

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 17

17.1. Quietness and strife are here contrasted. Though it is as old as history (Cain and Abel), continual strife is a most miserable and debilitating business, especially in the home. It will eventually be its undoing as all the relationships within it become fractured. Abundance does not ensure peace in the family. But though a family have not much more than a crust of bread the constant expressions of love and kindness within it make it a happy place where all obstacles can be surmounted.

17.2. The servant of Christ, though he be of the meanest origin, shall be promoted to rule. "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath" (Luke 12. 42-44).

17.3. If silver and gold were not inanimate, the fining pot and the furnace would be fierce ordeals. But these metals in the hands of a master craftsman can be perfectly manipulated to give lasting pleasure only by such heat. While the Lord never tempts a believer above what he is able to bear (1 Corinthians 10.13) it is in the heat of life, the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48.10) that a believer is made fit ultimately for everlasting glory but, in the meantime, that others may see and benefit from the example of the Lord's own workmanship. "We are his workmanship" (Ephesians 2.10).

17.4. "Naughty" is a word with which we are familiar from childhood! In origin, it means a thing of naught, of no value, worthless. Naughty behaviour, then, is pointless, meaningless and leads nowhere. People only see what they want to see, and hear what they want to hear, by nature. And if their ways are evil they will steer clear of reproof and give heed only to those of like mind. If we catch ourselves exercising the same spirit believers should pull themselves up with a start.

17.5. Whether oppression (14.31) or mockery, as we have seen at the earlier proverb, to denigrate the poor is to cast a slur upon God who made us to be what we are. We should never be pleased when hurtful events overtake others; it is a punishable offence in our Maker's book.

17.6. Here is a wonderful expression of the happiness of a loving home where the Lord has graciously spared its inhabitants. Grandfathers have lived to see their grandchildren and enjoy them as a signal blessing. The grandchildren themselves honour their parents and vie to be like them, in character if not in career. And the father of the grandchildren, himself the son of grandfather, likewise honours his father. And when all are united in Christ what greater honour can the Saviour bestow upon a family! Its very rarity enhances the honour.

17.7. Wise words would sit most inappropriately upon the lips of a fool, for he does not have the brain behind it to verify his words. It is even more inappropriate for a ruler, a lawmaker, a judge or person in a position of authority to lie. If authority, justice, business or education be founded on a lie the noble values which enrich life and are preserved by truth are driven away and the land becomes a hotbed of dissatisfaction, self-aggrandisement, double-dealing, hatred and ultimately self-destruction.

17.8. The question is whether this proverb is to be taken in a good or a bad sense. A “gift” sometimes means a bribe. “Thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous” (Exodus 23.8). “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deuteronomy 16.19). But the use of the expressions “precious stone” and “prospereth” seems to suggest true grace and true prosperity. So in a good sense the picture language evokes the handling of a precious stone which sparkles differently according to which way it is turned in the light and is a constant delight as different colours appear to the view. A gift also recalls the giver with love. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of believers as being given to Him by His Father six times in John 17 (verses 2,6,9,11,12,24). Believers are precious jewels to Him for the sake of what He has wrought in His people and the light which shines by Him through them into the world and because we are the Father’s gift. But He also speaks in John 17 of giving His people eternal life (verse 2), the words of the Father (verses 8,14) and His glory (verse 22). All precious jewels. Such gifts prosper to the delight of the Godhead, the encouragement of the believer and the blessing of those with whom the believer rubs shoulders.

17.9. We are not talking about a “whitewash” here. Corporate frauds and double dealings are a different matter altogether. It is personal offences and misdemeanours. We are being taught constantly in the Proverbs (10.12; 16.28; 19.11) to overlook faults against us personally and not to reveal the peccadilloes or the failings of others. Peter brings this matter before us again with great emphasis:- “Above all things,” he writes, “have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” where “charity” is the distinctively Christian word for “love” (1 Peter 4.8). The word “seeketh” in the text does not betray selfishness but an altruistic effort to draw out and win friendship which will be enriching for both parties. If we expose someone’s frailties we embarrass them and it puts a barrier between them and us and between them and those we speak to also.

17.10. This is not to decry corporal punishment but only to remark that a fool will not learn from his mistakes. It needs but a word to cause a wise man to reflect upon his mistake and resolve never to visit that scenario again.

17.11. Intentionally or not, summary justice may be executed by a representative who takes personal offence at a colleague's dishonesty. A good example, perhaps fresh from David's recounting of the incident to Solomon, is in the matter of Absalom as recorded in 2 Samuel 18.5-33, though David did not know his own best interests and was too emotionally involved for the common good. However, it is worth noting that such illegal, unilateral action may incur reciprocal justice as it did in the case of Joab. He does not appear in the list of David's mighty men in 2 Samuel 23 (though two of his brothers and his armour bearer do) and David gives specific instructions to Solomon (1 Kings 2. 1-6) concerning his treatment. It is also recorded that a lifetime's hatred for Solomon's throne was formed in the mind of Hadad through Joab's actions (1 Kings 11. 14-22). At all events we are not to be "cruel" messengers of the gospel but should revere the words of scripture, "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me" (Psalm 131.1).

17.12. A female bear, enraged at the loss of her cubs, is not more furiously irrational than a foolish man frustrated in the midst of his set purpose. We must not be surprised when the foolish receive the gospel and its messengers with as much hurt as they can inflict.

17.13. If a person delights in evil, and is so accustomed to doing evil, that the only way that kindness can be welcomed is with more evil, then evil's relentless grip will embrace him and his in ever-increasing intensity. The children of that home will follow in those footsteps, though children should always be taught that they do not have to replicate the bad things they come across in their own family situations and that the grace and power of the Holy Spirit can deliver them.

17.14. A burst water main does much damage and is difficult to bring under control. It is a picture of the eruption of strife. It is not so much a "burst" water main as the pressure when a stop cock is unloosed and then can't be turned back against the force of the water. So is the force of contention, because of human nature, that it is best not started. If we stir up trouble we may be letting ourselves in for and making ourselves responsible for much human damage; more than we bargained for and more than we may wish to be responsible for.

17.15. Those who do the opposite of that which is pleasing to the Lord according to His laws, His commandments and His word will meet with His righteous anger in due course. Particularly where justice is concerned. So to make excuses for a wicked course of action in anyone or to find the innocent guilty will not go unpunished. God is God whether we believe in Him or not; so that if we act unrighteously on the basis of unbelief, the visitation will still come.

17.16. Wisdom is no investment other than in our minds and hearts and if there is no heart to learn then it can only be pride to purchase a doctorate, or an education in order to make out that we must be clever because we (or our children) attended such and such a place.

17.17. This proverb is often fulfilled within the natural realm of things but is most supremely fulfilled among brethren in Christ, within Christian friendship. To have loving support in the bleak times, as well as the sunny periods of our lives, acts as a strong foundation undergirding our whole approach to life. Especially it is the very time, when the going is tough and our energies sapped, for brothers to invoke their best wisdom and advice on our behalf and ensure that we stand firm and that our reactions are true.

17.18. This proverb revisits Proverbs 6.1-5 and the Holy Spirit cautions once again of supporting others with financial help who more than likely cannot be trusted, or have other debts to repay which will have precedence over repayments to us, especially if this overrides the pleadings and good sense of a friend. If the friend who loveth us at all times finds us in this situation, and the brother finds us in such adverse circumstances as suggested here, we do well to take urgent heed. It is a reminder to take the advice of friends and brethren who have our best interests at heart when we are in danger of betraying our livelihoods or even our souls.

17.19. Pride is a transgression that causes strife and the person, whose pride in his family, their affairs and accomplishments is overweening, is inviting trouble and making them a target at the very least for mirth, more likely jealousy and ultimately even violence.

17.20. We speak of those who are “up to no good” and this is a characteristic of those whose hearts are turned away from God. The speech of one whose fundamental way of life is rebellion against God will both cause and receive mischief.

17.21. It is beyond us to know how our children will turn out, or with what characteristics they will be born, but we can influence them to the best advantage by our instruction and good example. If there is no greater disappointment than a foolish or wayward child, it is a wonderful thing to be the evangelist to one who turns out excellently in the faith. “I have no greater joy,” says the apostle John, “than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

17.22. It is worth comparing this proverb with 15.13. A merry heart acts medicinally to produce a healthy disposition. The sorrowful heart breaks the spirit; and that drieth the bones. Our health fades with the fading of our spirit and leads us into deep troughs. Clearly this proverb is a “wake-up” call to cause us to seek the Spirit’s aid to overcome all forms of oppression and opposition “lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2.11).

17.23. When we were considering verse 8 the possibility was raised that it could be interpreted in a bad sense with the word “gift” meaning “bribe.” In this proverb there is no doubt. The wicked person produces his secret weapon, a bribe for those who can “pull

strings,” as we say, to overthrow justice or cause a matter to fall to his advantage which may otherwise have dubious merit or be vigorously opposed.

17.24. Alexander the Great and Napoleon thought they could conquer the world and failed. The wise man uses his wisdom to benefit and advise on matters nearer to home. His projects are within reach and sustainable. The foolish man is “airy fairy,” or entertains grandiose schemes which will not endure serious scrutiny. Let us aim to help our brethren at hand with the means at our disposal waiting upon Christ’s wise directions.

17.25. Solomon began this portion of the Proverbs (10.1) with a not dissimilar observation. A foolish boy brings grief and bitterness to the family and, most especially, to his parents. What would our parents think of us if they could see us now? More to the point what does our heavenly Father think of our actions? Mere tomfoolery? Ill-advised? Selfish self-seeking? Wicked? Or would our parents rejoice before the Lord that He had given them such a good son/daughter?

17.26. It is possible that this proverb hearkens back to Solomon’s own experience with his brother Adonijah. He was very careful not to punish Adonijah when he had asked for mercy, though he was guilty of treason. Instead he tested him to see if he would show himself to be worthy or wicked and sent him home. He broke curfew, to attempt by underhand means to renew his efforts ultimately to gain the throne and paid for it with his life when Solomon’s wisdom saw through his deceit. (It would be good to read 1 Kings 1-2 and trace the outworkings of the early wisdom of Solomon from which we may observe the origins of some of his later proverbs.) Adonijah, on the other hand, struck out at David and Solomon by attacking the monarchy as if right (equity) was on his side.

17.27. The next two proverbs form a couplet; the former from the wise man’s perspective and the latter from the foolish. There are situations when the less we say the better. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5.2). There are situations of grief when listening is the most necessary faculty. There are complex situations when hearing all sides is essential before making reply. A few weighty words, well considered before utterance, is the mark of knowledge. It is not necessary to multiply words to prove a thorough understanding of the matter in hand. The point well grasped and an accurate response is what is required. The fewness of words enables them to be well weighed, considered in many different ways and be of many different applications. The in-word is “cool.” And that is precisely the force of the words translated “excellent spirit;” but particularly the sense is that the speaker is not heated or overwrought.

17.28. If the issue is beyond a man and he says nothing, nobody knows what he is thinking and he may do himself a favour (for what it is worth) if men count his silence for sagacity. If we button our lips it will prevent the breaking out of intemperate speech and, if successful, will be to our credit. It may even earn us a reputation, however mistakenly, for skill. Others’

high reputation of us may give us breathing space to attain to a greater standard with an accompanying more deserved reputation.