

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 20

20.1. The Bible does not actually forbid drinking wine but it does speak of temperance, that is self- control (Galatians 5.23), as a fruit of the Spirit. It instances Noah (Genesis 9.21) who “began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.” It led to shame and awoke prurience in Ham for which he and his descendants were cursed. The prophet Isaiah declares, “they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment” (Isaiah 28.7). It is very definitely unwise to be unfit for work through strong drink especially if our labour bears responsibility for people’s lives as a judge or people’s souls as a priest.

20.2. The fear which the powers that be instil may be terrifying if enforced with physical abuse. A low profile is the best response in such circumstances and great care is required to ascertain clearly the Lord’s will before believers declare to the faces of those that persecute them for their faith which is in Christ Jesus, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4.19-20). There is also the command, “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Matthew 10.23) and to know which course of action to take in perilous times will certainly be revealed - but to the humble, not the rash zealot.

20.3. Perhaps Solomon had in mind his father David who, “when...the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies” (2 Samuel 7.1,11) conceived the idea of building the Temple; but God said to him, “Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood” (1 Chronicles 28.3). If David had rest from his enemies as a public figure, how much more shall it be an honour to a private individual to cease from private strife. Meddling where there is no need to, and no right, stirs a hornet’s nest and it will be the worse for the one involved.

20.4. We have met lazybones in 13.4. but as he is such a familiar figure, and could be insidiously disguised as ourselves, so he is brought to our attention again by the Holy

Spirit. It may be too cold for him personally but his excuse will probably be that the ground is too hard for ploughing. Just as we are to sow beside all waters (Isaiah 32.20) so we are to work in all weathers.

20.5. The first part of this proverb is a reminder of 18.4. The wise heart is pictured as being like a well. Whether it is the counsellor who draws out of his own wise heart, or the one seeking advice who elicits the help, it is in any case good to be in receipt of excellent advice and good to give it.

20.6. The Lord Jesus Christ takes up this theme, “When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men” (Matthew 6.2). “Have it to thyself before God,” (Romans 14.22) is spoken of about faith but the principle extends to every deed that should be exercised in faith. So that the one who exercises his faithfulness, keeping it as much as possible between himself and God, is comparatively rare, and we should endeavour to be such ourselves.

20.7. Whether simply natural justice or, better still, the man who is righteous in God’s sight, it is for that person to be consistent with his profession. If he/she is, then the children will follow suit for there is that in integrity which is persuasive and winsome as it issues from absolute standards of truth.

20.8 If that person is a monarch or has power he has only to look and that will frighten away all evildoers and even prevent them from pursuing their evil from afar. We do not see the Lord, and therefore it must be a powerful inward spiritual impulse to enable a person to apprehend that “look.”

20.9. Everyone must have the eyes cast down in the presence of the King of kings for, tested by ultimate standards, none can stand before Almighty God. It is the deceitfulness of relativism, that is comparing ourselves favourably with others who are worse than ourselves, to make us think that we are better off than we are. We must judge ourselves by God’s standards and according to the requirements of His commandments and accordingly apply for mercy in Christ.

20.10. Again, absolute standards are the subject here. Double standards, changeable dealings are hateful to the Lord who loves absolute justice. It is not acceptable to the living God, who changes not, that there should be one standard for one and another for another, or differing standards according to time and place.

20.11. This is another famous proverb. The proverb means that all adults and teenagers are known by their doings, whether pure and right. It is so far true as to be true of children “even.” How many young people growing up have a reputation for purity? For loving only what is right? How many adults? This is not a proverb to insist on a certain standard of behaviour for children in isolation from later on in life. It is the opposite of

the “don’t do as I do, do as I say” mentality. We are all known by God, who knows us altogether, as to whether our work is pure and right. If we are convicted of sin in this regard by the Holy Spirit, then we should not delay to apply for mercy to the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting as we confess our sins to Him.

20.12. The most succinct comment on this is Psalm 94.9. “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?” he that formed the eye, shall he not see?” This has been a group of proverbs about the absoluteness of God in all His ways and that mankind would be wise to conform to them absolutely.

20.13. We have met this theme before, because we all know times when we don’t want to get out of bed and for some this is an endemic failing. As the hymnwriter says, “the daily round, the common task will furnish all we ought to ask.”

20.14. Here the picture language takes us to market. We have something to sell. “It’s not worth much”, says the dealer and if the seller is not satisfied he goes elsewhere and finds that, for the most part, all buyers say the same. But the dealer sees his chance for profit, and when he has duped the seller he boasts about the “treasure” he has got so cheaply. A fair price and open dealing is the requirement of the Lord.

20.15. There is gold, and there are rubies, but then again there is the teacher of wisdom and the scripture knows which is to be preferred and advises us accordingly.

20.16. Here is an oft recurrent theme, an urgent matter, against which the Holy Spirit would warn His people. Where there is a combination of a wastrel or spendthrift and a relatively poor society this is a frequent temptation. The Spirit teaches us throughout this book – at 6.1; 11.15; 17.18 and it is going to occur twice more 22.26-27; 27.13. Envisage three parties. The man in financial difficulties. His friend. The lender. The lender receives from the friend a valuable item of clothing as pledge for the repayment of the money loaned. It would, of course, be worth more than the money lent. This scripture tells us that, such is human nature, the man will almost certainly default and that, as we say, the friend might as well “kiss goodbye” to his possession.

20.17. This is powerful picture language. It reminds us of 9.17, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” “Bread” stands for all sorts of food, and even for “earnings” as when we speak of “earning our bread” or “earning our corn.” If you have ever eaten sandwiches on a sandy beach you will fully understand most of the force of the imagery. The part of the picture which the sand does not, perhaps, quite bring out is the “afterwards.” As we might say, in addition it leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. Here then is a picture in any walk of life of ill-gotten gains being gloated over and then conscience strikes for a far longer period than the enjoyment lasted. Another hymnwriter speaks of “pleasures that can never cloy” and this is quite the opposite.

20.18. This is a proverb that is always and everywhere true. Even our heavenly Father in the counsels of eternity, as we say, “deliberated” with the other Persons of the Trinity. Church officers, in particular, should not act unilaterally. To be able to give and receive good and sound advice in any situation is invaluable and is something everyone should aim to achieve. Much depends on attitude and manner, winsomeness and persuasiveness, as well as the substance of the advice if good counsel is to be acceptable.

20.19. There is much “revision” in this chapter. Here we revert to the theme of 11.13 and 18.8. Talebearing in a child and gossip in an adult are much the same except that the latter is more reprehensible. Those with time on their hands may well be afflicted by this malady but it may also be a character defect which needs to be addressed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He is willing to do so, else we would not have His frequent pleadings in this book. Flattery opens us up to unguarded speech, to say nothing of giving us false ideas about our own importance. We must be on guard.

20.20. Here is disobedience to the 5th commandment (Exodus 20.12), the first commandment with promise (Ephesians 6.2), “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” All promises have to be “claimed” (Ezekiel 36.37 – “I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them”). We have so much of our parents in us: our very characteristics are inherited, though selected for us by the Lord. Even if our parents were not perfect we must honour them for these things at least, and by obedience while we are under age. Now, cursing goes much further. It speaks of an aggressive rejection and qualifies the perpetrator for the loss of the length of days spoken of in the commandment. More than that “they die obscure” (as Milton says of those who are atheists) lonely, unheralded and without hope unless they repent while there is yet time.

20.21. Again, the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15. 11-32) is the best commentary on this verse. It does have a happy ending, in the sense of a salvaged one, but not in the matter of the inheritance which was forfeited.

20.22. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12.19). That itself is a repetition of Deuteronomy 32.35, “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence.” In Hebrews 10.30 it is written, “Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord.” Mankind is apt to hit back harder than the injury received and if sin is not to be added to sin, injury to injury, it must be left to the all-righteous God in justice and in mercy to deal with our real or supposed wrongs. He alone knows how to evaluate them and how to proportion, as well as apportion, blame. “Wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee” is a very succinct summary. If we nurse a sense of grievance, plead this promise that He will put it right.

20.23 also has another succinct conclusion, “a false balance is not good.” Again, this is no new theme; we had it as recently as verse 10. Such pithy words, much in little, enable us to encapsulate the whole matter in our thinking. If we have been mis-sold or cheated we may plead these words before the LORD who, as specified in the previous proverb, will repay.

20.24. Perhaps this is one of the most far-reaching of all proverbs for it presumes a whole approach to life. All we have and are – our family tree, our own personal makeup, the times in which we live, our location, our wealth or poverty, our education – these are all of the Lord. It follows that not to believe in the Lord is to walk in darkness. But even in the fully committed believer there is much that he/she does not understand. A sin which we never knew was lurking there in our character may suddenly surface. “That’s not like me,” we think. But it is like us. It’s the first time it’s surfaced, but it was always there waiting. What we do not understand, we should daily commit to the Lord, for “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8.28). Contrary events are an especial vexation, so we must commit them most especially to the Lord.

20.25. The best commentary on this proverb is Malachi 3.8-10. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse...and prove me now herewith...if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” A rash vow may perhaps come under this heading when the votary scrabbles about to find a way to be loosed of a vow which he cannot keep and which he did not have to make. The expression “devoureth” suggests rather the robbing of temples or sequestering church funds and then seeking to cover it up by a feigned investigation. Maybe Romans 2.22 “thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?” is also an interpretation of this proverb, where it is envisaged that one who would never dream of worshipping idols feels quite happy in cheating God, “devouring” in that sense, as per Malachi 1.7-8.

20.26. Here is a powerful expression, that one might have thought would have become a proverb in the English language, but hasn’t – to bring the wheel over someone. The picture is of a chariot ploughing through the enemy in a field of battle. So will a wise ruler deal peremptorily with ungodly opposition if his rule is to survive. So must we deal with wicked thoughts.

20.27. The enlightened spirit which is in man is His Holy Spirit, deep calling unto deep (Psalm 42.7), the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit (Romans 8.16), shining in the inner life to bring to light hidden wickedness that it may be disposed of. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139. 23-24).

20.28. Psalm 45.4 sings prophetically of King Jesus that He rides prosperously “because of truth and meekness and righteousness, traits of the King of Kings but by no means of all in authority.” In Christ, “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85.10) and this is why His people fall under Him; love Him.

20.29. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9.23-24). “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1. 27-29). There is a happy progression in this proverb. The young man’s strength fails little by little, or, if wounded or he meets with an accident, suddenly. But he is wise if, in seeking God in Christ, he pursues wisdom which will adorn him; as a man prudent in his own doings, and as a counsellor and example to others in old age.

20.30. One design of corporal punishment, vividly expressed for effect (but not intended absolutely literally for stripes are not on the belly nor is it the severity, the blueness which accomplishes the design) is to be a powerful deterrent to evil whether the punishment is observed in another or received in one’s own body. It is designed to deal with the innermost thoughts and motives and we are wise if we learn from our mistakes before we have to learn from the punishment of those errors. There is a worse than corporal punishment, as Paul writes, “and...men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (Romans 1.27). “God gave them over also to a reprobate mind” (Romans 1.28). But it is always the inwardness of our errors of which the Holy Spirit desires to make us aware and from which He lives to free us, for our perfection is the ultimate aim. “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the work of thine own hands” (Psalm 138.8).