

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Proverbs 10

The chapter summaries in the edition of the Authorised Version of the Holy Scriptures published by the Trinitarian Bible Society in 2012 are taken from an edition printed in 1773 by Eyre and Strahan. Headings in other editions are not dissimilar. We read, “from this chapter to the twenty-fifth are various observations of moral virtues and their contrary vices.” In other words how a believer should model his/her life and what might be expected as the consequences if not. Inasmuch as they are moral virtues they are always and everywhere relevant. It would be well for all mankind to observe them. But a believer in Christ should not fall short in this regard. “Wisdom hath builded her house” (Proverbs 9.1) and this is the wise structure of life we must erect under the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ’s wisdom.

The New Testament epistles, as the Bible draws to its close, take up this theme again. A new believer beginning to read through the scriptures may discover these before getting to read the Book of Proverbs. Typical of the contrasts between right and wrong as presented in the New Testament we find, for example, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” Again the vice and contrary virtue is apparent:- “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4. 28-29).

It is difficult to know how best to comment. Some writers gather the various topics under headings, but that is to minimise the force of scriptural repetition. Though it may be a slower process, we (the writer and the reader) will, by the same wisdom, savour each instruction.

10.1. A young lad should seek to learn wisdom in his dealings from his earliest days under the instruction of mother and father. Both parents will take pleasure in his attainments or be grieved if he fails. However, it is particularly characteristic of the father to rejoice to see the next generation following the principles he has espoused. It is the part of the mother, especially, to feel the ingratitude of a constantly wayward boy, who rejects the efforts to lead him into paths of wisdom.

10.2. The next instruction is phrased with the vice first and the virtue last. This is not quite so usual but is still a frequent occurrence. It is a common experience that mankind would pay anything to be made better from a life-threatening sickness. Righteousness and wickedness are portrayed under the illustration of a treasure chest, of accumulated wealth. Wickedness has no purchasing power when it comes to attaining a useful life; righteousness, which at its minimal level may signify “right living” avoids those evil ways which may cause early death, as we have seen, for example, in Proverbs 7.27; 8.36.

However, in the scriptures, righteousness may refer to two other things. In the sense of “right living” it becomes a moral darkness, a “moral night” as the hymnwriter says, if it makes us proud and leads to self-righteousness. But in any sense moral righteousness, at its best, is best described in Isaiah thus:- “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64.6) where, for emphasis, all our righteousness is evaluated separately as the individual acts, righteousnesses, which spring from a righteous attitude whether it be a proud stance, self-righteous, or not. We are like urchins. Our moral deeds at their very best do not cover us and are indeed stained. They cannot save us.

And so, the other scriptural usage of “righteousness” is to “declare his righteousness (that is, Christ’s) for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3. 25-26). This is called the “righteousness of faith” (Romans 4.13). The gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ presents Him as the only perfect man, and therefore the only man acceptable to a perfectly holy and righteous God. His death has provided a perfect atonement for sinners who put all their trust in the Saviour’s perfections and not their own, His righteousness (that is, perfection) being attributed to all who by repentance and faith become members of a new race, no longer Adam’s but Christ’s. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (creation): old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ...” (2 Corinthians 5. 17-18).

When a person is saved, he no longer thinks that any good deeds he thought he had could earn him salvation. Rather, he certainly redoubles his efforts to do that which is good to the glory of the Saviour, Whose he is and Whom he represents, but out of love to please Him; not to earn anything. In this sense a Christian’s deeds may be described as righteousness; as in Romans 6.13 where it is written, “yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members (hands, feet, tongue) as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

10.3. So that when we come to this verse we may think of it at its lower level as those who live a “good” life. But it is always best to understand the word “righteousness” in

its higher sense whenever we come across it in the scriptures; at least to have an eye on the higher meaning in every case, that is, that it refers most supremely to the saved believer. In this example, we see that for a believer to draw the meat from this verse would be to understand that the Lord will always feed the soul, sustain the soul of a believer, even in the most adverse circumstances (as in Psalm 23. 1,5) while, at the end when it really matters, the unbeliever will be stripped of the accomplishments that he imagined he had achieved. It would be good at this point to read Psalm 73, where the believer is troubled that all seems to be going well for the unbeliever and with difficulty for the believer, “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...they are not in trouble as other men...” (Psalm 73.3ff). This is not true, but can be our perception at times. Then comes the realisation of the truth of the matter, Psalm 73.17ff “then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How they are brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors...”

10.4. Careful preparation, careful study and careful delivery of the end product in any profession or walk of life, even while at school or learning a trade, is the sure way to achievement. The language here is of an ongoing lifestyle – he “becometh poor” or “maketh rich” suggesting a need constantly to monitor one’s work ethic.

10.5. There is a time to push home an advantage. As Shakespeare writes, “there is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.” Drug or alcohol-induced laziness, or simply a natural lassitude of nature at any time, is shameful; but when there is life-changing, life-enhancing opportunity it is at its most reprehensible. Such opportunities may be lost forever.

10.6. “Blessings” and “head” are contrasted with “violence” and “mouth.” The mouth will be prevented from utterance violently, if need be as with a punch (an illustration of the vigour with which restraint will be enforced), where justice prevails. Free speech and a free press may be admirable, but only if used for just causes. Men will praise us if we do well to ourselves (Psalm 49.18) but it is our heavenly Father’s approval or disapproval that is spoken of, though that disapproval may be revealed by providential events or administered by second causes, that is by people in a position to do so.

10.7. There is also a double contrast here, in these beautifully constructed verses. “Memory” and “just” and “name” and “wicked.” It is wonderful to recall the Man Christ Jesus; to thank the Lord also for scripture writers, hymn writers, commentary writers and those whose examples have inspired us. We hardly ever have need to experience rotting vegetation, itself more pleasant than rotting flesh. So we scarcely ever think of the wicked of time past, except perhaps in history studies and certainly not with affectionate memories. Their souls are left with God Himself, for to Him belong the issues from death, Psalm 68.20.

10.8. Sometimes when we rebuke children they struggle and do not want to be told. To be like that as a grown up is folly. It is wise to review and learn from our mistakes, indeed to have regular times of reviewing our lives. “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psalm 141.5). Someone once described those who spend too much time tweeting and on Facebook as the twittering classes. That is the meaning of “prating.” Having many words which gush out without, for the most part, anything of significance to say. Once again it is good to be reminded of Ephesians 4.29 “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

10.9 Walking and running are elegant pictures of making our way through life, and the Bible often refers them to the Christian life. Life is a long distance matter – walking is very apt to the pacing of ourselves. But spurts are sometimes necessary, as in preparations for examinations and in many other ways, so that sprinting is apt. To walk uprightly of course is a picture of walking without stooping, to walk erect. But the picture illustrates a healthy stance, a journey through life in accordance with the laws of the Lord. Likewise, a person cannot hide for long the crooked interests of his heart. Do read again Isaiah 40.31.

10.10. Here is a double repetition so that we may revise. It would be good to read again the text of, and the comment on, Proverbs 6.13. One who winks gives us to understand that what is being said is not to be taken seriously, when it should be; it may privately signal a corroboration in mocking the speaker. Then, once again, we are to consider the one who goes on and on, not knowing what he is talking about. We should give but little heed to such, seeing it is of such little significance and is going to lead to final collapse if persisted in..

10.11. Once again we are referred to that part of verse 6 which said, “violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.” But the contrast is different. There it was “memory” and “mouth”; here it is like for like, “mouth” and “mouth.” A righteous man’s mouth is like an open well, full of life refreshing ideas. The wicked man’s mouth should be like a well stopped up for the poisonous nature of its provision.

10.12. There are those who do nothing but cause trouble wherever they come, where there was none. We are used to meeting such. But the bitterness of hatred over one perceived or actual wrong sustained may cause someone who never was like that to become so for the remainder of life, to their own and others’ great detriment. This is a theme which occurs from time to time in the Bible. James, for example, illustrates each in James 4.1 and 5.20. “From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

10.13. We speak of making a rod for our own back. The original picture was of being beaten on the bare back for some serious misdemeanour. So the disobedient, perhaps not so much wilfully as simply being unwilling to learn, makes life hard and painful for himself. A child may have to do something twice or even three times who didn't want to do something at all, simply because of unwillingness to focus. It is his own time, when he would rather be doing other things that he is wasting. Understanding leads to wisdom which in turn means that we have something to say in vital situations which can benefit others.

10.14. Once again the emphasis is on the mouth of the foolish. He who has nothing of value to say often has too much to say. The wise man lays up, collects, amasses and stores in his mind sensible and valuable things. He speaks but rarely, but will produce these acquisitions to benefit others if and when required. The foolish man talks anyway and sometimes brings upon himself his own demise.

10.15. When a man labours hard at his work for the welfare of his family and, maybe, business that wealth will purchase for him all he needs even when times are hard and prices inflated. At a higher level his spiritual acquisitions are his highest gain and will be his fortress against temptation and doubt. Whether the one or the other, the foolish man has not resources in the difficult day. He wasted his opportunity and came to poverty and when he needed to draw upon reserves in difficult times, he had none.

10.16. Later scriptures comment admirably upon this verse. The Lord Jesus Christ in John 6.27 says, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life which the Son of man shall give unto you." "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (Romans 6.21).

10.17. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14.6) said the Lord Jesus Christ. The way is the road, the direction, the route which leads to life. To be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ combines what is said here in Proverbs with what the Saviour says in the gospels. Again we are reminded that to refuse to obey will cause us to go astray, to wander in unprofitable views, doctrines and habits.

10.18. Two foolish things are here laid bare, for human nature is such that we may well find ourselves trying these things on. If not, good; but it is a real likelihood for some. Tennyson was aware that it is a frequent occurrence and wrote, "Forgive! How many will say forgive, and find a sort of absolution in the sound to hate a little longer." People also very easily go over the top when they are emotional and say things about one another that cannot be substantiated and simply are not true, but cause much hurt.

10.19. A preacher or teacher has to be careful. Any sort of adviser or even a doctor has to weigh words carefully, which we don't always appreciate; but it is necessary. As for tweeters...! Restraint, especially in words, especially when aroused or opposed is wisdom.

10.20. As with "righteous," which we considered earlier, so with "just". It has a lower meaning, that of being right and fair. But also a higher meaning of the one who is "justified" by faith in Christ Jesus. We find the former sense in Romans 3.26 "that he (that is, God) might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" and the second in Habakkuk 2.4 (and quoted Galatians 3.11; Hebrews 10.38) "the just shall live by his faith." A fair-minded man may help us enormously by simply being honest. But a justified man may be the means of our eternal salvation and of building us up in our most holy faith by words of life, a much more noble end. These are likened not simply to silver, but choice silver. The words are selected to best effect, and the effect is a choice outcome. But in the case of wicked man, even his very emotions, his heart, where you would expect there to be some spark, has grown withered and loveless.

10.21. Again, whether on a lower or a spiritual level, a righteous man may be of great help. But a fool who "obeys not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 1.9).

10.22. This is one of the more famous proverbs. The blessing of God speaks of His favour through which He bestows whatever good thing He pleases upon His children. "In his favour is life" (Psalm 30.5). Though in the natural order of things "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" and "man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 5.7;14.1), the blessing of the Lord gives inward love, joy, peace and many other things. This is no promise of carnal security, for believers have to live in the world without being of it, nor does it give any place for the health and wealth, the prosperity "gospel," but as we have seen in Proverbs 4.18 is the inward strength which, being constantly renewed and enriched, causes the path of the just to be as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

10.23. A fool thinks it fun to ridicule, scorn and undermine the real achievements and efforts of the well-intentioned. It is so much easier than the real effort of solid attainment; but that which is harder and slower to come by, requiring much effort and concentration, is of lasting value and much more sensible to make our life's work.

10.24. A desire may be prayed for whereas fear ravages the heart. We are told in 1 John 4.18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." And in 1 John 5. 15-15, "...this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." The unrepentant wicked one has good cause to

be afraid. When the “desire of all nations shall come” (Haggai 2.7) then shall the desire of the righteous be finally fulfilled and we shall find that, along the way, all desires which ministered to the coming of His kingdom have been granted also.

10.25. Whirlwinds, hurricanes, tsunamis and storms wreak havoc but are relatively soon over, though they leave sorrow and much clearing up as their aftermath. Though they caused much hurt and damage the wicked pass away. It would be good once again to read Psalm 73. 17-20 at this point. The church is made up of individual believers but collectively it is said of the church of the living God that it is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3.15).

10.26. It is a real problem to have to allot a lazy or indifferent person a task in a team effort. It will cause frustration and failure. It is described as setting the teeth on edge in the expression “vinegar to the teeth” and it speaks of the sense of everything being out of joint, to use another picture. Just a sense of nothing working right or harmoniously. “Smoke to the eyes” speaks of a real, smarting hindrance preventing immediate progress and causing much delay.

10.27. We have had cause to consider “the fear of the Lord” in Proverbs 1.7 and other associated scriptures. Here we are told that it “prolongeth days” which, once again, may be considered at two levels. Long life and eternal life. The first commandment with promise (Ephesians 6.2) is alluded to by Paul, saying, “Honour thy father and thy mother...that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long upon the earth.” The first commandment with promise is actually the fifth commandment and reads at Exodus 20.12, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” So we see there a promise of long life, conditional upon obedience, to those who fear the Lord. But we read in John 3.16 that, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here, the prolonging of days has quite a different perspective, that of eternity. A wicked man never knows how long he might have lived had his ways been different.

10.28. Hope and expectation are meant to be exciting things. Nothing good is to be expected for those who die in their sins. They shall be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1.9). The ultimate gladness of a believer is described in 2 Corinthians 4.17 as an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

10.29. We considered “way” in verse 17. In Psalm 37.23 we read, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” We shall find strength in doing whatever the Lord has appointed for our individual lives and in doing so according to the commandments of His word. By contrast, the destruction just

mentioned above is the reward of the wickedness of unbelief; indeed of all wickedness not repented of.

10.30. The Lord Jesus Christ opens His sermon on the mount (which is his definitive statement at the beginning of his ministry of the principles and values of His kingdom and what He would expect from those who follow Him and become citizens of His kingdom) with the Beatitudes. The third one reads, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Meekness is not always rewarded as it should be. But the new heavens and the new earth will be peopled by those who were meek after the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that ultimate sense they shall never be removed. Not so for the wicked. You see how repeatedly the Lord appeals to the wicked to turn from their wicked ways by outlining for them what will be the end of their chosen way if they continue in it.

10.31. Once again we are reminded about our speech. "Froward," you will recall, is the opposite of "towards" and speaks of that person's words who has turned from God. There is no intention of literally cutting out the tongue. The intent of his words shall be brought to nothing and continuing opportunity to speak perverse things will be denied. Wise words will have many opportunities to flourish.

10.32. The unacceptable speech of the wicked knows no bounds unless silence is enforced upon them. They continue to advise unbelief, immorality and all manner of vain things, seeking to wield a pernicious influence. It is a mark of wisdom to know when, how and what to speak to have the greatest salutary effect. Let us guard our speech and to that end read once again James 3. 1-13.