

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 19

There are twelve proverbs in the Book of Proverbs which commence with the word “better” and seven in the book of Ecclesiastes. In fact, at 21.9; 21.19; 25.24 our translators have added (in italics) the words “It is” otherwise they too would begin with “Better” so I have included them in the following list. They are to be found at:- Proverbs 15.16; 15.17; 16.8; 16.19; 17.1; 19.1; 21.9; 21.19; 25.7; 25.24; 27.10; 28.6. There are additional proverbs which have the same idea but the expression “better” is more hidden in the verse, not so striking in its force, though the contrast is as effective. The Ecclesiastes ones are to be found at:- 4.6; 4.9; 4.13; 5.5; 6.9; 7.2; 7.5; 7.8 where 4.9 has additionally been included (and I might have included one or two others) where the contrast is as clear as if the sentence had begun that way.

Because they are memorable, sometimes witty, and always pithy they are worth learning by heart and, with that in mind, I have listed them below, without commenting. Some I have already commented on, and the others in Proverbs I will comment on when we reach them.

15.16. “Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.”

15.17. “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”

16.8. “Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.”

16.19. “Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.”

17.1. “Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.”

19.1. “Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.”

21.9. “*It is* better to dwell in the corner of a housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.”

21.19. “*It is* better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.”

25.7. "...better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen."

25.24. "*It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.*"

27.10. "...better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off."

28.6. "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."

It is noticeable that some themes recur. The longest one (25.7) is alluded to by the Lord Jesus Christ at Luke 14. 8-11.

In Ecclesiastes we find:-

4.6. "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit."

4.9. (mentioned in the introduction above) "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour."

4.13. "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished."

5.5. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."

6.9. "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire."

7.2. "*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.*"

7.5. "*It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.*"

7.8. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit."

These are instructions that the Lord Jesus Christ would have us know to walk in wisdom, seeing that He has been made by God to be our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1.30). To this end, as we have seen, He alludes to Proverbs 25.7.

Now, then, to return to Proverbs 19.1. If there is any form of perversion in a person's heart it will reveal itself through the lips. It is foolishness unto him (1 Corinthians 2.14). Better to be genuine and straightforward, though poor.

19.2. We regard it as a priority to feed our minds with knowledge but many are reticent about feeding the soul. Reading the Bible feeds the soul. Hearing the preaching of the Gospel and the Bible explained feeds the soul. Worshipping God through Jesus Christ our

Lord feeds the soul. Observing the Lord's Day to do these things provides the foundation for feeding the soul. To get ourselves involved in any activity without due consideration for our soul's welfare is ill-advised haste.

19.3. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child" (22.15) and the child is the father of the man. If we grow up unrestrained, mentally, morally, or physically, we shall do that which is right in our own eyes and resist the instruction that would be good for us. A badly made yoke, or a well-made yoke made to fit two unequally matched animals, causes rubbing, which expresses much the same idea as fretting. The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11. 28-30). No fret.

19.4. The unwise will interpret this proverb to be an encouragement to pursue wealth. The wise will interpret it to teach them to be friendly and neighbourly to the poor without discrimination.

19.5. This is such an important theme, seeing that the natural bent of the heart is to deceive or conceal, in short to lie, that we need to be often counselled not to be tempted to bear false witness to suit our own situation. This theme was first taken up at 6.19 where a false witness is described as one of the things the Lord hates.

19.6. There is nothing wrong with seeking favour but everything wrong with attempting to bribe. The Lord cannot be bribed, but He acts with grace (a synonym for "favour") towards those who seek His mercy. An earthly prince may limit his favours. The Lord God is bountiful with them to those who ask aright, in sincerity and truth.

19.7. If the unregenerate act like this, how much more should the believer not do so! Job cried out, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends" (Job 19.21 – and the whole passage Job 19. 7-28 is worth re-reading at this time.) Let us not turn a deaf ear to the afflicted. James also speaks to this theme (James 2. 15-16), "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, and be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

19.8. This verse is a revision, a reminder, of the early chapters about getting wisdom. At no point in our lives should we neglect to add the things which promote the soul's growth. "...giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1. 5-8).

19.9. Virtually the same as 19.5. If the veiled threat of “shall not escape” (19.5) escapes the false witness, “shall perish” will surely bring it home, if he takes heed at all.

19.10. Though it sometimes happens that a servant usurps the monarchy it is such a reversal of what is wholesome that it forms powerful picture language here. If a fool shows delight in something, it is not likely to be in that which is genuinely wholesome. The unsavoury story of Abimelech in Judges 9 is an illustration, for Abimelech though one of many brethren was the son of a servant girl (Judges 9.18). Judges 9 is worth re-reading for the sake of the force of one of the few Old Testament parables, which it contains.

19.11. This is the most elegant language to describe a noble virtue. Sins committed against us do not have to be dealt with in anger, self-righteousness or revenge. Our “pound of flesh” does not have to be demanded to make satisfaction. It is a mark of the highest character to overlook a transgression. Whatever hurt was inflicted is borne bravely and banished. In face of injustice or any consideration which might stir up wrath, it is wise to put it aside; temporarily if justice demands it, permanently if forgivable and unrepeated, entirely at his discretion. “Wisdom is justified of her children” (Matthew 11.19) and he is free, and wise, so to act. The Lord Jesus Christ bids us to have compassion as He has had pity upon us and to forgive every one his brother their trespasses from the heart (Matthew 18. 33,35).

19.12. The gentle distilling of the dew upon the earth is a frequent abundant renewal of the earth. This is what the favour of a king imparts to a favoured citizen, and this is how the King of Kings imparts the bread of life continually to the believer. To have angered the king is to be as apprehensive as any who hear the fearsome roar of a lion aroused. “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7.11).

19.13. The first part of this proverb is not dissimilar to others we have met (10.1; 15.20; 17.21; 17.25 – see how often we have to revise it!) but its being linked to a foolish wife is new. It is good for a husband and a wife to keep each other on the narrow way that leads to life but it can happen that a mother has so often to check the children, perhaps in a multitude of little things, that it becomes second nature to her to spread this demeanour into other relationships and situations increasingly frequently that it even intrudes into the matrimonial relationship. It drips away and little by little erodes patience, confidence and even affection.

19.14. It is not wrong to come into an inheritance; it is the managing of it that shows whether the heir is worthy or not. Many do not have a physical inheritance, but we all have inherited traits. What we enter into becomes the data of our lives, and from this we work out our salvation (Philippians 2.12). Even “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). Though this couplet is not exactly parallel, its diversity heightens the one thing verse 14

does have in common with the previous verse and that is the mention of “wife.” The prudence that she has learned is from the Lord, and a wise wife is the gift of God.

19.15. Laziness is a very difficult habit to break and is best overcome in childhood. The welfare state may disguise the hunger but there is an inherent dissatisfaction at times in the lazy heart none the less. If we do not nurture our souls then that which is the most important part of our very natures will starve and shall perish by default in everlasting destruction.

19.16. When a lawyer said to the Lord Jesus Christ, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked him what was written in the law. To which he replied with an excellent summary of the 10 commandments, which Jesus commended, Himself replying, “This do, and thou shalt live.” But, of course, the thing is impossible. We cannot keep them all the time and so they fail to bring us eternal life. They are a good guide to life and are as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, Who alone fulfilled all the law and therefore alone merited eternal salvation. Our salvation is through faith in Him. For the believer the Saviour has given a new commandment that we love one another (John 14.17). To be heedless both of the ordinary rules of life and the way of eternal salvation is death.

19.17. One of the biographies of the missionary Jim Elliot is entitled, “He is no fool.” It is taken from his favourite saying, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” When a believer gives what cannot be repaid as unto the Lord, the Lord will see to it that gain (not necessarily financial) will come of it to his soul’s welfare and nothing that he needs (as distinct from what he might like) will be withheld.

19.18. It may not suit the modern methods, which raise feral children as likely as not, but corporal punishment (of course, within measure) is commended in the Bible. Swiftly administered and swiftly over it is in that respect better than the long drawn out system of reprimands.

19.19. A furious person with a vicious temper has to be restrained by punishment else the temper will never be curbed, and, even then, it is often with great difficulty.

19.20. It is a privilege to grow wise with years and if the elderly cannot do many things they once did, they can dispense wisdom and thus influence the next generations for good. Their words will often be welcomed, especially by grandchildren and greatgrandchildren. There is a time for accumulating wisdom, never a time for not assimilating it and old age is especially a time for dispensing it.

19.21. This is a famous and memorable proverb. From it have come the words, “Man proposes but God disposes.” A person’s bright ideas may not be so bright; or may be at the wrong time; or, as with David in the matter of building the Temple, he may be the wrong person. It is what God intends which counts. And His purpose and counsel shall stand.

Nowhere is it more important to believe this than in the matter of the purposes which Almighty God has vested in Christ (Ephesians 1. 9-12).

19.22. God is generous in his assessment of kind thoughts (2 Corinthians 8.12) and will outstrip our intended kindness by His own kindnesses, as He did with David (2 Samuel 7.11 – “Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house”), commending him that he did well that it was in his heart to build the Temple (1 Kings 8.18). If, being poor, we cannot be lavish with our contributions we may still in our poor way show kindness. We should neither pretend what we haven’t done nor exaggerate what we have.

19.23. Not that being citizens of earth we shall not experience evil; even Christ knew man’s evil to bear it for His people. To be visited with evil means that it shall adhere to us and be enjoined upon us, given over, even, to it. A believer, “though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down” (Psalm 37.24). “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures” (Psalm 36.8).

19.24. This is, perhaps, the most comic of the proverbs. Oh! it is so hard, while he yawns (which is surely harder) to be bothered even to eat. Yet it is deadly serious. The lazy person doesn’t work and therefore is not entitled to eat. More to the point he becomes incapacitated for work, and reduced supplies mean a reduced stomach and the desire to eat is atrophied too.

19.25. We have met the scorner before in 9.8. A scorner is best avoided. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” is how the Book of Psalms begins (Psalm 1.1). The contrary truth is also the same as that which is taught in 9.8 that reproof bestowed upon a wise man will increase his store of wisdom.

19.26. “Wasteth” means to “lay waste”, to be a wastrel, that is to demolish in a spendthrift way the estate, the resources of his father. The prodigal son is an instance of this, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me...and not many days after the younger son...wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all...he began to be in want (Luke 15. 12-14). To chase away may involve physical banishing from his presence but essentially means the undermining of all the values his mother had taught him over many years.

19.27. This is the heartfelt plea of a father to a wayward son. It is the plea of our Heavenly Father, delivered by the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the wayward children of men.

19.28. Here we see combined two strands which we have met before, that of the false witness and the scorner. Indeed, a false witness by definition scorns justice and this proverb spells out the iniquity which the false witness might not have spotted, that he is a scorner and that he scorns one of the most basic rights of man, that of justice. Surely this should

convict him of his sin and lead him to repentance. Much is condensed into the second part of the proverb. By the mouth we eat; by the mouth we speak. With wicked words an evil person destroys, by eating up, what is good. This element of the thought is omitted; inferred. What he actually does is gulps down evil upon evil, feeding himself upon it with no taste whatever for what is good. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4.8).

19.29. The judicial system in a rightly ordered society is to punish sin. The judge decides on guilt and where it is necessary appoints the decreed punishment for scorners and fools. The punishment officers inflict it. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2. 13-14). In heaven, where there is no sin, there will be no need of such instruction or such punishment.