

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 11

11.1. A modern generation is not so familiar with balances in shops except perhaps in greengroceries. We are more likely to be familiar with them from the school chemistry lab. If one of the weights put on the balance is incorrect in favour of the businessman, then the customer is always going to be defrauded. This verse, then, speaks of just business dealings, and by extension, trustworthy dealings in all things. But what especially is revealed here is the intimate concern, down to very detail, that the Lord takes in the affairs of mankind.

11.2. Once again the best commentary on this verse is one of the Saviour's beatitudes. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5.5). This is the opposite of what the world values. A proud bearing is esteemed as carrying authority. It was not so with Christ nor should it be so with His followers. We shall be reminded of this matter again in the course of this book. Quite the contrary pride is a badge of shame. Christ bestows His wisdom upon the lowly, as you would expect from the One described by the prophet Zechariah (9.9):-"behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass..." where "lowly" is replaced by its synonym "meek" when quoted in Matthew 21.5.

11.3. Integrity, long practised, is a backdrop to lead us to correct decisions but the attitude of perversity in any issue will finally bring down the one who, by definition, persistently engages with the opposite of what is good.

11.4. "The day of wrath" refers to any day on which the anger of God is revealed, but most especially puts us in mind of the day of judgment. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" says Paul in Romans 1.18, whether the wrath of the Day of Judgment is anticipated by judgments against them on earth or not.

11.5. Again the word "perfect" also has two meanings; a lower, where it simply means "complete," or a higher where absolute perfection is intended. It is best always to look for the higher meaning, but at the same time to bear in mind the lower. Scripture records that, "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a

ransom for him” (Psalm 49. 6-7). Only in the higher sense of the righteousness which is by faith can it truly be said that “righteousness delivereth from death.”

11.6. The first part of this proverb echoes the first part of the previous verse, with two differences; firstly that it is plural, which is stylistic and secondly that it speaks of the conclusion of the direction mentioned in the previous verse, namely ultimate deliverance or a, at a lower level, a successful outcome of the matter in hand. The wicked being ensnared, according to the former proverb, are now captured, caught red-handed, with no prospect of appeal.

11.7. There is no hope of the bliss of heaven for a wicked man after death, and this surely is an incentive to cease from sin. Whatever he hoped, whether rest from life’s labours or the rewards of heaven, will all be denied.

11.8. On the other hand the times of trouble of the righteous (bear in mind the lower and higher levels of usage of this word) come to an end but the wicked man, who has perhaps been spared overmuch trouble before, will then enter into his full quota of it.

11.9. It is terrible when a person’s reputation is slanderously or libellously destroyed without cause and it is an honourable thing to attempt to clear one’s name. However, never mind the misconceptions of men, we will probably experience less hurt by leaving it in the hands of our heavenly Father than pursuing matters through the courts. It reminds us also that if we judge another prematurely we may be wrong in point of fact and add to the hurt. However, the courts are there to establish facts, and facts, when proved, will discover such a man to be not guilty of the things alleged.

11.10. Political correctness, as we say, often leads to nonsensical situations, not dissimilar to Dickens’ “the law is an ass.” When truth and commonsense prevail, guided by the wisdom of the fathers of a city or nation, then the peace and happiness over which people rejoice is established. When unreasonable opposition is overthrown with their private agendas of wickedness there are shouts of gladness.

11.11. The first part of this proverb parallels the last, but the second describes the opposite conclusion. What happens when the wicked triumph instead of perishing is the very destruction of that city or nation. It may be a good thing while there is yet time to support the work of organisations like the Christian Institute, that blessing upon this nation might yet win the day.

11.12-13. Verses 12 and 13 belong together, with the sense of the earlier verse being made clear by the later. It is by his unwise, hurtful observations that a person is seen to hold his neighbour in contempt, whereas a wise person says nothing where there is no need of any comment. Telling tales was one of the things we probably first learned about at school; and a person who tells a secret that he was pledged to keep as a condition of receiving the information in the first place, is guilty of a shameful offence – it causes

shame to both parties, as likely as not. Confidences are to be faithfully observed as part of true Christian witness.

11.14. This is another famous proverb, one which members of any jury, committee, council, cabinet or advisory board should esteem highly. “In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” One view and then another should be put forward. And then the matter looked at from every possible angle before a decision is reached. Safe guidance may then be the conclusion of such lengthy consideration; but the time spent is worth it if the verdict or decision is safe for posterity. If no one is on hand to act as a sounding board or give positive direction then, because we are fallen creatures, we are likely in a time of crisis, when emotions are fully engaged, to rush into a rash decision or conclusion.

The three committees, meeting at Cambridge, Oxford and Westminster who translated the Authorised Version, completed in 1611, are a most effective example of the proverb “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” They sent the translations to each other for review; and even read their translation out aloud to one another to ensure that the flow of the language and the cadences and rhythms of the chosen words should have maximum impact in public as well as private reading. Truly a multitude of counsellors ensured a safe translation.

11.15. Once again the Holy Spirit of the Lord repeats earlier teaching so that it might be embedded in our consciousness by constant reminders. It would be worth reading Proverbs 6.1-5 again with the comments. It is a rule of thumb never to be involved, but, after careful consideration, an exception might be made for friends. We see how gullible people are when they are taken in by doorstep or telephone frauds. Let us seek the Holy Spirit’s help to warn us off that which would be so thoroughly unwise.

11.16. This is a beautifully rounded proverb, worth remembering by heart. While a man may have honour and a woman earn riches the manner of expression emphasises that which is a great adornment in each case. The words “grace” and, as here “gracious”, (like words which we have considered before) have a lower and a higher meaning. It may simply mean “charming” or it may mean full of the grace of the Holy Spirit of Christ as a saved person. The word that is common to both parts of the proverb is “retain.” Grace and strength (moral and spiritual as well as physical) enable us to keep a consistent hold on our deportment as well as our possessions.

11.17. Certain accomplishments give a sense of inner satisfaction and this is one of the enrichments of the soul. The exercise of mercy is one of these things that are right in and of themselves and therefore find an echo of rightness within. A merciful man is more likely to be on the receiving end of mercy himself, either because his exercise of mercy is widely known and therefore returned into his own bosom by those who have a sense of justice, or because the Lord Himself exercises a mercy to him in regard to

the forgiveness of his sins. The cruel have no inner satisfaction but, on the contrary, a restlessness and a griping conscience within; and is likely to have cruelty recompensed to him by those who, rightly or wrongly, take it upon themselves to avenge his cruelty as opportunity presents.

11.18. Deceit of one kind or another is the weapon of the wicked and deceitfulness is his, perhaps invisible, trademark. It is of the essence of deceit that it is difficult to detect. It is delightful picture language that righteousness is sown; that it will grow and bear fruit is the signification. As surely as seeds grow and bloom so will righteousness reap its full harvest. There is also in the use of this picture language more than the suggestion that righteousness is the crop of choice; deliberately sown in order that there might be a harvest of it and that one might live to enjoy it.

11.19. The pursuit of evil results in death. We are going to come across this more than once before we finish in Proverbs. For example, there is Proverbs 14.12 “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”, repeated in Proverbs 16.15. Concerning this theme, with its contrast of the ways which respectively lead to life or death, the Lord Jesus Christ says, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7. 13-14).

11.20. To abominate is to loathe. The one who turns his back on the Lord God, despising His goodness in his heart, is the just recipient of His displeasure. It does us good to think of the pro-active delight which the Lord takes in the ways of those who seek to please Him.

11.21. The joining of hands signifies the ratifying of an agreement to act jointly, and as it is the wicked who are involved, so it will be the joint working of iniquity. Isaiah 7.2, 6-7 furnishes an example:- “It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim...saying, Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a breach therein...Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.” We read in the New Testament, “And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves” (Luke 23.12). Pilate thought he could fob off on to Herod the decision as to what to do with Jesus; Herod had been desirous of meeting Him for a long time. It was a seemingly mutually helpful situation. Of course, it achieved nothing. In the former example Judah was delivered and in the latter the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and Herod died a terrible death shortly after (Acts 12.23).

11.22. A pig does not appreciate the value to man of a golden jewel which it has rooted up and the two do not sit comfortably together, so to speak. Likewise it would be most fitting for a beautiful woman to have intelligence and good taste to match, but

incongruous for such to lack these virtues. Maybe the Lord Jesus Christ was alluding to this very verse in the sermon on the mount when He said, “Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matthew 7.6).

11.23. The innermost aspiration of a believer, despite very real failings, is to see the altogether lovely One and be made like Him. On a lesser level the words of Philippians 4.8 are apposite:- “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things...and the God of peace shall be with you.” All that the wicked who set these things at nought can expect is God’s wrath.

11.24. This is another very famous proverb. The wise man scatters his seed and reaps a harvest. The miser hoards but has no advantage by his riches. As we shall also see in Proverbs 20.4, the lazy man forbears and suffers, “The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.” Ecclesiastes 11.1,4 show us a similar contrast. “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days...He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.” You might think that scattering loses; and hoarding preserves. But in ordinary things and in spiritual things the reverse is a true principle. Again, the Lord Jesus Christ reminds His followers, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6.38) alluding, in all probability, to this and the following proverb.

11.25. “Liberal” here means one who gives freely, and as Jesus says, will be recompensed in kind.

11.26. Joseph was moved by the Lord to store the harvests in barns prior to the seven years of famine and then to make them available in the lean years. But to fail to make food available, most likely by pricing it out of the reach of the poor and starving, when it is actually available, is to court hatred. For life and death are the issues here and to be denied sustenance is to be denied life.

11.27. The theme of seeking is a very rich one in the scriptures. For example, Isaiah 55.6 “Seek ye the LORD, while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” And, (Matthew 7.7-8) “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” And, “If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the

ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" (Matthew 18.12). Diligence in seeking, whether in pursuing a career or opportunity, will lead to results under the Lord's guidance, to the place and position of His appointing. The one who seeks mischief does not have far or long to look. It comes to him. If we do not diligently seek the good, we may find ourselves drifting into temptation for it is not possible to be neutral in these things, as David in the matter of Bathsheba.

11.28. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 9.23-24). Here is a specific command not to trust in riches, but in the living God. A branch draws its sap from the trunk and the trunk from the roots of a tree. So we draw our goodness and flourish by being in Christ. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15.5).

11.29. Civil war is particularly devastating. As the Lord Jesus Christ observed (Luke 11.17-18). "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?" Trouble in a home, a church or a nation lays it low. Everything will be blown away. And, if any good things that once were flourishing are left, they will be windswept. The foolish person who initiated such folly in his own house shall become a mere servant in someone else's; someone who was too wise to allow his own house to come to ruin.

11.30. "He that winneth souls is wise." To win a soul to the Lord Jesus Christ is wise. To turn an erring brother or sister from the error of their ways is wise. "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" (James 5.20). "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12.3). Notice that the turning of many to righteousness is echoed by Jesus' words, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 14.5,16).

11.31. When we read, for example, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5.5) we can easily understand that the meek will inherit the new heavens and the new earth. But what about in this life? Jesus was meek and was put to death. It is clear, however, that He has inherited a faithful people who in the here and now exercise faith on the earth. This proverb puts down a guideline that there will be

sufficient of a recompense to encourage us to continue in the faith while here, pending the ultimate everlasting recompense of eternal glory. Parallel to that, the sinner will reap everlasting destruction hereafter, but even now will experience the beginnings of such a recompense.