

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 18

18.1. The “desire” spoken of here is not a God-given usefulness of the capacities the Lord has bestowed upon a person. It is rather a desire born of his own inner, but natural, wish. The Holy Spirit repeats themes, as we have seen, so that we may be frequently warned at different points as we read through the Bible. Hence the golden rule of scripture is to compare scripture with scripture (1 Corinthians 2.13). In Jude we have these words, “murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 16-19). The word “lusts” in Jude 16 & 18 is very often translated “desires” and means “heats” or “burnings” of fierce inner compulsions. Jude 19 speaks of men who separate themselves from sound churches to cause others to follow them rather than remain where there is true doctrinal teaching. Our proverb similarly links the desire to serve lusts with this separation from those who, by proclaiming the truth, speak against the toleration of such practices.

18.2. Self-expression is a keynote of education and, within limits, is acceptable. But because of inborn corruption the discovery of the heart will lead to the revealing of sin upon sin. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17.9) We shall never discover the depths of depravity within, and if we attempt to do so we shall just open the floodgates to add sin to sin. It is foolish and leads to that knowledge which is fallen and exemplified by Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2.17) was forbidden to them. It was the serpent who tempted Eve saying, “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3.5). And what was the great discovery? That they were naked (Genesis 3.7); and in that moment shame hit the human race. Satan knew that that would be the discovery all along. And that it is why it is the fool who seeks to pursue the natural desires of his heart. They will lead to his shameful undoing.

18.3. The rebels against God hold believers in contempt as uneducated and haters of knowledge, because believers exalt faith above mere learning. Any disgrace, any fall from grace, whether in an unbeliever or a believer brings reproach. It is exceptionally sad to a believer to have dishonoured his Lord and self-reproach will cloud his life. David knew reproach, and speaks prophetically of the Saviour also by his own experience:- “For thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face...and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me” (Psalm 69. 7,9). The Saviour, unlike David (Psalm 69.5), knew no sin and it was for our transgressions that He was wounded (Isaiah 53.5).

18.4. Words reveal the knowledge of the mind and the reflections of the heart. They come from the depths and, in a man whose meditations are on the word of the Lord, they will impart that which had been hidden beforehand to many and will therefore be of great help to them as they bring to bear on their situations in life things they could never have considered before through ignorance. The second part of the proverb changes the picture, though both halves concern water. A spring of fresh water is pure and can be drunk at source before it gathers impurities; and it never runs dry. Ever fresh goodness is supplied by the word of God Himself in the Bible and the person who is schooled in it will be a constant source of refreshment and reviving to those whose spirits have flagged or who are in any way overwhelmed.

18.5. If a wicked man produces a bribe (17.23) a man of position should not bend to procure his desire for him. Justice should always be aimed for, and be seen to be done. Underhand chicanery will invoke God’s anger. If the righteous are brought into great straits because of such miscarriage of justice, so much the more will be the wrath of God upon the perpetrators.

18.6. Do not get involved in issues which do not concern you, is the significance of this proverb, for punishment will be the reward of uncalled for words where there would have been no punishment before.

18.7. This proverb is a couplet with the previous one. In certain circumstances it may be worse than punishment he meets; even death. King Asa spoke foolishly (2 Chronicles 16. 2-3,9) and paid for it in that his land endured warfare and he personally was diseased in his feet. A person may be trapped by words taken down in evidence and used against him. “If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth” (Numbers 30.2).” “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5. 4-5).

18.8. This proverb revisits the subject of 16.28 and cautions the talebearer against the wounds that are sustained in the heart of the one whose secrets are revealed. It is a malicious talebearing that is meant here. Reporting criminal or seditious words or deeds in the interest of the state is another matter altogether and does not fall into this category at all. But spiteful revelations, or things that were uttered in friendship and then the friendship waned and talebearing became a means of hitting back, these are the sorts of situations covered by this proverb. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12.31). “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7.12).

18.9. A lazy person has much in common with a spendthrift, a timewaster or one who thinks nothing of leaving food. It reveals a carelessness with things of value; time, money or property generally. Indeed our throwaway society indicates an endemic carelessness with the earth’s resources.

18.10. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14.1; 53.1). The wise person believes in God not in theory only, but actively. He has sufficient faith to turn to the LORD in times of trial and discovers that He does all that, and more than, a strong tower does. A strong tower may collapse (Luke 13.4), but God provides safety. “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4.8).

18.11. However, the wealth of a rich man is not at all dependable. That in which he puts his trust, in contradistinction to the wise believer, is liable to fluctuation and is at the mercy of global forces beyond his control. That same rich man, in common with others, thinks that his own investment portfolio, his own opinion on anything is superior to others and atop this high wall he may perch satisfactorily. But if a wall may fall apart so may all things in which self-opinionated men put their trust.

18.12. Pride and humbleness are here contrasted. There was none so humble as the Lord Jesus Christ. His approach to the city where God had caused His name to dwell (Deuteronomy 12.11) was “meek, and sitting upon an ass” (Luke 21.5). It is very important that believers should learn humility and this theme is repeated in Proverbs (as in 11.2) and throughout the scriptures.

18.13. To have an opinion, and still worse to express it, before making an effort to understand the issues as best one can, is to be exposed to shame when one who really understands the matter speaks decisively, to the satisfaction of right-minded people, on the subject.

18.14. “A wounded spirit who can bear?” The brokenhearted shall be comforted. It is a crucial means of leading to repentance or to the relieving of grief. The Lord heals the brokenhearted. A broken spirit also speaks of a similar experience. But a wounded

spirit is another thing altogether. It speaks of damage to the inner being which may display itself in any one of a number of relatively mild depressions to severe psychosomatic illness. At a minor level it is difficult perhaps to be patient. At a more severe level it is difficult to know how to treat. An unharmed and buoyant spirit will keep a person going through all sorts of reverses and when a believer enlists the aid of the Holy Spirit resources become available to secure a passage through the most gruelling situations. Problems become challenges and shameful opposition reasons for joy. When the apostles were beaten for the sake of Christ “they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5.41). The Jewish Christians were urged to “call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion on me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Hebrews 10.32-34).

18.15. By mastering and seeking, knowledge is obtained. By welcoming and listening, opportunities for educational attainment avail themselves. If this is the mark of the prudent and wise person, how much more shall the believer long for opportunities to grow in the knowledge of the faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

18.16. It is not just bribes that are in mind here. A generous and wealthy benefactor with vast sums at his disposal will have far-reaching acclaim and receive national or even international honours. How much more shall believers make room for the Father, the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1.17) and honour the Saviour who gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4.8) through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12. 8-11)!

18.17. A person may not be so good as he thinks he is and whether under cross-examination in a court of law; a searching viva voce for a doctorate; or simply iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27.17) when a friend tests the validity of his friend’s first principles or assumptions, he will discover he has much to learn and has not yet achieved perfection of understanding. It may be difficult to refute a clever man but if he is an enemy to the gospel the Lord will always raise up one to expose the falsity of his reasoning.

18.18. The Holy Spirit taught us in Proverbs 16.33 that “the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.” In secular sports and minor matters the toss of a coin is accepted as deciding who goes first or who takes which end - whether or not any advantage is conferred by so doing. In matters of great importance, when there is nothing to choose as far as anybody can see between two people or two courses of action, the jurisdiction of the LORD, who knows all issues better than men and what the future holds in a way they cannot, is obtained by the way in which the

lot falls. It is not to be thought of as “chance;” but as an accurate disposition of the Lord’s sovereign will. All alike must abide by this rule. However, a modern lottery is simply gambling and, as a means of obtaining that which is unearned and is taken from others (though by their ill-advised consent), is not a means of guidance but, for most who participate, of poverty.

18.19. While we should not have to be in continual servitude to the strong will of an overweening person, if we do succeed in alienating a former friend or brother or sister in the faith, it will indeed take much longer to win them back than to lose them, if indeed they can be mollified at all. This is military picture language. A well fortified city may take many months to besiege and the assailants may not succeed in taking it but have to retreat emptyhanded. A brother offended may well engage in subsequent opposition and it will restrain energy from other work which could be accomplished to deal with his issues. As the scripture says, “if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12.18).

18.20. This is a reminder of the first part of 12.14. The picture language is straightforward. What goes into the mouth through the lips will satisfy the stomach. The fruit of the mouth and the increase of the lips refers to speech; especially the giving of good advice or the preaching of the gospel or witnessing to the Saviour’s name. Men will repay in ordinary times and help in bad times for the kindness and wisdom they have received and enjoyed.

18.21. John Gill puts it well. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” “Of witnesses, according to the testimony they bear; of judges, according to the sentence they pass; of teachers, according to the doctrine they teach; of all men, who, by their well or ill speaking, bring death or life to themselves and others. Some, by their tongues, by the too free use of them, or falsehood they utter, are the cause of death to themselves and others; and some, by their silence, or by their prudent speech and prevalent intercession, secure or obtain life for themselves and others; yea, judgment at the last day will proceed according to a man’s words, “by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12.37). The tongue is the instrument either of a great deal of good, or a great deal of evil. “And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” That delight to be talkative; that love to use the tongue, whether in a good or in a bad way, shall accordingly be recompensed; shall enjoy the advantages or disadvantages arising from it.”

In World War 2 there were posters in railway compartments, on stations and in the streets and shops saying, “Careless talk costs lives.” Meaning that spies might overhear and use for enemy advantage our supposedly innocent words and that it was therefore right to be guarded in our speech.

18.22. While it is true that men may do better than they know, the opposite can happen also. The sense is that the finding of a good wife is the making of a man and, though marriage is always and everywhere right (but not always granted), where it is granted it is a mark of the Lord's favour. To have received such a favour and yet reject the Lord is providing fuel for the Lord's anger without a doubt.

18.23. It would be good to read Matthew 18.23-35 as an exposition of this proverb. Though the one servant, so far from being rich was in debt to the tune of ten thousand talents, he was in a position of power and superiority over the other servants, one of whom was in a similar plight, but whose debt was comparatively small. He used exactly the same words of pleading to the senior servant as that servant had used to his lord. But to no avail, although the Lord had been merciful to him. We see from the parable of the Lord Jesus Christ that He will deal mercifully with entreaties and that, therefore, believers should not deal roughly with their fellows.

18.24. Here we have another of the "top ten" proverbs. "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Friendliness both keeps friends and makes friends. Believers should always be welcoming to those who come to their church. In the name of the dear Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom pre-eminently these words, "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," are true. Even the Saviour's enemies observed Him to be the "friend of sinners" (Luke 7.34).