing of many in this position. People who have accepted bribes have brought ruin on themselves and shame on all who were associated with them. The hater of gifts—that is, the one who resolutely refuses to be bought—will live.

The soldiers who guarded the tomb of our Lord were silenced by bribes, to their eternal dishonor (Matthew 28:11-15). Samuel challenged Israel to testify to his integrity on this subject (1 Samuel 12:3-4). See Proverbs 29:4.

15:28

The man who walks in the fear of God will weigh his words carefully, lest by a hasty utterance he dishonor his Lord and hinder where he desires to help. The wicked has no such consideration; he speaks whatever comes to his lips, no matter what harm it may do. People often actually pride themselves on being frank and outspoken, when in reality they are simply exhibiting the calloused state of their consciences. If truly aroused to the value of words, they would weigh them well before speaking them and thus avoid much mischief and sorrow. Because a thing is true, it is not necessarily a fit subject to be discussed and passed on from one to another. The righteous will consider carefully the effect of his words before uttering what can never be fully recalled. Contrast Elisha with the sons of the prophets at Jericho (2 Kings 2:15-18).

15:29

The wicked have no right to expect anything from Jehovah; He makes no promise to heed their cry. When the day of their distress comes they find no one on whom to call. When idolatrous Israel turned to God in their troubles, He refused to be entreated of them. He referred them to the gods they had served, in order that they might realize what it meant to have turned their backs on Him.

But He has pledged Himself to hear the prayer of the righteous; and with Him to hear is to answer. The man who delights himself in God when all is bright will find Him a Friend close at hand when darkness enshrouds the soul. Let us not forget that it is written, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide

in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). See Joshua at Gibeon (Joshua 10:12-14).

15:30

The gospel of the glory of the blessed God is the "good report" of this proverb. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Precious as light when one has been groping in darkness, is this good news to a soul that has been longing for deliverance from a burdened conscience.

The good report sent from Heaven to men in their sins concerns God's Son, Jesus Christ, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). It is a Person who is presented to man in the gospel. When He is trusted and His work understood, it does indeed rejoice the heart and make the bones fat. See the jailer of Philippi (Acts 16:29-34).

15:31-33

See note on Proverbs 15:10. Jehovah values the wise who are humble enough to be thankful for correction when going astray.

The intellectuals of this world are often too proud to receive an admonition. Fancying themselves superior they disdainfully turn away from him who would, in the fear of God, reprove them when in error. But in so doing they show that they despise their own souls.

It is only those who hear reproof who get understanding. Abiding in the fear of the Lord they admit it is wise to acknowledge their mistakes and faults. So they receive admonition as coming from God Himself, for "before honour is

humility." He who takes the lowly self-forgetful place will be lifted up in due time. See Joseph's remarkable history (Genesis 37-50).

Proverbs 16

The human proverb, "Man proposes, but God disposes," finds its far earlier counterpart in Proverbs 16:1.

16:1

"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). He may plan and arrange, but when the time arrives to speak or act the answer comes from Jehovah. See Balaam (Numbers 23-24).

16:2

Ever since the fall it has been second nature with man to justify himself. Until brought into the light of God's holiness he is certain that his conduct is defensible. His ways are clean in his own eyes, but he is not to be trusted to judge himself rightly for the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Jehovah weighs the spirits. His balances are exact. His judgment is unerring; it is He who solemnly declares, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Daniel 5:27).

Only by allowing God to be the judge of his sin can a man receive the salvation provided through the finished work of the Son of God on Calvary's cross. Otherwise condemnation can be his only portion. See Belshazzar (Daniel 5:25-30).

16:3

The word *commit* might be rendered "roll." He who rolls his affairs over on the Lord will find Him ever ready to take charge of them all and to carry them on to a proper completion. But it must be remembered that if I thus commit all to Him, I no

longer choose for myself what the outcome should be, but say with confidence, "Thy will be done." God would have every desire whispered in His ear, and then left in faith that He may act according to His love and unerring wisdom. See Hannah (1 Samuel 1:9-20).

16:4-5

All things will result at last in the glory of God. Earth's long tale of sin and sorrow will eventually result in magnifying His love and His holiness. Those saved by His grace will praise Him forever; but the wicked will also acknowledge His justice in the day of their condemnation. He detests pride; all who walk pridefully will be broken before Him, try as they may to resist His power. They will be declared guilty when He sits on the throne of judgment. How much better to bow in repentance now, while He is on a throne of grace! See His word regarding the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6).

16:6

Wrongdoing between men is best reconciled by lovingkindness and truth. This proverb is not referring to the atonement of our sins before God. No amount of kindly deeds and truthful words can purge the conscience of guilt and give acceptance with Him. But by showing repentance and making amends to someone who has been sinned against we will go far towards clearing his mind of the past evil. It is the fear of Jehovah that leads to departure from what is unholy and contrary to sound doctrine. This fear of God will lead one to endeavor to have a conscience void of offense both towards God and men. See the apostle Paul (Acts 24:16).

16:7

The truth of this proverb is a far-reaching statement, which is not pondered often enough. It allows no exceptions. If a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, his enemies will be unable to say one word against his character. They may hate him, but they are compelled to admit that God is with him.

If therefore my enemies are not at peace with me, I should ask myself, Do my ways really please God? Doubtless I soon will be reminded of something needing to be judged in His presence.

The one who goes on quietly "through evil report and good report," will close the mouths of his enemies. He wastes no time in self-vindication, but is concerned only with pleasing God and committing all to Him who judges righteously. A holy, humble walk will silence even his worst foes. See Daniel (Daniel 6:4-5).

16:8

Integrity of heart is better than thousands in silver and gold. How poor is the man who piles up his millions, but sacrifices his conscience to do it! A simple living, with the mind and heart at rest, and a walk in accordance with righteous principles is infinitely to be preferred to a large income coupled with covetousness and unholy practices. See Naboth and Ahab (1 Kings 21).

16:9

Compare this verse with Proverbs 16:1. People frequently think they are having their own way, when in reality the Lord is leading them through strange paths for their discipline and blessing. See Naomi (Ruth 1:21).

16:10-15

These verses bring to our minds the ideal king. Occasionally earthly monarchs have been raised up who hated iniquity and loved righteousness. But this world still groans for the coming and reign of the true King, who will judge the nations with justice, and in whose mouth the vile person will be despised.

It is God's Anointed alone whose throne will be established by righteousness and to whom lawlessness of every kind is an abomination. In His lips there is a sure decision, for His mouth does not break the laws of sound judgment. Christ is the grand pattern for all human rulers. To the degree that they imitate Him, they properly maintain the kingly glory.

Whatever is right and true among men is from God. All indecency and dishonest trickery are detestable in His eyes. So we have the weights and balances introduced in the middle of this section relating to kingly dignity. For the same integrity that directs the decision of the upright king also influences the measures used by the poorest of his subjects.

The king delights in lips of truth and loves sound speech. His anger is as a death-sentence, but wisdom will pacify it. In his favor is life and refreshment. If life is in the light of an earthly king's countenance, how much more life is in the light of the King of kings—"In thy presence is fulness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). See David (2 Samuel 3:36).

16:16-17

Compare with notes on Proverbs 2:1-9. The man of wisdom and understanding has his fortune made for both worlds (see Daniel 5:11). It is easy to be deceived by a counterfeit wisdom that does not come from above, but is earthly, sensual, and

devilish. That wisdom which does not begin with the fear of the Lord is Satan's counterfeit. Arrogant, worldly people may boast that they have all knowledge but they do not know to depart from evil. They follow the highway of iniquity.

16:18-19

Pride was an archangel's ruin, as it has been the destruction of untold myriads of men and women on earth. It is the sure precursor of a fall; the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity cannot permit His creature's self-exaltation to go unchecked. It is far better to be little in one's own eyes and to find happy fellowship with the humble, than to share the pursuits and treasures of the proud in spirit.

It is when one sees pride in another that its hideousness is clearly revealed. How often we will complacently tolerate in ourselves what fills us with disgust when we see it in someone else. But God notices the least beginning of unjudged haughtiness in each heart. What mind can conceive how hateful it must all be to Him! May we see to it that this deadly sin is examined in His presence, before it leads us to our lasting sorrow! See Haman (Esther 5-7).

16:20-24

These five verses form a series of epigrams on the value of applying wisdom to the various affairs of life. To proceed wisely in a case presenting difficult obstacles assures a good result. This is true of those who confide in Jehovah and find their happiness in obeying Him.

When wisdom rules our innermost being our behavior will be discreet. Kindly lips will demonstrate a humble heart and willingness to be instructed. This is true understanding and

like a spring of living water it flows forth to bless others. The opposite is true of fools. Their folly is evident to any person of discernment.

The condition of the heart is of prime importance. If all is right there, the words of the lips will also be upright. The profitable and pleasant counsel of the wise will replace the speculative boastings of worldly wisdom. Note the characteristics of true wisdom as described in James 3:17, and see the confession of the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:6-9).

16:25

This verse repeats the statement of Proverbs 14:12. It emphasizes the danger of refusing the path of wisdom for self-chosen ways that only end in death. See note on that verse.

16:26

The laborer pursues his occupation because of his desire to be satisfied with the fruits of his toil. His appetite craves gratification and so he presses on in his service. This is as God ordained when the fall shut man out of the garden, and he was commanded to eat his bread in the sweat of his face. Wealth gotten without labor is generally a very dangerous acquisition. He who knows the weariness of honest toil will be careful how he uses the results of his labor. Ponder the cases of Ruth (Ruth 2), and of Gideon (Judges 6:11-12).

16:27-28

See notes on Proverbs 11:13 and 17:9. Everyone addicted to the sinfully cruel habit of gossiping should ponder these words carefully. It is an ungodly man who digs up evil and whose lips seem to be set on fire of Hell. Such a one goes about scattering

the seeds of strife as one might sow thistledown, or the pods of other noxious weeds, to result in a harvest of grief and anguish to many a soul.

There is no question that whispering and backbiting is one of the greatest curses among Christians. This detestable vice alienates the dearest friends and creates misunderstandings of all kinds. Many are defiled by repeating tales which a godly person would seek to cover and never repeat. See what mischief was brought about by the talebearing of Doeg the Edomite, and see that you follow not in the steps of so unsavory a wretch (1 Samuel 22:9-19).

16:29-30

Many an otherwise kindly and gracious soul has been misled by the energy and apparent earnestness of a violent man. His eyes were blinded and he was led on to join that violent man in things that were quite opposed to his own more mature judgment. Fair speech coupled with a magnetic personality have often led one into a way that was not good. It is wise not to be too easily persuaded. Before making a decision, take time to ascertain the mind of God, so you will not be a partaker of other men's sins. Neglect of this led Jehoshaphat, a most amiable man, into many a snare (2 Chronicles 18:1; 20:35-37).

16:31

Probably the last line of this proverb should read simply, "It shall be found in the way of righteousness." The verse does not say the hoary head will never be found in the paths of wickedness; alas, often white hairs crown the sinner's head. But it is characteristic of the way of righteousness and when found there, it is indeed a diadem of honor. Riotous living in

youth generally means feebleness in middle age and premature death. Temperance and righteousness tend to strengthen body and lengthen life. Hear the testimony of Caleb, who wholly followed the Lord (Joshua 14:11); and note what is written of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:7).

16:32

Self-mastery is the greatest of all victories. Men have subdued kingdoms but were defeated in the effort to control themselves. A bad temper is often excused on the ground of genetic make-up, but it is rather the evidence of unjudged pride and impatience. "Learn of me," said Jesus, "for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). The meek man is not a spiritless man, but he is slow to anger. He can be righteously stirred when occasion requires, but not when it is his own dignity that is in question. "Add…to [self-control] patience" (2 Peter 1:6) is a verse for us all. It is generally a sign of weakness when one allows himself to become angry and excited in the face of opposition. Note Nehemiah's calmness of spirit and dependence on God when meeting the irritating sneers and downright opposition of the enemies of Jerusalem.

16:33

In this world it may seem that chance rules the lives of men (Ecclesiastes 9:11). But a supreme intelligence controls all things, even when He is unseen and unrecognized.

The men of ancient times frequently resorted to casting lots to determine troubling questions. It was used to divide Canaan among the tribes (Numbers 26:55-56) and was used on many occasions to detect guilty persons (for example, Jonah 1:7). The last mention of the use of lots in Scripture is in connection

with the election of Matthias to the vacant apostleship left by Judas (Acts 1:15-26). It would seem that since the days of the patriarchs God had given judgment through lots, and so the company of the twelve used this method to keep their number complete. Paul evidently was never numbered with them. He was the messenger of the glory of Christ to the nations, while the twelve were connected primarily with testimony to the Jewish nation.

For instances of God's giving judgment by the lot, see the cases of the two goats (Leviticus 16:8); Achan (Joshua 7:16-18); and Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:41). In the book of Esther we find the lot (called Pur) used by Haman to determine a day for the destruction of the Jews (Esther 3:7 and 9:24-25).

Proverbs 17

We are carried back to Proverbs 15:16-17 as we take up the first verse of the wise sayings of this chapter.

17:1

The word *sacrifice* (KJV) refers to the peace offerings, portions of which were eaten by the offerer and his friends. Such a feast was supposed to indicate great piety on the part of the host and his intimate associates; but if marred by discord and contention, it lost all its precious character. A dry morsel with peace and quietness was much to be preferred to a celebration with controversy.

Similarly the Corinthians had misused the Lord's supper, making it an occasion for a common feast, where strife and party spirit raged. The apostle, rebuking them, admonished them to eat their own meals in quietness at home and not come together to condemnation (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

17:2

A dependable servant is better than a misbehaving son. The latter can blame only himself if his wronged father gives him an insignificant allowance or cuts him off altogether. But the servant who has been faithful in the performance of his duties is remembered as one of the household. Yet no hired servant can give the joy to the heart of a father that is afforded by an obedient son. See Eliezer (Genesis 15:2-3).

17:3

Trials and afflictions for the saints of God are what the fining pot and furnace are in the purifying of precious metals.

> *Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The refiner of silver and the purifier of gold know just what heat is necessary to purge away all dross. They will take care that just the right amount is permitted. So it is with our God and Father. He desires to free us from the base things of earth, and He allows us to pass through the fires of affliction for that end. But it is precious indeed to know that He sits by the fining pot, waiting until His own image is reflected in the soul; and He walks in the furnace with His persecuted children. See the sons of Levi and the three Hebrew children (Malachi 3:3; Daniel 3:19-27).

17:4

When the heart cherishes iniquity, the ear easily listens to lying lips and a malicious tongue. The upright in heart learn to know the voice of the deceiver and to refuse his words; but the unjust and false soul readily falls in with those who are like himself. See the people of Judah and the lying priests and prophets (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

17:5

Compare with Proverbs 14:21. The Lord has left the poor always with us that we might be stirred to kindness and consideration for those in less agreeable circumstances than our own. To mock and disregard the poor because of their

poverty is to reproach Him who has permitted our circumstances to be so diverse.

When calamity comes on another, we should respond with loving sympathy. If instead we cherish gladness in our hearts because of their griefs, an impartial Judge is looking on who will be avenged in time. God judged Edom for rejoicing over Israel's punishment. As a result, Edom too was punished. See Obadiah 12-16.

17:6

God sets the individual in families. The aged find their youth renewed in their children's children; while the young respect their fathers and honor them by obedience to their instructions. This is the ideal household, where order is administered according to God's standards and love rules all hearts. Happy the home where the divine pattern is exemplified. See Jacob and the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:8-22).

17:7

Good words from the mouth of an evil man are distasteful and out of place, for the life fails to back them up. There is a lack of sincerity about them that is very repugnant to an upright soul. On the other hand, *noblesse oblige* ("rank imposes obligation"). Falsehood coming from one who is respected as a leader of the people is even more to be denounced. Men feel instinctively that he who leads others should be real himself. They will overlook lack of ability and an absence of brilliancy or of natural or acquired talent; but deceitfulness will never be forgiven. It was this sense of the responsibility of those in position that made men ask in derision, "Is Saul also among

the prophets?" when his lips uttered "excellent speech" (1 Samuel 10:10-12). The same feeling has caused the unconverted to remember with scorn Abraham's denial of his wife. The very fact of his exalted position made his sin more noticeable (Genesis 20:1-13).

17:8

A gift presented as a token of pure affection and respect will be highly valued by its possessor. It will pave the way for a deeper relationship. He who would find love should be a giver not just a receiver. Jonathan's gifts to David cemented their friendship by expressing the love that was in his heart (1 Samuel 18:3-4).

Spiritually, we are reminded that Christ has ascended on high and given gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8)—not to be used for self-aggrandizement, but for service to the church. Rightly employed, the gift truly will be a store of grace, giving its possessor acceptance among those who value spiritual gifts. But beware of the danger expressed in Proverbs 17:23.

17:9

See remarks on 10:12; 11:13; and 25:23. He who forgives and forgets the sins of another is an imitator of God and will be loved by all. He who repeats a matter to the detriment of another is following the example of that evil spirit who is called "the accuser of our brethren."

To cover a transgression, however, does not mean to make light of sin and allow iniquity to go unrebuked in another. On the contrary, it is to go to the erring one personally in tenderness and brotherly kindness; this is done to activate his conscience concerning that which is bringing dishonor to his

Lord. If such a mission is successful, the sin should never again be mentioned. It is covered and none other need know of it.

Unfortunately this is seldom carried out among us! Evil is spread abroad; backbiting goes on in secret; and thus many are defiled, love wanes, and fellowship is destroyed. The one who goes about repeating things unnecessarily is in a wretched business indeed. He separates true friends by his detestable practices and casts reproach on the name of the Lord. It is a pity the people of God are not more awake to the evil character of the gossiper. He should be shunned as a polluted leper who will defile all who listen to him.

God alone can safely hear the sad story of a brother's shame. Into His ear it can all be poured, coupled with earnest prayer for the restoration of the one who has gone astray. To persist in repeating accounts of evil-doing to fellow saints only distresses and injures those who are persuaded to listen. Few indeed are the men who will take a brother's wrongdoing to heart and make it an occasion for self-judgment and confession of their own sin to the Lord.

Someone has said that when tempted to relate unsavory things of an absent person three questions should be asked: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? To these a fourth might well be added: Have I told him about it personally? Asking these questions of ourselves would stop an immense amount of sinful gossiping.

Nathan did not spread the sin of David abroad but reproved him in the fear of God (2 Samuel 12). In Sanballat we see the typical whisperer endeavoring to separate Nehemiah and his brethren by shaking their confidence in his integrity (Nehemiah 6).

17:10

Chastise the fool severely and he still maintains his self-complacency; but gently reprove a wise man and he will take it to heart. The fool is so thoroughly enamored of his own poor judgment that he can conceive of none more capable than himself. The other realizes his own limitations and is thankful for advice and correction. Contrast Abimelech and Herod (Genesis 21:25-26; Luke 3:19).

17:11-13

Nothing irritates a proud, insubordinate man more than to be held in restraint by lawful authority. He breathes the air of treason and rebellion; therefore he must be dealt with in severity. To contend with him is like battling with an enraged beast that has been robbed of its offspring. He will repay good with evil; therefore evil will not depart from his house. "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons" (Colossians 3:25). Note the ways and doom of Joab when he became exalted in his own eyes (1 Kings 2:28-34).

17:14

A leak in a dike could be stopped with a pebble if noticed at the beginning. But if neglected, it will grow greater and greater until, at last, the inrushing waters will carry away everything in front of them. So it is with strife. How many a lifelong contention has begun with a few hasty words. If repented of and apologized for at once, the quarrels would have ceased immediately and years of sorrow averted. The Spirit of God has said, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). If this simple rule

were literally obeyed, untold heartaches would be avoided! Happy the man who lays his head on his pillow nightly with the knowledge that he has no unrepented, hasty actions or angry words to his account. When days and weeks of charges and counter-charges are succeeded by months of crimination and recrimination, reconciliation is hard and difficult. It is far better to humble oneself and admit the wrong at the beginning. The alternative is to grieve the Holy Spirit of God and lacerate the hearts of beloved saints by a long period of un-Christlike wrangling. This disputing will leave wounds that never can be healed or scars that never can be erased. See Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:35-40).

17:15

To justify the wicked and to condemn the righteous is to call evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). Jehovah would have truthful judgment. What is opposed to justice is an abomination. Observe that to justify necessarily means to *declare* righteous, not, as some theologians would have it, to *make* righteous. God justifies the ungodly on the basis of Christ's finished work—that is, He clears guilty sinners of every charge when they trust His Son, turning to Him in repentance. This is very different from making sinners to be practically upright in their living. Their upright behavior is a result of justification, but it is not justification in itself. This is an important distinction if we would understand correctly the Christian doctrine of grace as set forth in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians.

In this verse, to justify the wicked is to wink at their sin and to pass by iniquity without a suitable atonement; while to condemn the just is to charge them with evil unfairly. To do so

is intolerable in the sight of Him who is the righteous Judge. This was Pilate's dreadful sin when, in order to please the people, he released Barabbas and condemned Jesus, even though he had declared him innocent a few moments before (Matthew 27:24-26).

17:16

It is useless for one who has not set his heart on the acquisition of wisdom to endeavor to learn it by rote. No price can purchase wisdom if the senses are not exercised to discern between good and evil. A fool may grasp certain forms of knowledge through study and intellectual application; but this is very different than having the innermost being controlled by understanding. We only know truth as we walk in it. See Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-22).

17:17

In reading this verse the Christian's heart involuntarily turns to the one Friend whose love the many waters of judgment could not quench, neither could the floods of wrath drown it. Our Lord Jesus Christ is that Friend. His love does not change, and He is preeminently a Brother born for adversity. No human example, however true and devoted can fulfill this verse.

Nevertheless, this thought does not support the sickening sentimentality that forgets His divinity and calls Him our "Elder Brother" or other similar unscriptural titles. But as a devoted brother can be depended on in the day of adversity, so He can be counted on in the hour of need and trial. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

> *His is an unchanging love,*
> *Higher than the heights above;*
> *Deeper than the depths beneath,*
> *True and faithful, strong as death.*

It is unspeakably precious for the soul to abide in His love. If one doubt obscures the full splendor of His undying affection, joy and peace will give place to gloom and foreboding. But when nothing is permitted to hinder the enjoyment of that perfect love that casts out fear, life is sweet indeed. Communion with Him is dearer far than any human friendship can afford.

Many saints have trusted Christ as their Savior who do not really know Him as a living, loving friend—One who enters into all their griefs and would share all their joys. When He is known this way, the difficulties of life can be faced with calmness, and the heart can confide in Him in every hour of trial. See Proverbs 18:24.

17:18

See notes on 6:1-5; 11:15. Lack of sound judgment leads one to accept liability for another in light of the repeated warnings of the Word of God. It is not wise to pledge security for another unless one is quite prepared to lose and can well afford it. Paul pledged the security for Onesimus, as Judah did for Benjamin; but each had counted the cost and was ready to pay to the last penny (Philemon 18-19; Genesis 42:37; 44:32).

17:19-20

There are those who delight in contention and are impatient of restraint, demonstrating their love for their own ways. In

their haughtiness, they build up their gates, thus inviting destruction; for by exalting themselves, they are near to a fall. Having a wicked heart, they find only evil. Their perverse tongues continually stir up mischief. Hanun, proud and defiant, proved this fully, as narrated in 2 Samuel 10.

17:21

Such a verse requires no comment. It is an unhappy fact that is very evident to all. David's grief over Absalom is proof of the truth of this proverb (2 Samuel 18:33). See also Proverbs 17:25.

17:22

See 15:13,15. Nothing breaks the body's systems like gloom and melancholy. When the heart is filled with joy, it refreshes the whole being. The merriment of the Christian is far more real than the mere frivolity of the unsaved. The Christian is able in all circumstances to rejoice in the Lord and be lifted above circumstances that would depress and weigh down the soul. Then, in place of showing his happiness in the empty ways of the world, he can sing and make melody in his heart to the source and object of his gladness. "Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). The man of the world has to resort to various devices to relieve his uneasiness and rouse his spirits. He eagerly participates in all kinds of diversions in order to *forget* his sorrow. On the contrary, it is when the child of God *remembers* his place and portion in Christ that his joy overflows. Contrast the different attitudes of the unknown writer of Psalm 116, first when occupied with himself and then when his faith soared up to God.

17:23

The lawbreaker, conscious of his evildoing, secretly endeavors to bribe with a gift those who are called to sit in judgment on his crimes. Such a course is a tacit acknowledgment of guilt. It is hard indeed to deal fairly with a man to whom one is indebted for a favor. Therefore it is necessary to sternly refuse anything from those who are bent on a sinful course. It was when the king of Babylon sent letters and a present to godly king Hezekiah that he was taken off his guard. He acted without seeking counsel of Jehovah, as he had so readily done when it was a letter of blasphemy he had received (contrast Isaiah 39:1 with 37:14).

17:24

The wise man concentrates on gaining the knowledge of the Lord and walking with Him. The fool wanders aimlessly here and there with no settled purpose. He tastes various theories, getting a smattering of everything, but all to no purpose. Paul warned Timothy against such men who "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3). But they have no desire for the truth of God which alone is wisdom. Instead they follow fables, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). The very opposite attitude characterized the great apostle himself, who could say, "One thing I do!" (Philippians 3:13.)

17:25

See Proverbs 10:1, and 17:21. The young man is not the only, nor by any means the greatest, sufferer when he throws discretion to the winds and plunges into foolishness and vice. The poignant grief of his father's heart and the bitter

disappointment of his mother are sorrows too deep for words to express. To have brought into the world one who despises their love and disobeys all their authority is terrible indeed. Sadly it little affects the haughty, stubborn heart of the wayward youth who plunges recklessly on, adding grief to grief and heartache to heartache! See the stubborn and rebellious son of Deuteronomy 21:18-20.

17:26

The ruler who punishes the good man and the subject who strikes the upright ruler display the same perversion of justice. Neither is rare in this world. It is not unusual to take vengeance on innocent men in order to shield guilty ones and to revolt against God-fearing rulers because their peaceable ways were opposed to the lawless, restless spirit of the age. See the account of Ishmael's assassination of the upright prince, Gedaliah. Then read how he massacred the fourscore men from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria, lest they reveal his crime (Jeremiah 41:1-7).

17:27-28

See notes on Proverbs 12:23 and 15:2. The simpleton is always babbling. The man who has knowledge will not be continually airing what he knows. He is of a quiet spirit and can bide his time. A man who must always be talking is usually one whose grasp of things in general is very slight. Among Christians, an ever-running tongue is certainly no evidence of a discerning person. He whose knowledge is limited is esteemed wise when his words are few. One who lives in the fear of God sets a value on words that the careless soul cannot understand; for he remembers that for "every idle word that men shall speak, they

shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). Even his experiences of God's love and favor are not always to be told lightly to others. Paul seems to have kept the secret of his having been caught up to the third heaven for fourteen years until the right time came to relate it (2 Corinthians 12:1-7). Note the self-control of Elisha in this respect when going out after Elijah (2 Kings 2:3).

Proverbs 18

Nothing is more clearly taught in the Scriptures than the need of a separation between the clean and the unclean— between those who love the truth and those who walk contrary to it. Separation from evil is imperative. He who would honor God must bow to this principle, whether it be to separate from evil friends, from ecclesiastical evil, or from evil business practices. The word is plain: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). The only proper course for a Christian who sincerely desires the Lord's approval is to walk apart from all that is unholy. He must refuse fellowship to those who by their endorsement are partakers of the sins of others.

18:1

In this verse we see a different kind of separation that is condemned by the Scriptures. There is a vast difference between one who in humility and obedience to God separates himself from evil, and another who, through pride and self-importance, separates himself from those who refuse evil, in order to do his own pleasure. This person is the heretic of whom we read in Jude 19: "These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." Men of this type are "murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16). It is sad when Christians behave as these false professors.

We often find men who are born of God and unquestionably gifted by Him, but whose nature is unbroken and willful! Men

like these go on with their brethren as long as their authority is acknowledged and obeyed. But let there be an unwillingness to follow their advice implicitly, and their pride will tolerate no refusal. Either they must have their way, or they will leave the assembly and begin something more to their own taste. These are the people who separate, not for the Lord's glory, but for their own pleasure; having so done, they storm and rage against all wisdom, complaining loudly against those who will not accept their orders as supreme.

To separate from apostasy is right and Scriptural. To separate from what is godly causes grievous division in the church. It is the human will setting itself above the authority of the Word and Spirit of God.

Even in difficult situations that make the most cautious, godly person move slowly, it is very wrong to turn my back on the church God has formed. It is a mistake to excommunicate myself because I think another person should be disciplined. When one has a humble spirit, troublesome occasions only furnish opportunities for waiting patiently on God and seeking to exercise the consciences of fellow saints. It is only the headstrong and willful who will take matters into their own hands. If they are unable to override tender consciences, they separate themselves and rage against their brethren. Alexander the coppersmith was evidently this type of man, if, as seems likely, he is the companion of Hymenaeus mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20. Having given up the truth, Alexander became the bitter opponent of those who stood for it (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

18:2

See note on Proverbs 15:14. Nothing is more characteristic of the fool than his contempt for instruction and his lack of desire to understand. He displays to the most casual observer the foolishness in his heart by the trifling words that flow from his mouth. Consider our Lord's rebuke to the Pharisees who had no delight in understanding (Matthew 23:17-19).

18:3

Throwing off all control and living selfishly results in shame and reproach. He who would have the confidence of his brethren and be respected by his friends must demonstrate a spirit of obedience. This spirit indicates a self-controlled, thoughtful man who values integrity. However high the rebellious person may carry his head for a time, his behavior will ultimately lead to his disgrace. See Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-6).

18:4

The heart is the well, or fountain, from which our words flow. In our Christian dispensation the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer and forms a more wondrous well-spring of wisdom than the wisest could have in the past age. Our Lord spoke of the believer when He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). Commentators have searched in vain for the scripture Jesus referred to. Might it be that Proverbs 18:4 (perhaps with other passages) was in the Lord's thoughts when He spoke? Jesus verified the general testimony of the Scriptures by using the same figure to picture the truth He was declaring.

The thirsty soul finds in Christ the wisdom of God. Trusting in Him, the believer receives that divine indwelling which causes wisdom, as a flowing brook of living water, to flow from him for the refreshment and joy of other needy ones. See Stephen (Acts 6:8, 10).

18:5

How often God, the righteous Judge, insists on impartial justice by those set to represent Him in the tribunals of men! And if He so clearly declares His abhorrence of false and biased decisions in the courts of the world, how very protective He must be concerning the judgments made by His saints! See His word through Moses and the later revelations through Paul (Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 16:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-7).

18:6-8

See Proverbs 26:20-22. The fool is ever ready for strife, and his mouth utters hasty and bitter words on the slightest pretext. His contentious lips call for severe rebuke and will be his own destruction, unless he is brought to repentance. He delights in slander and scandal, rolling evil tales as delicious morsels in his mouth, and fills his heart with what is unholy and perverse. He readily listens to the gossiper and as readily imitates his ways. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were of this spirit (Numbers 16).

18:9

The spendthrift wastes his possessions, the lazy person wastes his time. Both come to poverty, as did the prodigal of Luke 15.

The disobedient son of Matthew 21:30 was clearly on the same road.

18:10

The name of Jehovah stands for the Lord Himself. To run into it, as into a strong tower, is to confide in Him in the time of trouble. This is the blessed privilege of every true saint. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [i.e., garrison] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). All that perplexes and oppresses the human spirit can be poured into God's ear. Then the soul can leave all burdens with Him and can confide in His love. Thus the heart will be at peace, protected as in a garrisoned tower, however the enemy may rage. See a lovely picture of this in the tower of Thebez (Judges 9:50-57).

18:11

The fortress of the man who trusts God contrasts sharply with the fortress of the man who trusts in his wealth. He does not know the name of the Lord, and in his conceit he thinks that he is forever secure. However his riches soon vanish away and leave him desolate and forsaken. How often did the Savior, when on earth, have to rebuke those who trusted in uncertain riches! See especially Luke 6:24 and Mark 10:24.

18:12

See note on Proverbs 16:18. It is needful that creatures so given to pride be reminded of its dire result again and again. It is a

sure precursor of destruction. Humility, on the other hand, is the forerunner of honor. God delights to exalt the lowly.

The Hindu word for humility is said to be "the dust"; for it is a proverb among them that "you can walk on the dust forever and it never answers back." Humility is self-forgetfulness—the spirit of meekness that is of great price in the sight of God. Weigh well His word to Barak (Jeremiah 45:5). Notice how the first clause of the Proverbs 18:12 is exemplified in Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16), and the latter in his son Jotham (2 Chronicles 27:6).

18:13

An unwise person makes rash judgments, founded on one-sided evidence or formed by jumping to conclusions. He is ashamed when the case is thoroughly investigated, and he is found to have spoken without proper proof. Such judgments have not been uncommon, even among Christians who may well learn from this verse. But it is perhaps the young man who is especially vulnerable to this snare, particularly if he is too full of self-confidence. See David's erroneous judgment as to Ziba and Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 16:1-4; 19:24-30).

18:14

When Jehoshaphat put the singers in the forefront of the army Judah was victorious (2 Chronicles 20). When the spirit of praise fills the soul, one is enabled to rise above the infirmities of the body and the trials of the way. But let the joy be lost and the spirit be broken and defeat is certain. The saint can rejoice in the Lord, whatever his circumstances, if his line of communication with God is unbroken and his conscience is

free. Joy in the Lord will make a victor of the feeblest. See Nehemiah's word to the returned remnant (Nehemiah 8:10).

18:15

The wise and prudent man *seeks* for knowledge, therefore he *gets* it. He does not haphazardly seek an accumulation of varied lore. Rather daily and earnestly he searches for absolute truth, as revealed in the Word of God. That search results in the enlightenment of the man of godly integrity. See Ezra (Ezra 7-10).

18:16

Contrast this verse with Proverbs 25:14. We may consider this verse from two standpoints: the natural and the spiritual. From the natural view, its meaning is plain. A man, by bestowing favors on subordinates, easily works his way into the presence of their master. This is a common procedure on the part of those who desire audiences where they are themselves unwanted. We need not dwell on it.

If, however, we think of gift in the spiritual realm it brings before us an important lesson. In the Epistles, the word *gift* refers to that which the ascended Christ bestows on His servants for the edifying of His mystical body (Ephesians 4:8-12). A gifted man does not need to force himself forward. His gift will open doors for him as truly as in the case of a material gift for a natural man. In other words, the man who has had a ministry committed to him by the Lord Himself need never be a groveling slave to the methods of the present age. Let him go on quietly in faithfulness, and the Master he serves will bring him to the front in due time if He would have him there at all. Self-assertiveness is the last thing that should be found in a

servant of Christ. Humble obedience to his Lord, coupled with the loving desire to serve in His name and for His sake, should distinguish the gifted man above all else. See the prophet Amos (Amos 7:14-15).

18:17

See Proverbs 18:13. It is most unwise to hear only one side of a story and then give judgment on what has been presented. This is particularly true when it is a matter that is troubling the saints of God. Even with the most conscientious there is always the likelihood that only a partial account has been told. Therefore it is wise to hear both parties, and, if possible, to have them meet face to face. Most men can make out a good case for themselves if left alone; it has been natural for fallen man to justify himself since the day that Adam sought to throw the blame of his sin back on God. Therefore, to decide a case on one-sided testimony is almost certain to result in a miscarriage of justice. See Saul and Samuel (1 Samuel 15:13-14).

18:18

See note on Proverbs 16:33. When argument was in vain and differences seemed irreconcilable, the lot was resorted to as a final settlement. This was in a time when the written Word of God was not completed, nor the Holy Spirit abiding in His children. In this dispensation of grace the completed Word of God, ministered in the power of the Spirit, is given to us for a court of final resort.

Because of her sin Jerusalem was left with none to cast a lot to determine matters of controversy. Justice had been trampled on and could not be found (Micah 2:5). There is a warning for us in Jerusalem's example, for if our ways are unrighteous, we

turn to the Word of God in vain for guidance. “The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way” (Psalm 25:9).

18:19

See note on Proverbs 17:14. No tangles are so hard to straighten out as those between brothers who once were knit heart to heart in true affection. To win back a brother who has been offended is more difficult than to subdue a walled city. Each is likely to view all that the other does with suspicion and mistrust once confidence has been shaken. Entrenched behind the bars of wounded pride and unwilling to view the matter in relation to God, it will be impossible for either party to be overcome by grace and humility. How much easier it is to humble oneself at first than after months or years of strife! There are few quarrels that could not be settled in a very short time, if both parties agree to meet quietly before the Lord to look into their differences. But the opportune hour, once passed by, may not recur for a long season. Remember, when tempted to perpetuate strife, the dishonor that will accrue to the name of the Lord. Be warned by the unbrotherly example of contention between the men of Judah and of Israel with its sad consequences (2 Samuel 19:41-43).

18:20-21

He who scatters words with his lips will reap an abundant harvest: sinful words will lead to death, righteous words bring life. Words seldom fall idly to the ground. Uttered often in thoughtlessness, they take root and come to fruition most unexpectedly. A chance word, dropped casually to a stranger, may be the means of untold blessing. The soul of the one who

uttered it rejoices when later he is told of the blessed result of his words. The man of God should be encouraged to spread the precious gospel of God as he steadily pursues his way through life. He may be assured that "with the increase of his lips shall he be filled" (20).

But if the words are evil, the harvest is just as certain; and it is well known that weeds and noxious plants flourish where nourishing fruits and grains cannot grow. The man of unholy lips will find abundant result from his reckless words and will as surely as the righteous man "eat the fruit thereof" (21).

Contrast the false teachers of 2 Peter 2 with the ambassadors for Christ of 2 Corinthians 5. Both will yet be rewarded according to their sowing.

18:22

It is not blind chance that unites congenial partners in the bonds of holy matrimony. A wife (not merely a woman) is a gift from the Lord and is an expression of His loving favor. Therefore a young man must seek the Lord's guidance before he permits his affections to go out to a young lady. There would be fewer incompatible marriages if couples would allow God's mind to direct them and not mere whim. Let the young Christian consider well whether the marriage he is contemplating is likely to prove an unequal yoke and a hindrance to spiritual growth, rather than a help. See Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:9-12). Note the last clause of Proverbs 19:14.

18:23

There is an evil inclination associated with great wealth that, if not guarded against, dries up the milk of human kindness and hardens the heart against the needy. Let those whose

temporal riches place them in the position to help the poor, remember that the ear of God hears every unheeded cry of the poverty-stricken. His eye beholds every ungracious action on the part of those who could relieve, but do not offer any help. See the parable of the implacable servant (Matthew 18:23-35).

18:24

None complain so loudly of the lack of love and friendliness on the part of others as those who themselves show very little of either. He who busies himself to show love will receive it back again. He who is himself a friend will find friends to reciprocate his kindness. But the true Friend, as we saw in Proverbs 17:17, is always a friend. His heart is unchanged by the unfaithfulness of the objects of his devotion. He is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother. He always demonstrated love and grace in this world where all by nature were estranged from Him.

Let those who complain of lack of love on the part of fellow-saints imitate Christ's holy example. Be concerned about showing kindness, not about receiving it, and "good measure, pressed down,... shall men give into your bosom" (Luke 6:38). See the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37).

Proverbs 19

Ignorance is not to be admired. The worldly axiom, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," is false and foolish. To lack knowledge is undesirable.

19:1-3

The first three proverbs of this chapter are intimately connected, and we therefore consider them together. They contrast the path of truth and the way of self-will and ignorance. It is far better to be poor and unknown, walking before God in uprightness and integrity of heart, than to be obtrusive in speech but given to folly and perverseness.

Mere zeal will not suffice to keep one right. One may be earnest, but earnestly wrong, as was Saul of Tarsus before his conversion (Acts 26:9). He who runs on without learning the will of God adds sin to sin. His foolishness leads him astray, and his deceitful heart is irritated against the Lord. He is bent on his own way and can tolerate no correction. See the behavior of Jonah when he was acting in self-will (Jonah 1:3; 4:8-9).

19:4

The well-to-do will always have many who claim his friendship, while the indigent will often find that he is separated from his neighbors because of his poverty. For though the easily-satisfied optimist may think this world is glamorous, it really is a cold, and feelingless place after all.

But there is a legitimate sense in which friends may be made by means of wealth. Our Lord commanded His disciples, "Make

to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). Riches, if used for the alleviation of misery and to the glory of God, may be the means of much blessing. When at last the one who has so used them passes away, the objects of his Christlike benefactions on earth will be waiting to welcome him into the everlasting home of the redeemed.

Notice verses 6-7 and 17 of this chapter of Proverbs for more comment on the inequities engendered by worldly wealth. The just man will not regard the rich more than the poor. See Job 34:19 and James 2:1-9.

19:5

The judgment of God is according to truth. He will see that every transgression and disobedience receive its just reward. A lie may seem to triumph for the time being, but the truth eventually will prevail. See the witnesses against Naboth (1 Kings 21:8-13). Note Proverbs 19:9.

19:6-7

These verses continue the theme began in verse 4. There are always multitudes to serve a nobleman and play the part of friends to one who can be their benefactor. How different was the spirit of Jesus in this world. He received sinners and ate with them; He sought not the smiles of the great, nor feared their frowns! Through the Holy Spirit He commanded those who would follow in His steps to "mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate" (Romans 12:16).

The world prefers the rich and great over the destitute and outwardly lowly. But let the Christian remember that his Lord appeared on earth as one of the poor whom His brethren

despised. His friends went far from Him, though He pursued them with tender entreaties. Surely those who are now linked by grace with Him must always cherish a loving concern for the needy.

19:8

The Hebrew word translated *wisdom* conveys the idea of sound judgment or common sense. See 15:21.

To pursue moral uprightness and to cleave to understanding bring true peace and lasting happiness. See Timothy (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

19:9

In 19:5 we are reminded that the liar will not escape judgment. Here we are told what his doom will be—he will perish. He will be destroyed. That is, his hopes will be cut off, and he will go out into the darkness; broken beneath the judgment of God, he will endure unspeakable sorrows forever (Revelation 21:8).

19:10

A servant ruling over princes and a fool living in the lap of luxury are both out of place. They indicate conditions that are inconsistent with logical order. Circumstances may arise in which a prince is helpless and obliged to rely on the judgment of someone in a lower position. But the wise servant will use his powers with discretion and remember his true position, though all is under his hand. See Joseph (Genesis 47:14-20).

19:11

See note on Proverbs 14:29. An uncontrolled temper, displayed in hasty, unjudged anger, indicates a man who has never

learned the great lesson of self-control. A pompous, conceited person cannot overlook an injury done to him, but must vent his wrath on the offender whenever possible. A man of sound judgment and discretion has learned to pass lightly over offenses and seeming insults that would goad one who lacks wisdom on to intense indignation. Even Esau, whatever his failings otherwise, proved himself when he greeted his brother Jacob (who had greatly offended him) with grace and magnanimity (Genesis 33:4-9).

19:12

Because there is great power in the word of a king his wrath is to be dreaded and his gracious favor eagerly sought. How much more fully may the words of this proverb be applied to the coming King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah! When the great day of His wrath has come, how miserable will be the condition of all who do not know His grace. To the repentant soul, this grace is indeed like dew on the grass! Both aspects are illustrated in Pharaoh's dealing with his chief butler and his chief baker (Genesis 40).

19:13

The first line of this proverb correlates with Proverbs 17:25. How unhappy the home where both a foolish son and a contentious wife are found! They are very likely to be found together; for where the wife disputes her husband's authority, siding with the children in opposition to his proper discipline, the effect on the home will be anything but good.

It is a very common thing to see parents disputing and wrangling before their household. The deadly result is that the sons and daughters learn to despise the father's authority and

to defy the mother's correction when she does attempt it. These children grow up with a lawless, disobedient spirit, bent on having their own way and persisting in their refusal to submit to proper discipline. Christian parents may well ponder the instructions given to each in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 3. The contentious wife is illustrated in Michal, the daughter of Saul (2 Samuel 6:16-23 and 1 Chronicles 15:29).

19:14

See Proverbs 18:22. One may inherit house and wealth, but none can give a prudent wife but the Lord. It is God who joins man and woman together and therefore forbids man to separate that union. He who said at the beginning, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him," (Genesis 2:18) is still concerned about His people's happiness. Therefore the man of faith can safely trust God to give him the appropriate life-partner. It is when one chooses for himself, relying alone on his poor human judgment instead of waiting on God, that bitter mistakes are made which are often irremediable. To marry in Christ is not necessarily to marry in the Lord. Any marriage between Christians would be in Christ. Only when the will is obedient to the mind of God will marriage be in the Lord. See Rebekah's case, and note how markedly Jehovah ordered all (Genesis 24).

19:15

See notes on Proverbs 12:24 and 13:4. Many of us fail to realize that idleness is sin. Time wasted must be accounted for at the judgment seat of Christ. Needed rest is, of course, very right and proper. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart… and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). But idleness is

quite different; laziness is trifling away opportunities that will never return. It is failing to appreciate the value of time. In a physical sense, the sluggard often experiences the pain of hunger; and spiritually, the same is also true. He who lacks godly energy and does not seek nourishment for his soul will come to poverty and experience the pangs of spiritual famine. See Paul's words to both the Ephesian and Colossian saints (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5).

19:16

The truth of this verse is frequently presented in Scripture. It is, so to speak, a kindness to oneself to obey the commandment of the Lord. His Word is a word of life. To forsake it is to die. Therefore he who despises the ways of God and chooses to follow his own course is short-sighted indeed. He is sealing his own destruction and bringing down well-merited wrath on his own head. See Shimei (1 Kings 2:36-46).

19:17

It is truly precious to contemplate Jehovah as the patron of the poor. He has left the poor in the world to test the hearts of those who have better provision. He accepts what is done with compassion to relieve the needy, as done for Himself. Money and goods given with loving pity to those in distress are not gone forever. He takes note of every penny and makes Himself responsible to see that all will be repaid; and we may be sure the interest will be greater far than could be realized in any other way. Genuine philanthropy is the result of true love to God. Those who have experienced the love of God in their lives will have a corresponding concern for all men. To do good is well-pleasing to the Lord. Generosity will not lose its

reward, even if it is only giving a cup of cold water in His name. The widow of Zarephath was none the poorer for ministering to Elijah in his distress. She found instead an unfailing cruse of oil and an unending supply of meal (1 Kings 17:10-16).

19:18

Discipline, firm but gracious, should characterize the home. Brutal punishments, even to endangering the life of the one chastised, are very wrong and opposed to the Spirit of God. Unloving chastisement can only harden, not recover, a wayward child. "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath," (Ephesians 6:4) is a needed admonition in many families. Unreasonable demands and punishments out of proportion to the offense committed should be diligently avoided. Many a child who might have been saved by careful, godly training in his earliest years, has been left to grow up in untrammeled freedom until the father thought he was old enough for chastisement. Then he became the subject of severe treatment that filled his heart with anger and alienated him for life from his well-meaning but exceedingly unwise parent.

"The iron hand in the velvet glove" has long been the symbol of strict discipline administered in grace. To leave a child to himself is to display a cruel indifference to the fate of one committed to our care. To be heartless and unnecessarily severe in correcting him is the opposite extreme. The Word of God teaches the happy medium that produces the desired results. The child should come to realize that it is his good which is sought. Many irate fathers who merely vented their frustrations have lost the respect of their children. See Saul's

unwise treatment of Jonathan, which alienated his heart in place of winning his confidence (1 Samuel 20:30).

19:19

It is useless to rescue a man given to uncontrolled anger. By the intercessions of his friends he may be delivered from the unhappy consequences that would naturally have followed his outbursts of temper; but he is likely at any time to repeat his bad behavior. He will draw down righteous retribution on his own head and bring trouble and perhaps ruin on his defenders. See 22:24. Such a man is evidently unbroken and lacking in the grace of self-judgment. He should be left to himself until he learns by punishment what he would not receive otherwise. Samuel found it hard to submit to this lesson; he only gave Saul up at last when the Lord distinctly commanded separation from him (1 Samuel 16:1).

19:20-21

To despise counsel is to play the part of the fool. He who is wise values instruction, especially when it comes from a person in authority. He knows that whatever man may plan and however wisely he may scheme, the counsel of the Lord is certain and will be duly carried out. God has said, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). How vain the man who would dare to set himself in opposition to God's wisdom and authority. Happy is he who, waiting on God for instruction, obeys implicitly His counsel, and therefore works for and with Him. See Joshua's commission (Joshua 1:1-9).

19:22

A kindly, benevolent spirit appeals to all men because it is unselfish and thoughtful of others. But to make great promises while unable to fulfill them is reprehensible. It is far better to be poor and frankly admit one's inability to do what the heart might desire, than to promise largely and be proven untrustworthy. To be what you are, and not to pretend to be what you are not, is a sound principle. An honest person, even if poor, gains the respect of anyone whose good opinion is worth having. See Peter and the lame man (Acts 3:6).

19:23

This verse is a synoptic statement of the precious truth unfolded in Psalm 91—the portion of the man who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. He who fears the Lord has no anxious concerns as he rests in the enjoyment of God's omnipotent power and unchanging love. He can rest satisfied, knowing that he cannot be visited with evil; all things must work together for the good of one who is trusting God. What seems to be evil will become a means of blessing by causing the heart to cling more closely to the God of all grace. See Paul's song of triumph in Romans 8:28-39.

19:24

Having the very means of sustenance before him, the sluggard is too lethargic to avail himself of it. The figure used may seem almost absurdly exaggerated, but it is meant to picture a most extreme case. Though seated at the table with nourishing food in his hand, the eater is overcome by drowsiness; he prefers to abandon himself to ease and sleep rather than rouse himself to

take his meal. The Word of God is a feast for the soul. Unfortunately, many sluggards, with abundant opportunity to feed on its precious wisdom, are too indifferent to search and find its treasures for themselves. Eglon, king of Moab, appears to have been this type of man (Judges 3:17-25).

19:25

To allow a mocker to go unrebuked could put a snare before the feet of the simple, who might conclude that the mocker's expression of contempt was irresistible because it was not refuted. It is therefore right and proper to punish him who opposes the truth by exposing before all the fallacies of his position. If he is wise, it will be no hardship to be reproved because, in his wisdom, he values truth more than his own dignity. See Paul's word to Timothy regarding those who are perverted (1 Timothy 5:20).

19:26

See verse 13 of this chapter. Bitter indeed are the sorrows a rebellious son brings on his parents. Such a child is the incarnation of selfishness. He will ruin his father, spending all his substance for self-gratification. In his stubbornness, he will even drive his mother from him, refusing all correction. Shame and disgrace are thereby brought upon their name; but he is supremely indifferent to all this. Determined to be free from all restraint, he recklessly plunges on to his doom. This is a sad, sad picture, often duplicated in this unhappy world. It is especially characteristic of the last days in which we now live (2 Timothy 3:2).

19:27

This is a far-reaching command of vast importance. It is an evidence of youthful pride for one to suppose he can listen to all kinds of theories, good and evil, but be defiled by none. Spiritual eclecticism may seem to be characterized by open-mindedness and liberality; but it generally ends by destroying faith. You can only recognize and avoid error when the truth of God is known and delighted in. Therefore it is vital to earnestly and diligently study the Scriptures. When someone proclaims what is contrary to God's revealed word, it is time to refute him and his teaching. You cannot afford to trifle with unholy doctrine.

Remember that what is opposed to the teaching of the unerring Word of God is directly from Satan. To dabble with it is to expose yourself to its powerful influence. Therefore refuse to hear it.

One simple question is all that needs to be asked of anyone taking the position of a spiritual instructor, in order to detect the bias of his doctrine. It is this: "What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew 22:42) He who is unsound on the nature of Christ is wrong throughout. If the true deity, or divinity, of the Lord Jesus be denied; if the atoning efficacy of His blood be explained away; if the sinlessness of His spotless humanity be in any way clouded, the system is wrong at the foundation, and it will prove to be unsound in all else.

> *'What think ye of Christ?' is the test*
> *To try both your state and your scheme.*
> *You cannot be right in the rest,*
> *Unless you think rightly of Him.*

J. Newton

For a Christian to continue to hear or support a man who blasphemes his Lord is treason of the darkest hue. If one does not teach the doctrine of Christ, he is to be refused and no fellowship shown him, because he abides in the darkness; and "what fellowship… hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14) See the spiritualists of Isaiah's day (Isaiah 8:19-20), and the Judaizers and Gnostics of the apostolic period (Titus 1:10-11; Colossians 2:8; 2 John 9-10). All these groups are to be found in our times, multiplied a thousandfold. "From such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:5).

19:28-29

These verses present the solemn accounting that awaits an ungodly witness. In this world he mocks justice and correction. His mouth devours iniquity. Although he may be independent now, he will eventually have to learn that God has prepared judgments for him and stripes for his back. Deceit and transgression may seem to go unchecked for a time; but the blow will soon fall that will cause the worthless witness to realize that God cannot be trifled with forever. See Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

Proverbs 20

Who can tell the agonies, the broken hearts, the blasted lives, the lost souls, that have been the result of failure to heed the warning of the opening verse of Proverbs 20? No other vice has so cursed the world and caused such awful misery and suffering as intemperance. Those who laugh at jokes about drunkenness should go out after nightfall through the dark streets of our large cities to see the disastrous results of this vice. The wretched victims of alcohol have been numbered in hundreds of millions; yet Satan has no difficulty in persuading thousands of reckless youths to start on the same fearful road that has lured many to their ruin.

20:1

Wine has its place. Scripture recognizes its medicinal virtue and a lawful use of it when needed (1 Timothy 5:23). But how easily it becomes a snare that destroys the will and wrecks the life.

"Wine is a mocker," tempting the youth to his undoing and deceiving him who rashly supposes he can indulge as he pleases, and then set it aside when he desires. Even godly men have been deluded in this way to their shame and grief. See Noah and Lot (Genesis 9:20-21; 19:30-36). Consult notes on Proverbs 23:29-35.

20:2

See note on 19:12. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). Therefore we must recognize their authority and submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. To resist the power is to resist Him who appointed it and thereby

to sin against one's own soul. Challenging the king's authority will provoke him to anger and his wrath will be poured out on the rebellious.

We may apply this proverb to the King of kings. Who can measure the power of Christ's wrath when all His grace has been despised and He sits on His royal throne to execute judgment?

Hanun experienced the wrath of king David when he refused his kindness (2 Samuel 10).

20:3

See note on Proverbs 17:14. How strange the pride that makes a man dread to admit he has been wrong or unwilling to back down graciously for the sake of peace, even though he may feel he is in the right—providing no divine principle is at stake. "Let your [yieldingness] be known unto all men" (Philippians 4:5) is an important verse. A man of God will be ready to give up his so-called rights rather than to prolong a disagreement. But a fool will persist in contention and meddle with matters in which he should have no part. Even so devoted a man as Josiah failed for lack of having learned this lesson (2 Chronicles 35:20-24).

20:4

Ready with any excuse to abandon his labor, the sluggard neglects the cultivation of his fields when others are at work. Therefore when harvest-time arrives, his fields are bare, and he is found begging from (as he would put it) his more fortunate neighbors. The fact is, fortune has nothing to do with it. Their diligence has brought its own reward, and his

slothfulness its natural consequences. Compare this verse with Proverbs 19:15, 24.

20:5

See note on 18:4. We have already been reminded more than once that it is only the fool who blatantly pours out a stream of words on every occasion (see 17:27-28 and 18:7). With the prudent man it is quite otherwise. His words are few, and only spoken when there is occasion for them. This is not because of his lack of sound knowledge and the ability to instruct; but he prefers to bide his time. Deep in his heart, as in a well, he hides counsel and wisdom. His quiet composure may cause foolish people to think he is inferior to themselves; but a man of understanding will be able to draw out what will be profitable at the appropriate time. See Joseph and Pharaoh (Genesis 41).

20:6-12

There is a moral connection between each proverb in this section, all dealing to some degree with the question and the test of purity. Most men are ready to justify their own uprightness and kindness, as was Job before he saw the Lord (Job 29-31). But faithful men who will vindicate God thereby proving all others to be liars are few indeed. In Elihu we see such a one as he speaks on God's behalf (Job 32-37).

The man who is really just (made such by grace) demonstrates it by his lifestyle, not simply by the declarations of his lips. The children of such a man are blessed by his godly life. Abraham is a shining example of this (Genesis 17:1-9).

If any are righteous, it should surely be the king who sits on the throne of judgment and scatters away evil with his eyes. But even among such (or among men at large) who is there

who will dare to say, “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin”?

Many testify to their lack of integrity by using unequal measures. All such are evil in the eyes of the Lord (see 16:11, and note verse 23 below).

Even a child’s actions speak of his character, as in the instance of little Samuel in the tabernacle (1 Samuel 3:18-21). What should be said of the actions of those older in years, with added responsibilities?

Clearly, then, no man is pure in himself. But Jehovah gives the seeing eye and the hearing ear to those who wait on Him, that they may behold and do His will and hear His voice. When all pretense to purity in oneself is given up, it is found in Christ by those who receive Him.

20:13

See verse 4 of this chapter, and note Proverbs 6:9-11; 24:33-34. The warnings against slothfulness and self-indulgence are abundant. “Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (23:21). The active and diligent are rewarded for their toil. “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Ephesians 5:14). Such are the stirring words addressed by the Holy Ghost to sleeping Christians in a world where all should be aroused to the value of time so rapidly passing away. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

David fell into his grievous sin by taking his ease (2 Samuel 11:1).

20:14

How common is the deceit mentioned in this verse! It is the characteristic falsehood of the bargainer. He depreciates the article his heart desires in order to procure favorable terms. When at last his price is agreed on, he goes his way, rejoicing in his shrewdness and boasting of his ability to get a bargain. But a holier eye than that of man was looking on, noting every action, word, and thought; and the day of accounting draws rapidly nearer. See Ephraim (Hosea 12:7-8).

20:15

Gold and gems are of no value compared with the lips that speak wisdom. No price can be set on the precious truth of God, the wisdom that comes from above. See Proverbs 2:1-5, and consider Psalm 119:72.

20:16

See notes on Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15. Ruin and disaster dog the steps of him who unwisely promises security for another or who has any dealings with a strange woman. The only path of safety is to keep clear of both. When one weakens in his principles he generally invites defeat. Only the man who can say no and stand by it when tempted to compromise is secure. He who will not heed must learn for himself in bitterness of soul. See the example of Judah (Genesis 38).

20:17

It is only for the passing moment that deceit seems to prosper and to promise well. The full result is far otherwise. In place of a sweet and delectable morsel, deceit fills the mouth with hard

and disappointing gravel. Compare 9:17-18, and see Matthew 26:14-16 and 27:3-5.

20:18

Rash and unthinking actions are to be deplored. Before beginning a project that may not easily be ended, one should count the cost and counsel with those who are known to be wise and prudent. Our Lord expanded and amplified this proverb when He said, "What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke 14:31-32). Read of the actions of Rehoboam and Shemaiah (2 Chronicles 11:1-4).

20:19

See notes on Proverbs 11:13,18:8, and 25:23. He who flatters someone to his face will as readily slander him behind his back. By soft, devious words and ways he will gain the confidence of his victim. Appealing to his pride and desire for approval, he loosens his tongue until the unsuspecting person relates things far better left unsaid. When he has thus lured him on to unlocking his heart, he will go to others and pour into their ears what he has just learned. He flatters them in the same way, leading them to believe that they alone are the recipients of his favor. No character is more detestable. Utterly lacking in moral principle and destitute of godliness, such a person can do untold mischief among a Christian assembly. The safe plan is to refuse altogether to listen to "him that flattereth with his lips." By so doing, much sorrow may be

averted. The one who praises his listener while he backbites another, deserves to be treated in the spirit that David displayed toward the Amalekite who brought him news of Saul's death (2 Samuel 1:1-16).

20:20

See note on Proverbs 19:26. No parents are perfect in all their ways, but, like civil authorities, they are to be honored because of their position. They stand as God's ordained authority over their children. To honor the father and mother is to honor Him who has created us and established the home, setting the individual in families. Therefore he who reviles his parents will find his light put out and he will be left in darkness. Even though a father or mother fail grievously, a son whose spirit pleases God will seek to cover and hide their shame. Only an ungrateful and foolish child will spread it abroad. This was the error of Ham (Genesis 9:22).

20:21

See Proverbs 21:6 and 28:20. Treasure rapidly accumulated at the expense of conscience and honor will yield little comfort. Proverbs 10:22 defines the source of true wealth: "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." "As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool" (Jeremiah 17:11). They who set out with the determination to gather wealth at all cost will learn the bitter lesson that they have missed the true and lasting treasure which would have given heart-satisfaction and joy in its possession. See God's word to the

rich who have gained their fortunes by oppression of the poor (James 5:1-6).

20:22

No lesson is harder for some of us to learn than that of confiding all our affairs to the hands of the Lord, especially when we feel we have been wronged and mistreated. Yet it is plain from Scripture that the saint can make no greater mistake than to take charge of his own affairs in such a case. Nothing could be clearer than the injunction, "Recompense to no man evil for evil… Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19). To determine to take revenge in the face of God's command is to act in direct disobedience to God; we need not be surprised when all our efforts fail. The person who admits that the Lord has allowed all circumstances for his good, then bows his head and bends before the blast, will find God ever ready to intervene at the needed moment. To look beyond the human instrument of our grief, however vindictive he may be, and to see all the purposes of our Father working out, gives rest and comfort to the sorely-tried soul. This sustained David when Shimei cursed and stoned him. The whole passage is so tender and striking, I feel it must be presented here in full:

> *And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou*

> *bloody man, and thou man of Belial: The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day* (2 Samuel 16:5-12).

It is doubtful if, in all David's spiritual history, he ever reached a higher height of holy confidence in God than at this time of deep, deep trial. Shimei's spiteful cursing in so public a manner and at so sorrowful a time must have deeply lacerated his already wounded spirit. But he bowed his head in submission instead of executing vengeance on Shimei. He did not seek self-vindication from the charges made, but held on in submissive confidence saying, "Let him curse," and taking all from the Lord Himself.

Shimei was but an instrument, inspired by Satan, yet really permitted of the Lord, for David's chastening and discipline. David views him as such and looks not at second causes, but at

the great first cause Himself. This is most blessed! Would that every tested saint could follow his example!

The day came that Shimei was a cringing suppliant at the feet of the man he had cursed; publicly admitting that he had acted perversely he confessed "thy servant doth know that I have sinned" (2 Samuel 19:16-23). David's royal clemency was extended in forgiveness—a far greater victory than vengeance would have been. During the reign of Solomon, in God's righteous government, Shimei was put to death for the treachery that ever characterized him. "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons" (Colossians 3:25). I am not to interfere with judgment. Be it mine to bow in submission to all God's ways, acknowledging His hand in everything that would otherwise disturb me.

20:23

See verse 10 of this chapter. This verse comments on the dangers of judging people by various standards, according as they relate to oneself or not. A Christian should be characterized by one true, honest standard of righteousness. Frequently in estimating the conduct of certain people we use a variety of principles. We excuse in one, particularly in ourselves, what we judge severely in another. But in the scales of the sanctuary both are tested by the same weights. God would have our balances patterned after His. Unequal weights are an abomination in His sight. See the half shekel (Exodus 30:15).

20:24

The prophet Jeremiah stated the same solemn truth as this proverb. "O Lord," he said, "I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." So he added, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10:23-24). Concerning every one of us it can be said, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Joshua 3:4). This is true of every step of our journey through this world. Each day we enter on new scenes and new experiences; therefore it is folly to depend on our poor, finite wisdom in order to understand our way. Only God knows the end from the beginning. With Him, all is one eternal Now. Who else but He can direct our steps? Happy the soul who can commit all his ways unto Him and sing with confidence and holy restfulness, "My times are in thy hand" (Psalm 31:15). To such He has said, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psalm 32:8). But this daily guidance is only for the submissive, obedient believer. Others must experience the bit-and-bridle direction of circumstances and tribulations. See Israel at the Jordan (Joshua 3:4).

20:25

Two closely connected things seem to be referred to here, with a keen, underlying touch of irony that is meant to prick our conscience. It is foolish and dangerous to rashly call anything holy or to make a vow before fully investigating the situation; these could both result in much sorrow and trouble. Elsewhere Solomon speaks of making this mistake.

> *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?* (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6)

The practice of making vows seems to be clearly contrary to the spirit of the Christian dispensation, in which grace is reigning. Under the old dispensation of the law, when God requested something of man, it was quite in keeping to make such particular pledges. Paul's vow was evidently that of a Nazarite, taken prior to his conversion (Acts 18:18). It would therefore be vital to make sure that such a promise was according to the mind of God before making it. See Jephthah's rash vow and its terrible consequences (Judges 11:30-40).

20:26

No government is established in peace when lawlessness and violence are rampant among the people. It is necessary for the preservation of society, the peace of the righteous, and the stability of government, that those who oppose law and order be destroyed. So, before the millennial kingdom is set up, the wicked will be rooted out of the earth. See Isaiah 63 and Revelation 19.

20:27

The spirit of man is not mere breath or some impersonal idea. God "formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1). The spirit enables man to think and plan, to weigh evidences,

and to discern between things that are material, moral, and spiritual. “What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Corinthians 2:11) In this verse it is evident that the spirit is the seat of intelligence. How would it sound to substitute the word breath for spirit in either of these scriptures? This would make them declare God formed man’s breath as an entity within him, and that by his breath he understands the things that concern him. In spite of all that deluded equivocators may allege to the contrary, the Bible clearly teaches the true individuality of the spirit.

In several versions of Scripture the word *lamp* is used in this proverb; the spirit is called the lamp of the Lord. Notice, it is not the light of Jehovah. The lamp is the vessel that holds the light, which itself is divine, proceeding from God. But man’s spirit can be a light-receiver and light-retainer, illuminating every part of his moral being. This gives him preeminence over all the lower creation. What an immeasurable gulf there is between the lowest type of man, with all his capabilities of divine enlightenment, and the highest type of animal, who is forever insensible to spiritual instruction.

The Scriptures declare that “there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:11). The savage gropes after Him because of his fear and desires to appease God’s supposed anger and hatred. He has no desire to love and serve Him because of who He is and what He has done. Even so, the most degraded savage gropes after God for his spirit is the lamp of Jehovah, dimly though the light may shine. But train an animal to the highest point of brute-intelligence, and he shows no recognition of responsibility to a creator, no sense of spiritual conceptions. This fact alone is enough to forever destroy the agnostic

theory of evolution as taught by Darwin and Huxley; even though it is eagerly received by so many who are ever ready to run after what seems to be new and novel, particularly if it appears to eliminate God from His own universe.

Through the spirit, God communicates to man and pours His light into every chamber of his being. This is what produces a sense of need, a yearning after Himself. For in his natural state "there is none that seeketh after God." When His testimony is received and the soul bows before Him in repentance, His Holy Spirit, through the Scriptures of truth, witnesses with our spirits that we are His children. See Elijah and the still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13).

20:28

In Proverbs 20:26 we saw that it was the king's wisdom to execute judgment on his foes. Here we are reminded of the other side of his character. His throne rests on righteousness, but it is upheld by lovingkindness. The two are essential—lovingkindness and truth. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). When He reigns, both will be displayed in perfection (Isaiah 32).

20:29

See note on Proverbs 16:31. In the economy of nature, as of grace, there is a time and season for all things. Youth delights in deeds of prowess and glories in physical strength. Age is the time for meditation and self-control; the gray head is a reminder of this, beautiful indeed in its place. In his first Epistle, the apostle John declared the same thoughts in a spiritual sense. The young men are those who are strong in the faith, in whom the Word of God abides, and who have

overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14). To the fathers, he simply writes, "Ye have known him that is from the beginning." It is that experiential knowledge of Christ which is enlarged and deepened by the passing of the years (1 John 2:13-14).

20:30

A skillful surgeon is not always concerned to immediately heal a wound because added suffering may be required to purge the system of poisonous matter. There is often a probing and consequent inflammation that is very painful but good in its final result. So it is with God's dealings when sin has been tolerated by His children. Stripes and sorrows may be laid on them, but only that the inner parts of the being may be purged of all hidden evil by self-judgment and full confession in His presence. The psalmist is not the only one who could say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Psalm 119:67). It would be unwise for a patient to object to the pain caused by the surgeon while he endeavored to free the wound from impurities that might hinder healing and, if unremoved, poison the whole system. So is the saint foolish indeed who complains under a Father's chastening hand and seeks to free himself from the stripes rather than to "hear… the rod, and [Him] who hath appointed it" (Micah 6:9).

Proverbs 21

The prophet Daniel tried to influence the conscience of the impious Belshazzar on the last night of his reign at Babylon. He endeavored to impress the Chaldean king with his duty to acknowledge "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways" (Daniel 5:23); but he would not be humbled.

21:1

This proverb presents the same truth of the sovereignty of God in a slightly different way. (See 20:24.) There is no monarch so great that he can act in independence of God. Whether he admits it or not, Jehovah is controlling him as He controls the flow of the streams. He who "hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm" (Nahum 1:3) can make the wrath of man to praise Him. As already noted, (Proverbs 11:8) the book of Esther is the fitting illustration of the truth of this proverb (Esther 6:1-10). Jehovah's word to Cyrus, written long before that ruler was born, is another striking case in point (Isaiah 45:1-7).

21:2

See Proverbs 20:6. Self-righteousness is perhaps the most human of all sins. Men will excuse and explain away in themselves what would be severely judged in others. The Lord beholds the heart and takes notice of the pride gnawing like a worm at the root. He who is commended by God, not he who commends himself, is approved. See Paul's example (1 Corinthians 4:4).

21:3

It was a common thing for men to forget that sacrifices and offerings were not pleasing to the Lord when uprightness was lacking. He always placed righteousness and equity above ceremonial observances, as He does today. While He was on earth the Lord witheringly rebuked the Pharisees for their attention to ritualistic details while forgetting justice and integrity. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13) was His word. Isaiah expressed the same truth of the supreme importance of the execution of righteousness; he contrasted the ceremonial fasts with what really delighted Jehovah (Isaiah 58:5-14). See Samuel's word to Saul (1 Samuel 15:22).

21:4

As long as man persists in rebellion against God, he can do nothing that will be acceptable in His sight. Lofty eyes and a proud heart are obviously sinful. But even what might otherwise be considered meritorious is sin while man refuses to bow in repentance before Him.

When a country rebels against its lawful ruler, the inhabitants may carry on many useful occupations and labor diligently in them; but all are tainted with sedition and cannot be considered profitable or right. When they lay their weapons at the feet of the king and acknowledge his authority, these same occupations become pleasing and proper in his sight. So it is with man away from God and with those who turn to Him in contrition of heart. See the Holy Spirit's estimate of Israel while God's Anointed is rejected (Romans 10:1-4).

21:5-7

Riches accumulated by means of honest, wholesome toil give pleasure and a measure of satisfaction to their possessor. But the hasty gathering of wealth by lying and deceit, often coupled with downright robbery, will bring sorrow and shame with it. One may possess boundless stores of gold and silver and yet be as needy as the Arab lost in the desert. When almost dead for want of food, he found a package in the track of a caravan. He opened it with trembling eagerness, hoping it might be dates. He dropped it in dire disappointment as he groaned, "It's only pearls!" Those pearls were worth thousands of dollars, but they could not feed a starving man. So with wealth illegally gotten. It cannot satisfy. He who possesses it will be in deepest and most abject poverty after all. Life will be a weary round of frustration and disappointment, and he will be left to groan at last, "All is vanity, and pursuit of the wind." See Ecclesiastes 5:10-17.

21:8

The ways of a guilty man are like the trail of the serpent. It is invariably a sign that something is radically wrong in his heart when a person's path is crooked, and he has to be continually excusing and explaining. He who walks with God will be above reproach, for he will avoid every form of evil. The work of the pure is right. His life is like an open book, which explains itself and silences his enemies. Daniel was of this character; when the presidents and princes sought to find fault with him, "they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him" (Daniel 6:4). Ahab's history is a solemn illustration of the crooked ways of a guilty man (1 Kings 16-22).

21:9

See note on Proverbs 19:13. Happy will be the family where relationships follow the lovely order of God's Word. If the husband treats the wife kindly, and the wife is adorned by a meek and quiet spirit, the children are likely to be in godly subjection; the home will be a sweet foretaste of that eternal one for which we wait. But where a brawling woman seeks to rule and will not be content unless she has things her own way, the home is most unpleasant. A quiet corner on the housetop is better far than to dwell in a palatial residence with such company. Both Job and David found it so at times (Job 2:9-10; 2 Samuel 6:20-23). See verse 19 of this chapter of Proverbs.

21:10

We generally find what we look for in others. The man who seeks goodness and virtue in his neighbor is almost certain to find something worthy of praise; but he who goes about looking for evil can readily find something in most people which he can gloat over. No one finds favor in the eyes of this critical person, even though he has to admit their superiority to himself. Sanballat was that kind of man (Nehemiah 6:5-9).

21:11

When one who mocks the truth is permitted to go unrebuked, it strengthens his position in the eyes of the ignorant. For this reason, we are told, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20). Most likely they will resent the correction, but this only emphasizes their need of it. A wise man, on the other hand, profits by instruction and receives knowledge. See the result of Paul's rebuke to Ely mas

the sorcerer, as contrasted with his rebuking of Peter and Barnabas (Acts 13:8-12; Galatians 2:11-16).

21:12

This verse refers to the final triumph of the righteous over the wicked. The just man will not be overly depressed and anxious when he sees the present prosperity of the wicked. He knows their joys are empty and their days of boasting few at best. Soon they will fall, for God has so ordained it. The verse might be easier understood by a Jew than a Christian, but in either case it remains true. Iniquity cannot flourish long. The just will overthrow the house of those given to evil. Even a Jehu can therefore be an instrument in God's hand (2 Kings 9).

21:13

In Proverbs 19:17 we had a positive statement regarding the Lord's assurance that he who comforts the poor will be richly repaid. The negative is equally true. He who does not heed the bitter cry of the needy will in due time cry himself and be unheard. The destitute and afflicted have a faithful Friend in the God who created them. His concern is very real, and He takes note of all done for or against them. This is especially true when they are of the household of faith. See the premillennial judgment of the nations of the earth, as pictured by our Lord Himself in Matthew 25:31-46.

21:14

Nothing so readily defeats hatred and anger as doing good to one who harbors malice. It must be done quietly and unpretentiously, so that others are not made aware of it. For there is danger that well-meant kindness, done openly in the

sight of all, may be mistaken for hypocrisy, designed to deceive onlookers. But what passes between two parties in private will not be misunderstood, if it is not mentioned afterwards. This is how Jacob sought to turn aside the assumed wrath of Joseph (Genesis 43:11-14).

21:15-16

When a man is himself righteous, he delights in righteousness; whereas, to the immoral man moral virtue seems to be the certain road to ruin. For example, a businessman who in his public and private life shows integrity would find it painful and sorrowful to depart from principles of honesty. But with too many it is accepted as an axiom that one cannot prosper in business while maintaining the right. To attempt to do so seems to them to foreshadow certain and speedy failure. The young man launching out in life is very apt to be deceived by this unholy and utterly false idea; whereas the experience of many has confirmed the testimony of Scripture that the only true and lasting success results from righteous dealing.

He who wanders away from the paths of sound wisdom will remain in the congregation of the dead. “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1 Timothy 5:6). True abundant life is only enjoyed by the upright who set the Lord always before them. Contrast Judas (Acts 1:18).

21:17

The spendthrift and the self-indulgent are not on the path to future wealth and comfort. The frugal and self-denying, by their carefulness today, pave the way to easier circumstances in the future. The young man who spends his time in folly, seeking dubious pleasures with unwise companions, is laying

up misery and want for his later life. He who pampers his appetite with costly delicacies in youth, will likely have to eat more common fare in old age. While those who were wise enough to forego present, destructive indulgences will be in a position later on to enjoy the comforts they have accumulated through labor and carefulness. The intemperate lover of folly and pleasure is likely soon to reach the depths to which the prodigal sank (Luke 15).

21:18

This proverbs states a principle of intrinsic justice. But when grace was revealed through Christ Jesus, the righteous, upright One became a ransom for the wicked and the treacherous! Justice demands the punishment of the guilty, in order that the guiltless may be delivered; but love gave the guiltless One to die that the guilty might be justified. An illustration of the proverb is seen in the siege and deliverance of Abel of Beth-maachah (2 Samuel 20:14-22).

21:19

See Proverbs 21:9. No creature is more lovely than a woman who exhibits the precious graces of the Spirit of God. But a woman bereft of thoughtfulness and kindliness seems almost to be a misnomer. A contentious and angry woman, no matter how physically attractive, is disagreeable beyond all words, and can by her tongue and her wretched ways produce untold misery. It is preferable to live in a tent in a wilderness alone than in a palace with her company. Athaliah was evidently a contentious woman. Violent and treacherous, she would stop at nothing to accomplish her unholy ends (2 Kings 11). See Proverbs 27:15-16.

21:20

See verse 17 of this chapter. The wise man does not live for the present; but he prudently considers the coming years when strength will fail, and he will be unable to labor as in his youth and prime. Therefore when his days of rest from toil come, he has provisions stored away for the sustenance of those who still depend on him. The foolish thinks only of the passing moment and spends his time and money lavishly, until he finally has nothing. Consider Paul's word as to parents providing for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14).

21:21

A steady pursuit of righteousness and lovingkindness is the sure road to what all men desire—life and honor. They are linked together by uprightness. The empty glory of this world and the praise of worldly people are worth little after all. But to be honored by God, and by those who love Him, abides forever. God delights to bless those who honor His Word and yield obedience to His truth. For the truth was not given to be a source of intellectual enjoyment alone, though it is that; but truth is to be demonstrated in the life, as it was fully in our Lord Jesus Christ. A moral, loving life commends the truth to those who might be driven from it by the harshness of some of its followers. When grace and truth together control the being, life, righteousness, and honor will be the happy result. See Asa, king of Judah, and note how he prospered as he sought what was pleasing to God. His recorded errors emphasize the defeat he suffered when he left the path of righteousness (2 Chronicles 14-16).

21:22

Brute force and heavy fortifications are of little help against superior wisdom. It is not might alone that counts, but knowledge and ability. Seemingly impregnable positions have often fallen by the use of wise strategy. Jebus and Babylon were supposedly invulnerable to every assault, but both fell before men of insightful wisdom (1 Chronicles 11:4-6; Jeremiah 51:27-33). The lesson is important when we are called to fight against spiritual foes. We need the wisdom that comes from God and His Word to overcome the powers of evil. See Ephesians 6:10-18.

21:23

Again our attention is focused on the control of the tongue. Unwise words, however true they may sometimes be, are often the cause of serious trouble and disaster. To diligently guard the mouth and the tongue is to avoid many a grief and bitter memory. See James 3:2-12 and compare the notes on Pro verbs 11:13; 15:1; 17:20 and 18:6-8.

21:24

An arrogant, self-willed spirit is displayed by unbridled words and uncontrolled anger. A humble man is a gentle man; he will not be given to outbursts of wrath or indignation. Of course the man in this verse is to be distinguished from one who on extreme occasions loses control of his temper and utters hasty words under strong provocation. Such a man may afterwards be plunged in deepest sorrow and humiliation over his sin; but it is otherwise with the proud and haughty scorner. He has no remorse because of his wrong spirit, but persists in a course of action that is in every way contrary to meekness and patience;

he forgets that the wrath of man does not promote the righteousness of God. See Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:5-7).

21:25-26

Like a drone in the hive, the lazy man covets the fruits of labor but detests the work which produces them. He is occupied with himself, full of desire, but opposed to effort. Selfishness is his strongest characteristic. On the other hand, the righteous man is a producer. He loves to acquire, but only in order that he may "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17). He desires to satisfy the needs of those dependent on him and have plenty to give to any who are in need. In this he is an imitator of God who "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (James 1:5). Contrast the spirit manifested by Achan (Joshua 7:21) and that of the Philippian assembly (2 Corinthians 8:2). See notes on Proverbs 12:27; 13:4; 19:24; 20:4.

21:27

See notes on 15:8-9, 26 and 21:4. The sacrifice of the lawless is always detestable and unacceptable in the eyes of God; this is especially true when the offering is just a cover for hypocrisy . To carry on so-called religious duties to be seen of men while hiding a life of wickedness is iniquity of the most revolting character. This lack of sincerity caused our Lord to sternly rebuke the scribes and Pharisees of His day. They were punctilious in observing the law and the added directions of the Talmud in regard to the temple offerings; they made broad their phylacteries (Matthew 23:5); they loved to pray standing on the street corners to be seen of men; but meantime they profited at the expense of poor widows and were characterized by covetousness and wickedness of the vilest

description. Their moral descendants are many in our own day. They can put on a devout expression, use pious words, and ostentatiously give of their wealth to public charities; but their inner lives are black and iniquitous. For a time they may cover their true condition from the eyes of men, but in God's sight their sacrifice is abominable.

21:28-29

The false witness may be believed for a moment but his destruction is certain to come. He who testifies truthfully according to what he has heard and knows will be able to maintain his position consistently and speak unchallenged. Such was the good confession of our Lord Jesus Christ when he testified before Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. Whereas the testimonies of the lying witnesses did not even agree with one another (Matthew 26:59-64 ; 27:11-14).

He who has no respect for human or divine law will harden his face and persist in his false words and ways; but the upright proves his purpose by his consistent speech and actions.

21:30-31

The trusting soul rests on the fact that the counsel of the Lord will never be defeated. Therefore he fears not the wisdom or understanding or the plots of his foes. What can man do to harm the one who is covered by the wings of Jehovah? "Though an host should encamp against me," said David, "my heart shall not fear" (Psalm 27:3).

Numbers or superior accouterments will not ensure victory; we trust the God of our salvation as He goes before us. This was the confidence of Asa when confronted by the vast army of Zerah the Ethiopian at the battle of Mareshah. "Asa cried

unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee" (2 Chronicles 14:11). This is delightful to contemplate. With Asa it was not a question of the relative strength and prowess of the hordes of Africans and the army of Judah; but it was simply a question of the power of God and the puny ability of weak, mortal men. "Let not man prevail against thee" was his plea.

In the Hebrew language there are various words that are translated in English as "man.". The ordinary term that links man with Adam is *Ahdahm*, a word derived from a root meaning "red clay." *Geber* refers to man in his might, and is derived from a root meaning "to be strong." *Ish* depicts man in his dignity. However Asa chose a word that emphasized man's lack of importance and strength: *Enosh*, signifying frail and incurable. It pictures man in his low estate as fallen and mortal.

To Asa, the great Ethiopian host seemed insignificant. All the strength of this world was nothing in contrast to the mighty power of the God who was leading the army of Judah and Benjamin. The result was certain: "The Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled…for they were destroyed before the Lord, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil" (2 Chronicles 14:12-13).

May each saint cast himself upon the same omnipotent Savior-God in every time of apparently overwhelming trouble; thus he will prove for himself that "safety is of the Lord."

Proverbs 22

This chapter begins with a comment on the great importance of a person's reputation.

22:1

The first verse of this chapter declares that a good name is to be preferred far above earthly treasure, though often it is forfeited to obtain riches. The adjective *good* does not occur in the original text. But "a name" is used in the sense of a character of renown, as elsewhere in Scripture: notably in Genesis 11:4, "let us make us a name"; Deuteronomy 26:19, "make thee high…in name"; 2 Samuel 7:9, 23; 8:13; and many other passages. In this sense then a name is more desirable than vast wealth, and to be respected is more valuable than immense revenues.

It is a great mistake for the young to suppose that an honored name is more easily made on the battlefield, in the halls of government, the ranks of great writers, or in the business world. No name is more lasting and enduring than that won by him who lives for God and considers all that earth has to offer as worthless for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to David caused Abishai and Benaiah to win enduring names (2 Samuel 23:18,22). Devotion to Christ has caused many to be immortalized who otherwise would long since have fallen into oblivion. Who would have remembered the twelve apostles, if they had not left all and followed Jesus? What would have been the glory of the name of Saul, the rabbi of Tarsus, compared with that of Paul the missionary of the cross?

22:2

The concept of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, if understood correctly, is a Scriptural doctrine. We learn from Scripture that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). Human reason, apart from divine revelation, would never have discovered this wonderful secret. Universal brotherhood—the union of all the races and nations of men in one great family, springing from one common stock, despite obvious physical and ethnological differences— was never dreamed of by philosophers until they were enlightened by the inspired Word of God. Prior to that time the brotherhood of certain races was acknowledged proudly, while the human mind revolted against accepting a despised and ignorant slave of inferior caste as a brother. But the Hebrew Scriptures testify throughout to the fact that all men sprang from one common father, Adam, and are linked together by ties that cannot be dissolved. The Christian Scriptures emphasize this truth and seeing Adam as the son of God, declare that God is "the Father of spirits" (Hebrews 12:9); therefore in a creatorial sense, God is the Father of all men.

However the aspect of God's universal fatherhood through creation is very different from the relationship within the family of God as revealed by our Lord and His apostles. Man by the fall lost the divine likeness and became a sinner ruined and alienated. Hence the need of redemption and regeneration. By new birth those who by nature were children of wrath and disobedience, are made children of God and partakers of the divine nature. A new, eternal life is imparted and the Holy Spirit given, thus they cry, "Abba, Father." Only those spiritually

born form the new creation brotherhood because they possess a common life and nature.

This distinction needs to be kept in mind in our day of looseness and laxity. Men who rebel against the truth of the fall gladly call God their Father and see no need for the new birth. They link up saint and sinner in one great family.

The Christian unhesitatingly and freely acknowledges that Jehovah is the maker of all and that He is compassionate to all His creation. But he sees two families described throughout Scripture: "the children of God… and the children of the devil" (1 John 3:10).

22:3

This solemn proverb is deliberately repeated in 27:12. In God's exceeding love He faithfully warns us of the terrible consequences of refusing to bow before Him in repentance and receive the grace He offers through Christ Jesus. The wise man sees the evil coming and hides himself in the refuge God has provided. But the simple harden their hearts and refuse to heed the warning of imminent danger, thus ensuring their own destruction.

"A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2). Faith sees the fulfillment of these precious words in the man Christ Jesus and fleeing to Him exclaims, "Thou art my hiding place" (Psalm 32:7). If He is rejected and His grace despised, certain and eternal judgment will follow. Contrast the Philippian jailer with the Roman magistrates (Acts 16:25-40).

22:4-5

How different are the paths and the ultimate rewards of the godly and the perverse! Heaven and Hell are as diverse as the roads leading to them. The godly man is marked out from others by a meek and humble spirit and the fear of the Lord. The ungodly is rebellious and self-willed. The way of the former leads to true riches, the honor that comes from God, and life everlasting. The steps of the latter soon became entangled in thorns and snares. He who lives in obedience to the word of Jehovah will be preserved from the traps of the world. Contrast Hezekiah and his son Manasseh before he was humbled (2 Chronicles 29-33).

22:6

To start a child right is of utmost importance. The saying of the Jesuit, "Give me your child till he is twelve, and I care not who has charge of him afterwards," has passed into a proverb. The tree follows the bent of its early years, and so it is with our sons and daughters. If they are taught to love the world, to crave its fashions and follies in childhood, they are almost certain to live for the world when they come to mature years. On the other hand if they are properly instructed from the beginning as to the futility of living for the pleasures of this world, they are in little danger of reversing that judgment as they grow older. Parents need to remember it is not enough to tell their little ones of Jesus and His rejection or to warn them of the ways of the world; they must see to it that in their own lives they exemplify their instruction. This will count above all else in the training of the young. Little ones will observe our pretence and hypocricy if we speak piously of separation from the world while demonstrating the spirit of the world in our

dress, relationships in the home, and the friends we seek. We need not wonder then if they grow up to ignore our words of instruction while imitating what our lifestyle proclaimed to be the real object of our hearts.

But where a holy, cheerful atmosphere pervades the home and godly admonition is coupled with godly living, parents can count on the Lord to keep their households following in the right way. See Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5).

22:7

He who obeys the Scriptural injunction to "owe no man any thing, but to love one another" (Romans 13:8), will escape the awful bondage of the debtor. The rich almost invariably lord their position over the poor, except where grace intervenes to check the potential pride of the human heart. Therefore it is natural that he who lends should consider himself superior to the borrower. The latter destroys his own freedom by his neglect of the divine command. It is far better to be in meager circumstances and dependent on God, than to have plenty but to know that it belongs to another. Nothing so crushes the spirit of a man as debt, if he has any conscience about it at all. The Christian should fear debt and flee from it, realizing that it is the effort of the enemy to undermine his peace and destroy his sense of dependence on the Lord.

The matter of debt should be of greater concern among Christians. People think little or nothing of accumulating bills and borrowing money without proper security, which afterwards may cause them deep grief and bring dishonor on Christ. He who would be the Lord's servant alone and in bondage to no man will avoid debt in every form. Many by

carelessness in borrowing, have left their families in dire distress. See the example in 2 Kings 4:1.

22:8-9

These two proverbs are in striking and intentional contrast; again they remind us of the certainty of a harvest similar to the character of the sowing.

He who sows iniquity will reap a hopelessly worthless crop. Though he take a lordly position and vent his anger against the godly, his rod will fail and his rule will come to a derisive end. See the example of the unhappy Pharaoh of the exodus.

But the kindly, benevolent soul who plants the seed of thoughtfulness for others will reap a bountiful harvest of consideration and blessing for himself. Bread cast on the waters returns after many days. See Ebed-melech (Jeremiah 38:7-12; 39:16-18).

22:10

See note on Proverbs 21:11. The scorner of this book is very much like the boaster of 1 Corinthians 5. Such a man can work untold mischief among a company of the Lord's people. His wretched evil-speaking, coupled with his contempt for all godly restraint will corrupt the whole assembly. Therefore it is necessary to obey the Word of God and "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

The law extended no mercy to the one who scorned the God of Israel and troubled His people. By the testimony of two or three witnesses he was to be put to death, that the evil might be put away from among them (Deuteronomy 17:2-7).

In this dispensation of grace such an extreme measure is not commanded. The saints are admonished to separate the troublemaker from their company, in order that the rest may be saved from falling into his unholy ways; thus the name of Christ will be kept from further dishonor. Once the mocker is separated he is in the place where God can deal with him. But while he remains in God's family, he is a source of grief to the assembly and a reproach to the Lord. See Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20).

22:11

A righteous ruler delights in a man of pure heart and gracious words. And the King of kings is indeed a Friend to such a one. It is the pure in heart who see God; they who truly are pure will demonstrate it by obedience to the word, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). A bitter, acrimonious, and fault-finding tongue does not belong to the pure-hearted man of God, but is generally the evidence that one is far from being right with Him. Note what is said of Mordecai (Esther 10:2-3).

22:12

The Lord's eye is on His own truth, which is the only real knowledge. He guards it day and night and will never let it fall to the ground. When spoken by His servants He will see that it accomplishes His purpose (Isaiah 55:11).

But the false words of the unfaithful will accomplish nothing. The Lord Himself will overthrow them. Error cannot always prosper. It may seem to thrive for the moment, but it will be destroyed eventually. Contrast Micaiah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 22).

22:13

See notes on Proverbs 12:27; 15:19; 19:24; 21:25; and 26:13. The sluggard devises many excuses to account for his laziness and utter lack of energy. Where no dangers or difficulties exist he imagines them; and where they really are he exaggerates them to such a degree that they appear to be insurmountable. He who approaches life in the strength of faith finds the lions have been rendered powerless to destroy him. Contrast with the slothful man of this verse, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, one of David's mighty men (2 Samuel 23:20).

22:14

See notes on Proverbs 2:16-19; 6:23-35; 7:4-27. The one who stops to listen to the flattering words of the strange woman is lured to his destruction. None who walk with God will be deceived by her; but he whose ways displease the Lord will readily fall a victim to her seductions. He will stumble into sin and its fearful consequences as a blind man falls into a deep pit. Judah is an example of this in Genesis 38.

22:15

See notes on Proverbs 13:24 and 19:18. To leave a child to himself is to ensure his ruin, for folly is bound up in his heart. Properly administered discipline will correct the natural tendency to go astray. Of course the rod is not the only form of discipline. Corporal punishment is not always required and might at times be very unwise. The rod, throughout Scripture, speaks of authority and power; in this case it refers to that parental restraint to which the child owes so much. It was the lack of this firm yet kindly discipline that was responsible in

large measure for the evil ways of both Absalom and Adonijah (2 Samuel 14; 1 Kings 1:6).

22:16

It is foolish to seek to accumulate wealth by oppressing the needy or to endeavor to gain the favor of the rich by giving them gifts. Both courses lead to want instead of increase.

He who practices either of these habits, may seem to prosper and flourish for the moment; but his end will show the truth of God's Word. He will not find the happiness he sought; he will at last be obliged to admit that his purpose has been utterly defeated because of the iniquity of his heart. See what is said in James 5 of the rich who oppress the poor and withhold their wages.

22:17-21

The challenge in verse 17 reminds us of the admonition repeated seven times in Revelation 2 and 3: "He that hath an ear, let him hear…" We have read many words of wisdom in the book of Proverbs and many more are to follow. The soul may become so used to them as to fail to discern their excellent character. We must apply our hearts to the knowledge given in these proverbs. For it is of all importance that they be kept within and fitted to the lips of the hearer, whose trust must be in Jehovah if he is to exemplify them in his life.

In the original the expression translated, "Have not I written to thee excellent things," (20) is literally "have I not set them before thee in three ways" or "a third time." This indicates the superlative nature of the counsel contained in this book. These excellent things are things of the highest value, beyond mere human wisdom. It is God Himself marking out the safe and

right path for His children. Thus will they "know the certainty of the words of truth," (21) and be enabled to use them correctly in reply to all who inquire. In this day of doubt and skepticism, it is a blessing to be able to rest the soul on the true and precious words of the living God,

In the New Testament we find four inspired apostles quoting unhesitatingly from the book of Proverbs. Paul quoted from it in Romans 12:19-20, and Hebrews 12:5-6; James in chapter 4:6 of his Epistle; Peter twice in his first, and once in his second letter, namely 1 Peter 4:8,17-18; 2 Peter 2:22; and Jude in the twelfth verse of his trenchant arraignment of the false teachers already creeping in among the saints.

But of deeper interest to the believer is that our Lord Himself, in His address at the table of the Pharisee as recorded in Luke 14, used a portion of this treasury of proverbial truth as His text (Proverbs 25:6-8). Added to this we find allusions and references to its teaching throughout the later books of the Old Testament and all parts of the New. God has linked this plain and intensely practical portion— these "words of truth"— inseparably with all the rest of His holy Book. As we continue our study, may it be with a fuller sense of the sacred character of the simple admonitions and hints for daily life that are contained in the book of Proverbs.

22:22-23

These proverbs contain a warning word to those who sit in the place of judgment ("gate" in KJV). If the ways of justice are perverted, let him who renders a false and oppressive sentence remember that the supreme Judge is observing all; He will render to every man according as his work has been.

Righteous judgment is precious in His sight because it then reflects the integrity of His divine throne—a great *white* throne, unsullied by iniquity. If wrong is perpetrated on the needy now, Jehovah Himself will appear as their Advocate in that highest court of all. Then dreadful indeed will be the reward of those who have used the courts of earth for the furtherance of iniquity. What will be the position of the Herods and Pilates when dragged before that bar of infinite holiness?

22:24-25

A man is known and formed by the company he keeps. "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Therefore it is important to consider carefully those whom we choose for companionship and fellowship. To keep company with a man given to wrath and fury is to be contaminated by his hasty ways and to bring a snare on one's own soul. Anger and malice are the works of the flesh. The Christian should have no association with one quickly angered, for we are too easily defiled by such conduct. To continue friendship with one displaying these evidences of unjudged carnality is to endanger one's own life and testimony. A Saul is no fit friend for a David. See Proverbs 21:24.

22:26-27

See notes on 6:1-5 and 11:15. There are some who will never learn by rules. Therefore they must learn by bitter experience. Many people who have read the warnings of Proverbs all their lives, regarding the dangers of accepting liability for another man's debts, have lost nearly all they had through unwise commitment to men who turned out unworthy of their

confidence. Much pain and shame might have been avoided had this passage in Proverbs been heeded!

When grace rules, they who have nothing with which to pay are frankly forgiven all their debt (Luke 7:40-43). But when stern justice has to be dispensed, he who does not have the means to pay his self-imposed obligation is in danger of losing his very bed from under him.

22:28

This is almost a repetition of what God said to Moses: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deuteronomy 19:14).

Each Israelite had received his portion of land directly from Jehovah. Its borders were marked out by clearly-indicated landmarks, which all were commanded to respect. He who removed them forcibly, or in secret, would have to deal with God for his violation.

In this dispensation of grace the allotment of God's people is heavenly, not earthly. Our inheritance is in the precious truth which He has committed to us. To remove the landmarks—the great distinguishing doctrines of Scripture—will be to incur the divine displeasure. Yet, unfortunately, many supposedly learned doctors are engaged in that wretched business today. No truth of Scripture is too sacred for their irreverent handling. Precious truths like those of atonement and justification by faith—even the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ—are, in their eyes, but common ideas, which they may dismiss or ignore as they

please. But a day of reckoning is coming, when God will judge them in righteousness; and those who have been misled by their removal of ancient and venerable landmarks of God's Word will curse them for the loss of their souls. Terrible will be the accounting of men who, while posing as instructors of the flock of Christ, have all the while been Satan's instruments for overthrowing the saving truths of Scripture. See Paul's warning word to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:8-13, and 4:1-5). Compare with Proverbs 23:10-11.

22:29

Reward is sure for the diligent. He who applies himself with earnestness to his appointed labor will be noticed and recognized because of his ability. How much more when he labors for the Lord, seeking His approval, rather than that of his fellowman! "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord," is the principle on which the believer orders his daily service (Romans 12:11). Often, one fears, we act as though it read, "Fervent in business; slothful in spirit; serving yourselves."

He who would one day stand before the King and enjoy the sunshine of His approval, must labor now to be well-pleasing to Him. The faithful life of Daniel is a good example of this godly diligence. He was a man who, whatever the changes of government, always came to the front, standing before kings.

Proverbs 23

Nothing that concerns His creatures is too small for the Creator to notice. Therefore, in the opening verses of this chapter we have a section devoted to the proper behavior of a man who dines with one of higher station than himself.

23:1-3

These verses remind the one invited to dine at a ruler's table of the importance of self-restraint. It is unwise to presume on the lasting favor of one in authority and to accept privileges accorded by him, as though they are deserved. A faithful person displays an attitude of quiet deference at such times. A blase manner soon evokes disgust, indignation and ill-will. Daniel and the Hebrew children demonstrated a commendable spirit when honored with the king's delicacies. Although they did not eat the king's food, they displayed a respectful attitude in refusing it (Daniel 1).

23:4-5

The Scriptures warns us many times against making the accumulation of wealth the object of our hearts. The man who trusts his own wisdom and ignores this divine instruction will find, too late, that he has set his eyes on that which is fleeting and evanescent; for earthly treasure is often scattered far more easily than it is collected. Riches seem possessed with wings. Like eagles, they fly away, leaving the one who set his mind on them disappointed and heart-sick.

God has faithfully warned of the folly of the mad chase after wealth, yet few people are impressed by these warnings. Worldly men will strain every nerve and exhaust every scheme

to possess money which they can never enjoy; and it is clear, that many of the children of God are contaminated by the same covetous spirit. We are slow to learn, therefore the need of the Lord's discipline which many of us experience all our days. See Paul's word as to the dangers of wealth (1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-18).

23:6-8

In these verses we are warned against accepting the hospitality of an insincere person. He may speak pleasantly and profess to delight in your company; but it is safer to avoid him and refuse his advances. His delicacies will prove dissatisfying and your pleasant agreeable words will be wasted: for in one way or another he will see that his favors are returned. He never thinks of doing good and giving unselfishly. He will seek to use for his own advantage, those who obligate themselves to him by accepting his pretended kindnesses. However pleasing his smile, it is hiding a deceptive heart. He is covetous and self-seeking, and his ways are shaped accordingly. See the old prophet of Bethel (1 Kings 13).

23:9

To seek to instruct him whose heart is set on folly and waywardness is wasting one's breath or like casting pearls before swine. When there is no desire for wisdom, but knowledge and understanding have been deliberately trampled under foot, it is useless to waste words. See Proverbs 26:4. Jotham's rebuke of the followers of Abimelech is a case in point (Judges 9:7-21).

23:10-11

See note on Proverbs 22:28. He who raids the field of the widow or the orphan because of their apparent helplessness, in order to increase his own possessions, will learn to his sorrow that they have a kinsman-redeemer, in Jehovah Himself. He will support their cause and show His power on their behalf. Let those who are wronged commit their affairs to Him, knowing that He will not fail any who trust His love and count on His intervention. It is refreshing and uplifting to see how David referred all his concerns to God when he was misjudged and oppressed. See Psalm 35.

23:12

This is another reminder of what we read in Proverbs 2:1-9. Only when the heart is applied to instruction and the ear determined to hear right and profitable words, will there be progress in divine things. A careless learning by rote will never profit. It is when the whole being is occupied with the truth, that Wisdom resides in the soul of him who seeks her. An aged Christian was said to have *meditated* the Bible through three times in his life. This is very different from merely *reading* the Scriptures. It implies patient, careful study of each portion perused, resulting in true spiritual growth. Listen to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 15:16).

23:13-14

See note on Proverbs 19:18. Discipline, administered promptly, not in harshness, or undue severity, will profit the child. Though he may suffer at the time, correction will prevent the ruin and misery that are bound to follow a life of self-seeking and rebellion. In verse 14 of the Revised Standard version the

word used is *Sheol.* It is not exactly hell, but the world of spirits. It is used to describe the final end of such a vicious, undisciplined life. Chastisement will correct evil tendencies. All parents should have the same concern regarding the training of their children that Manoah manifested (Judges 13:8-12).

23:15-16

In these words of a father addressing his son, we may hear the desire of our heavenly Father that His children walk in the truth. It is our precious and holy privilege to bring joy to His heart by loving wisdom and speaking right things. See 3 John 3-4.

23:17-18

It is not wise to envy those who seem to prosper in wickedness, for their day of retribution is coming. Righteousness may suffer in the present age, but it will be proven at last that those who daily lived in the fear of the Lord chose the better path. It seems certain that in verse 18 the doctrine of future retribution is strongly indicated. Newberry suggests "Verily there is a hereafter" as an adequate rendering of the original. The thought appears to be that there is a time coming when present conditions will be reversed, and righteousness will triumph. Then he who has walked in integrity and the fear of God will be rewarded for all his sufferings here. See the last two beatitudes in our Lord's sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:10-12).

23:19-21

Intemperance in eating and drinking demonstrates a heart uncontrolled by wisdom. The Christian is bidden to be temperate in all things, that by sobriety and careful behavior he may commend the gospel of God. He is to bring his body into subjection, not being ruled by its carnal appetites. He who does not heed words like these must bear his just punishment. This was the sin of the stubborn and rebellious son of Deuteronomy 21:20. See verses 29-35 of this chapter of Proverbs.

23:22

Exuberant, self-confident, and resourceful young people are likely to forget the reverence due to their aging parents. Let the young give them that filial consideration which they will desire for themselves when years have destroyed early vigor and mentality. Esther's obedience to her aged cousin Mordecai is a lovely example of what is taught in this verse (Esther 2:20).

23:23

See note on Proverbs 4:7-9. This is an important word for our indifferent and liberal age. We may well cry with the prophet, "Truth is fallen in the street" (Isaiah 59:14). But he who desires the approval of God above the praise of men will value truth and be ready to purchase it at the cost of friends, reputation, possessions, even life itself. Nor will he part with it whatever the suffering that may result from contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Rationalists may sneer and the superstitious persecute, but he who possesses the truth will gain wisdom, instruction, and understanding that is mysterious to men who are only wise in

a worldly sense. Who exemplified the truth of this verse more than the one-time rabbi of Tarsus? See Philippians 3:7-11.

23:24-25

See the second clause of Proverbs 10:1. When children display righteousness and wisdom the hearts of their parents are filled with a joy beyond telling. It delights and encourages parents to see the children for whose salvation they have toiled and prayed, walking in uprightness and prudence through a world filled with pitfalls. How little the young reflect on the effect their behavior has on their fathers and mothers. Many people say that they dearly love those who have lavished such constant affection on them all their lives, yet by their actions they wound their parents' spirits and break their hearts. Consider verses 15-16 of this chapter. See Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 46-48).

23:26

In this verse, as in verse 15, the Christian hears the voice of his heavenly Father. The words are not addressed to the wicked. They have no heart for God, nor can their eyes find in His ways anything in which to delight. But God speaks to His sons, saying, "Give me thy heart." It is His right, and surely the child of His grace will rejoice in being able to give God what He craves. He does not yearn for mere service as in Martha's case, but heart-occupation with Himself as illustrated by Mary (Luke 10:38-42). When one has experienced the preciousness of redemption by the blood of Christ he will gladly say,

> *Take my poor heart, and let it be*
> *Forever closed to all but Thee.*

> *Take my love, my Lord; I pour*
> *At Thy feet its treasure-store.*

He is worthy of the best we have to give. To Him we rightly yield the citadel of our deepest affections. Only when He possesses our hearts will we be delighted in His ways. See the living sacrifice of Romans 12:1-2.

23:27-28

Compare these verses with Proverbs 7. If the young man would be preserved from impurity, God must have his heart. None are safe who allow their affections to be fixed on this world. Everywhere there are to be found those who would lure away the Christian from the paths of truth and virtue. In the Lord alone is there strength and deliverance. The unholy woman against whom we have been so frequently warned is like a deep ditch, hidden until one has stumbled into it. He who pleases God will escape from her. How terribly Samson suffered at the hands of such a woman! (Judges 16).

23:29

The six questions asked in this verse are answered in the verses that follow. Woe, sorrow, contentions, babbling (or perhaps, complaints), needless wounds, and inflamed eyes are characteristic of the one who is described in the following verses.

The abrupt questions focus our attention on the terrible and vivid description of the drunkard that is presented as the answer.

23:30-35

Indulgence in the pleasures of wine to the point of inebriation is a cause of much human sorrow. Drunkenness is one of the greatest curses of the ages, yet it is a sin that is seductive and attractive to those who are socially inclined. Throwing to one side all restraint, they are allured by the sparkle of the bubbling liquor. But the results cannot be described. What seemed so delightful and innocent becomes like a venomous reptile whose bite sets the veins on fire. Immorality is linked with drunkenness, as effect with cause. All self-respect goes when the brain is controlled by the deadly poison. Lust and license possess the drunkard.

The inebriate is like a man endeavoring to lie down in the heart of the waves of the sea or like one who tries to sleep on the mast head. When he becomes sober he feels bruised and wounded, but makes no determination to flee the cause that has, in a great measure, destroyed his will. The unnatural craving which possesses him leads him to seek again the means of his destruction. See Nabal (1 Samuel 25:36-38).

It becomes the child of God to flee these destructive tendencies, and by sobriety and self-control, to be an example to those who are weaker. “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is [ensnared], or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth” (Romans 14:21-22). To play fast and loose with what has ruined so many people is certainly not to walk charitably. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans

15:1). Careless indulgence in that which is to others like the poison of the adder is most inconsistent and thoughtless.

Proverbs 24

This chapter completes the second section of the book of Proverbs. It includes proverbs arranged directly by the wise king and evidently put into circulation before his death.

24:1-2

The first proverb in this chapter is a warning against falling into the snare that distracted the godly Asaph until he went into the sanctuary of the Lord (Psalm 73). See notes on Proverbs 23:17-18. When Asaph saw the end of the wicked, all his envious yearning vanished. How could a saint of God begrudge the worldly person his fleeting pleasures when judgment, like a dark and gloomy cloud, is lowering over his head!

Nor is that the only thing that makes their lot wretched. Their hearts and lips similarly are occupied in destruction and mischief. Who could be happy when so engaged? Disappointment and grief will always be the reward of those who hope to find happiness through iniquity. Scripture is replete with many instances of the final end of the wicked. For example, see the wretched life of Jehoram, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 21).

24:3-4

Filling the mind and heart with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding is like building a mansion on a solid foundation and filling it with costly treasures. In the same way the life of the wise is beautifully adorned, bringing joy to him and delight to his companions. He who has the wisdom that comes from above will never be poor. See James 3:17-18.

24:5-6

See notes on Proverbs 20:18. There is an intimate connection between these verses and those just preceding. Wisdom makes its possessor strong, however inferior he may be in other respects to his adversaries.

The meaning of the expression "make thy war" (KJV) is evidently "make successful warfare," or "war to thine advantage."

24:7

The wise man does not act rashly. As he goes out to meet the enemy, he takes advantage of the counsel and experience of others. He is not an egotist. His safety is in his willingness to hear what others soberly present. Our Lord may have had these words in mind, as also those of verse 27, when He instructed His disciples as to the importance of counting the cost, before beginning to build or going out to a conflict (Luke 14:28-32). See the poor wise man of Ecclesiastes 9:14-16.

Unwilling to repent of his evil-doing, the fool is unable to attain wisdom. Therefore he is speechless when the hour of his judgment comes. See the man who ignored the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11-13).

What rich grace led Jesus, the eternal wisdom, to be as a lamb, dumb before the shearers, when He stood "in the gate" to take the judgment for His own (Isaiah 53:7).

24:8-9

Evil thoughts, said our Lord, come from the heart, and indicate a person's moral pollution. He who allows his mind to indulge in evil desires is full of mischief. His thoughts of folly are sinful,

whether put into execution or not; for thoughts as well as deeds will be judged when the secrets of men's hearts are laid bare. Men will give account for thoughts as well as for words and actions. The scoffer is one who permits the foolishness of his heart to control his lips. He ridicules holy things, as did Pharaoh when he asked, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exodus 5:2)

24:10

The hour of trial demonstrates the spiritual strength one really has. To faint or become disheartened indicates that one has not been truly counting on God for deliverance. The hour of trial and opposition will find the trusting soul more confident still, for he knows the source of all power. Contrast Elijah when threatened by Jezebel with David when the people spoke of stoning him (1 Kings 19:2-4; 1 Samuel 30:6).

24:11-12

These verses seem to refer to a mode of execution once prevalent in Syria and Palestine. Muenscher says, "When a criminal was anciently led to execution, a crier went before, who proclaimed the crime of which he had been convicted, and called upon any one who could say anything in behalf of the condemned culprit, to come forward; in which case, he was led back to the tribunal and the cause was re-heard." To selfishly withhold information that could save the condemned man's life, would be to stand with Cain and ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9) But the great Judge of all who ponders the heart would be witness against the one who acted so perfidiously and would assuredly render judgment.

What can be said of Christians who know millions are passing on to eternal sorrow, yet scarcely ever make known God's message of justification through the Lord Jesus Christ? Almost nineteen centuries have passed since Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). How many millions have not heard the gospel message, because we who are so richly blessed have so little heart to carry the word of reconciliation to them?

Even when some have been ready to go, there is amazing lethargy among those who could afford to assist them. Therefore only by great self-denial can these missionaries reach and remain in the needy fields, already white to the harvest.

Let us not forget that we will yet have to answer to God for our insensitivity. He will not ignore the self-seeking, the worldly-mindedness, the positive indifference that has led His people to neglect the carrying of His gospel "into all the world."

The cry of those ready to be slain rises up to His ear day and night while they wait for a deliverer. Be it ours then, not to say "we knew it not," but to rise to our privileges and help to spread abroad the saving word in every way we can. See Ezekiel, the watchman to Israel (Ezekiel 33:1-12).

24:13-14

As honey is delightful to the palate, so Wisdom will be to the soul devoted to her. In chapter 5:3 we found the strange woman simulating this; but though her lips "drop as an honeycomb," they who follow her pernicious ways will have bitterness in the latter end. On the contrary, Wisdom promises

an assured reward—an expectation that will not result in disappointment. The one who earnestly seeks understanding will never be put to shame. See the account of Cornelius (Acts 10).

24:15-16

The wicked rejoice in iniquity and are glad at the calamities of the righteous. But though the just man stumbles frequently, he will be lifted up again, for "God is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). The sevenfold fall may refer either to what are commonly called misfortunes or to moral lapses brought on through spiritual carelessness; for if the saint of God becomes careless, he is as weak as other men. But where grace has worked in the soul, there will be recovery; while the one who makes an insincere profession will return like a dog to his vomit or like a sow to her wallowing in the mire, thus becoming overwhelmed with evil (2 Peter 2:20-22). Contrast Peter with Judas (Matthew 26:75; 27:3-5). Compare this proverb with Psalm 34:18-22.

24:17-18

Love does not gloat over the sorrows of others, even though their adversities may be richly deserved. Remembering that he is himself a subject of grace, the humble, contrite soul walks softly, having tears, not sneers, for the afflictions of his enemies. The eye of Jehovah will note when the attitude is otherwise; He will see that he who is glad at calamities will not go unpunished. This was what provoked God's wrath against Edom (Obadiah 12-16) and turned His anger away from Jacob to Esau. See notes on Proverbs 17:5.

24:19-20

Compare this proverb with 24:1. There is no reason to be either troubled because of evil men or to envy their present estate. They have no power or might, unless for a brief time it is delegated by the God of the righteous; their wealth and prosperity is only for a moment and will soon vanish away forever, leaving them poorer than the poorest. No reward for all their toil on earth awaits them in eternity. Their lamp will go out in darkness as they fall beneath the awful judgment of the God whose holiness they have despised and whose grace they have refused. See the judgment that fell on Herod (Acts 12:20-23).

24:21-22

All who know the Lord should be subject to God, and therefore to the earthly powers that are ordained by Him. Those who are rebellious disturb the peace and order of society by plotting against the established government. In the church such men also arise who would overturn all godly order and trouble the minds of the saints. Their capacity for evil will be greatly hindered if they are avoided. In worldly commonwealths, Christians are subjects, not rulers. Therefore we are exhorted to render to Caesar what belongs to him, not joining in with political changes and social upheavals. To fail to obey the word of God in this matter will involve the unwise saint in many a snare; then when the overthrow of the revolutionary leader comes suddenly, the misery of both the rebel and his followers will be great. See the outcome of the insurrections of Theudas and Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:36-37).

24:23-26

Verse 23 to the end of the chapter seems to be a kind of appendix to the book as originally written. This is indicated by the introductory sentence "These things also belong to the wise" (23). Four subjects are taken up in this additional section, all of which have been previously treated. The topics are the evil of showing partiality in judgment; counting the cost; prejudiced witness; and slothfulness.

Verses 23-26 treat the first topic. He who defends the wicked brings hatred upon himself. He will draw down on his head the indignation of the upright. But he who condemns the guilty will earn the respect of the people and receive their blessing. All will "kiss his lips" who gives a just sentence. Among Eastern nations, the kiss was a symbolic act denoting affection and esteem.

Solomon himself is perhaps the best illustration in Scripture of the righteous judge until "He shall come whose right it is to reign, and to execute justice throughout the whole earth" (1 Kings 2 and 3:16-28).

24:27

We have already noticed that the discourse of our Lord recorded in Luke 14:28-32 may have had reference to the principle enunciated in Proverbs 24:6. That proverb was illustrated in His words about the king going out to battle without proper advice. Verse 27 may have also been in our Lord's mind as it finds its counterpart and fuller explanation in the warning drawn from the account of the man who began to build and was not able to finish. It is wise to count the cost, lest the undertaking be too great and prove but a monument

of folly in the end. Such a reminder was the tower of Babel, which overconfident men began sacrilegiously to build, but were unable to complete (Genesis 11:1-9).

24:28-29

To testify against one's neighbor in order to accomplish his ruin and procure revenge, because of real or imagined wrong, is improper for a saint of God. The man of faith need not be concerned about defending his good name; he certainly will not be found falsely accusing his neighbor, however much he has suffered through him. He can quietly leave all his circumstances in the hands of Him who will ever vindicate His faithful servants.

An important point is reached in the experience of a believer when he learns to look beyond all second causes to God Himself. Only then can he say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am… to be content" (Philippians 4:11). The apostle described a mind and soul that is content to know His will is being carried out, despite all efforts of the enemy to thwart it. This attitude elicits a wonderful victory over the natural propensity to see in our circumstances cause for complaint, dissatisfaction, and revenge.

See the remarks as to David's behavior towards Shimei in the notes on Proverbs 20:22.

24:30-34

This graphic portrayal of the sluggard's field was given as by an eyewitness who stood sadly gazing on it and pondering as he viewed its desolation. Thorns and nettles were flourishing, but there was no fruit. The wall was broken down and everything

spoke of lack of care and slothful indifference. May we too gaze on it and consider it well!

Verses 33 and 34 are the musings of his heart as he meditated on the unhappy scene. The sluggard was sleeping when he should have been laboring. The hour is approaching when he will be aroused by poverty coming like a man on a journey and want like a soldier in full armor. But the sluggard will be awakened too late to realize that his wasted opportunities have gone beyond recall. See the spiritual lesson of these verses as noted in Proverbs 6:10-11 and 20:4.

This warning against laziness closes the book as first set forth, unless chapters 30 and 31 attributed to Agur and Lemuel were then part of it. If so, the next section was inserted in its present place by divine guidance when the work was issued in its final complete form.

Proverbs 25

We now begin a portion that did not form any part of this book until the days of Hezekiah, nearly three centuries after the death of Solomon himself. Certain unnamed scribes, called in the Septuagint "the friends of Hezekiah," rescued from oblivion the maxims that form the next five chapters. We know from 1 Kings 4:32 that the wise king "spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five." We know little of the songs. We have the Song of Songs, the dirge of Ecclesiastes, and it seems likely that Psalm 127 and perhaps others were from his pen. The rest of his songs God has not seen fit to preserve. In the book of Proverbs we have already had before us over four hundred sayings which he collated and handed down to future generations.

25:1

Whether the proverbs of chapters 25-29 were transmitted orally or in writing from Solomon's days to the times of Hezekiah, we are not able to definitely decide. The word translated "copied" would favor the latter thought, but as the word is as correctly translated "collected" (according to well-informed Hebraists), we cannot be positive as to either position. All the Christian needs to be confidant of the divine inspiration of these proverbs is the well-known fact that they formed part of the Old Testament Scriptures when Jesus authenticated all of the three great divisions of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

25:2-3

More than once in the Bible our attention is called to the inscrutableness of God's counsels and designs. See Deuteronomy 29:29 and Romans 11:33-34. As the heavens are high above the earth, so are His thoughts above ours. It is His nature to conceal His wondrous purposes from prurient curiosity.

But though He so acts, He would have those in authority search earnestly His Word that they may find out His mind and will. This is good and profitable exercise. As they delve into His hidden things, so He also searches out the secret chambers of their hearts which are unknown to their subjects. He keeps His own secrets, even as they keep theirs, revealing them only to a chosen few.

Now all saints are kings to God. Therefore He would communicate His mind to each one who studies to show himself approved unto Him. May it be ours to be "kings" in this happy sense of the word.

See the words of the angel of the Lord to Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:17-18).

25:4-5

See note on Proverbs 17:3. By the removal of all dross from melted silver, there is produced that which suits the refiner; so by removing evil counselors and lawless men from before a king, his throne is established in righteousness. Notice in Solomon's history, the many evildoers who had to be judged before he could occupy his throne in peace and safety. See 1 Kings 2.

The same principle abides in regard to the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wicked will be destroyed and all the transgressors rooted out of the land when He returns in triumph to usher in the great day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1 and 2; Revelation 19).

25:6-7

These verses are similar in meaning and language to our Lord's parable in Luke 14:7-11. Undoubtedly He set high value on this precious collection of wise and helpful sayings.

That pride and love of approbation which leads one to boast in the presence of the great will almost certainly be followed by a crushing rebuke. He who places importance on himself and takes his place accordingly will likely rate himself far higher than others would. He will be forced in shame to give place to abler and better men. The man who is content with the lowly seat may be called to a higher one if he is found to be deserving of such recognition. See David, who was chosen as king when only a shepherd-boy (1 Samuel 16).

25:8

See notes on Proverbs 24:5-6,27. Only when a dispute is clearly of the Lord should one "go forth to strive." Too often, to their shame and deep grief, saints are found like king Josiah meddling in matters that do not concern them. How significant the words, "After all this," which introduce the unhappy account of Josiah's failure in going out against Pharaoh-necho. After a lifetime of carefulness and devotion to God, he went out hastily to take part in what he should never have interfered with and so meets a dishonored death (2 Chronicles 35:20-24).

Compare these verses with our Lord's words in Luke 12:57-59 and 14:31-33.

25:9-10

Much trouble and mischief might be avoided if people were careful to keep their differences to themselves, instead of spreading around information of their shameful quarrels. If the simple scriptural rule, "Tell him his fault between thee and him alone," were more generally acted on, many misunderstandings might be put right at once (Matthew 18:15). Instead dissension often drags on and involves an ever-increasing circle of people who should properly never even have heard of the case.

The proverb commends going directly to the one with whom there is danger of a quarrel and graciously discussing the matter in secret, being careful to keep it from sharp ears and prying eyes. Nor is this principle only something recommended. It is directly commanded by God Himself (Matthew 5:25-26). His people will be happy when it is taken to heart and conscientiously acted on!

25:11

The imagery in this verse has puzzled most commentators. Just what apples of gold might be is a question with many. One supposes embroidery of golden apples among picture-work of silver.

The explanation that seems most reasonable and commendable is that by golden, we are to understand a rich yellow or orange color merely; not that the apples are actually of gold. Many understand this figurative language to mean citron fruit or oranges on a silver platter.

But the writer witnessed one day a most unusual occurrence in the largest orange-growing district of southern California; something, indeed, that none remembered as having taken place previously. A fairly heavy fall of snow occurred during the height of the orange harvest. The trees everywhere were covered with the silvery down. As the lovely view spread out before me, and I noticed the great yellow globes hanging among the whitened boughs and leaves, I exclaimed, "Apples of gold in pictures of silver!"

Perhaps Solomon gazed on just such a scene. In his time, oranges were plentiful in Palestine; and the citron, a large fruit of the lemon variety, abounds there still. It is not unlikely that some wintry day he had beheld a similar view to that which I have attempted to depict.

The effect is lovely beyond all powers of pen to describe, but equally lovely are right words spoken at the proper time. Read the words of Boaz to Ruth, the Moabitess (Ruth 2:8-13).

25:12

A rebuke kindly administered by a wise man should be esteemed as of greater value than a costly present. Loving rebuke should not arouse indignation. Such were the words of Oded the prophet to the host of Judah, and we find them acted on as a message from God (2 Chronicles 28:9-15).

25:13

In ancient times, during the winter in Palestine snow was carefully put away so as to be available for cooling drinks in the heat of summer. The simile therefore is very easy to understand. As the cold snow refreshes the reapers in the

warm harvest days, so a dependable messenger refreshes the soul of his masters. See Jahaziel in 2 Chronicles 20:14-17.

25:14

See the contrast to this proverb in Proverbs 18:16. When clouds are seen in the sky in a period of drought, men hope for showers and are disappointed if they do not come. So when one talks of giving gifts but fails to fulfill his promises, he disappoints in the same way.

But Jude refers to this passage in regard to those who profess to be gifted as teachers of the truth of God, but who in reality have nothing for the souls of their hearers. It is common to see men who are self-confident and positive about their abilities and spiritual insight, but who possess no true godly discernment. See the full description of such false gifts in Jude 11-13.

25:15

Continued kindness and patience are powerful agents in overcoming obstinacy and angry passion, which seem as unyielding as a bone. A bone is hard and inflexible, but a soft tongue is said to break it. In other words, mild, persuasive language can overcome where heated words and wrathful expressions would only arouse deeper resentment. See David's words to Saul after he had spared that monarch's life a second time (1 Samuel 26:17-25).

25:16

See note on Proverbs 24:13-14. To eat honey in moderation is good and healthful. Taken to excess it may be very harmful. The same is true of what honey signifies.

Throughout the Old Testament, honey seems to illustrate mere natural sweetness, hence it was forbidden to form part of the meatoffering which typified Christ in His perfect sinless humanity (see Leviticus 2). Jesus never sought solace in natural things, however pleasant or agreeable they may have been. However, we are permitted to enjoy the comforts natural things afford, but we need to beware of making them the chief object of our souls.

Wives and husbands need to watch lest their affection for each other, sweet and lovely as it is, crowds out the things of God. So with the various joys and pleasures of life. What is legitimate and wholly proper in its place, may prove very detrimental to all spiritual growth if it is permitted to become the supreme controlling power of the life. A little honey may be desirable and helpful, as in Jonathan's case (1 Samuel 14:27). Its abuse is another thing altogether.

So too, honey may be extracted from the difficulties of life if they are met and overcome in the fear of God. But to set one's mind on searching for honey is far different than receiving it thankfully. Read of Samson's attitude when he found honey in the carcass of a lion slain in the power of faith (Judges 14:5-9,14). Also notice Proverbs 25:27.

25:17

The lesson is simple and important, but one which many of us are slow to learn. The heart of the proverb is expressed in today's axiom, "Familiarity breeds contempt." This is one form of the honey which the previous verse warns us about indulging in too freely. Even in the case of the best of friends we should be sensitive regarding continually visiting and

intruding; it is an easy thing to wear out one's welcome. Frequently people who were the best of friends become the bitterest enemies because of neglect of so simple a Scripture as this.

More time spent in secret with God and less spent in socializing would result in far greater profit to our souls and bring much more glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the error to which the younger widows were prone, and be warned (1 Timothy 5:13).

25:18

How little the slanderer considers the grief he causes to the innocent objects of his vicious tongue! The hateful and cruel words he recklessly utters are war-like weapons, carrying pain and anguish, destroying peace of mind, and arousing indignation. On the other hand, the injured one should take all injustice to the Lord Himself and leave it at His feet, accepting it as part of the discipline of the path. He will rise triumphantly above the tongue of slander and every other evil when he remembers that nothing can come to a believer but what divine love can use in blessing.

Nothing is harder for a wounded spirit and a sensitive soul than to endure untrue accusations. It is natural to the human heart to display indignation against the false accuser, and a determination to clear oneself or take revenge. But to go on, looking to God for grace to live so that all will see the falsity of the charge; to commit the keeping of my reputation to Him who permitted the trial for my humbling; to admit the righteousness of God's ways as I reflect on the many occasions on which I have dishonored His name—these are healthful

exercises indeed. This is how I am kept from taking things into my own hand. I can count on God to act for me, as He did for Job, David, Daniel, and a host of others who had learned to commit all to Him whose love is unchanging. He never permits a trial unless He discerns in the condition of one's soul a necessity for the affliction. See verse 23 of this chapter.

25:19

What is more trying on the nerves and wearing on the spirit than a broken tooth or a dislocated foot? Anxiety and inconvenience are ever present. In the same way frustrations abound when we depend on a faithless man who deserts his post in time of trouble. See John Mark (Acts 13:13; 15:37-38).

25:20

In ancient Palestine nitre was a native mineral soda that would foam when put in contact with an acid. To take away a person's coat in cold weather would add to his discomfort and arouse his indignation, even as vinegar poured on soda would effervesce. In the same way one who sings light frivolous songs to him who is of a heavy heart only increases his distress and causes his anger to be stirred.

There is a time for all things. The merry-hearted love to sing; the sad and grief-stricken prefer loving sympathy. See Judah by the waters of Babylon (Psalm 137:1-4).

25:21-22

These are the verses quoted, with the exception of the last clause, by the apostle Paul in Romans 12:20-21. There he takes them verbatim from the Septuagint. It is certainly worthy of note that the Holy Spirit quotes from the Proverbs of the Old

Testament when commenting on conduct suited to Christians. This but bears out the remark made in the introduction that in the book of Proverbs we have the behavior which becomes the man of God basking in the full blaze of present truth.

Vengeance should be far from the thoughts of the saint. He is to show grace and compassion even to his enemies, losing no opportunity to minister to their need. By so doing, the fire of love will soften their angry feelings. The Lord will reward the one who imitates his Master, who said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). It would be the greatest incongruity for one who was himself the object of loving grace to attempt to seek revenge. Read of the attitude displayed by Stephen during his stoning (Acts 7:60).

25:23

The receiver of stolen goods is as guilty as the thief. So is it with the one who encourages another to relate scandalous stories. Nothing is more conducive to strife and sorrow among the people of God than the repeating of matters that cannot profit and that bring pain to the one of whom they are related. But there is no surer way to encourage the backbiter than by listening to his tales. If met by an angry countenance and reproved in the fear of God, the malicious gossip might often be nipped in the bud.

When people come with unsavory tales about absent persons it would be well to meet them in the spirit that David manifested towards Rechab and Baanah, for such people are character-assassins (2 Samuel 4:5-12).

25:24

This is a repetition of Proverbs 21:9. It is not by mere chance that the words are repeated; the wretchedness of dwelling with a rebellious and contentious woman is referred to several times. God has established an order in creation which is not broken with impunity. See Ephesians 5:22-24.

25:25

The glorious gospel of the blessed God is the preeminent good news from a far country. It is like a draught of clear sparkling water from a cold spring to a thirsty soul. When weary, famished, and ready to perish, the poor sinner drinks the living water, and it becomes in his inmost being a fountain springing up unto everlasting life. See the woman of Samaria (John 4:6-29).

25:26

To the thirsty traveler a polluted fountain or a spring defiled with filth and impurities is a cause for grief and vexation. So a godly and upright man is disappointed and pained to see a righteous person oppressed by those who have no principle and who refuse to obey divine or human law. See Gedaliah and Ishmael (Jeremiah 41:1-3).

25:27

See note on Proverbs 25:16. The immoderate use of honey is pernicious. Much more so is excessive ambition. He who lives only to glorify himself will be wearied in the search. The entire book of Ecclesiastes is witness of the emptiness of selfish aspirations. Also see God's message to Baruch the son of Neriah (Jeremiah 45:5).

25:28

See note on Proverbs 16:32. Self-control is ever important. Paul kept his body under control to avoid dishonoring the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Lack of this self-control sadly dishonored Noah shortly after he had been given dominion over the earth (Genesis 9:20-21). Moses, too, the meekest of all men, failed in self-control when angered at Meribah (Numbers 20). May grace hold our spirits in godly subjection, so we do not become like a city exposed to the ready assaults of its enemies! Even when one is clearly in the right, nothing so negatively influences his case as losing control of his temper and uttering heated, hasty words. Others are prone to forget the minor points of the evidence at such a time and to judge by the spirit demonstrated. Therefore the importance of exemplifying in our words and ways "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:1).

Proverbs 26

The fool, so frequently mentioned in Proverbs, is the subject of the first twelve verses of chapter 26. It should be born in mind that the term as used here has no reference to one mentally weak or incapable through simplicity. Fool and folly are almost synonymous with sinner and sinfulness, though the added thought of willfulness is needed to fully understand many of the warnings and threatenings. Fools are those who make a mock at sin, rejoicing in iniquity and refusing to heed the voice of wisdom.

26:1

Both weather conditions described in this verse are out of place and may cause serious inconvenience. Snow in summer is injurious because it retards growth. Rain during harvest greatly interrupts the reaper and may even ruin the crop. So a fool in the place of honor is unsuitable and may cause much damage. He does not know how to conduct himself and he fulfills the passage, "Man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:12). Read of Nebuchadnezzar's attitude before his repentance (Daniel 4).

26:2

Fools are ever ready to curse someone, often to the great anxiety of ignorant and timid souls who fear the fulfillment of their maledictions. But as the sparrow and swallow fly through the air and pass quickly from view, so it will be with a curse uttered without cause.

A second interpretation suggested by some is that no curse will come on anyone unless there is reason for it, but this idea

is also suggested in the first interpretation given. Compare this verse with Goliath's curse (1 Samuel 17:43).

26:3

See notes on Proverbs 10:13 and 19:29. The order here will seem strange to some. We think of the horse as requiring the bridle to control it and the donkey needing the whip to spur it on. But in Syria it is just the opposite. Horses are not used frequently and are often exceedingly stubborn; the donkey is apt to be too ready and needs to be held in by bit and bridle to keep it at a proper gait. The fool is likely to err on either side and therefore the rod is necessary to correct his willfulness. The psalmist warns against failing to obey God's instruction and therefore requiring bit and bridle guidance (Psalm 32:9).

26:4-5

Though these verses seem to give opposite directions, they are too closely connected to allow fault-finders to raise the charge that they are contradictory. When you are conversing with a fool you need to consider the time and manner in which you answer him. To answer him in the same scoffing and egotistical spirit that he exhibits, would be to sink to his level. But on the other hand to allow foolish, unlearned statements to go unchallenged without rebuttal will only reinforce his self-assurance and conceit. To expose his shallowness and reply convincingly to his foolishness may at least humble him and cause him to feel the need to investigate more fully. When the men of Hezekiah did not answer the vapid blasphemies of Rab-shakeh they obeyed the first of these instructions (2 Kings 18:36). When Nehemiah replied so brusquely to the wretched

pretensions of Sanballat he acted according to the second (Nehemiah 6:8).

26:6-9

These couplets allude to the same general subject as the previous verses. To entrust a fool with an important message is like cutting off the feet or drinking something harmful. The purpose will be thwarted, for a foolish messenger cannot be depended on. His feet might as well be amputated, so far as his carrying the word correctly is concerned. Or it may be that we are to think of the sender rather than the one sent. In that case it would be as sensible to cut off his own feet or to drink what is injurious as to entrust his message to a fool. Looked at from either standpoint, it conveys the thought of vexation and delay. Jonah played the part of such an envoy before he was brought to see his sin (Jonah 1).

The lame walk with a halting, uncertain gait because of their unequal legs. When he who is not himself wise attempts to use wise speech, he too stumbles and by his uncertain words and ways makes known his folly. Such was Saul among the prophets (1 Samuel 19:24).

The first part of Proverbs 26:8 is somewhat ambiguous and has been translated in various ways. Some have rendered it: "As he that putteth a precious stone into a heap of stones." This implies that to honor a fool is like casting a costly jewel among the common stones by the wayside—the honor is worthless. Others read "putting into a purse a stone of the heap." That is, as it would be foolish to put a useless bit of stone carefully into one's purse, it is equally foolish to bestow honor on one who does not deserve it.

Both the above would be true enough; but many scholars do not think that either of them is intended or implied here. The common version would seem to mean that it is as senseless to honor a fool as to tie a stone in a sling and then try to throw it. This interpretation seems well-supported and appears to be correct. See Herod's experience (Acts 12:20-23).

A thorn-branch in the hand of a drunkard is almost certain to prove harmful to himself and others. The same is true when a fool attempts to teach. He will destroy himself and those who listen to him. Consider what God has said as to Shemaiah the Nehelamite (Jeremiah 29:30-32).

26:10

Scholars are very far from agreement among themselves as to the exact meaning of the Hebrew in this text. For lack of better authority we keep to the King James version, which at least expresses a solemn truth that is consistant with the Word of God. Judgment, though it seems delayed, is sure for all fools and transgressors. Nothing can change this truth. God will render to every man according to his deeds.

Stuart and Muenscher read "As an arrow that woundeth every one, so is he that hireth a fool, and he who hireth wayfarers." That is, to hire wicked or unknown persons is to invite disaster. The rendering of the Revised Version is practically the same as this: "As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth a fool and he that hireth them that pass by."

J. N. Darby reads, "A master roughly worketh every one: he both hireth the fool and hireth passers by." He admits in a note that it is a "difficult verse." His rendering is ambiguous, but

seems to convey the thought that a master does not care whom he hires, so long as he gets the work accomplished.

26:11

The horrible habit of the dog that eats again the filthy food it has ejected from its stomach is an appropriate picture of him who leaves his foolishness for a time, only to return to it with eagerness and zest later.

The apostle Peter applies the proverb to those who, having professed to know the saving grace of Christianity, go on for a time in an upright way. But when exposed to their old temptations, they turn back to their former sins with intensity and delight demonstrating that their hearts had not really been renewed. Such persons are often supposed to have been children of God; now they are considered to have lost the salvation they once enjoyed and to have become again children of wrath. Such teaching as this is unscriptural. All who come to Christ receive eternal life and will never perish. They are forever linked up with Himself. The precious life they have received is eternal life—non-forfeitable. A careful study of Peter's words shows he refers to persons who only had outwardly reformed their lives, but who were never truly converted to God. He says:

> *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge [or acknowledgment] of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered*

> *unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22).*

In the previous part of the chapter, Peter had been writing of false teachers who make false professions throughout: persons who would pursue Christianity as a system, even with a view to pervert it, but who had never known its power. Such people might go on for a time as though really born of God, but their true state would at last be seen. Giving up their unsatisfactory profession and relapsing into their old ways, they become apt illustrations of the truth of this proverb.

It should be noted that a dog in Scripture never illustrates a believer, but is often used to picture a false teacher. See Paul's warning in Philippians 3:2 and notice Isaiah's description in chapter 56:10-12 of his prophecy regarding false teachers. They are like dogs who turn to their vomit again, even as a sow that has been washed goes back to her wallowing in the mire. Had the sow been changed into a sheep (the figure of a Christian) it would no longer delight in mud and filth. A sheep may fall into the mire, but it will never be at rest again until it is free from it. A sow finds its natural element in the mire. This marks the difference between a real saint of God and a mere reformed hypocrite. Peter and Judas aptly picture the two classes of people. When Jesus simply looked at Peter his heart was broken and this resulted in his restoration (Luke 22:61 and John 21:15-19). On the other hand, Judas was controlled by his covetous spirit to the end, until remorse set in, but no repentance toward God. See the notes on Proverbs 14:14.

26:12

See Proverbs 26:5. A person who is arrogant and considers himself superior to all instruction places himself hopelessly beyond the reach of help. The out-and-out fool, who does not pretend to anything more than his foolish ways is more easily delivered than the narrow-minded egotist who merely pretends to be wise and pious, but is thoroughly in love with his own ways. We are warned against this miserable condition in Romans 12:16.

Having considered the fool in various aspects, the sluggard is held up to view in the next four verses.

26:13-16

See notes on Proverbs 13:4; 15:19; 19:15; 20:4; 21:25-26; 24:30-34. We are all familiar with the sluggard; he is one who means well, but accomplishes nothing because of continued procrastination. If there are no real difficulties, he will imagine them, and they then become as real to him as if actually existent. He cannot go out on the streets because he imagines there is a lion in the way, though others see no danger. The man of determination goes out in the •strength of the Lord and tears the lion apart as Samson did; but not so with the slothful man. Any paltry excuse will hold him back (see 22:13).

In olden times doors were not hung on hinges, but turned on pivots, thus moving frequently, but never going anywhere. Whether they turned on pivots or hinges, the door cannot move away from them. So with the sluggard; he is constantly expecting to be up and doing, but remains in his bed, tossing from side to side.

Even when seated at the table, he is almost too lazy to carry his food from the dish to his mouth. It is the extreme of slothfulness, but in warm climates is not an untrue description. See 19:24.

Despite his lack of purpose and determination, he is wiser in his own eyes than any number of men who are characterized by tact and energy. He can invent excuses and plausible arguments in unlimited quantities to justify his disgraceful behavior. Neither the disgust nor the anger of better men than himself will affect him.

This lack of purpose is sometimes found among young saints and can only result in a weakened testimony. It is better to be overzealous than play the part of the sluggard. See Joash king of Israel and Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 13:14-19).

26:17

To meddle with other people's quarrels is always foolish and often dangerous. Dogs in Syria are wild and savage. To take one by the ears would be to needlessly expose oneself to injury and suffering. It is wise to leave dogs alone, a custom that is commonly followed. In the cities they swarm in packs and are useful as scavengers; but no one attempts to control or interfere with them.

So when others are in strife, the passerby should avoid interference. It is best to let people settle their own differences between themselves, unless they appeal to another person to act the part of a peacemaker. Moses found that the Hebrew men who fought together were bitterly resentful of his unsolicited mediation (Exodus 2:13-14).

26:18-19

This proverb describes a person who wantonly perpetrates unkind tricks on others, causing them serious inconvenience and perhaps heavy loss. Then he attempts to laugh it off as mere amusement. He is like a man pretending to be insane and finding his sport in injuring others. Deceit in the name of pleasure is as much to be denounced as any other sin. Self-control and a concern for the welfare of his neighbors will cause one to avoid this deceitful behavior. Only the most thoughtless and selfish person will engage in amusement at the expense of another's suffering. See Proverbs 10:23 and 2 Peter 2:13.

26:20-22

See notes on Proverbs 11:13; 16:27-28. Already we have had our attention frequently directed to the evil of gossiping. But because we are so slow to learn, we are given added instruction in regard to what has become in many places a blighting curse among the people of God. Happy is the assembly of saints that does not number a slanderer or talebearer among its members! Just as fire goes out for lack of fuel, so many difficulties disappear when there is no whisperer to go around perpetuating the strife. But, just as coals added to burning coals preserve the fire, so a contentious man causes ill feelings to be inflamed, and malice and hatred to burn more strongly than ever. It is a miserable business to go about stirring up unholy passions and making conflicts more difficult to settle. For the words of a gossiper are devoured by many as though they were choice tidbits, which go down into the depths of the being and often cause permanent damage. See Proverbs 12:18 and 18:8.

26:23-28

One who makes fervent affirmations of love and affection, while his heart is bent on evil, is like a cheap piece of pottery that has been veneered with a coating of worthless silver. Such an article appears to be of value, but is really rubbish. So it is with the hypocritical professions of the flatterer. He speaks fervently only to cover his evil intent. Hating the object of his attentions, he endeavors to deceive by fair speech; but his heart is corrupt, and he is not to be trusted. He attempts to cover his malice with sweet sounding words and for a time may succeed; but eventually his true character will be openly demonstrated.

Having dug a pit for his neighbor, he will fall into it himself, as did Haman in the book of Esther. By flattery and apparent zeal for the honor of Ahasuerus, he won permission to destroy all the Jews; but he was discovered in his perfidy and hanged on the gallows he had made for Mordecai. He was as one who had rolled a stone up a hillside, and when it broke loose, it returned on him with crushing force. The courtiers, by similar means, persuaded Darius to promote the decrees which they thought would result in Daniel's destruction. In the end, they were brought to the fate which they hoped would have been Daniel's (Daniel 6).

The last proverb of this chapter expresses a truth that has long been recognized among all nations and is preserved in proverbial form among many peoples. "It is common for men to hate those whom they have injured" is the English rendering of the saying of Tacitus. Conscious of having wronged another and being determined not to confess it, the deceiver fills his heart with hatred against the object of his wrongdoing.

He who has debtors may graciously forgive them; but he who is in debt is very apt to cherish the bitterest animosity against the one from whom he has borrowed. One may readily overlook an injury, but the one who has done another a favor will often be hated for his kindness. This is so common among fallen men that it hardly needs comment.

To hide his wretched feelings, a liar will flatter with his lips while all the time he is plotting the ruin of his victim. It is the sin which became, as it were, incarnate in Judas Iscariot! May every Christian learn to avoid it as most revolting and disgusting and altogether opposed to the truthfulness of the spirit of Christ.

Proverbs 27

Procrastination is a snare that often results in ruin. The first verse of this chapter solemnly warns every reader against this error.

27:1

The present is given man in order that he may plan wisely for the future. To defer until tomorrow what should be attended to today is a sad mistake that has destroyed untold thousands. The old Spanish proverb says, "The road of by and by leads to the house of never," while another trite saying reads, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." The English are fond of quoting, "Procrastination is the thief of time;" and it is likely that every nation has some maxim intended to remind one of the warning of our verse. Yet, how prone we all are to leave for tomorrow matters that should be settled at once!

In nothing is this matter of procrastination more evident than in regard to the great question of the salvation of the soul. Again and again Scripture impresses on men the importance of an immediate settlement of this matter of tremendous consequence. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Hebrews 3:7-8; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Isaiah 1:18). These are but a few of many such calls to urgent decision.

Yet what is more common than to find people putting off a final settlement, like Festus, until a "more convenient season," which in many instances is never found! The uncertainty of

health, reason, and of life itself all loudly cry, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow.”

Pharaoh said “tomorrow” when he should have said “today,” and the morrow found his heart as hard as a millstone, beyond the reach of repentance or concern (Exodus 8:10).

If the reader is unsaved, let me remind him of five important reasons why he should not delay in coming to Christ.

First—Every day spent in sin is a day lost. The only true life is that which is lived for God. Those who are saved always regret not having turned to the Lord earlier; they find true joy and peace in the path of the just, which shines ever brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

Second—Every day spent in procrastination is adding to the terrible number of things you can never undo. It is often forgotten by the young that even though saved and forgiven at last, the consequences of their sins will never be blotted out. We have an influence on others today for good or ill and a future change of ways may never utterly destroy that influence. Sin leaves its effect on our minds and bodies—an effect that lasts through all time. A father meaning to impress this fact on his son told him to drive a handful of nails part way into a clean, smooth post. With great delight the lad did as he was bidden. “Now, my boy,” said the father, “draw them out.” This was soon successfully accomplished. “Now take out the holes,” was the next command. “Why, father,” exclaimed the child, “that is impossible!” So we may think of the forgiveness of our sins as a drawing out of the nails; but, let us never forget that the marks remain. Therefore the wisdom of ceasing at once to do what can never be undone.

Third—It is possible that at any moment conviction of sin may pass away from the troubled soul and that God may cease to speak to you by His Holy Spirit. Many a man or woman has, by long resisting the Holy Ghost, reached a point where, like Pharaoh, the heart refused to respond to further entreaties or warnings. Such people are often said to be "gospel-hardened," and the designation is all too correct.

Fourth—Before tomorrow, Death may claim you for his prey. Even as you read these lines, he may be feeling for your heart-strings. David said, "There is but a step between me and death" (1 Samuel 20:3); and so it is with any of us. Before tomorrow, sinner, your lips may be silent, your heart be still, your form be cold, and your soul in Hell!

Last of all, you should not forget that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. He may return from Heaven to call all His redeemed away (according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) before you lay down this book. No event has to transpire, no prophecy to be fulfilled before that great and solemn moment arrives. "In such an hour as ye think not" (Matthew 24:44), the day of grace may be brought to a close, and the days of vengeance begin for all who have rejected, or merely neglected, so great a salvation.

Knowing not what a single day may bring forth, it is surely wise to turn at once to God, admitting your sins and trusting His grace!

27:2

Self-praise always indicates poor nurturing and a lack of realization of proper conduct. If others praise you, go on humbly looking to God to keep you in a spirit of meekness and

lowliness; for you know far more about your own failings than any other can. Boasting in your attainments or abilities is obnoxious and opens the door to severe criticism. See the men of Ephraim and Manasseh (Joshua 17:14-15).

27:3

A fool's wrath is so heavy because of its unreasonableness. He will listen to no explanations and will view with malice and suspicion all attempts to appease him. Better far to leave such a man to himself than to argue with him, for he is incapable of sound judgment. Treat an angry fool as Hezekiah commanded his nobles to act towards Rab-shakeh (Isaiah 36:21).

27:4

The anger referred to in the previous verse s a brief tempest of the mind, a passing emotion. It is to be dreaded while it lasts; but jealousy is to be feared far more, for it lingers when all outward evidence of it has disappeared. "Jealousy is cruel as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6). See the brothers of Joseph (Genesis 37).

27:5-6

True love will lead me to be faithful to my brother even when his steps are declining from the path of moral virtue. While avoiding a fault-finding spirit, I will seek to recover his soul if he has gone astray. In so doing, I may have to wound him, but such pains are faithful. Reproof in grace is better far than love kept concealed, which forbids my drawing his attention to his faults. An enemy may lavish kisses and tokens of affection at such a time, overlooking the evil and bolstering the wrongdoer up in his unrighteous cause, but they are deceitful evidences

of love, like the kiss of Judas. How faithful was Paul to Peter and Barnabas and to the beloved Galatians, dear as all assuredly were to him (Galatians 1 and 2).

27:7

The verse has been paraphrased as follows: "The pampered glutton loathes even luxurious food; but he who is really hungry, will eat even indifferent food with a high relish." Hunger stimulates appetite and enjoyment for what would otherwise be despised. To many, the Word of God is one of these bitter things; but when the soul is hungry it becomes sweet as honey. See the little books eaten by Ezekiel and John (Ezekiel 3:1-4; Revelation 10:9-10).

27:8

The Lord has given "to every man his work," and we may also say to every man his place. "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Corinthians 12:18). He who fills his appointed niche in dependence on the Lord and maintains his proper place will find rich blessing. But as a bird that wanders from its nest exposes itself to danger and suffering, so is it with him who turns away from his sphere.

Looking at it in another way, we may apply the principle to life within the church. God would have all His children gather together in the peerless name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He who wanders from the joy and blessedness of this fellowship because of imagined insults or any other cause is like a homeless bird that has forsaken its nest. See Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).

27:9-10

In a warm, dry atmosphere and an enervating climate like that of Palestine, it is very soothing and invigorating to be anointed with oil. Sweet and stimulating perfumes are employed to rouse the inactive sensitivities and bring welcome refreshment. Loving, solicitous counsel on the part of a true friend is as refreshing and stimulating to the soul as oil and perfume are to the body. Happy is the man who has a friend to advise him in this way. David found such a friend in Jonathan.

When grief and calamity fall suddenly, it is far better to have a tried friend like this to turn to, than to be dependent on relations, however near, who may lack the heart and affection of a close companion. Time and distance are powerful forces for the weakening of family ties, as many have learned to their sorrow. Each should know that Friend who sticks closer than a brother! See notes on Proverbs 17:17 and 18:24.

27:11

The obedience and careful behavior of a wise son reflects positively on his solicitous parent. If the child is willful and disobedient the father will be reproached for not properly training his offspring. The admonition is important for us as "sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus." By walking worthy of Him who hath called us, we will glorify our Savior-God and Father before men. How often do wicked men reproach Him for the follies of His children! David's sin caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and therefore the child of Bathsheba had to die (2 Samuel 12:14).

27:12

This verse is a repetition of Proverbs 22:3. See previous notes. In this proverb we read a warning to the unsaved. How great must be the concern of the God you are neglecting that He reminds you again of the importance of considering your future and hiding yourself in Christ before judgment comes and it is too late. If you pass carelessly on to your well-deserved doom after this second warning, "What wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?" (Jeremiah 13:21)

27:13

This too is a repetition of an earlier proverb (20:16). It is not mere chance that caused the friends of Hezekiah to repeat several of Solomon's wise sayings in this way. It is rather God's way of bringing to our attention the importance of the instruction they contain. He who neglects such abundant wisdom is truly guilty and deserves no sympathy when he has to reap as he sowed.

27:14

There is a vein of easily perceived irony in these words. One who declares his affection beneath one's window, with loud tones early in the morning, when the object of his attentions is resting, is utterly obnoxious and his blessing becomes instead a curse. Blatant unsolicited words of praise are always to be dreaded. They generally demonstrate insincerity of heart and a lack of sensitivity that is most repugnant to a quiet, humble person. The Italians say, "He who praises you more than he is wont to do, either has deceived you, or is about to do it." See Absalom and the men of Israel (2 Samuel 15:1-6).

27:15-16

See notes on Proverbs 21:9,19. No better comment could be written on the first of these verses than Dr. Thompson's description of a Palestine rainstorm. He says: "Such rains as we have had thoroughly soak through the flat earthen roofs of these mountain houses, and the water descends in numberless leaks all over the room. This continual dropping—tuk, tuk—all day and all night, is the most annoying thing in the world, unless it be the ceaseless chatter of a contentious woman." He who endeavors to hide the fact that such a disagreeable person shares his home is like one who tries to hide the wind or who seeks to keep people from detecting the fragrance of perfume when his right hand is covered with it. Ahasuerus considered Vashti as having offended in this way when she shamed him before all his nobles by defying his command (Esther 1:10-20).

27:17

By friction, one iron instrument is sharpened and polished when rubbed with another; so we may be a help to each other by interesting and profitable exchange of thought. A recluse is always a very one-sided man. He who would be a blessing to others must mingle with them that he may learn to understand their needs and their sorrows. He may gain much wisdom by their superior knowledge or virtues. Among Christians, fellowship one with another is precious indeed and becomes increasingly sweet as the days grow darker. How profitable to Timothy was the association with Paul (2 Timothy 3:10-11).

27:18

Even as the caretaker of the fig tree would be entitled to enjoy its fruit, so faithfulness in our appointed service has its rewards. Let the Christian remember that his Master is in Heaven, and that he who honors and obeys Him in this the day of His rejection, will be honored when the day of Christ has come. Meantime let him labor on, strong in faith, giving glory to God, and the harvest is sure, as with the hard-working farmer of 2 Timothy 2:6.

27:19

Of all mirrors, clear water is perhaps the most primitive. As the reflection portrays the face of him who is looking into it, so does one man's heart reflect another's. There is no difference. Men may seem to differ through hereditary characteristics, education, or the lack of it, environment, or experience; yet the fact remains that all have the same evil corrupt heart which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. No one has ground for boasting over another. All are sinners needing a Savior.

Therefore, to show a man his sinfulness, I only need to describe in a measure the evil of my own heart; he is likely to think someone has privately informed me as to his faults and I am exposing him publicly! Often men have reasoned this way when some faithful preacher was declaring the terrible sinful nature of every human being!

It is a blessing to remember that since all are sinners alike, a Savior has been provided for all. See the "no difference" gospel as expounded by the Holy Spirit in Romans 10:5-13.

27:20

This verse helps to seal the truth of the previous one. In this all men are the same. The natural heart will not permit the eyes to be satisfied. There is in man an insatiable capacity likened to Hell. Let man accumulate as he may, he still yearns for more. This is the great lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes. There we find a man with a heart so large that all the world could not fill it. In the Song of Solomon, on the other hand, we have an object so great that the heart cannot hold it; the cry goes up, "I am sick of love" (Song of Solomon 2:5). It is Christ alone who can meet every craving of the soul and more than satisfy all who find in Him the object of their deepest affections. See Proverbs 30:15-16.

27:21

There is no hotter crucible to test a man than when he is put through a fire of praise and adulation. To go on while being slandered, clinging to the Lord and counting on Him to clear one's name is comparatively easy, though many weaken in such circumstances. But to humbly pursue the regular course of one's life, undisturbed and unaffected by applause and flattery marks a truly godly man.

Hundreds have thrived spiritually when going through adverse circumstances, but have failed grievously in prosperous times. Gideon becomes a warning to all who are in danger of pride resulting from unmerited praise (Judges 8:22-27).

27:22

Folly is bound up in the heart of the fool and after long years of willfulness it becomes part of his very being. To beat him as one beats grain in a mortar will not deliver him from his

wickedness. In childhood the correction properly administered might have had good effect (22:15). But having permitted his character to develop itself, it is now too late to seek to eradicate the foolishness by corporal punishment. Nor will moral persuasion effect the desired result, for the fool is deaf to all entreaties and cares for nothing but doing his own pleasure. It is a dreadful state to be in. God alone can awaken such a one to a sense of his guilt and his danger and turn him from his folly. See Jeremiah 13:23.

27:23-27

A shepherd's faithful service results in suitable provision for himself and those dependent on him. Wealth is fleeting and riches soon pass away. See note on Proverbs 23:4-5. Therefore the importance of earnest persistent effort and careful adherence to duty. Even a crown does not last forever. Dynasties rise and fall in this world of changes. But he who plods on, conserving his resources and wisely attending to the care of his flocks will have both food and clothing; what more does the wealthiest enjoy?

We also may see in these verses a picture of pastoral care among the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock. Christ told Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep. Wherever He has implanted the pastor's heart this will be the result. A loving shepherd will look well to the state of the flock; not, however, with a view to pecuniary profit, nor as lording his position over his flock, but out of pure love for the members of Christ.

Nor will he be without reward. It is sure to come in the end, even though he does not labor for it. "When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that

fadeth not away" (See 1 Peter 5:1 -4). In Jacob's defense to Laban we are reminded of what this shepherd service may mean if carried out conscientiously (Genesis 31:40).

Proverbs 28

None are so cowardly as those who are carrying about a guilty conscience. They are terrified by their own thoughts and frightened by a shadow. The first verse contrasts them with the righteous.

28:1

Some men live in the continual dread of the consequences of their sin. But those who live to please God and walk rightly before men, are inspired with holy confidence and almost superhuman courage. When naturally weak and timid men and women were martyred for Christ's sake they were bolder than a lion facing its foes. Contrast the army of the Syrians with Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 7:6-7; 6:8-17).

28:2

The word *transgression* (KJV) in this verse bears the sense of rebellion against lawful authority. When a people refuse to acknowledge the powers that be as ordained of God, they are likely to be exposed to the evil schemes of various leaders, especially during a period of anarchy. Each ruler is jealous of the other, resulting in a period of lawless confusion.

In contrast to so unsettled a state, it is a happy land that is ruled by a wise and understanding governor who long occupies his seat of authority.

Among the Arabs, a dreadful malediction is implied in the words, "May God multiply your sheiks." No people or country can prosper when exposed to frequent alterations in the executive power. The state of Judah, after the carrying away of

Zedekiah, is an apt illustration of this, as is much of the history of the Judges.

28:3

Obscure men, when suddenly elevated to positions of trust and confidence, are likely to be far harder on those of their own former class than one born in a different station of life. They seem to have no pity or compassion, and may be compared to a sweeping rain, which instead of helping the crop to mature, washes away all the seed and leaves no food. The publicans of our Lord's day exhibited this lack of feeling for the lower classes and were detested by the populace. They were members of the chosen race themselves and therefore hated and despised by the Roman power. Yet they served that very authority and used their positions as a means of oppressing their poor countrymen. See the protestation of Zaccheus, who declares he had not acted according to the ordinary custom (Luke 19:8).

28:4-5

It is natural that men who have themselves forsaken the law should praise those who follow in the same crooked path. When a man is always ready to excuse unrighteousness in others it generally reveals his own uneasy conscience. They who walk uprightly are able to convict those who do not because those with moral convictions are able to discern matters correctly.

Evil men are blind to true justice because of the iniquity of their own lives. Those who always put the Lord before them and live for His glory are enabled to understand everything—not in an unlimited sense, but everything pertaining to

integrity of life and just judgment. See the Spirit-anointed ones of 1 John 2:20, 27.

28:6

The honest poor may take comfort in God's estimate of them. In His sight they are preferred far more than the perverse rich. Poverty is indeed a difficult trial and often involves much sorrow; but it is not to be compared to the unhappiness of the godless wealthy man who sows the wind to reap the whirlwind. Contrast Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

28:7

A father finds great joy when blessed with a careful, faithful son who seeks to keep the commandments of God and the laws of men for the Lord's sake. Through his obedience he exhibits true intelligence. The father of a wild, reckless son who finds his companions among riotous men is put to shame by his son's evil behavior. How rich the grace that led the father in Luke 15 to go out to meet such a son "while he was yet a great way off." It is a precious picture of the joy that fills the heavenly Father's heart when one poor wanderer returns, whose wretched, sinful life has long shamed the God who created him.

28:8

Extortion and covetousness are alike detestable in the sight of God. Lending money out to get high interest may seem to be good business in the eyes of unprincipled men; but treasure so earned will not profit the owners. When taken away in the prime of their lives they will leave their riches to those who

are concerned about the poor. See God's word to the rich men of the last days (James 5:1-6). Note also Jeremiah 17:11.

28:9

God has never promised to hear prayer if the heart is not upright before Him. The psalmist says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). The verse we are now considering attests this solemn fact. It is useless to look for answers to prayer when we refuse to obey what God has written for our instruction. He has revealed His holy will in His Word. Everything necessary for the believer's instruction in righteousness is made known there. Where God is truly feared, His Word will have its due weight, and the obedient soul will order his life accordingly. When this is the case, prayer will be acceptable and will obtain a ready answer; but when the Word is refused or despised, what passes for prayer is but an abomination to the Lord. See Ezekiel's message to the self-willed elders of Israel who came to inquire of Jehovah (Ezekiel 20:1-3).

28:10

See note on Proverbs 26:27. To deliberately turn the steps of the righteous from the path of moral uprightness is to incur God's displeasure in a most solemn and awful form. The Lord Jesus has said, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). How dreadful must be the iniquity in the heart of one who would willfully plot to turn any away from obeying the voice of the Lord! Yet many have so offended and been made to know the indignation of a holy

God. He gives good things to the upright, but judgment to him who would lead them astray. Balaam was guilty of this heinous offense and his doom was swift and sure (Revelation 2:14; Numbers 31:16).

28:11

Pride and conceit often accompany great wealth. Riches give the wealthy a certain sense of security and independence of God, an environment that is ruinous to the prideful soul. But understanding is of far more value than great possessions. The poor one who has discernment is superior to his well-to-do neighbor. It is not the great, the rich, the mighty, or the noble that God has chosen, but "the poor of this world rich in faith" (James 2:5). See 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 and the first clause of Proverbs 10:16.

28:12

See notes on Proverbs 11:10; 29:2; and verse 28 of this chapter. The triumph of the righteous inspires joy and confidence in those who are concerned about the stability and welfare of a state. But when the evildoers rule, there is fear and anxiety, which leads even trustworthy men to conceal themselves lest they become the objects of political hatred.

Long have men waited and groaned in pain for the coming triumph of the righteous One. His kingdom will be ushered in with great glory, when all the earth will come into blessing. Until then, the kingdoms of this world must be subject to uncertainties and overturnings because of the rejection of the true King. Saul's wretched reign is a figure of the present time; the reigns of David and Solomon picture the coming glorious reign of Christ.

28:13

The greatest mistake a soul can be guilty of is to attempt to cover sin and transgression. Yet men invariably avoid speaking out frankly with a confession of their true state and actions. It seems to be natural to fallen man (ever since the day that our first parents sought to hide their nakedness by fig-leaf aprons) to endeavor to cover his shame, hoping to avoid the just consequences of his sin. But God's Word clearly reveals the fact that he who justifies himself will finally be condemned. It is the one who sides with God and condemns himself who is justified from all things.

Confession is the divinely-appointed method of securing a clear conscience, not confession to some human mediator, but to God Himself. "It we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The basis of our forgiveness is the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because in rich grace, He bore the sinner's judgment on Calvary and shed His precious blood to put away sin, God can "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Of course, confession does not mean a general acknowledgment of sinfulness and wickedness of life, uttered to ease the soul. True confession involves genuine repentance and self-judgment. Therefore we are told here that he who "confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." The repentant man no longer hugs the chains that bind him but longs for full deliverance from them. He comes to God with real concern about his unholy ways, thoughts, and words, earnestly seeking grace to cease from them and to walk uprightly before the Lord. But he cannot do this in himself.

Only when he rests in simple faith in the finished work of Christ and yields himself to God as one now alive from the dead is he able to rise above the sins that have blighted his life and almost damned his soul.

David most preciously portrays the change that comes over a man when he stops hiding his iniquities and comes out into the light of God's presence confessing them before Him. Only then can one know the blessedness of transgressions forgiven and sins covered. See Psalm 32.

When a man attempts to cover his own sin, he adds to the dreadful list, for he is refusing to obey the command that goes out to all men everywhere calling on them to repent. But when God covers sin, it is done effectually and perfectly and will never be interfered with for eternity.

28:14

See note on Proverbs 23:17. This verse most appropriately follows the previous one. He who is forgiven and rejoices in that knowledge is now responsible to live in the fear of God. He who grows careless and prayerless, neglecting the Word of God and hardening his heart against discipline, will fall into grievous trouble and sorrow; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6).

He who always fears the Lord will be delivered from conceit and self-confidence. He will walk in obedience to God's revealed will. Fearing no longer to be judged for his sins, he will fear lest he grieve the Holy Spirit of God within him and dishonor the name of His Savior and Lord. It was this healthy fear that protected Joseph when he was exposed to a

temptation that would have overcome any who trusted in their own strength (Genesis 39:9).

28:15-16

A wicked ruler does not acknowledge the higher Power that has permitted him to occupy his honored position. He only cares to gratify his personal inclinations, as Ahab when he unfairly took possession of the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kings 21). Oppressing the poor and failing to rule justly, such a prince is like a wild beast let loose among the populace.

Lacking true intelligence, he fails to see that the security of his throne is dependent on the welfare of his subjects; therefore he rules with a heavy hand until all hearts are alienated from him. Such conduct springs from covetousness and a desire for self-aggrandizement. He who hates this evil passion and refuses to be controlled by it ensures the stability of his house and prolongs his days. Contrast Saul and David. Also see notes on Proverbs 28:12.

28:17

The guilt of having willfully murdered or helped in the murder of an innocent man burdens the conscience with a fearful load that may drive one to suicide. This would be especially so in Israel. Unable to find a sheltering city of refuge, the guilty assassin would rather die by his own hand than meet the avenger. The traitor Judas fully exemplified this proverb.

28:18

It is not the salvation of the soul that is contemplated in this verse. None can blot out past sin and be justified before God by walking uprightly. We have already noticed this in our

comments on 28:13. This verse refers to the practical day by day living in the grace of our salvation. The one who clings to the Lord with determination, walking uprightly before Him, will be saved from much failure and sorrow that he would otherwise have to endure if following his own desires. He who refuses the correction of the Word of God and independently pursues his own course, walking in the pride and self-sufficiency of his heart, will have a sudden fall. His perverseness will result in unexpected disaster. How many a saint has proven this to his sorrow! Unfortunately we are slow to learn from what God Himself has revealed or from the failures of others! Among the prophets, Daniel and Jonah stand out in vivid contrast as illustrations of the two statements in this couplet.

28:19

See notes on 28:7 and 12:11. In the original Hebrew there is a striking parallelism in the two parts of this proverb. Muenscher translates this verse as, "He who tilleth his land shall be *satisfied* with bread; but he who followeth vain persons shall be *satisfied* with poverty." The one, by diligence, will be filled with what is necessary for his growth; the other, because of his folly and neglect, will be filled with sorrow and be as needy as his neighbor is wealthy. It is not chance that makes one prosper, while the other fails. It is simply the difference between patient, faithful adherence to duty and the abandoning of self-control to follow after what is worthless. The two classes are everywhere around us.

They also are found in the spiritual realm. Two young men confess Christ. From the day of his conversion, one conscientiously separates himself from the world in its various

forms and devotes himself to faithful cultivation of the fields of Scripture. As a result he grows in grace and in knowledge. His soul, fed and satisfied with bread, has that which he can share with the needy souls around him. The other, having the same opportunities, compromises with the world, follows after its vain company, neglects his Bible, and becomes spiritually starved. At last he breaks down entirely in his discipleship and never amounts to anything for God. It is a serious question if he ever was saved at all. People wonder at the difference between the two; but there is nothing perplexing to the man of God who notices their respective lifestyles. A semi-worldly person never develops into a Timothy. It is the faithful, uncompromising young man who becomes a power for God and is satisfied with good things.

28:20

A faithful man is not likely to accumulate vast wealth in a this world. He will be rich in heavenly treasure and will abound with blessings even in a worldly sense; for he who acts for God can count on God to act for him. However, if the getting of riches is made his life's goal he will not be acquitted when called to account for his methods and thorny practices. Fraudulent schemes may seem to triumph over diligent perseverance, but the end result will prove the value of diligence and the worthlessness of deception. To become rich quickly is almost certain evidence of injustice somewhere. The Christian should avoid such a course. It is far better to be comparatively poor, but to maintain a good conscience, than to make haste to be wealthy and lose the sense of communion with God. See Isaiah's message to the conscienceless capitalists of his day. They seemed to know as much as

money-lovers today about the advantages to themselves of monopolizing business (Isaiah 5:8-10). See notes on Proverbs 23:4; 22:1,16; 27:24; 28:22.

28:21

See notes on Proverbs 18:5. Dishonest and thoroughly unprincipled, he who displays prejudice in his judgment, looks only to his own gain. He will defeat the purposes of justice for the merest trifle if it is for his apparent advantage. The false prophetesses of the scattered Israelites were showing bias in their messages for "pieces of bread" when Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy against them (Ezekiel 13:17-19).

28:22

See notes on 20:21 and verse 20 of this chapter. An evil eye (KJV) is a covetous eye and shows the condition of the heart. A covetous man, eager to be rich, forgets the sure calamities that are certain to overtake him in God's righteous government. Ponder Micah 6:12 and Matthew 19:23-24.

28:23

See notes on Proverbs 19:25; 20:19; 26:28; 27:6. For the moment, the flatterer may please the object of his praise; but one who faithfully reproves a wrongdoer will be more valued when there has been time for reflection. No kindness is done for a person when his faults are glossed over, and he is made to feel comfortable in his sin. He who goes to a wrongdoer, meekly and in the fear of the Lord, desiring him to consider his unholy ways, may arouse anger and indignation at first; but time and conscience are on his side. The end result will be that he will be appreciated more than the flatterer. Peter could

write of “our beloved brother Paul” after the searching ordeal he underwent in Antioch (2 Peter 3:15).

28:24

See notes on Proverbs 19:13, 26. This proverb speaks of the youth who, feeling he is entitled to his parents’ possessions, spends all on himself. He has no sense of responsibility for their well-being and when questioned as to his duty he boldly declares his innocence. This youth is acting like a criminal who destroys what belongs to others. The Pharisees, with all their religiousness, were violating the letter and spirit of this word by their Corban law (Mark 7:11).

28:25-26

See notes on Proverbs 13:10 and 18:12. A proud man readily stirs up conflict. Haughty and self-confident, he boldly antagonizes more dependable people, giving them no rest until he has his own way. He has never learned the lesson of no confidence in the flesh. By his unbending spirit and questionable behavior, he causes an indescribable amount of damage among the people of God. He is sharply contrasted with the one who has learned from Jesus, who is meek and lowly in heart. The spiritually-minded man can be trusted with prosperity and exemplifies in his life the fact that he is devoted to the Lord. God alone knows the human heart and rewards “a man according to his conduct” (Jeremiah 17:9-10, NIV). A man who walks humbly will walk wisely and will be delivered from many snares. See the Lord’s estimate of the heart as portrayed in John 2:23,25.

28:27

See notes on Proverbs 14:21; 21:13; and verse 8 above. One of the evidences of the intervention of God in the affairs of men, is that he who has pity on the needy never loses by doing so. But he who refuses to notice their sad condition and hoards all his possessions for himself, finds grief and anguish in the end. God makes Himself responsible to repay with interest all that is given to the poor. They are left in this world to test the hearts of those in more fortunate circumstances. A blessing is on the philanthropic; a curse is on the man who has no heart for the poor and thinks only of his own enjoyment while allowing others to suffer. See the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-27). Compare with 11:25.

28:28

See 28:12. When evil men are in power, nothing is secure, and men of peace and quietness hide, dreading to be noticed publicly. But when the unrighteous are overthrown, the upright are everywhere visibly increased, having confidence in the safety of their households and goods. See the condition of the Israelites in the days of the Philistine domination, and their altered estate when Jonathan overthrew their wicked oppressors (1 Samuel 13:6; 14:22).

Proverbs 29

Irrevocable and crushing judgment will be the reward of one who despises wise counsel and plunges on in his sin until the patience of the Lord is exhausted.

29:1

Hardening the neck is a figure taken from the manner in which a stubborn bullock turns away from and avoids the yoke. This illustration aptly pictures obstinate men who persistently refuse to heed reproof. They set their wills stubbornly against what would be for their own best interests, thus ensuring their destruction.

God is gracious and long-suffering, slow to anger, and does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Yet even His patience with the unrepentant will one day come to an end. He will plead, and strive, and warn until it is clear that the heart is fully set on having its own way. Then He leaves the hardened soul to its doom, giving it up to sudden destruction. There are many scriptural examples of this, such as Korah, Dathan, Abiram, Belshazzar, and Jezebel.

29:2

See notes on Proverbs 28:12,28. However much individual men prefer sin to holiness, collectively they rejoice when the righteous are in authority and mourn when evil men rule. Even the vilest people enjoy the comfort and protection of themselves and their property when the upright flourish. The unbeliever who hates Christianity and makes it the butt of his cheap ridicule, nevertheless prefers to live in a land where the teachings of the Bible are generally held and where the

Christian faith is respected. To the degree that principles of the New Testament control the minds of the men who administer civil government, peace and prosperity prevail; none know this better than the openly skeptical. The same was true in Israel in regard to the Law and the Prophets. The reign of a Josiah or a Hezekiah was much to be preferred to that of an Ahab or a Manasseh.

29:3

See note on Proverbs 28:7. Loose living is a snare to which young men are particularly exposed. He who is wise will avoid it as he would a viper about to strike. Immorality will ruin body and soul. Its awful consequences are beyond description. "Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22) is a very beneficial warning. See 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.

29:4

When David sang that "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God," he had to admit "my house be not so" (2 Samuel 23:3, 5). It is Christ who is seen as the King who will one day establish the land by judgment. A scepter of righteousness will be the scepter of His kingdom. Meantime it is the privilege of every earthly sovereign to endeavor to be a fitting type of God's anointed Ruler. The receiver of gifts or bribes is not a godly model. His evil example results in the corruption of the entire government. See this in Samuel's sons (1 Samuel 8:3).

29:5

True praise, the honest recognition of merit in another, is right and proper in its place. It may be the means of cheering

and encouraging a deserving person, who is perhaps depressed. But flattery— saying what the heart does not mean in order to mislead or to curry favor—is a net and a snare for the feet of the one who listens. Insincere compliments are most dangerous. The humble man will turn away in fear from any who approach him in this way. The heart is too prone to think well of itself as it is without listening to the flattering words which only fuel the fire of pride. The doom of Absalom should sound a solemn warning in our ears! None were so praised as he, and few princes have failed more terribly (2 Samuel 14:25). See also notes on Proverbs 28:23 and connected passages.

29:6-7

The evil man is overthrown by his own transgressions. The very sins in which he delighted prove to be his undoing. When the upright shouts and sings for joy, the wicked is pierced through with many sorrows. The latter lives only for himself and does not consider the cry of the needy. The former, recognizing his own indebtedness to God's sustaining and preserving grace, is quick to show compassion to the indigent who cry for help. In his benevolence he becomes an imitator of Christ who always "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Contrast the spirit of Peter and John with that of the unscrupulous Pharisees (Acts 3:1-8; Matthew 23:23-28).

29:8

The first part of the couplet in this verse is rendered by J. N. Darby, "Scornful men set the city in a flame." When a crisis arises and the populace are stirred, the ruler who meets them with cold sarcasm or stinging scorn only adds to their anger

and causes their passions to burn more fiercely than ever. Rehoboam's answer to the men of Israel is an exemplification of this (1 Kings 12:13-14). If he had followed the counsel of the wise men he would have appeased the people and averted their indignation.

29:9

It is futile to endeavor to convince a fool of his errors. He is proud in heart and admires himself and his opinions above all else. To strive with him will yield no good result. Whether he becomes heated and wrathful or whether he seems for the moment to accept advice cheerfully, it all comes to the same thing: there will be no happy resolution because the fool will refuse to accept correction. Nehemiah's controversy with the sometimes affable but generally openly angry Sanballat illustrates well what is meant by this proverb (Nehemiah 2:10,19; 4:1-10; 6:1-9).

29:10

Because of the differences in their lives, bloodthirsty men hate those who are upright. This is seen in "Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.. .because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). Holiness and godliness invariably provoke the hatred of wicked men who see condemnation of their own vile ways in what is right and good.

The just, on the other hand, are glad to be their brother's keeper— seeking to preserve his life and care for his soul. This concern for the blessing of others is one of the first and strongest evidences that a man has been born of God.

29:11

Mind and spirit are used synonymously for the seat of intelligence. A fool readily pours out all he knows, regardless of the effect it may have for good or evil. A wise man discreetly guards his tongue, knowing the impropriety of hasty speech. It is not that the fool is more frank and open than the wise; but mere frankness, without a consideration of what one says, is not at all to be commended. This quickness to speak is what characterizes that pest of society, the gossip and the talebearer.

On the road to Emmaus our Lord Himself, who knew all things, did not immediately reveal His full knowledge of the solemn events in which He had been the central figure. He asked the disciples, "What things?" when they expressed their wonder at His apparent ignorance. He wished to test their hearts; and all was for their blessing, as was proven afterward (Luke 24:13-32). Joseph, in his dealings with his brothers, maintained the same reserve until the moment arrived when the revelation, "I am Joseph!" had its full effect (Genesis 42-45).

29:12

In the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus there is a passage which seems to explain this proverb. "As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers; and what manner of man the ruler of the city is, such are all that dwell therein." A corrupt ruler will surround himself with corrupt men, his own evil example acting powerfully on the formation of the characters of those around him. Therefore it is important that those who occupy positions of authority possess integrity and uprightness. It was a sad period in the history of Judah when

their pastors, or rulers, were their examples in disobedience to God (Jeremiah 2:8; 10:21).

29:13-14

See notes on Proverbs 22:2. It is unfortunate that there are those who oppress the needy; both are totally dependent on the same common Benefactor who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). His eye is over all His works, and He notes the need as well as the behavior of all His creatures. He makes the eyes of both the poor and those who lord it over them to alike sparkle with life and intelligence.

A faithful king will be thoughtful of the weak and will judge the poor fairly, thus patterning his actions after the Most High who rules over all in righteousness. Therefore his throne will be established in peace. The *word forever* (KJV) is often used in what might be called a limited sense, as when in law we speak of transferring property "to him and his heirs forever," that is, to perpetuity. See what is said concerning the throne of Solomon, a type of the reign of Christ (Psalm 89:19-29).

29:15

See notes on Proverbs 19:18 and 23:13-14. An undisciplined child will bring shame on his mother and ruin on himself. Refusing to discipline him because of a personal dislike of causing temporary pain, demonstrates hatred instead of love. Correction and reproof, properly administered, are for the child's best interests and open his heart to wisdom. Let the over-indulgent parent be warned by the fate of Adonijah. It was for good reason that God recorded the unhappy fact that "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why

hast thou done so?" No wonder Adonijah became a rebel! (1 Kings 1; 2:13-25).

29:16

See verse 2 of this chapter and the connected passages. It is a principle in God's moral government that although the wicked may seem to prevail over the righteous, they will surely retreat and righteousness will hold sway at last. When the wicked are in power, lawlessness flourishes and uprightness is crushed; but this can only be for a time. "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment," as Zophar rightly observed, though he was wrong in applying it to Job when he was looking for the cause of his affliction (Job 20:5).

Throughout the past and the present dispensations, in large measure the wicked have been in power. At times God has permitted them to test most severely the patience of the righteous. But their overthrow is near, when God's King will appropriate His rightful power and reign, and the world-kingdom of our God and His Christ will come. Then the upright will "have dominion in the morning"— a morning without clouds, when righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

29:17

See verse 15 of this chapter. What wisdom a parent needs for correction to be properly administered and his household brought up in the fear of God! Perhaps nothing so causes one to realize his own failures and shortcomings as to see them duplicated in his children; and nothing, therefore, makes one

feel more keenly the need of divine grace and wisdom in dealing with their children. But God's Word is sure. Let the father and mother exercise a firm but kindly discipline, and God has promised that their efforts will bear good fruit. The corrected son will give rest to the heart and delight to the soul. This was seen in Isaac, whose lovely obedience did not flinch even when it meant to permit himself to be bound on the altar. And it is noteworthy that God had foreseen in Abraham the ability to control his household before he made him the recipient of the promises (Genesis 18:19).

29:18

By the word *vision* (KJV) is meant spiritual enlightenment and insight into divine things. A reference to 1 Samuel 3:1 will make this clear: "The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." To meet the need of communicating with His people God raised up Samuel, who was appropriately called "the Seer"—the man with opened eyes—as Balaam described himself.

It is important that the people of God in all ages have this open vision. "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets," (Numbers 11:29) having the eyes of their hearts enlightened that they might discern clearly what is of God and what is opposed to His mind. The apostle Paul in writing to the carnal Corinthians urged them to earnestly seek the best gifts, "especially the gift of prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1, NIV). The prophet is one who enters into the knowledge of the Lord and disseminates it in freshness and power, meeting the actual need of the time. He does not necessarily foretell future events, but he declares the message that reaches the conscience and activates the affections.

When ministry of this nature is lacking among the people of God and the assemblies of His saints, they soon become lawless. Substituting natural enthusiasm for the Spirit's energy, they open the door to what is simply carnal knowledge.

But we should not forget the second part of the couplet. Even if ministry of an edifying character is rarely known, where the Word of God controls the ministry there will be blessing. He who obeys God's Word will be happy amidst the existing confusion, enjoying fellowship with Him. When leaving the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul did not commend them to gifted ministers, in view of evil teachers soon to arise. Instead he commended them to God and the Word of His grace, which was able to build them up. This Word abides today and remains to comfort and direct the saints in all circumstances. But the enlightened eye is needed to discern what has been revealed therein. Lack of vision will be revealed in a cold, dry, theological, or philosophical, treatment of the Scriptures, as though presented to exercise the intellect, rather than the heart and the conscience. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is applicable for all Christians while in this world of trial and testing (Ephesians 1:15-23).

29:19

The Septuagint reads, "a stubborn servant," which seems to convey the right thought. Correction by words alone would avail little with such an unprincipled and self-willed person. Therefore strict discipline would be required to make him render proper service, which is implied in the phrase "he will not answer" (KJV). IS this not true with those of us who have been made servants of our Lord Jesus Christ? Have we not often failed to heed His Word, refusing its correction,

therefore having to know the pains of chastisement? Obedience is a lesson slowly learned. Most of us are more or less patterned on the order of Jonah, who only became obedient after serious grief and trouble.

29:20

In 26:12 this statement is made concerning a man who is wise in his own eyes. The two attributes are likely to be found in the same person. He who is filled with self-conceit is very liable to be hasty in his words. Of God it is said, He "will not call back his words" (Isaiah 31:2); He need not do so, for "the words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalm 12:6). But the self-confident man is continually speaking words that he has to recall because of his reckless impatience and his ready exaggeration. There is little hope of changing such a man, unless there be true self-judgment and repentance. This serious sin is often treated as a mere infirmity in which the person who commits the sin is to be pitied rather than blamed. Hasty speech is evidence of a disobedient spirit. It was characteristic of King Saul and on one occasion would have caused the death of Jonathan had the people not interfered and rescued him (1 Samuel 14). Jephthah too is a solemn warning as to hasty speech (Judges 11).

29:21

In a note, J. N. Darby states that "son" is literally, "son of the house." He explains it as meaning that the servant inherits his master's goods. It was this that pained Abraham; for, much as he valued the service of Eliezer of Damascus, he could not bear the thought of a servant inheriting in the place of a son.

God's servants are His sons and so will be His heirs and joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.

29:22

See note on Proverbs 28:25. A man of unbridled temper provokes continual contention and had best be avoided. His fury can only spring from an unchecked evil nature, and therefore he constantly violates all law, human or divine. None can walk in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and display a wrathful and passionate spirit. The two things do not go together. See the elder son in the parable, whose unreasonable anger was the only jarring note in the merriment occasioned by his brother's return (Luke 15:28).

29:23

Pride precedes destruction. It is a sure precursor of coming judgment. But he who is of a meek and humble spirit will obtain honor. Seeking it not, it will be thrust on him; while he who purposely seeks after his own glory, will fail miserably to obtain what he desires. Contrast Haman and Mordecai throughout the deeply interesting book of Esther.

29:24

To share the plunder a robber has stolen is to make oneself a participant in his evil deeds and draw down on one's head the same sentence. This action is against a person's own best interests, even viewed from a worldly standpoint. Put under oath, he is afraid to testify the full truth, and therefore brings himself under condemnation for abetting and concealing a theft. See Leviticus 5:1.

It is a serious thing indeed to join in with other men's sins. The Holy Ghost warns the believer against it, showing that association with evil, or acceptance of it, necessarily defiles him who acts in this way. See 2 John 10-11; and 1 Timothy 5:22. This is a principle often forgotten in our day, but one of vital importance for all who desire to maintain the holiness of God's house on earth.

29:25

In the 14th verse of the preceding chapter we were told, "happy is the man that feareth alway." However in this verse we learn that there is a fear to be avoided as dangerous and soul ensnaring. The fear of God is most attractive in a saint. The fear of man is destructive of his spiritual life and testimony. How many people have been ruined by this fear!

Safety and security are the reward of the one who trusts the Lord alone. He who fears God will not fear man. He who fears man does not fear God as he should. See Paul in Galatians 1:10; and compare Luke 12:4-5, and John 12:43.

29:26

This proverb adds to what the previous verse had brought to our notice. They who seek the ruler's favor are those who fear man and will have to learn by sad experience the futility of putting their trust in princes.

The Lord's judgment is ever righteous. When Wolsey cried, "Had I but served my God as faithfully as I served my king, He would not have cast me off in my old age," he uttered a great truth.

While the man of God will be obedient to rulers, he will never fawn on them. He sees in earthly rulers the representatives and servants of the Most High, who is the supreme Ruler in the kingdoms of men. Elijah was a splendid example of the man of God, when he confronted the ungodly Ahab, as narrated in 1 Kings 18.

29:27

The two families of people described in this proverb are forever opposed. The just detest what the wicked love and vice versa. So it always has been since Cain strove with Abel and killed him. So it will be until the devil and all who do his bidding are cast into the lake of fire. There can be no truce or treaty of peace between the hosts of good and evil. Incessant warfare must be waged until righteousness dwells undisturbed in the new heavens and the new earth, and God is all in all in the universe of bliss.

Until then, let those who know their God shrink not from the conflict. Grasping the sword of the Spirit, covered with the armor of God, they should go forth valiantly to meet the foe. They must depend on the strength of the One who says, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth…And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

This chapter concludes the collection of proverbs copied out, or collected, by the men of Hezekiah and marks the end of the sayings distinctly attributed to Solomon. The next two chapters, which close the book, are credited to Agur the son of Jakeh, and to King Lemuel. The latter, I judge, is a pseudonym

for the wise king Solomon; but Agur, as we will see, is evidently a different person.

The question of inspiration is not disputed, whoever these men may be, for the very simple reason that in the times of our Lord Jesus Christ the book of Proverbs was composed of the various parts which are now included in it. when He said, “the Scripture cannot be broken,” He necessarily included each portion of the Proverbs.

Whether Solomon himself, or a later editor, collected them into one volume, we have no means of knowing. Though we do know that Proverbs 25-29 never formed part of the book until the reign of the great reformer Hezekiah.

Proverbs 30

We now take up the study of the words of Agur, a wise man who keenly felt his ignorance, as is generally the case with the truly enlightened. In the first verse we learn of his parentage.

30:1

The first two proper names in this passage (Agur and Jakeh) have been translated by some as common nouns; in which case we would understand the verse to say, "The words of a gatherer, the son of [the] pious." This might imply that the contents of Proverbs 30 have been gathered by an editor from various sources to be preserved for our instruction. It is evident, however, that neither the translators of the Bibles in use today nor the Masoretic scribes so understood it. In the Chaldee and Syriac translations the capitalized words are found as given in the text of the King James version.

Professor Stuart, a learned Hebraist, by changing the vowel-points, renders the whole verse: "The words of Agur, the son of her who was obeyed in Massa. Thus spake the man: I have toiled for God, I have toiled for God, and have ceased."

Some commentators have supposed *Agur* to stand for Solomon and *Jakeh* for David; but the most straightforward explanation is that Agur was an inspired man of whom we have no record elsewhere in Scripture. His father's name gives no clue to his family or tribe in Israel. *Ithiel*, which is translated "God is with me" and *Ucal*, "able," are apparently his companions, or possibly persons who received instruction from him.

30:2-3

Agur begins his oracle by declaring his own ignorance apart from divine enlightenment—that "vision" of 29:18 which enables a man to be a teacher of holy things. He is keenly aware of his limitations and lack of intelligence in the serious matters about which he is concerned. He has been compared with Amos, who was not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. However, the Lord enlightened Amos while he was engaged in his ordinary occupation and gave him the gift that enabled him to be a rebuker of kings. Agur was a plain, simple man, of little natural ability, perhaps even below average in human intelligence. Yet the Lord opened his understanding, revealing to him great and precious things; and He gave him the wisdom to impart these truths to, not only Ithiel and Ucal, but untold thousands who are still profiting from his words. He was one of those holy men of God who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). Inspiration is God's way of taking a poor, feeble instrument and so controlling his mind, tongue, and pen as to cause him to give forth the very words of the eternal One.

30:4

The most learned man becomes incredibly ignorant when confronted with questions like those posed in this verse. We are at once reminded of the Lord's challenge in Job 38 and 39. At best, human knowledge is very limited and narrow. No man, apart from divine revelation, could reply to the questions asked here. The first never found an answer until the words of our Lord concerning Himself, as recorded in John 3:13: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." He it was

who descended likewise, as it is written, "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:9-10).

How much there is for the believer in the precious truth connected with the Lord's descent and ascension! Because of our sins He died on the cross, bearing the righteous judgment of God. There He drank the dreadful cup of wrath that we could never have completely drained to all eternity. But because of who He was, He could drink the cup and exhaust the wrath, leaving nothing but blessing for all who trust in Him. He died and was buried, but God raised Him from the dead, and in triumph He ascended to glory. Enoch was taken from this life without experiencing death. Elijah was caught up in a flaming chariot and carried by a whirlwind to Heaven. But neither of these went up in his own power. Jesus, His work finished and His ministry on earth accomplished, ascended of His own volition, passing through the upper air as easily as He had walked on the water.

The fact of His having ascended to Heaven and having been received by the Shekinah—the cloud of divine Majesty—testifies to the perfection of His work in putting away forever the believer's sins. While Jesus was on the cross, Jehovah "laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). He could not be now in the presence of God if one sin remained on Him. But all have been atoned for and put away, never to come up again. Therefore He has entered Heaven, by the power of His own blood, having accomplished eternal redemption. "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, He led captivity

captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8). He had destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," that He might "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The trembling, anxious sinner is pointed by the Holy Ghost, not to church or sacraments, not to ordinances or legal enactments, not to physical limitations or feelings, but to a risen and ascended Christ seated in highest glory!

> *The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* (Romans 10:6-10).

Christ carried our sins on the cross. He died for them. He has been raised from the dead in token of God's infinite satisfaction in His work. He has ascended up to Heaven, and His place on the throne of God as a man in glory is proof positive that our sins are gone forever. When this fact is embraced it gives deep and lasting peace.

When the believer realizes that all has been done in a way that pleases God; that He who accomplished it is one with the Father; that man as a fallen creature had no part in that work save to commit the sins for which the Savior died: then, and

not until then, does the majesty of the work of the cross dawn on the soul.

The question, "What is his name, and what is his son's name," followed by the challenge, "if thou canst tell?" finds its answer in the New Testament revelation of the Father and the Son.

30:5-6

There are two great facts enunciated in these verses. The first is the perfection of the Word of God and the second, the all-sufficiency of that Word. The Scriptures, as a whole, are called the Word of God. Any portion taken separately is a word, or saying, of God. All Scripture is God-breathed; every part of it is divinely inspired. It is therefore pure and perfect in itself. All who rest on it find its great Author is a shield from the enemy's assaults and a refuge for their souls. He will be the protection of those who confide in Him; but no one who doubts or questions the integrity of His words really trusts Him.

To attempt to add to what God has already written is to deny the all-sufficiency of Scripture. It will provide for every circumstance of life and enlighten the saint in every aspect of the faith. In each age there have been visionaries and enthusiasts, as well as frauds and charlatans, who have sought to supplement the Bible with revelations and compilations of their own, claiming divine authority. But when compared with these writings, the Holy Scripture shines forth like a diamond of beauty and value surrounded by worthless bits of glass and paste. The Bible alone is truth. All imitations are lies that deceive the one who believes and follows them.

The apocryphal books to both Testaments are an example of deceptive writings. This is particularly true in regard to the

wild legends of Tobit and Judith, the apocalyptic visions of Hermes, and the ghostly records of the pseudo-gospels of the Infancy, St. Thomas, and Nicodemus.

The Jewish Talmud and the vagaries of the Cabala are the same kind, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

In the Christian era, especially in the last two centuries, many imitations have been palmed off on the credulous as being of the same character as Holy Scripture. But judged by the words of Proverbs 30:5-6, we unhesitatingly declare these writings to be lies of Satan. Of this number are the pretended revelations and wild hallucinations of Emanuel Swedenborg; the *Book of Mormon* and kindred works of Joseph Smith and his followers; the *Flying Roll of the Jezreelites*; the prophecies and visions of Ellen White, regarded by the Seventh-day Adventists as of equal authority with the Bible; the unchristian and unscientific theories of Mary Baker Eddy, as set forth in *Science and Health*, which its followers claim to be a key to the Scriptures. To this list may be added any and every book or teaching that claims a divine origin, but has not been included in the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, or the New Testament. In the grand collection of the Holy Bible, God has made known His holy will and revealed all that He will impart concerning Himself, His purpose, and His ways, until the ushering in of the glory for the saints. That day will also be the day of doom for those who refuse His sure testimony, trampling it beneath their feet or adding to it the poor thoughts of sinful man!

Read Psalms 12:6 and 119 in its entirety; Deuteronomy 4:2; and 12:32; Colossians 1:25; and Revelation 22:18-19.

30:7-9

This prayer of Agur appeals to the heart of the saint in all dispensations. It has a strong resemblance to the touching prayer of Jabez recorded in 1 Chronicles 4:10. It is an appropriate expression for any child of God, even though grace has taught the soul to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,... to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11-12). Only as the heart is surrendered to Christ can one triumph over all circumstances. He who knows himself understands well why Agur could pray for moderate circumstances if it were the will of God. He did not distrust divine power to keep him in any state. He did distrust himself.

The first of the two things that he required of the Lord, was to be kept from iniquity. He desired that vanity and lies be removed far from him. The man of God fears sin and hates it. The new nature within him makes it impossible that he should be happy while walking in an evil way. Holiness is his joy and delight, therefore he groans for full deliverance from the flesh, that lawless principle within his breast that wars against the new nature. A professing Christian who finds pleasure in vanity and lies, demonstrates the true condition of his heart and makes it plain to every Spirit-taught soul that he is still a stranger to the new birth. A hatred of sin and yearning to be delivered from its power and its very presence is one of the surest evidences the Spirit is at work in the soul, even though the person may not yet understand completely the precious, peace-giving truths of the gospel. The youngest and the oldest

saint may therefore very properly take up the cry of Agur, "Remove far from me vanity and lies."

The second petition has to do with temporal things and is worthy of careful notice. We can well understand a man praying that he be preserved from poverty, but it is most unusual to find one who dreads wealth and prays to be kept from riches. He dreaded abject poverty, lest in the weakness of his flesh, he would become dishonest, and bring reproach on the name of his God. But riches, too, were equally to be feared, because it is a common thing for men to grow more and more independent of God as their worldly goods are increased; "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked:...then he forsook God" (Deuteronomy 32:15). The wealthy are exposed to many snares that those in moderate circumstances seldom experience. Agur had observed this. Therefore he would not desire to revel in luxury, but would be fed with food befitting his station in life. He would choose, if such were the will of God for him, to occupy a middle position between the two extremes of deep need and overflowing abundance. The more we meditate on this prayer, the more we see its wisdom and piety.

30:10

The circumstances of a servant in the East, who was often a slave, were hard at best. Therefore he who took it on himself to accuse a servant to his master, whether the accusation were true or false, was likely to be hated by the poor wretch he had informed on. And if the accuser were proven to have had no just grounds for his charge he would be put to shame by one of inferior station. Applying this principle to Christians, we are reminded of the impertinence and lack of thoughtfulness and care for one another, which would lead one saint to judge the

service of his fellow laborer. “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth…Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:4, 13).

30:11-14

The word *generation* is used here, as in many other parts of Scripture, to describe a particular class of mankind having certain characteristics in common. Our Lord used it this way when He spoke of the Jews as an evil and adulterous generation and declared that that generation should not pass away prior to His return from Heaven. To suppose He meant a generation of thirty to forty years is to throw the entire prophecy into confusion.

Agur graphically describes a generation of prideful people for our instruction and warning. Self-sufficient, they recognize no indebtedness to father and mother, but curse the one and do not bless the other. Contaminated with the horrible pollution of their sins, they are nevertheless pure in their own sight, each declaring his own goodness. See Proverbs 20:6.

Rolling their eyes and raising their eyebrows, they demonstrate their supercilious insolence and haughtiness. If anyone seeks to correct them or make them aware of their true condition in the sight of God, they turn angrily on him as wild beasts ready to tear him with their teeth, which are like swords and knives. Even where there is no provocation, they can be cruel and treacherous, devouring the poor and the needy. See Proverbs 6:17 and 21:4.

This generation of people is typified in the New Testament by the Pharisees. Outwardly they were cold and proud, correct and pious, while secretly they devoured widows' houses and did not heed the cry of the poor.

Such is man in his self-righteousness. Such would be characteristic of all, had not the matchless grace of God made some different!

30:15-16

Proud and self-sufficient though he be, the heart of man is never satisfied. Like a leech voracious of his food, he is never full. The two daughters are perhaps simply a symbolical way of declaring this characteristic of the blood-sucker of Arabia. But I have followed Professors Noyes and Stuart in regarding the words "Give! Give" as the names of the daughters. The name indicates their wretched habits.

Notice the peculiar yet exact use of the numbers three and four. Three things are never satisfied: the unseen world, into which disembodied spirits are constantly descending; the barren womb; and the earth on which rain falls incessantly somewhere. But "four things say not, It is enough." Therefore to the three already given, the author adds fire. It devours until all that it can reach has been consumed. Then it has to cease and is, in a sense, satisfied, but only because it must be; were there more material to feed on, it would go on destroying still.

All of these are just pictures of the restless yearning, implanted in man's bosom by the Fall. The world and all that it contains is not enough to fill and satisfy man's heart. "Thou hast made us for Thyself," said Augustine of Hippo, "and our

hearts will never be at rest, until they rest in Thee." How slow we are to learn the lesson!

30:17

See verse 11 of this chapter. It is a well-known fact that ravens, eagles, and many other birds of prey begin their attack on a carcass, living animal, or person by plucking out the eyes. Instinct seems to tell them that once the power of sight is gone, their victims are quite disabled. "The crow shall one day pick out thine eyes!" is an Eastern imprecation which may indeed be founded on this very proverb.

The disobedient mocker will come to grief in a similar way to what is described here. Suddenly, but surely, he will be deprived of the power of vision. He will stumble in the darkness, vainly trying to beat off the foes that have destroyed his happiness and would further ruin his life. It is the law of retribution to which all have to bow. How many a parent, shamed and heart-broken because of the waywardness of a rebellious son or daughter, has remembered in an agony of remorse his own similar disobedience when his parents, long since departed, were harassed and distressed by his refusal to be controlled. These memories return in later years with crushing force.

30:18-20

Again we have a three and a four carefully distinguished. All the causes of wonder are beyond a man's ability to explain, but only three are impossible for him. He cannot trace the paths of an eagle in the air, a serpent on a rock, or a ship in the sea. The way of a man with a woman—completely controlling her mind and will—may not be able to be explained, yet there are too

many examples of it to permit its being considered as too wonderful for him.

The author goes on to describe the behavior of an adulterous woman. Hardened in conscience, she lives in her sin; but like the eater who wipes his mouth and removes all evidence of his eating, she hides her guilt and boldly says, "I have done no wickedness."

"Exhort one another daily,... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13) is a verse to be profitably kept in mind. Sin is frequently excused as something for which men are not morally accountable. People often consider sin a mental and physical disease rather than as iniquity for which the wrongdoer will be called to account. But God has declared plainly that He will "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

30:21-23

The first three of these obnoxious things are very irritating. The fourth completely overturns the order of the household.

A servant ruling is like the sweeping storm of Proverbs 28:3. It was not an infrequent occurrence in the East for a slave or a servant to be suddenly elevated to great power through some remarkable turn of events; sometimes it was through treachery, as in the case of Zimri (1 Kings 16:1-20), or through favoritism as in the undeserving Haman (Esther 3). Persons of a low position who are exalted are often far harder on the populace than those born in high station. One has said that a servant ruling becomes "the most insolent, imperious, cruel, and tyrannical of masters." Equally disquieting is a fool or a

churl who is full of food—that is, has all that his heart desires. Rolling in plenty, he despises the needy and considers that his possessions entitle him to respect, though he lacks every virtue. This was true of Nabal the husband of Abigail to whom we have referred before.

A fitting completion to this wretched trinity is an odious woman when married. Unamiable and vindictive in her disposition, she destroys the peace and happiness of her family.

The fourth instance, however, is to be dreaded more than all, so far as interfering with the order of the home is concerned. The Septuagint renders the clause "A handmaid when she hath supplanted her mistress." A home is completely destroyed when one employed as a servant wins the husband's affections, alienating his wife and children. Unhappily, such instances are far from rare and have wrecked thousands of families. How important it is to watch for the first beginnings of an unholy familiarity that may result so fatally!

30:24-28

In the four wise things described in these verses we have a beautiful picture of the gospel.

We have already remarked on the provident habits of the grain-eating ant of Palestine, in the notes on 6:6-8. Its wisdom consists in diligently preparing for the future. Instinctively the ant knows to make use of present opportunities in order to supply coming needs. It carefully stores away its food, anticipating a time when the bright days of summer are past and gone, and the cold of winter prohibits its search for provision to sustain life.

In material things, man readily shows the same wisdom as this tiny creature. He, too, provides against the coming days when ill health or old age will forbid his going forth to labor. But is it not amazing that men who display remarkable foresight in earthly matters will forget altogether to prepare for that unending eternity to which every moment brings them nearer?

Forgetful of the ages that follow this short life on earth, they allow golden opportunities to slip by, never to return. They rush carelessly on, ignoring the need of their souls and the fearful danger that lies just beyond death. “As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:27-28). Here we learn of the fast-approaching danger and of the One who alone can deliver from it. But the majority of mankind are so insanely concerned about the fleeting present that they completely ignore the everlasting future.

To all such, the insignificant little ant preaches loudly, crying in the ears of any who will listen, “Flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7); “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12)! The ant is a practical preacher too, for it teaches by action. Refusing to idle away the golden hours of summer, the ant faithfully uses the present in view of the future. It is unlike human beings who waste the days of childhood, youth, and middle age with insignificant matters, leaving themselves unprepared for eternity,

The ant pictures the wisdom that all should take to heart. If the reader is unsaved, if he has not yet settled his eternal

matters by coming to Christ, let me shout in his ears the cry of the shipmaster to the runaway prophet: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God" (Jonah 1:6)! If you are not awakened soon, you will be aroused too late; you will learn that preparation days are over and eternity has begun with your soul still unsaved, and you will abide forever without Christ!

To him who desires to escape coming judgment the coney also has a message telling of the only safe refuge. Properly speaking, the little animal of the 26th verse is not a coney at all; it is a very timid, defenseless creature of the marmot type, known to naturalists as the Syrian hyrax or rock badger. The true coney belongs to the rabbit family and does not live in the rocks. But the hyrax does. It is described as "a small animal found in Lebanon, Palestine, Arabia Petra, Upper Egypt, and Abyssinia. It is about the size, figure, and brownish color of the rabbit, with long hind legs adapted to leaping, but is of a clumsier structure than that quadruped. It is without a tail, and has long bristly hairs scattered over the general fur; as to its ears (which are small and roundish instead of long, like the rabbit), its feet, and snout, it resembles the hedge-hog. Because of the structure of its feet, which are round, and of a soft, pulpy, tender substance, it cannot dig, and hence is not fitted to live in burrows like the rabbit, but in the clefts of the rocks. It lives in families; is timid, lively, and quick to retreat at the approach of danger; and hence is difficult to capture. In its habits it is gregarious, and feeds on grain, fruits and vegetables." In the Hebrew it is called *Shaphan* and is included in the lists of unclean animals in Leviticus 11:5 and Deuteronomy 14:7, because, though its jaws work with a cud-chewing motion, it does not have a divided hoof. Psalm 104:18

refers to the same fact that is brought to our attention here in the Proverbs: “The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.”

The hyrax is feeble and defenseless in the presence of its enemies and unable to burrow and make a house for itself. It finds a suitable dwelling-place in the clefts of the rocks where it is safe from the power of the marauder and protected from the fury of the elements. Surely the picture is plain. “That Rock was Christ,” says the apostle, when writing of the rock from which flowed the living water in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4). There too the rock speaks of Him; for He alone is the sinner’s refuge. The little unclean hyrax, weak and feeble, flees to the rocks and is safe. So, too, the helpless unclean sinner, awakened to a sense of his dire need and aroused by the signs of the storm that is soon to break over the heads of all who neglect God’s salvation, flees for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ. He finds in Him a safe and blessed shelter where no foe can ever reach him and judgment can never come.

It is in the clefts of the rock that the hyrax hides; it is in a Savior, pierced for our sins and bruised by the awful vengeance of the Holy One, that the believing soul finds a hiding place.

> *On Him almighty vengeance fell,*
> *Which would have sunk a world to hell;*
> *He bore it for a chosen race*
> *And thus became their hiding-place.*

Have you found a refuge in Him? If you are still living under the wrath of God, cease from all effort to save yourself (which can only result in bitter disappointment in the end). Flee to

Jesus while He still extends the peace-giving invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The third wise thing mentioned in Proverbs 30:27 is the locust. Having no visible leader, they go forth in ranks, like soldiers in their respective regiments. They are so methodical that they seem to be acting under definite instructions and in strictest discipline. To those who have found a refuge in Christ the locusts furnish an example of that subjection one to another and to our unseen head in Heaven. This might well shame us as we contemplate the broken, scattered condition of the people of God and reflect on our share in the terrible ruin.

To the world and the world-church, the body of Christ must seem like a heterogeneous, miscellaneous company, with no leader and no bond of union. But the same Jesus who died for His people's sins is now seated in highest glory; God has made Him the head of all who have been redeemed by His precious blood. The Holy Spirit, sent down from Heaven upon His ascension there as man, is now indwelling every believer; this binds all together in one great company, every one "members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

When the soul grasps this blessed truth, it will lead to judgment of all that is opposed to the truth of the church as revealed in Scripture. If there is one body, and the Word of God knows no other, I will acknowledge my membership in that alone; by obedience to the truth, I should walk worthy of the vocation wherewith I am called.

The locusts all work together and this declares their wisdom. So it should be with the body of Christ. Divisions and schisms are plainly declared to be sinful and works of the flesh. "For ye

are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3)

Earnestly the saints are exhorted to walk together in love and fellowship, "striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippi-ans 1 \21). Throughout the letter to the Philippians this precious unity is ever insisted on. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 likewise, the apostle writes: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Such is the lesson of the locusts. May we have grace to learn it in the presence of God.

It is now generally acknowledged that the Hebrew word *shemameth* in verse 28 does not refer to the spider, but to a little house-lizard called the gecko. It is very common in Palestine and has a peculiar idiosyncrasy for fine hangings and palatial homes. It uses its forefeet very much like hands to catch its food, chiefly flies and spiders, and securely hold them while it devours them. On the under side of each toe is a tiny sponge-like sac containing an adhesive liquid. As it runs up marble walls or out on decorative ceilings, this substance oozes out; it enables the gecko to "take hold with its hands" on the smooth, slippery surfaces, from which it is not easily dislodged.

This lizard should speak to us of the power of faith. This is indeed the hand by which the believing sinner takes hold of the precious truth of God and enters into His blessings. Faith allows us to be at home in the King's palace and ensures an eternal abode in the Father's house.

It is amazing grace that gives all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ a place by faith even now in the heavenlies.

> *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:4-7).

He has gone up on high as our representative. Soon we will be there with Him to enjoy His companionship for eternity!

Happy is the soul who has learned the message of these four wise things!

30:29-31

It is quite proper to speak of the first three creatures as excelling in their movement, though it would hardly apply to a king. Majestic and glorious, he moves with stately bearing and therefore comes under the second head.

The lion is characterized by unflinching boldness; it represents that holy courage which should mark the Christian soldier as he contends earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. In his faith, he is to have virtue, true courage, to withstand in the evil day and remain true to his course. It is not mere dogged determination that is contemplated, but "the irresistible might of weakness" that leans on God; this is what led Paul to write, "when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The second in this series has been variously translated as "a greyhound," "a girded horse," "a zebra," and "a strutting rooster." The latter is preferred in the Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, and Chaldee versions. But according to the best authorities the word simply means *girded as to the loins*. It may therefore be applied to any slender creature characterized by swiftness. The translators of the King James version preferred "greyhound" as most fully expressing the idea of an animal adapted to running. It matters little what beast is signified. The lesson for us is clear enough. As a girded animal does not rest until it reaches its prey or the goal to which it is running, so the saint is to press swiftly on, refusing to be turned aside by the attractions of this world. He is viewed as a racer in Philippians 3:13-14:

> *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

This should always be the Christian's attitude. Having no city here, he does not halt to dally with the insignificant things of earth. With girded loins and eyes fixed on Christ, he hastens on to the judgment seat where the prize is to be awarded.

> *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,*

> *and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* (*Hebrews* 12:1-2).

Christ was the great pattern-pilgrim, passing through this world as a stranger; He found only sorrow and grief here, but His joy is now full in glory!

The male goat is the climber. Refusing the low and often unhealthful valleys, he mounts up higher and higher to the rocky hills and the peaks of the mountains. (See Psalm 104:18). Breathing the exhilarating air of the top of the rocks, he finds both pleasure and safety in his retreat. The lesson is simple. The Christian must walk on the high places; then like Habakkuk, he will be able to rejoice in the day of trouble and joy in the God of his salvation when everything of earth seems to fail (Habakkuk 3:17-19). From the soul of the climbing saint there will ever be melody.

A heavenly-minded soul is lifted above all the mists of this poor world and enabled to view all from God's standpoint.

> *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God* (*Colossians* 3:1-3).

This is the lesson of the male goat. Would that every believer could enter into it!

The last in the list of these pleasant things is the king going forth in undisputed, majestic strength. It is the overcomer, the man of faith, made a king unto God; his dignity is never

greater than when he walks in lowliness and meekness through this world, drawing his supplies from above not from below. Great is the honor conferred on all who have been redeemed. No longer children of the night, but of the day, they are called to overcome the world in the power of the truth revealed to them by faith. Abraham was such a "king" as he went from Melchizedek's presence to meet Sodom's fawning monarch. He vanquished this ruler in a different way from that in which he had defeated the confederacy headed by Chedorlaomer (Genesis 14). God would have every Christian defeat his enemy in stately majesty, joining forces with Him, and counting the richest treasures of earth as dung and dross. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Strong in faith, the man of God views his present situation in the light of his future reward. Then, even though accounted as sheep for the slaughter, he can exclaim, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

30:32-33

Having depicted in parable the dignity of the saint and his appropriate behavior, Agur's last word is an exhortation to self-judgment. He gives a warning to those who may have forgotten their holy calling by foolishly exalting themselves, and speaking or acting with evil intent. If the thoughts are not pure, speech is exceedingly dangerous. It is far better to cover one's mouth than to persist in what is unrighteous.

It is so easy to provoke another to anger. To do so betrays a soul that is out of communion with God and a disobedient spirit. As butter is produced by churning and blood by twisting the nose, so strife results from unnecessary provocation. "The

servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Timothy 2:24). He is exhorted to demonstrate gentleness and that fine courtesy which marked all that Jesus said and did. Coarse, ungenerous words and ways are very unbecoming in one who is the recipient of God's mercy. He is therefore expected to demonstrate the compassion of Christ toward even his enemies.

With this final warning Agur's message comes to a close. He is unknown except for this precious collection of wise sayings preserved for our edification in this one chapter. Yet how much we would have lost if the Spirit of God had not included his ministry in the sacred volume!

Proverbs 31

The final chapter of the book of Proverbs is designated as "The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him."

31:1

It is generally believed that Lemuel was the name Solomon's mother used for him. There was no King Lemuel among those who sat on the thrones of either Judah or Israel; nor do we have any record of a king by that name among the surrounding nations. This title occurs only in this chapter and is probably intended for the son of David and Bathsheba. The name simply means "Unto God," or, "With God."

It is most interesting and deeply affecting to be permitted to listen to a part of the instruction given to the young prince by his mother. It is also precious to note how grace had worked in her soul, if she was indeed Bathsheba, so that she, whose history had been so sadly blotted, could be her son's guide and counselor in matters of such great importance. No doubt the loss of her first-born, taken away in the Lord's discipline, made Solomon (also called Jedediah, "Beloved of Jehovah") all the dearer to her heart (2 Samuel 12:24-25). He was probably in her company often, learning to value greatly her instruction and her loving care. How much he was indebted to her for that godliness which marked his early reign, will never be known until the records are read at the judgment seat of Christ. The influence of a God-fearing mother is beyond all telling.

31:2

The opening verse of her prophecy seems to imply her deep concern that she give her son the appropriate counsel.

The thrice-repeated "what" has the force of "what shall I say?" She desired to have the mind of God concerning that which she endeavored to impress on his young heart. Words were sacred things with Lemuel's mother; for she felt keenly the need of instructing her son correctly and feared lest she in any way should mislead him.

The expression "son of my vows" speaks volumes. Like Hannah, she had doubtless been much in prayer for her child both before and after his birth. She was humbled, repentant, and deeply exercised over the recent sin in which she had participated; there would be cause for much concern as to the future of the child whose mother had so sadly failed. This keenly felt concern would seem to have resulted in pious vows concerning her son. They expressed the purpose of her heart to bring up her child in the fear of God.

Some might seek to use such a passage as authority for making vows now, and especially baptismal and confirmation pledges. But this passage does not address this issue. Though none can doubt the sincere piety and the good intentions of many who make these vows, such a practice is thoroughly opposed to the letter and spirit of the New Testament. In a legal age making vows was quite in keeping with God's ways, and He gave full instruction concerning them and the necessity of paying them. He made known also how a wife or a minor might be released from such a vow, if on the day of the promise, the husband or father disallowed them. See Leviticus 27. But nothing like this is known in the Epistles, which were

written to unfold the doctrine and practice pertaining to the church of God.

Undoubtedly, Christian parents can and should bring their children to God in prayer. They must seek divine wisdom to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In the present age of grace, this exercise replaces the vows and pledges made by godly parents of the previous dispensation.

If, through ignorance and legality, one has made a vow which he afterwards learns is opposed to the truth of God, he should go at once to the Lord in contrition of heart confessing his error. To go on as though this vow had really bound his soul would be a serious mistake. For instance, a Roman priest takes a vow of celibacy. If, after discerning more clearly the will of God, he leaves the apostate system wherewith he has been connected, his vow is in no sense binding once he repents. Such a case is contemplated in 1 Corinthians 7:25-28,36. He who has pledged himself to perpetual virginity, if he finds later that he has made a mistake and put himself under severe restraint, is free to marry, and the Word says, "He sinneth not." The solemn words of Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 do not affect the question at issue. What is contemplated there is a vow made in accordance with the law, in the legal dispensation. "Ye are not under the law but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

31:3

Lemuel was faithfully warned against the snare of licentiousness. How well would it have been for Solomon if he had ever persevered in the path of temperance and self-control advised in this verse. He should have remembered the admonition, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself

(Deuteronomy 17:17). His early life seems to have been marked by obedience to this command of God and by heeding his mother's warning. But in his later years he cast discretion to the winds, and the sad result was, "his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11:3).

31:4-9

He who would rule well over a nation must first be master of himself. It was in this area of self-control that Noah failed when set over the renewed earth (Genesis 9:20-21). Earnestly Bathsheba warns her son of the evil effects that follow intemperate indulgence in wine and strong drink. It is not for kings to be given to inebriation, for drunkenness clouds the understanding and desensitizes the mind. Drinking immoderately, they are likely to forget the law, and thus be rendered unfit to try a case in righteousness.

Kings of the past ages were the representatives not merely of the executive power but, in a large sense, of the judicial and the legislative sides of government as well. The afflicted and the oppressed would not receive justice from a drunken king, therefore it was extremely important that his mind remain clear.

If any drink to the point of intoxication let it be those who are ready to perish and those who are disheartened and bitter of soul. There is a tinge of undisguised irony in the sixth and seventh verses that must not be overlooked. Strong drink might help the despondent to forget their poverty and to remember their misery no more. But the true remedy is for the temperate judge of the oppressed to hear their cause patiently and render a decision in righteousness. He is to open

his mouth for those who cannot speak for themselves and deliver any who would be in danger of undeserved destruction. See Proverbs 24:11-12.

31:10-12

From verse 10 to the end of the chapter, the subject is the virtuous woman. This section is an acrostic poem. In the original language, each verse begins with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It was a favorite form of composition among the Hebrews and is used frequently in the Psalms and in the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

Virtuous is used in the sense of thrifty and devoted. Of course the devoted wife would be faithful to her husband; but chastity is not what is particularly before the mind. The virtuous woman is a dependable woman, one who can be counted on in every emergency. She is capable and energetic, with a high sense of the dignity and importance of administering the affairs of the home. Her worth is beyond that of the most valuable jewels.

In such a wife the heart of her husband may safely confide. In her love and unselfish affection he finds treasure so vast that, whatever his circumstances, he will never be in poverty. Her influence is for good and not evil all the days of her life. It is a lovely picture of the mutual relationship of Christ and the church. The church acknowledges Him as Head and delights to love and serve Him; while He finds His joy in her and sees in her an inheritance of untold value!

31:13-15

Finding her deepest joy in loving service, the virtuous wife takes delight in weaving with her own hands the wool and the

flax which are to be the clothing for her household. The picture is an Eastern one, but nonetheless lovely to Western eyes. Kitto says, "In the state of society to which this description belongs, every kind of drapery for the person, the tent, or the house, is manufactured at home by the women, who make it a matter of pride to be able to boast that their husbands and children are entirely clad by the labor of their hands; and the man's robe clings the more sweetly to him,— is warmer in winter, and cooler in the heat, from his knowledge of the dear hands by which every thread has been prepared."

Dainty delicacies or coarse fare when provided by her hands become sweet indeed to her family. She is not content with slipshod service but is constantly finding new things, as the merchant ships bring to us the treasures of distant lands.

She shames slothfulness by her early rising, even before the first beams of the sun begin to light the horizon. In Syria, the women are up long before the dawn to prepare the morning meal; this enables the men to go to work early, so they can rest during the hottest part of the day.

Only love can make such diligent service sweet and delightful. Where love is lacking, this work will be the worst drudgery. Paul exemplified this attitude of loving commitment when he called himself and his fellow-laborers *bondservants* of Jesus Christ. This should be the church's happiness—to serve the living and true God, while waiting with eager expectancy for His Son from Heaven.

The wife described here is secure in her true state in the home. Unless that is settled all would be fear and anxiety. So it is with the Christian. Service springs from the knowledge of an established relationship. It is not a price paid to win the favor

of an unreconciled God. But believers, having been reconciled to Him, serve in newness of the spirit, not in the oldness of the letter. All uncertainty is gone, and willing hands work as a result of the power of Christ's constraining love.

31:16-18

Unlike the unfaithful servant, who wrapped his talent in a napkin and hid it away where he could not use it, the prudent wife is continually adding to her husband's possessions by her economy and foresight. She enlarges her territory and becomes keeper of a vineyard, which indicates joyful service; for the fruit of the vine throughout Scripture symbolizes gladness. The bride in the Canticles had to acknowledge, "mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song of Solomon 1:6); but it is blessedly otherwise with the virtuous wife described in this chapter.

The girding of the loins for service may well remind us of that obedience to the truth of God which characterizes the devoted soul (see Ephesians 6:14). The truth of God's Word equips us with strength and fitness to perform our daily tasks. No believer can render proper service unless his mind is controlled by the unerring Word of the Lord. The virtuous woman wraps her loose flowing garments tightly about her, drawing them up to leave the feet free to go about her work, doing with her might what her hands find to do.

She finds profit in her labor; her lamp does not go out by night, for she realizes the importance of being ever watchful as well as energetic. How many a soul has sadly failed because, while very active in the Lord's work he has not maintained watchfulness. The lamp of his testimony has been allowed to

burn very dimly or to die out. Forgetting his responsibility as a child of light, the careless soul has been found a child of darkness, sleeping among the dead.

31:19-21

The nineteenth verse has reference to the ancient custom of spinning without the use of a wheel; this practice is still prevalent among some Eastern peoples. They hold the distaff in one hand and twirl their long wool spindles with the other, stopping to wind the thread on them as fast as it is drawn out. Thus, by diligence and economy, the virtuous woman is able to minister with loving care to the lowly and the needy. Her charity begins at home, for she watches solicitously for the comfort of her family. By her own skill she makes scarlet garments of warm wool for their covering in time of cold and snow.

Some prefer the rendering "double-garments" to "scarlet," as they do not see what the color has to do with keeping out the cold. But the Hebrew word used in this verse is never so translated elsewhere in Scripture. It is the scarlet obtained from the Tola, a cochineal-like insect. When crushed, it produces a fine deep red, or rich crimson dye, much admired by the orientals. It is the "worm" of Psalm 22:6, to which our Lord likens Himself; He who was bruised and slain that all His redeemed might be clothed in splendor for eternity.

It is noteworthy that to the present day, the mountain Nestorians and other Eastern tribes clothe their households in a scarlet or striped fabric, much like Scottish tartan in texture and material. Our text refers to garments such as these. Even in the smallest details the Word of God is absolutely correct.

31:22-24

The KJV uses the word *silk* in describing the clothing of verse 22. However it is now well-known that silk was not brought to the Mediterranean region from China until the reign of Justinian. Fine, white linen, glistening like silk, such as the bride is arrayed with in Revelation 19, is what is undoubtedly intended. As elsewhere in Scripture purple and fine linen are used together to describe the attire of the well-clothed. See Luke 16:19.

The purple was obtained from "the juice of a certain species of shell-fish found on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean sea. The juice of the entire fish was not used, but only a little of its liquor, called the flower, contained in a white vein, or vessel, in the neck."

Typically, the fine linen and purple picture practical righteousness and royal glory, as in the tabernacle hangings. In the rich man referred to in Luke 16:19 we see an example of how one could be outwardly covered with that which represents uprightness and privilege, while actually being "poor, and wretched, and blind, and miserable, and naked." On the other hand, the virtuous wife is clothed in what portrays her true character and dignity.

Her husband too is honored and esteemed. His place as sitting among the elders of the land implies that he occupied a seat in the gate of the city as a judge or a magistrate. See notes on Proverbs 22:22 and 24:7. His wife's thrift and good judgment reflect credit on him, adding to the respect in which he is held. His wife is indeed "an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18).

Not only has she enough to clothe her household and herself, but her unwearying industry enables her to produce linen garments and girdles for the caravan merchants. They readily purchase the work of her hands to carry them to distant places. Thus she is bearing fruit through her good works, and her abundant labors provide clothing for those far removed from her own dwelling. The spiritual lesson is easily seen. She who is faithful in ministering at home and clothes herself in a garment of practical godliness and righteousness will have enough and more to spare for the blessing of others.

31:25-27

Every clause here is of the deepest importance. The fine linen and purple of verse 22 are explained symbolically in verse 25—"Strength and honour are her clothing." That is of course strength of character, or uprightness of heart and conduct, coupled with that gracious dignity which belongs to one who walks with God. No wonder it is written, "she shall rejoice in time to come." Godliness and joyfulness are inseparable. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). There is no real happiness apart from righteousness, and vice versa. Where the conscience is at rest, the heart sings for joy. When David sinned, he did not lose his salvation, but the joy of it. It did not return until his sin was confessed in the presence of God, and he became once more a man "in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:2). Then he could call on the upright in heart to join with him in songs of rejoicing. Contrast Psalms 51 and 32.

As long as the soul has any controversy with God—if persisting in any known sin, refusing to confess evil doing, or failing to walk in any truth revealed in the Word—there will be only

unrest and lack of peace and joy. The secret of a happy Christian life is very simple. It consists in walking in the power of an ungrieved Spirit. Compromise with unholiness, grieves the Spirit of God who dwells in every believer, thereby robbing him of peace of mind and joy of heart. But when all that is contrary to His holy will is dragged out into the light and judged, then the confiding saint can lift up his voice in song and make melody to the Lord in his heart. Nor will this gladness fade away while daily reckoning oneself "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

Fittingly the next verse shows that the words of the virtuous woman are gracious. Like Priscilla instructing Apollos, she opens her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is in her tongue. What a contrast to the shrewish and contentious woman, condemned several times in earlier chapters (see Proverbs 21:19 and 27:15-16). Because of the pureness of her heart, she delights to utter words of grace and truth (see 22:11). Who does not prize fellowship with such a rare saint as this! When, instead of petty complaints and wretched, slanderous tales, the lips speak words of lovingkindness and truth, conversation becomes profitable. By such well directed wisdom and tenderness, the hearers are edified and refreshed.

The twenty-seventh verse emphasizes something that is unspeakably precious in a wife and mother. She looks well to the ways of her household. Solicitously she notices the habits and actions, as well as marking the speech, of her children. Without nagging and ill-temper, she exercises a firm but loving discipline over each one; checking here and encouraging there as she sees either to be needed. Never too

busy to seek to win an erring one from the snares of worldliness and pride, she does not eat the bread of idleness. By both example and precept she endeavors to guide her offspring in the way of peace. How poignant is the grief of this mother's heart, how strong the reprovings of her conscience, if the feet of any of her household go astray for a time in paths of sin!

31:28-29

As the children of the virtuous wife mature they recognize the wisdom and love demonstrated in her firm but tender discipline and attribute their well-being and blessing to her godly training and instruction. They rise up and shower praises on her. While her husband, rejoicing in such a partner of his joys and sorrows, exclaims in honest praise, "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." He has found in her what the heart craves—one whose comeliness of soul and mind excel even beauty of face and form.

In his admiration and delight we see a picture of the tender love with which our heavenly Bridegroom will regard His bride, the church. He will present her to Himself in the soon-coming day of glory, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27).

31:30-31

In these verses we read the secret of her devoted, virtuous life: She fears the Lord. This fear of the Lord, which the book of Proverbs has declared to be the beginning of wisdom, is her abiding characteristic. Her words, her ways, her dress, and her household discipline are all ordered as in His presence.

Others may pride themselves on their beauty or endeavor to obtain favor by winning words and pleasing manners; but if there is no true character behind such charms, the day will soon come when praise will give place to contempt. However, she who fears Jehovah will be honored by all who appreciate virtue and excellence of spirit. Her beneficent labors also will receive their public and well-merited recognition.

We who have the light of New Testament revelation can see in this last verse more than a hint of what awaits the Christian at the judgment seat of Christ. When the mists of earth have gone forever, its pride, folly, and iniquity eternally past, such a virtuous woman will appear in her Lord's own presence with rejoicing, bearing her sheaves with her. At His feet she will cast down the fruit of her hands and the works accomplished through His grace to have all surveyed by Christ. How sweet to hear His words of approval in the gate, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant.. .Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

At that moment who will regret the days of toil and nights of watching? Who then would exchange the saint's path and portion, with all its responsibilities as well as privileges, for a place of ease and careless enjoyment of a few fleeting hours on earth? Not one.

Living in view of that sacred hour when all our works will be inspected by Him who has won our deepest affections, may we purposely and earnestly cling to Christ. May we hold fast to His faithful Word, not denying His name, while we wait here for His return.

If these notes and meditations assist any to do so, they will have accomplished the author's most cherished desire.

Author Biography

Henry Allan Ironside, one of the twentieth century's greatest preachers, was born in Toronto, Canada, on October 14, 1876. He lived his life by faith; his needs at crucial moments were met in the most remarkable ways.

Though his classes stopped with grammar school, his fondness for reading and an incredibly retentive memory put learning to use. His scholarship was well recognized in academic circles with Wheaton College awarding an honorary Litt. D. in 1930 and Bob Jones University an honorary D.D. in 1942. Dr. Ironside was also appointed to the boards of numerous Bible institutes, seminaries, and Christian organizations.

"HAI" lived to preach and he did so widely throughout the United States and abroad. E. Schuyler English, in his biography of Ironside, revealed that during 1948, the year HAI was 72, and in spite of failing eyesight, he "gave 569 addresses, besides participating in many other ways." In his eighteen years at Chicago's Moody Memorial Church, his only pastorate, every Sunday but two had at least one profession of faith in Christ.

H. A. Ironside went to be with the Lord on January 15, 1951. Throughout his ministry, he authored expositions on 51 books of the Bible and through the great clarity of his messages led hundreds of thousands, worldwide, to a knowledge of God's Word. His words are as fresh and meaningful today as when first preached.

The official biography of Dr. Ironside, *H. A. Ironside: Ordained of the Lord*, is available from the publisher.

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To God be the glory.