

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 12

12.1. We have had cause to consider 1 Corinthians 1.30, that the Lord Jesus Christ is appointed to be the believer's wisdom by God. Now the Holy Spirit of Christ draws our attention to the scriptures, and when we sit down to read them we may consciously sit down to be personally tutored and that should make us ready learners. Our hearts will be drawn to love our Father's way more than our own way; His revealed will more than the world's teaching. In this connection do read again at this juncture 1 Corinthians 1. 17-31. "Brutish" is a telling word. Only mankind has a soul, and whenever we act as if we had no soul, without our immortal soul's best interests at heart, then we shall descend to the level of the soulless beasts, and soon act in a beastly way, and show a brutish, insensitive spirit.

12.2. "Favour" is by and large a synonym of "grace." When saved David writes on our behalf, moved by the Holy Spirit, "LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong" he is contrasting that with the time when "in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." It had been a liberating experience to rediscover that "in his favour is life" (Psalm 30. 5-7). He speaks as a saved man. Good works do not earn the reward of salvation but are rather done in order to please the Saviour who has already saved His people. If we are saved by grace, "then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Romans 11.6). However, those who obey God's commandments out of respect will be rewarded, at a lower level, with the reward of obedience, that feelgood factor with which we are all so familiar. So we may read this verse, like so many others, at two levels - of saving grace (the grace of faith), or the "grace" of obedience. But it would be a mistake to think that favour is ever earned.

Nought forseen Thy love excited,
Faith, or good desires in me;
But because Thy grace delighted
To be sovereign and free.

Perhaps the most significant thing about the second part of the verse is that condemnation is declared to be an opposite of favour. Condemnation is deserved; grace is unmerited.

12.3. Gardeners speak about a plant being established, by which they mean taking root. Animals may root out a plant or a gardener dig one out in error. The Lord will so watch over His people that nothing shall destroy their salvation. But the wicked ways of a wicked man shall have no lasting worth.

12.4. It might be good to anticipate by reading at this point Proverbs 31. 10-31, especially 31. 11-12. It is a wonderful thing to meditate that the Lord's people, the bride of Christ, are to act in such a way as be a crowning glory to our Saviour. All the best attributes of marriage are fulfilled in the marriage of the Lamb and His bride; indeed marriage is designed to set forth the relationship between the Saviour and His people. That is why the Lord "hateth putting away" (Malachi 2.16) for it severs the most significant thing marriage was designed to illustrate. Just how deep marital infidelity penetrates, on either side, is aptly described as "rottenness in his bones."

12.5. Deceit and deceitfulness are the great weapons of the devil. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the unbelieving Jews of His own day, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8.44). The scriptures will keep us from all false ways. If we will not read and obey the Bible, the fallen nature is going to fall prey to the vain imaginations and all manner of dupes of the devil. The working of Satan is, "with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2. 9-10).

Sometimes the word "right" means "righteous" and again, as we have so often seen, may be interpreted at two levels, For example in Psalm 45.6 we read, "the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre" and where this verse is quoted in Hebrews 1.8 it is translated, "a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" where the Holy Spirit clearly interprets "right" and "righteousness" as synonyms here. Now if a thing is righteous, as God sees righteousness, it has to be right; and if a thing is morally and spiritually right by God's standards it may be said to be righteous. Things that are established by God, though they have no moral significance, may be said to be right. It is right, that is correct, that two and two makes four. Sometimes we have to have an eye, once again, on both meanings. When we read Psalm 33.4 it is well to have both meanings in the forefront of our minds, "The word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth." The word of the LORD is certainly correct; it is also designed to impart spiritual life, and therefore is instinct with righteousness. "The word of the LORD is right" is emblazoned over the pulpit at West Woolwich Baptist Church.

12.6. We noticed in Proverbs 1.10-11,18 that "if sinners entice thee, consent thou not", entice, that is, in order to lay wait for blood, to murder or spill blood in robbery and that wisdom pleads with us not to mix with such a crowd and wisely says that it is

their own blood, their own conscience, their own immortal souls that are being ruined thereby. It is a big deal to embark on that way. In this verse there are several scenarios. Wicked men advise a course of murder but a word from an upright person warns the target, as in Acts 23. 16-21. Wicked men advise a course of murder in a cabinet meeting, say, but good men speak to the contrary and win the day, possibly the outcome in Psalm 120.7. Wicked men desire to shed blood but good men prevent it, thereby saving the wicked from fulfilling Proverbs 1.18 against themselves.

12.7. It may be that the Lord had this verse in mind when He concluded the sermon on the mount with the comparison between a wise man who built his house upon a rock and the foolish man who built his house upon the sand, where the lesson is that His own teaching is a rock foundation and man's teaching but sand, no base on which to build worthwhile, let alone eternal, foundations for living.

12.8. To be perverse is to hold persistently, as a settled way of thinking or of life, to the opposite of truth. The definition of "perverse" is "distorted" or "twisted" as Kipling writes of enduring the truth we've spoken

"twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools."

Jesus described His generation as perverse (Luke 9.41) and Paul writes that believers have need of being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2.15) and speaks of the "perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness" (1 Timothy 6.5). When times are right, and certainly in the Day of Judgment, a man shall be commended according to his wisdom. But they are dismal days when perversity domineers.

12.9. There are still a few who employ servants but for most this is not a current scenario. We can readily understand the point, however. Or, if it helps, we may speak of a firm with many employees being better off than the entrepreneur who cannot make a go of it sufficiently to employ anyone, and whose savings ploughed into the firm are not sufficient to stave off bankruptcy. It is a false sense of self-esteem to be without food and yet parade our independence. Ultimately, it is about false priorities.

12.10. It is a shame that the expression "tender mercies" has come over into English usage in the bad sense, as here, when it is so often used in a good sense. A quick look at a concordance reveals 10 occasions in the Psalms alone when it is used in a wonderful sense. Two examples suffice. Pss.103.4 and 145.9. "'Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.'" "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." Here the expression is ironic. In Genesis 24.32 Abraham's servant saw to the camels before anything else. Whether we are in charge of people or animals it should be in our heart

to put their welfare before our own. A cruel man is so far hardened that he may think he is being kind and thoughtful when he is really being most selfish and thoughtless.

12.11. The basic meaning of “vain” is “empty.” Those who waste their time and resources spending it in revelry or pointless language or activity rather than working is unlikely to see where it leads – to poverty and hunger. Our daily work provides our food and this should be our first priority after seeking first the “kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6.33).

12.12. The net is the stock in trade of the fisherman and the root or seed the basic requirement of the farmer-cultivator. The picture is that the wicked desire easy money from evil enterprises with a quick profit whereas the good man waiteth patiently (James 5.7) for the natural provision of the resources of his own fields on which he hath expended genuine labour.

12.13. If the previous two proverbs highlighted working the next two highlight speaking. The just (or justified) man speaking honestly shall be proved correct in court or in any other just circumstance, but the man who lies or slanders shall be proved to be maliciously in error.

12.14. Satisfaction and recompence. It is, as we say, “pay-back” time. The truthful dealing of his words and the genuine labour of his hands shall cause his toil to fetch a good price and his speech to be trusted and valued.

12.15. The expression “right in his own eyes” has also come over into the English language and has the force that the only person who can’t see that he is wrong is the person himself. Taking advice is good advice.

12.16. How many drunken men pick fights for nothing. “Presently” means “immediately,” “in the present time.” A wise man, so far from yielding to an immediate, unconsidered reaction is careful to exercise discretion. Joseph, the husband of Mary, is an example of such a prudent man. The attitude of Joseph is beautifully put in Matthew 1.19-20, “Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.” There was no shame to Mary, but Joseph’s discretion led to a happy outcome for “while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph...fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” Joseph proved himself to be a prudent man and we may learn that the Lord will lead where rashness and quick temper is avoided and thoughtfulness and prayer prevail.

12.17. Jesus said “I am the way, the truth and the life” and none exemplified righteousness better than He. He was, however, the butt of false witnesses as in Mark 14.56-59.

12.18. Barbed speech which hurts and destroys confidence and reputation is characteristic of some. But the encouragement and help of a gracious and wise person strengthens.

12.19. Once a person is convicted of lying it is never possible to be certain again if he can be trusted. It was but a brief moment when his word was believed with confidence. Truth and genuineness, in words and other matters, are a lifelong currency. Indeed, truth stands for ever true.

12.20. As with the false prophets with whom Jeremiah frequently contended (Jeremiah 14.10-16; 23.14-32; 28.1-17) they had a secret agenda to deceive. By and large that agenda was their own self-interest and standing at the court. Jeremiah suffered much heartache but “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30.5).

12.21. “There shall no evil happen to the just.” The scripture corroborates this. “The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil” (Psalm 121.7). “Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee” (Psalm 91. 9-10). Believers are in the world but not of it. They certainly partake of the evils which are in the world. It is the assessment of these evils that a Christian must understand. In Luke 21.16,18 the very same disciples are told, “some of you they shall cause to be put to death...but there shall not an hair of your head perish.” To much the same purpose are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 12.4-5. “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.” We shall all die and must all from time to time suffer the precursors of death even if, at that time, they do not lead to our death then. Death is certainly the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15.26). The Lord Jesus Christ taught believers that “in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16.33). Whatever evil happens to the justified person shall be triumphed over here sometimes, or in the hereafter. The wicked will meet inconvenience after inconvenience, downturn after downturn, disaster after disaster. All things will not work together for good to such.

12.22. Lies are the province of the “father of lies” (John 8.44), the devil, and consequently hated by the Lord. But the delight of the Lord is with the excellent (Psalm 16.3), those who deal truly. “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: 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 36-38). That men should so act in the face of true and generous dealing is the prompting of our heavenly Father’s delight.

12.23. Even the Romans understood that the art of art is in concealing art. A wise man, guided by Christ our wisdom, will know when to keep quiet even about complex issues, perhaps especially when matters are not straightforward and the evaluation of accumulated knowledge not easy. Fools speak the first things that come into their head on any issue, significant or not.

12.24. Responsibility, to a greater or lesser extent, is given to the one who applies himself. The one who has never done homework but spent every moment in his pastime and pleasure, will, if employable at all, always be among the employees and never among the employers. A Christian young person should, with this in mind, give himself to his/her studies and seek the Lord's help in them.

12.25. When a person has a heavy heart, that someone should stop to give a kind word is not only encouraging, but the good it does may be far beyond the time it took or the words themselves. The Holy Spirit will assist a believer to be alert to such initiatives. Job felt it keenly in his deprivation and exclaimed that "to him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friend" (Job 6.14).

12.26. The wicked sets out to deceive the good. Satan sets out to deceive the believer. "False Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13.22).

12.27. If it were not such a serious matter, this is quite a humorous proverb. A man is not too lazy to hunt, but much too lazy to skin and cook what he has captured. Following up our acquirements, pressing home advantages is what this proverb is about. Laziness shows itself in all sorts of ways. For example, with Esau in Genesis, there, for one morsel of meat he disclaimed his birthright (Hebrews 12.16) showing how little he valued it. Genesis 25.34 says that he despised it and what an affront (a profanity) it was in the sight of God. A wise man, a businessman, a trader, a shopkeeper appreciates the value of his property and his stock.

12.28. This verse, in effect, sums up the chapter. On the one hand the way which leads to death; on the other, the way which leads to life, as we have already seen in our earlier studies.