

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 15

15.1. Another proverb to memorise! Gentle speech must be the daily practice of a believer so that when perceived or real hurt is unexpectedly encountered and passions are roused it is second nature to reply gently. Horatius Bonar the hymnwriter speaks of brethren in theological debate,

“In days of public strife, when sharp and stinging,
The angry words went daily to and fro,
Friend against friends the polished missiles flinging,
Each seeking who could launch the keenest blow...”

stirring up anger; and there is much on the internet which breathes the same hasty spirit. Brethren these things ought not so to be. Situations get out of hand so speedily and leave wounds and regrets long after the incident is over. How surprisingly, sometimes, the temper subsides with a kind and gentle word.

15.2. A public speaker; an adviser in the corridors of power or small committee; an individual in personal or private conversation – all may, under the guidance of the Lord, be skilled to marshal all their array of accumulated learning to bring it to bear on the matter in hand to the great benefit of all. The foolish speak to the detriment of all who hear. Their words seem to gush forth. If only nothing was spoken in a weighty matter no great harm might come by it, but the torrent of their ill-considered words may lead to much recklessness. A fine example of both aspects of this proverb is to be found in Acts 19.23-41. When Demetrius spoke, “the whole city was filled with confusion...they rushed with one accord into the theatre” and the greater part “knew not wherefore they were come together...all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” The townclerk, in response, spoke very sensibly and firmly and with authority dismissed the people.

15.3. The Lord misses nothing. He is so great that He knows all thoughts before they become words; all speech before it becomes actions; all interactions of the written or spoken word upon each reader or hearer. He does not forget them, else how could He judge the world? Again, this is a truth that is set before us a number of times in scripture as, for example, in 2 Chronicles 16.9, “the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”

15.4. What an evocative, memorable expression “a wholesome tongue” is! Better still, to have such a tongue. The original Hebrew, as in the margin, is, “the healing of the tongue.” When a believer is born again, “he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5.17). And if such formerly owned a bitter, swearing, lying tongue what a wholesome change a wholesome tongue is! In a winter storm the sea may breach the defences. It may turn fresh water pools saline and destroy them as havens of wildlife, at least for some years. It may inundate houses, ruining possessions and causing havoc to clean up, while leaving its mark for many years. So is the breach caused by the hurt it does to the spirit of the one who so speaks and the one who is unfortunate enough to be the butt of the speech or who overhears and feels contaminated by it.

15.5. Children are often impatient of learning. A parent tries to teach them something vital and they say, “I know. I know.” But they don’t know. We know they are not listening and, at the very least, it is exasperating. They will have to learn the hard way. In some things that is good, but not in dangerous or urgent matters. Reproof is never welcome at first and this is why it is such a recurrent theme of the scriptures and particularly of this chapter. We always need to be reminded to take on board good advice and be warned of the consequences of our folly.

15.6. Again this proverb may be considered on two levels, the natural and the spiritual. All the resources of the wicked are dedicated to one end; trouble. But in those of the righteous their investment is to build up their family heritage. But even the poor of this world who are spiritually rich are filled with the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are hidden with God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 2.2-3).

15.7. The dissemination of knowledge is every teacher’s aim and that of every wise parent. It is a foolish parent who does not care sufficiently or has not the wit sufficiently to teach their child.

15.8. Even though it is a command of the Lord to sacrifice, His name is dishonoured when a devotee does so in an unrepentantly wicked frame of mind. “Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them” (Amos 5.22). “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4.24). “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart...He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Psalm 24.3-5).

15.9. This and the previous proverb form a couplet, the former being about worship and verse 9 about daily living. It is just the same principle. Whether our worship or our lifestyle it is either performed in unrepentant contradiction to God’s laws, in

which case it is utterly hateful and rejected; or else we seek to please God, and then He delights in and loves those whose choice is to embrace His ways.

15.10. As recently as verse 5 we had this constantly recurring theme, so we may gather the urgency as well as the importance of learning this truth. It may require a long apprenticeship. If our conscience tells us we are in the wrong we don't like to be told. But if we're not told then we shall just note what our conscience is telling us and proceed to ignore it. The reason for finding correction unacceptable is that it challenges the course of action on which we have set our heart and will require from us a change of heart if the advice is to be heeded. That's the rub. It will be the death of us and the perishing of our soul to remain heedless, however.

15.11. If the ultimate conclusion of disobedience towards God, hell and destruction, is clearly visible and apparent to God how much more so the hearts of those en route to such an end without the intervention of faith in the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which God hath brought to light for us in the gospel. "Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him" (Luke 12.5).

15.12. The very first psalm warns us (verse 1) not to sit "in the seat of the scornful." There is a positive blessing from God to be had in not doing so. But one of the hardening effects of learning to be a despiser, a mocker, a scorner is the disinclination to receive advice. And, of course, all advice to the scorner must needs be reproof. As for an initiative to seek helpful instruction, it will never enter his head.

15.13. Our face will reflect our inner disharmony. We may put on a brave face but we can't keep up such a mask for ever. In modern English "merry" has come to be associated with being mildly inebriate. But it was not always so. It speaks of lightheartedness in the sense of not being weighed down with care or overmuch sorrow. Sorrow breaks the heart. There is a difference between a broken heart and a wounded heart or spirit (Proverbs 18.14) where, strangely enough, the wounded spirit is the more serious malady. The broken heart may be healed. "He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted" (Isaiah 61.1). Quoting this verse, the Lord Jesus Christ declared, "he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4.18). We will think about the wounded heart when we reach chapter 18.

15.14. Again we revert to a theme that we have already had this chapter, intertwined with other recurring themes. Repetition and revision are the key to memorisation and acquiring experience. Seek knowledge at all times; be a lifelong student. Feed your mind and affection on spiritual things. "Not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2.13).

15.15. At one level this proverb is urging us to make the best of affliction by counteracting it with a merry heart continually, though this is easier said than done. However, on a spiritual level we should understand from Lamentations 3.33 that the Lord God “doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” It is for the believer’s good. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4. 17-18). Therefore to enjoy a continual feast of good things in the midst of affliction enables us, to the extent in which we are able to attain it, the better to praise the Lord for all His kindness towards us in all things; knowing that “the LORD will perfect that which concerneth me” (Psalm 138.8).

15.16,17. Here are two more “better is...” proverbs, and there are more to come. What is emphatically taught is that the fear of the LORD, and the trusting in the Saviour, makes everything else come right. If we have little it matters not, for with Christ we have all. And when the trouble of managing large affairs, businesses or households is considered, small may well be thought to be beautiful. The same may be said for love. A small vegetarian meal is to be preferred to a feast if everything is lovingly provided and lovingly enjoyed with loving conversation. Without that it is emptiness indeed.

15.18. “Appease” is the very word used in Acts 19.35, which we looked at earlier, in connection with the wisdom shown by the townclerk of Ephesus in appeasing strife. Angry Demetrius made the crowd wrathful (Acts 19.28) and “no small stir” (Acts 19.23) occurred. See how the Holy Spirit Himself provides the commentary on this verse, giving Luke (who wrote Acts) the very words previously used here in Proverbs.

15.19. It’s difficult to get through a hedge of thorns and it’s difficult to get through a day’s work with a lazy employee. The margin suggests that the picture is of a causeway, a raised and level embankment over difficult territory for ease of passage. So the believer will find the hardest going relieved because the Lord is accompanying us and working all things together for good (Romans 8.28).

15.20. We had a very similar proverb in chapter 10.1. With this difference, that here the foolish man is not merely the heaviness of his mother but by his action despises his mother. He might not mean to be quite as mean towards her, but this is ultimately what his action signifies and, of course, is a breach of the 4th commandment (Exodus 20.12).

15.21. We are in the midst of a “revision” passage. This verse revises, in different words, the substance of 10.23. There are those who delight in foolery and everything else is boring. The wisdom of a man of understanding (10.23) is to walk through life honestly and ably.

15.22 revises 11.14. A matter should be thoroughly considered and talked through in cabinet, if the government; with family members, if family affairs; with church officers if church matters - where unilateral action is generally unwise.

15.23. Of the Saviour it is said, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isaiah 50.4). And in Christ every believer may do the same. How apposite is the right word at the right time, especially if it were unbeknown to us at the time and all of the Lord! When our speech brings pleasure what an encouragement it is to speaker and hearer alike.

15.24. The Lord Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6.19-21). But our proverb speaks of looking to the Lord above to avoid hell, not simply loss or damage upon earth. Our soul's interests are at stake here. Look up to the only Saviour. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3.14-15).

15.25. The surrounding border of a house is more extensive than the house itself, and though the house be small (as probably in the case of a widow) all taken together might be smaller than the house of a proud man. But we must consider our ways and turn from pride if our lifetime's work is to be established by the Lord. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2.16-17).

15.26. Revision again; see verse 9. Everything about the wicked is an abomination according to verse 9; here the thoughts, which prompt the way, are singled out. "We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2.3). The words of the pure are pleasant not only to man but most importantly of all to God.

15.27. The ever insistent desire for profitmaking destroys banks and business houses when they overreach themselves; it is a not dissimilar desire ever to be seeking promotion. If bribery and corruption is involved, by implication the death of that institution or career is signalled, for "he that hateth gifts shall live." Even if promotion or profit is sought without deceit, it is liable to instil greediness for more. But the sure way to survive under the Lord's good hand is to avoid all bribery, whether of giving or receiving, and live a straightforward life looking for His blessing and His promotion alone.

15.28. Believers are mandated, “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3.15). A carefully thought out reply is appropriate for a carefully thought out faith. A fool with no faith and nothing to say does not stop to think about the torrent of his words. If drunk, he may scarce know that he has said them.

15.29. “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come” (Psalm 65.2). When the righteous approaches he shall be heard, but the wicked, though he approach, will not be received nor answered. As Jesus before Pilate, “He answered him to never a word” (Matthew 27.14).

15.30-31. The next two proverbs speak of the welfare of the eyes, the bones and the ear. What the eyes see of a lovely scene, or especially the opening of the eyes in understanding, brings happiness to our very being. Likewise good news relieves our fears and removes the weight of uncertainty, thereby giving great relief and incentive to pursue our lives again. Reproof does not seem to be such a glad vista or as welcome as good news but it is, if anything, more profitable and more conducive to taking up life again with renewed energy. It is not the end of the world to make an error; indeed it is the pathway to being considered wise if we profit from our mistakes and gladly learn from those who point them out to us.

15.32. More about handling reproof. It is so needful to know how to take it. Our very life is threatened by hardening our hearts against instruction, our very soul by hardening our hearts against the instruction of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we take heed to reproof, and obey it, we shall go on to make progress.

15.33. A number of proverbs commence with the words “the fear of the LORD.” To receive the instruction of the wisdom which is in Christ, the wisdom which is declared in this whole book of Proverbs and throughout the whole of the Bible, is to demonstrate regard for the Lord who, being the Creator and knowing all things, has so many things to impart. “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16.12), said the Saviour just before the crucifixion. As far as lies within us let us be ready at all times to be teachable, and to learn from all situations. Christ endured the humiliation of life in this world before entering into His glory. It is the same pattern with us. “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual...and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15. 45-49). To get the full force of this progression from humility to honour read the whole of 1 Corinthians 15. 35-58.