

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 14

14.1. Attention switches particularly in this proverb to the woman's role. She can either build her house or destroy it. Sometimes the word "house" means "household" and it is the domestic activities which are her prime concern, though if you now read again Proverbs 31. 10-31 you will see that her competency extends beyond domesticity without neglecting it (verses 13-15). It would be good also to read at this point 1 Peter 3.1-6. (The "amazement" deprecated in 1 Peter 3.6 refers to her reaction at Genesis 18.12-15.) It destroys family wellbeing and cohesion if she is neglectful through laziness, indifference or immorality.

14.2. "Walking" and "running" is a frequent description of the Christian "pathway" or "race." A person who lives according to the commands of the scriptures shows himself to be a God-fearer. One who delights in pursuing the opposite of what is true demonstrates ungodliness.

14.3. Pride betrays itself in speech and, though many are proud, it is a foolish attitude making a rod for our own back. Wise speech will, unless the circumstances are exceptional (as with Ahithophel 2 Samuel 15.31-37;16.23;17.1-23), earn men's respect who will take care of us to the best of their ability even in difficult times, as was the case ultimately with Jeremiah though often reviled.

14.4 A spotless home is not so welcoming or functional as a well "lived-in" house with the life of its children everywhere obvious. The former may be sterile; the latter has all the possibilities of future generations and successfulness.

14.5. Despite the 9th commandment many will bear false witness still, perhaps arrogantly saying "and who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10.29) or finding some other excuse to evade the direct commandment. "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Psalm 15.4) shall never be moved, where "changeth" possibly refers to changing the facts to suit himself.

14.6. A scorner disqualifies himself from seeking wisdom for he scorns the very process and the instruction which would provide it. We have a saying, "it's easy when you know how" and when we are helped by the Holy Spirit of Christ even the most difficult matters open up to us.

14.7. It is unwise to continue debating with, or even instructing, someone once it becomes clear by his replies that it is meaningless to him.

14.8. The wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ enables us to understand providence, that is the data which the Lord provides as the circumstances of our day to day living. What are we to make of them? How are we to interpret them? What is the Lord directing us into? "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" (Matthew 16.3). A foolish person is deceived into continuing in sin, thinking he will not be brought to account. Ultimately, death or the Lord's return will overtake him, still uncomprehending. "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19.42). "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21.34).

14.9. When it comes to modifying our behaviour, what matters more? God's approval, or that men mock us. Should not our heavenly Father's favour weigh more with us than the immediate, visible effects of the unbelievers' mockery or disdain?

14.10. There are some things so private and intimate that they are never disclosed, even to the nearest and dearest lest they should have sorrow upon sorrow (Philippians 2.27). Perhaps it is scarcely possible to put into words, in any case, what is felt. That is why spiritual ministrations through the foolishness of preaching are so helpful for they reach where no man, only the Lord, can reach. Though we cannot describe our bitterness we know we have it and that it colours our life. In quite the opposite way, but with just the same inward privacy, no one can enter into our joy, though they may understand it in theory. The joy of a much prayed for child being saved, after many, many prayers for example. Of course, other believers will appreciate that we are thrilled, but how thrilled only we know. It maybe that psychoanalysis intermeddles where it is not only unwelcome but, despite claims to the contrary, unhealthy.

14.11. Though it is built upon firm foundations the Lord will find other ways of destroying not so much the house necessarily as the household of an evil family. Though a poor man be a wanderer and move about a great deal, for a tabernacle is a tent which can be speedily erected and taken down, nothing can remove the blessing upon him and his wherever they abide.

14.12. This is another constantly recurring theme, so much so, that the exact wording is reproduced in Proverbs 16.25. A man may be often mistaken, but here the emphasis is particularly upon a fixed agenda of ungodly lifestyle on which he has set his heart. The ramifications of an ungodly lifestyle are more far reaching than might at first be thought. He may think it doesn't matter to God, but does he with fixed regularity take the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20.7), go shopping on Sunday or play and watch sport? (Exodus 20.8-11) The Lord Jesus Christ says, "wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matthew 7.13)

Even down to our words there are serious ramifications, as Jesus in the same speech (the sermon on the mount) declared:- “let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matthew 5.37). “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15.18). To the best of our ability and with the Lord’s help we must think through the logic of our lifestyle and determine where it is leading. If to the condemnation of the Lord, we could do no better than to repent and seek a better way in Christ for our eternal salvation’s sake.

14.13. The clowns who are able to portray sadness with their lightheartedness evoke a certain wistfulness, for we understand what it is like to carry on in our lives despite sadness and grief, even smiling wanly at others’ jokes to keep up appearances. Though we must carry on we must not assume that everyone else’s laughter is any different from our own but rather seek to minister grace to our hearers as often as circumstances permit.

14.14. Among believers, the term “backsliding” is almost a technical term for those who are dropping out of their Christian discipleship, temporarily or otherwise. Apart from Jeremiah and Hosea it is only found here in the Old Testament and is not a New Testament expression at all. Now Solomon is earlier than either Jeremiah or Hosea so that, although the word he uses is not identical, the concept is similar and we may attribute to Solomon the origin under the Holy Spirit of this evocative expression. For sliding backwards suggests being increasingly rapidly out of control. If it means (as probably) in a backward direction then, just as we speak of a combined speed in a head-on collision of two cars travelling each at 60mph to be 120mph, it speaks of a rapid falling behind combined with the increasing progress of the one who is pressing onwards. It makes a vast difference in the running of the race of life. There is also just the suggestion of sliding on one’s back where loss of control would be perhaps more significant than the speed. Both spell danger.

As we have learned from Matthew 15.18-20 (but do read these verses again now) “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts” and many other things, so that the backslider in heart has the mainspring faulty, the fountain poisoned; which will, of course, affect everything else. His own ways are, in fact, the ways of death. But the righteous who holds on his way shall be stronger and stronger (Job 17.9) and inner strength shall support him to his great satisfaction. This life is well described by Paul in Colossians 1.10-12 “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

14.15. We are daily bombarded by the media with countless opinions whose origins and agendas we cannot begin to guess, except that they are likely to be of the evil one. If we are not to be taken in by specious arguments, specious because based on false premises

which, maybe, we cannot spot, then we must look well to how we proceed lest we be taken in. We must, since we are in the world but not of it, seek to draw near to the Saviour who constantly prays for us, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17.15-16). Caution and prayerfulness will provide the seedbed for the wisdom the scriptures will impart to us. Then we shall not be taken in and deceived.

14.16. Again we have another oft repeated theme. In Proverbs 16.6 we have, "by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil." David says (Psalm 36.1) "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes." God-fearers may not necessarily be saved but they do help to preserve a nation. If the government of any nation is ungodly then we shall soon see immoral laws passed and wicked deeds being openly encouraged in law. Like a raging storm the ungodly are fierce to overturn quiet and godly ways believing that God neither hears nor sees. "Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?...he that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know? The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity" (Psalm 94. 8-11).

14.17. A person whose wrath is aroused over the slightest matter, out of all proportion to the offence (even if there was one) rages intemperately and deals with those who meet him viciously so that those who know what he is like hate to meet him.

14.18. Knowledge is the summit of wisdom, especially the knowledge of God. Paul says that the things that were gain to him he counted loss for Christ "that I may know him" (Philippians 3.10). "What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6.8). Fools do not value knowledge in others or in themselves. The great uneducated may deride the education of those who hold high office, whereas those who are wise without formal education will not react like that.

14.19. In a well-ordered nation state or community this proverb would be true but must wait for ideal days. More often it is not and so this proverb directs our thoughts to the final judgment. The condition which prevails because of the aggravation of sin, where the wicked seem to prosper is well set out in Psalm 73 which it would be well to read at this time. It will instruct us lest we fall into the psalmist's error, and will show us the final end of the wicked lest we should be tempted to give up good for evil, faith for doubt.

14.20. Whereas the previous proverb described a state that should be but often isn't, this proverb describes a state that shouldn't be but often is. The poor should not be hated, especially not because he is poor, and still more not so because he is one's neighbour. "Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee" (Proverbs 3.29). There is of course more opportunity for dissension between

neighbours because of their proximity, and it is therefore essential that our relationships be kept free from bitterness and rancour. What it may lead to if left unchecked is well illustrated in Deuteronomy 19.11-13:- “but if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die...thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood...” To make friends with the rich simply because they are rich is despicable, for friendship should be extended to rich and poor alike. Friendship is surely cultivated on quite a different basis.

14.21. In this proverb the theme of “neighbour” and “the poor” is continued. These links help memorisation in a book where the diverse themes make it very difficult to do so, though individual verses are very memorable. It is not good to despise anyone, still less a neighbour. It is good to show mercy, especially to the poor who cannot repay you. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5.7). “When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14.13-14).

14.22. “A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations” (Proverbs 6.18) is one of the things that are a most hateful abomination unto the LORD. For, again, this is the mark of Satan’s fall, personified under the image of the king of Tyrus (Tyre), “thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee...thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28. 15-17). (This must refer to Satan, for since the fall no one has been created perfect. Of all the creatures that pre-date the fall only Satan and the angels who fell with him could be described as perfect yet becoming corrupted. And it is the leader who is spoken of here.) We are not ignorant of Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2.11) and when the people are not taught they will say “There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imaginations of our heart” (Jeremiah 18.12) to their own destruction. If we do not constantly seek to do the Lord’s will we will follow, quite naturally, the devices of our own fallen nature. We must in this, in particular, be like the Saviour who said, “I do always those things that please him (the Father)” (John 8.29) and “all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known...” (John 15.15). As we have often seen, repeated frequently because it is such a powerful incentive, “mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.”

14.23. Again this proverb is a renewed appeal of Christ in His wisdom to encourage labour and to discourage mere talk. It is encouraging to see the choice of wording here – “all labour,” even the most hands on, even the most menial, brings its reward. If we are all words and no action then we might expect to earn but little.

14.24. By definition one would suppose that the foolishness of fools is folly. But in the English, at any rate, the constant alliteration makes it easy to remember and serves to accentuate, to spell out the exceeding foolishness of folly. A monarch might have many

crowns. Knowledge is a crown (verse 18). The wise have riches as a crown, in a lesser sense because they have reaped the reward of their work but in a higher sense by faith having entered into the exceeding riches, (Ephesians 2.7), the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3.8).

14.25. Trustworthy evidence establishes facts; and facts will acquit the innocent. But hearsay or, still worse, fabrication effectively deceives and causes miscarriages of justice. A believer is to be absolutely transparent in this matter.

14.26. “Strong confidence” and “refuge” are powerful words. To believe in God, to fear Him and, better still by far, to trust Him for acceptance in His beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest strength known to man. Jeremiah, who surely should know, says “O LORD, my strength and my fortress, and my refuge in day of affliction” (Jeremiah 16.19). It is the man, Christ Jesus, who is described in Isaiah 32.2, “A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of waters in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” The psalmist prays to Christ, “Be thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort” (Psalm 71.3). A true believer surely knows this experience, it has been verified to him:- “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8.15-17).

14.27. A fountain, such a refreshing source to revive life, is contrasted with a snare, a trap, which is a means of capture and death. After being held in the chains of atheism and unbelief the first refreshing, reviving drink is faith in the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22.17).

14.28. The more people there are in a kingdom the greater it is and the greater the prestige of the king. If it is depopulated then there will be few to defend it. The Lord Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and, though in any one generation His people might appear to be in a minority, yet over all the generations of the world’s history it will prove to be the most numerous of any kingdom. And, what is more, it is increasing daily.

14.29. Solomon’s father, David, wrote in Psalm 103.8, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” and it is possible that this is something he had been taught by his father. Perhaps he had heard him tell of his hastiness and Abigail’s restraining of him spoken of in 1 Samuel 25. 10-31. Perhaps he had observed David’s example all these years after he had learned his lesson, for, as he says, “I was my father’s son...he taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live” (Proverbs 4. 3-4). We may alienate people for years, to say nothing of doing them physical violence, if we have a hasty temper. Such a person may be held up as an example of supreme folly.

14.30. We have had virtually the same expression as “rotteness of the bones” in Proverbs 12.4. We have only to think of leprosy, gangrene or even arthritis to know the misery it causes. On a purely physical level a sound heart prolongs life. Envy, of course, is not a physical thing but it affects our wellbeing very adversely. Envy, should there be a residue brought over from our unconverted life, will grievously affect our Christian affections.

14.31. The psalmist wrote of the LORD, “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor” (Psalm 112.9) and, of course, it follows that to oppress them is to act the opposite part towards them and therefore to reproach their Maker. Isaiah later wrote (25.4) “Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm” indicating, as in so many other places of scripture, that the Lord has a special interest in the disadvantaged. Jesus was poor, of whom it written, “poor, yet making many rich” (2 Corinthians 6.10); and “for your sakes he became poor” (2 Corinthians 8.9). The disciples were forward to remember the poor (Galatians 2.10) and, supremely, “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?” (James 2. 5-6). It is a characteristic of a believer that he has mercy on the poor.

14.32. When it comes to the final judgment then this proverb shall be most truly fulfilled. “Depart from me, ye cursed” (Matthew 25.41) is surely a driving away of the wicked in his wickedness. Read Matthew 25. 31-46. The earlier part of that passage speaks of the hope which the righteous person has after death.

14.33. Wisdom is the application of knowledge under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Christ to differing situations which arise. It will always be the essential approach of the one who waits on the Lord and can be therefore said to reside in his heart. It is a procedure which he loves; to pray, to understand the scriptures and to observe the providences. The immoderate, banal, inappropriate or rash reaction of the foolish reveals what is at the heart of their responses.

14.34. Again, one of the “top ten” famous proverbs. A nation is prospered by its worship of the living God by Whom it is enabled to exercise a just judicial system, an equitable government and enjoy the high favours of peace and fruitfulness. Not only nations, but smaller communities, tribes, cities, and societies of all sorts are betrayed should they be characterised by evil. All right thinking people will reproach them and God will reject them unless they repent. A good verse to memorise.

14.35. One aspect of the LORD’s punishment of David in the matter of Bathsheba was “because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (2 Samuel 12.14). David had caused shame to the Lord and to His attributes and methods of government. The Lord did not “change His mind” about the child even after David’s prayers. David was most often a wise servant and many times knew the favour of the Lord; in raising him

up to be king; in making him a sweet psalmist; and enabling him as a ruler over men to be just. A believer must be as circumspect as possible not to cause shame to the Saviour.