

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 16

16.1. Our dispositions and gifts of speech or writing (or whatever) are from the Lord. He gives gifts and supervises our schooling to prepare us for the life He has planned for us, whether we are believers in Christ or not. The clue, however, lies in the second part of the verse concerning “the answer of the tongue.” We have seen so often that speech may not be edifying nor originate with God, even as the Saviour said, “Let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matthew 5.37). This proverb is best fulfilled in the one who is born again. “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2.13). “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matthew 10.19-20).

16.2. We all think we are in the right and will set about justifying ourselves if challenged. In one sense this may be good, for if we have thought things through and have the courage of our convictions we are satisfied and don't need “to reinvent the wheel” every time that issue comes up. We will be able to give good and convincing reasons which may, or may not, satisfy those who disagree. We may have to agree to disagree. However, it may not be so good if our behaviour is challenged, not so good as it ought to be, and we justify ourselves and make excuses for what may be indefensible conduct. What matters is what the Lord makes of it all. Let us submit our intentions, actions, words throughout our days to the Lord first of all.

16.3. This verse is the logical conclusion of the previous one. It is by committing our ways to Him that we may look to the Lord to guide us through His word and also by His providences. So inward is this that it extends even to the very thoughts we will think, from which proceed our words and actions. This brings back to our minds Proverbs 3. 5-6 which it enables us to revise and see what progress, as good disciples, as good apprentices, we have made.

16.4. This is a far-reaching verse. It asserts that the Lord accepts all responsibility for His creation. “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”

(Revelation 4.11). “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Romans 9.21-24). “Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amos 3.6). “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Romans 9.17-18).

16.5. Pride is a cardinal sin which must be put down ruthlessly in every believer. Where proud peoples make alliances, especially against God, they are too weak to resist His might. “Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” (Isaiah 8.12-13).

16.6. Three very powerful forces are ordinarily at work to root out wrongdoing. Men often respond to mercy and resolve, whether successfully or not, to mend their ways. But the mercy of God revealed to His people in the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary (that is, the atoning power of His blood to cover sin, repented of and confessed) overwhelms the soul and is a potent force in directing a new subsequent life. Truth likewise roots out all sin and error and prompts the convicted sinner to cry out for the mercy mentioned already. In a court of law, when truth is proved, the alleged crime in dispute is judged definitively and right established. The church, which is, of course, made up of its individual members, is called in 1 Timothy 3.15 “the pillar and ground of the truth.” The fear of the LORD is preventative, whereas mercy and truth teach us the proper course of action when we have already gone astray. To see ourselves as others see us may help us to evaluate our lives; but to see ourselves as God sees us, unless we harden our hearts, is to begin to understand how wayward we are. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17.9).

16.7. This is a wonderful proverb. It does not promise that everything will be smooth but that those who dislike us or who are opposed to our views and are hostile in their attitude will be kept subdued by the Lord. What a powerful incentive this is to please Him. If even his enemies are quiet, how much more will other events work together for good (Romans 8.28). Believers are not to make enemies. “But I say unto you, Love your enemies” (Matthew 5.44). There are those who will make enemies of us. This proverb refers to our day to day living. When Paul preached the gospel he roused

hostility and that did not mean that his ways did not please the Lord. Far from it. And we shall find opposition in gospel work and must not shirk it on that account.

16.8. Whether we have much or little it must be obtained by legitimate means, else it will pall. There will be no blessing from the Lord if our lives are full of, or tainted by, ill-gotten gains.

16.9. This is one of a number of proverbs on the subject, and is a variation on 16.2. We make our plans but we do not always know what is best. Even down to daily arrangements the Lord must have the final word if we are not to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and meet with some contretemps. If the Lord directs our steps, we may tiptoe even through troubles which are flooding through our lives and come safely out on the other side dry shod. Believers are “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2.10).

16.10. The divine right of kings was strongly upheld by Protestant monarchs and as equally hotly contested by those who shared the same Reformation fundamentals. And the pope, who falsely claims kingly rights, also claims when speaking *ex cathedra* (that is, from the papal throne, speaking not privately but in his official capacity) to be infallible. This proverb seems at first sight to give some credence to the view that kings can't go wrong. In autocratic monarchy he certainly has the last word but that hasn't historically always made him right! However, taken in conjunction with the previous proverb, if a king as king seeks the Lord's direction in his official capacities, he will find (as all individuals and the king in his individual capacity will) that his direction will be sure and from the Lord.

16.11. “Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds?” (Job 37.16). If the Lord permits such an expression to be used as descriptive of His handiwork, then we may consider balancing to be a nicety of precision that is characteristic of the Almighty, Creator God. That being so, justice (think of the scales of justice at the Old Bailey, for example) and just dealings in ordinary affairs, especially purchases, are to be scrutinized to an exactitude by ourselves and will be so examined by God. As we have seen in an earlier proverb, if the weights are not correct, then, however it looks as if the proper procedures have been followed, there is dishonesty at the heart.

16.12. Kingly rule and any other form of government will only survive if righteousness is sought and prevails in high places. Of the Lord it is written (Psalm 97.2) “righteousness and judgment are the habitation (in the margin, establishment) of his throne.” That being the case, and as God is consistent in all His dealings, He demands of an earthly king, president, figurehead (and whoever has ultimate authority) righteousness and judgment, whether it be good decision making or justice.

16.13-15. There are three more proverbs concerning kings in quick succession. King Solomon speaks from firsthand knowledge in all these matters, whether of success or failure. Good counsellors, just judges and lawyers beyond the reach of corruption, honest citizens – all these give pleasure to a good ruler, for “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain” (2 Samuel 23. 3-4). King David, with almost his last words, explicitly says that the God of Israel, the Rock of Israel personally instructed him in this important matter, and I think we may be sure that he would have so taught Solomon his son. If a king is angry he is to be feared, for an absolute monarch has the power to sentence to death. If he is being unjust, irrational or rash an able counsellor may skilfully calm him. Calm speech helps in all situations. There are echoes in verse 15 of what David had been taught in 2 Samuel 23.4 concerning “clear shining after rain.” The grace, the favour of King Jesus is like this. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (Romans 16.24). “By grace ye are saved...that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2.5,7).

16.16. This is revising again! Proverbs 8.10. Maybe, as Solomon has progressed through eight chapters since the previous mention of the subject, he thinks by the Spirit that it is an appropriate time for assessment. All these proverbs which we have considered, are they maintaining their hold upon our lives? If we have truly amassed them let us, in evaluating their wisdom, account them to be a hoard of gold and silver, if well applied to our lives.

16.17. A highway is a main road, so that we may say that it is the main way of a believer, the great exercise along the pilgrim way, to be justified in Christ with His righteousness which cleanses from all sin and to continue with sanctified thoughts and just actions. Just as Jesus says, “I am the light of the world” (John 8.12) He also said concerning His disciples, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5.14). Similarly here we are told that the believer in keeping his way preserveth his soul; but in Psalm 121.7 it is said of the LORD Himself, “he shall preserve thy soul.” From which we learn that all our attainments, of whatever sort, are because the Lord has first given us to share in His own gifts which He expects us to use.

16.18. We have shortened this in our familiar English usage to “pride goes before a fall” which is true enough, but in omitting the parallelism, or summarizing it in that way, we habitually miss the rather more challenging lesson that “pride goeth before destruction.” Certainly the haughty spirit causes a fall, but the ultimate end, if persisted in, is self-destruction. Haman is a prize example; and, so long as it is not ourselves who are thus trapped, it is quite amusing really. Read Esther chapters 6&7 to get the full force of this classic example. We are to learn from other people’s

punishments and confess our sins to the Lord, and say to ourselves very often, “there, but for the grace of God, go I.”

16.19. Dividing the spoil is what the all-victorious conqueror does with his men or his allies. It is what Christ has done after His resurrection. “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53.12). “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2.15). “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death” (Philippians 2.8). We see the Saviour as supremely meek becoming the supreme Victor. This is He with Whom we should associate and share His spirit.

16.20. A believer will handle a matter wisely in the spirit of meekness. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord,” says Paul, “beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4.1-3). Goodness and happiness greatly enrich the soul with peace. Trusting the Saviour utterly brings the greatest contentment.

16.21. It is good to have a reputation, if it be justified, for wisdom and its practical outcomes, of which prudence is an example. We anticipate a later proverb (27.2), “Let another praise thee, and not thine own mouth.” And it is also written (2 Corinthians 10.18), “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.” “The sweetness of the lips” is a wonderful expression, but how does it increase learning? Well, an attractive presentation of a lecture, or an argument, or advice or any teaching helps the hearer listen and assimilate. But the teacher’s very acceptance by his hearers will send him scurrying to his books to learn more for himself; more thoroughly perhaps, more in volume certainly. It will, all in all, be a continually mutually beneficial experience.

16.22. Not all learning brings understanding. It may, for example, confuse the mind. This is why we should earnestly beseech the Holy Spirit to explain to us the scriptures, opening up our minds to them. But seeing that the Lord is Creator, there is nothing that He does not know, and He has observed the unfolding of all the events which He has precipitated, so we may ask the same Holy Spirit to give us a grasp, a handle (as verse 20 suggests) on all our secular studies too.. To be able to attain to a whole, unified view of life, and to do so in Christ (who is “head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1.22)) is an unceasing stream of blessing which constantly refreshes. If we were to change the picture and think of “mainspring” it keeps us ticking as a well-regulated clock that will scarcely vary a minute over an extended period in telling us the real time. So our spring will enrich others and be a faithful witness to, and representation of, the Saviour. “All my springs are in thee” (Psalm 87.7). As we have

seen before, fools cannot be helped. The fallout from the teaching profession perhaps lies partly in this that, in some areas, there is too great a percentage of pupils who are unwilling to learn, causing frustration to a competent teacher.

16.23. If your heart is not in something, you will not learn and will probably be a complainer. We have read of the outpourings of an unregenerate heart in Mark 7.21-23 and Matthew 15.18-20. A believer is to put his heart into something so that his heart is united (Psalm 86.11) in the work ethic which the Lord Jesus Christ teaches. It is a believer's wisdom to search and understand the scriptures and he will then have some good encouragement from that source to share with others.

16.24. We have learned in Proverbs 3.17 concerning wisdom, that "her ways are ways of pleasantness" and we have just thought of the sweetness of what proceeds from wisdom in verse 21. What a help, what an encouragement we may be with our words! They will benefit the very soul of those with whom we come into contact, in the very deepest places of their lives, and perhaps at the most crucial times of their lives of which we may be ignorant. Pain in the bones is very hard to bear. We also speak of "the bones of a matter." Health to the bones is a wonderful picture of how beneficial our words may be in the very fundamentals of life and at the most painful times.

16.25. Another of the "top ten" famous proverbs! Identical (except "that" for "which") to 14.12. Whatever springs most rapidly to mind may well spring from the remnant of our old, not thoroughly yet subdued, nature. We will want to do it, and if we are impetuous by nature, will not consult the Lord before we have prematurely acted. Young love is specially prone to this fault, with disastrous lifetime consequences, sometimes. Because a believer throughout life is in such continual contact with the world, he must learn in all things, in all things without exception, to refer them to the Saviour's wisdom before acting on seemingly good ideas, whims, propositions, issues or anything at all. The consequences can be irremediable and, at the very least, inconvenient and not conducive to our service in the church, in the Master's kingdom.

16.26. It seems likely that this proverb is a couplet with verse 27 and therefore to be interpreted in a bad sense. That is, that the man spoken of as labouring is ungodly, his motive selfish and his mouth greedy. It implies that he will never be satisfied, and always needing more to satisfy ever voracious cravings.

16.27. If we dig our gardens we will turn up worms. It is the aim of the ungodly to bring back past hurts; to hurt again when they have been laid to rest, as best may be, and forgiven, certainly, in Christ. Fire is one thing that rages out of control, ever spreading and likewise is the speech of the ungodly. James in his third chapter, verses 1&10, indicates that he is speaking to brethren. He says (verse 10) that certain things ought not to be so. That is, that professing Christians have brought over from their old way of life things which should have been left behind and have no part in a Christian's

manner. Speech is his subject matter. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell...the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3.5-10). Douse this burning fire, believer!

16.28. The picture language of sowing (by hand, in those days) suggests spreading and scattering strife, which was also, in its different way, the theme of the previous proverb. Believers are not to scatter or spread strife, or to multiply difficulties for others. Suspicion is a tool of the evil one to put doubt about somebody or something in our mind where, as likely as not, there is no taint. But once suspicion has been registered in the mind it is likely to be often recalled at the slightest subsequent instigation. It causes us to look askance at those whom we trusted, and puts a wedge between the closest of friends. The expression “whisperer” suggests that there is not known to be a fact, else it could be declared out loud and refuted if need be. But a suspicion, a rumour, even if we say there is no truth in it, sticks irrationally and ruins lives, as it is designed by the evil one and his agents to do.

16.29. Violence is much more high profile. But even so there are those to whom it appeals in the weakness of their nature and who can easily be persuaded that it is the life for them. Keep clear of such, for they live in every age, in every community.

16.30. Here we have a picture of the violent man meditating evil, and perhaps muttering to himself as he plans his evil purposes and brings them one stage nearer fruition.

16.31. The senior years of an older person should be the pinnacle of his life’s work, provided only that these years are not the crowning ignominy of an habitually sin-orientated lifestyle. A believer should not dread advanced years for, whether in retirement or in the sunset days of his labour, his vast and wise experience cannot be quantified and in exercise brings much expertise to his juniors and much rare wisdom to his peers.

16.32. Perhaps Solomon had meditated on his father David’s words, “My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: but the word of the LORD came to me saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about” (1 Chronicles 22.7-9). Though military leaders are highly valued, yet theirs is not the

highest calling in the land. So, within the realm of the temper and the spiritual life, to control one's spirit is a greater skill which is more greatly to be commended than capturing a city; and containing one's anger (and exercising only righteous anger after due consideration) is true valour and prowess, exceeding military skills.

16.33. It looks like chance and we do, indeed, speak of a lottery. But where there was not the skill to determine by providence, or the faith to determine by prayer, or two imponderables were to be decided between, the lot was permitted. It was under the direct care of the Lord to ensure the correct falling out of the decision. Such an important matter as the replacement among the apostles for Judas Iscariot was decided in this way, Acts 1. 15-26. The apostles "gave forth their lots" (verse 26) but the Lord revealed which of the two He had chosen (verse 24). All providences are of the Lord's disposing. Yet in this matter it did not rule out the apostles selecting two names and giving forth their lots. The "whole" disposing thereof is of the LORD.