

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 22

22.1. To be held in honour because of real worth or to have a good reputation well deserved makes life both pleasant and fruitful. There is similar encouragement in Ecclesiastes 7.1. The apostle John writes, “Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true” (3 John 12). It is a commendation which elicits trust. His name has been perpetuated down the years to encourage us to be approved also, for the scripture holds him up as an example (3 John 11-12), “He that doeth good is of God...Demetrius hath good report of all men.” How many believers have served their generation with all honesty down the years is known only to the Lord; but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ moulds such characters. Where it is possible people like to clear their names if they have been impugned; where it is not possible believers leave it with the Lord who knows the heart. Money can't buy it. And it is to be preferred, should there be a choice, at the expense of an opulent lifestyle.

22.2. That we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1.26) should give us kind hearts towards our fellow men. That we must all die should keep us from pride.

22.3. David writes (Psalm 57.1), “in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.” Sheltering from a storm is often wise even though we encounter delay. So this is picture language to seek the Saviour's help to see from the scriptures the nature of the storms we may expect. And while life must go on, to hide ourselves in Him. The advice the Saviour gave in Matthew 24.15-22 was heeded during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and historians have recorded that every believer escaped. The Saviour also advised (Matthew 24.44) “be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” He is “the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32.2).

22.4. This would not be the commonly accepted, worldly wisdom as the means of obtaining riches, honour and life. But spiritually it is always so. In Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2.3). Paul speaking of the riches of the Saviour's goodness and forbearance goes on to mention those “who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality” (Romans 2.4,7).

“Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Psalm 75.6-7). Jesus says that true spiritual and eternal life is vested in Him, “I am the life” (John 11.25;14.6).

22.5. The one who turns away from God will frequently find sharp hurts in life and become trapped in constant sins. As they are not pleasant experiences he would be wise to conclude that there is need of a turning back to God who would soothe the hurts and set him free, upon repentance. To seek the daily leading of the Lord will be to give a wide berth to such temptations and habits.

22.6. Here is another celebrated proverb. Training in the ways of the Lord and in every right behaviour is essential for a child for, as we shall see at 22.15, “foolishness is bound in the heart of a child.” Left to his own devices a child will inevitably go astray. There are, of course, kind and patient ways of training which Christian parents (the objects themselves of the Saviour’s love and mercy) must consistently show. Such principles, standards, words of wisdom will remain for ever and be equally valid throughout the whole of adult life, for the child is the father of the man.

22.7. We live in a society of borrowers so this proverb is a timely reminder. Though we may live in a free society we are ruled over by the rich when we are in debt. The final payment of a heavy mortgage may seem a release every bit as much as the freedom a lifetime slave might have gained after many years’ service. The great New Testament lesson is spelled out in Romans 13.7-8. In the midst of all life’s indebtedness, show Christian love. “Render...to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe to no man anything, but to love one another.”

22.8. The Bible often uses the familiar picture of sowing and reaping. The cycle of the year’s crops is well understood. Over the longer period of life it makes a salutary lesson concerning our actions. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6.7-8). Job 4.8 reads “Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.” The relief of the nation at the demise of the king of Babylon and his enforcers is described in Isaiah 14.5-7, “The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing.” Heaven will be such a relief from earth’s cruelties, injustices and oppressions.

22.9. “Bountiful eye” is a wonderful expression. An eye to spot need and to anticipate where help will be required; coupled with a willingness and an ability to provide

liberally at one's own expense is all summed up in these brief words. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psalm 41.1).

22.10. We have constantly met the scorner in this book of Proverbs, for he is frequently met with in life. He is to be dismissed, at the very least from our own thoughts; and from public office if wisdom is to prevail. Contention, strife and reproach, with all the searchings of heart they cause, are all the results, not to say aims, of the scorner.

22.11. What does the King of kings love to see? Purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5.8). "Purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4.8). Of the Saviour Himself it is written, "Grace is poured into the lips" (Psalm 45.2). No wonder He loves to see it in His children! "They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke 4.22). Therefore "let your speech be always with grace" (Colossians 4.6). Let it be "sound speech which cannot be condemned" (Titus 2.8). "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matthew 12.35) and that includes the words of his lips. The friendship of the Saviour is to be prized above all things. He has laid down His life for His people. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends" (John 15.13-15).

22.12. Though the Lord is a spirit, He is aware of all things and remembers all things which He observes so as to judge the world. "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16.9). "Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?" "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job 31.4; 34.21). Even the wise words of a wise man will be overthrown if he is in transgression, as with Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17.14).

22.13. There may or may not be a lion. It may be prudent, if there is, to delay a while (22.3) but it is more likely to be an excuse when there is no such danger. There is no end to the excuses which a lazybones makes to avoid work.

22.14. Here we revert to the theme of earlier chapters. The strange woman is one who is estranged from God and all good. To be ensnared by such is the fate of those whom God abhors for their sin. The picture is the snare of a deep pit from which it is impossible to escape without help. The Lord will help the repentant sinner who forsakes that which God abhors.

22.15. By nature a child is wrapped up in silly, inconsequential things. Corporal punishment administered appropriately and proportionately in season does more good than mere cautionary words and probably hurts less.

22.16. Micah 2. 1-4 speaks of what God will do (in principle – the specific destruction is not mentioned except that it is the overrunning of the land) to those who annexe the lands of the poor to augment their own. Unless forced to do so, a man is not likely to surrender his possessions to the wealthy, unless he feels that he may gain by making a deal with the rich. It will not be long before the agreement will go by default.

The New Testament teaches us in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content (Philippians 4.11). It teaches us that “having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6.8). The Lord Jesus Christ, presenting Himself before us as the most precious possession of all, bids us be content with such things as we have: “for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13.5). “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6.9-10). “Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?” So it is good not to be such.

22.17-21. However much we know it in theory, we always need reminding in the midst of life’s business that we need the Lord’s wisdom and direction at all times. So Solomon pauses in the midst of these sundry subjects to bring us back to the Saviour and His wisdom. Let us learn carefully Christ’s words which bring wisdom and apply them as closely to the detail of our lives as we can. Let us accumulate knowledge, not for head knowledge merely nor to feed pride, but that its application may lead us in green pastures, beside the still waters and in the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23.2-3). Paul writes in Colossians 2.23 of things which demonstrate a mere show of wisdom. The wisdom that is in Christ, and obtained by the scriptures, will keep us from false religions, false prophets, false doctrines (which may seem learned) and every false way.

Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness and peace (3.17). Walking with Christ is a delightful road (Luke 24.13-32). “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command you this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6.5-7).

When David says in Psalm 40.10, “I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart” he does not mean that he has not memorised its teachings but that he has publicised them, for he goes on to say, “I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.” David taught Solomon well, so that he writes “That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.” Whether through public preaching in the

sanctuary, or by the private reading of the Bible, the Lord has graciously provided pleasant and life-giving instruction.

Luke in the introduction to his gospel (Luke 1.4) writes, “that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed”. He is echoing Solomon’s words of verse 21, “that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth.” We need to be founded on truth, for that is certainty. If our instruction has been in the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ and his scriptures how blessed we are! This verse is also echoed in 1 Peter 3.15, “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” The Proverbs are addressed to his son (2.1;3.1;5.1;6.1;7.1) and to all the children of men (4.1) and in this pause Solomon summarises, “have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge?” It is therefore a good time to revise and consider what we have attained now, that we didn’t know before we started.

22.22-23. This couplet revisits verse 16. We are not to take advantage of a person’s vulnerability. “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him at safety from him that puffeth at him” (Psalm 12.5). And, if we are the oppressed, we may claim that help. This is beautifully expressed in Psalm 68.18 concerning the Saviour’s victory over all the powers of evil, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive.” Jeremiah 30.16-17 spells out the same truth, so needful to those who are oppressed and might be tempted to forget that, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12.19).

22.24-25. Anger and fury are contagious – caught by contact. Believers are not to join forces with protestors and zealots even to resist an opposition which they have in common. Pilate and Herod were made friends, united against Christ, when they had been previously at enmity (Luke 23.12). It doesn’t bode well.

22.26-27. Again, we have frequently met this theme beginning with 6.1. We may be required to pay up at the most difficult of times and lose even basic necessities such as our very bedding.

22.28. The law enjoined, “Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour’s landmark (that is, his boundary hedge or fence, or markers), which they of old time have set in thine inheritance.” “Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark” (Deuteronomy 19.14; 27.17). It was a great sin in Ahab and Jezebel to confiscate Naboth’s vineyard and put him to death (1 Kings 21.4 – but read the whole chapter). The full extent of this injunction is covered by the 10th commandment, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Exodus 20.17). Our neighbour is defined (Luke 10.29-37) as anyone with whom we come in contact.

22.29. In any occupation the careful and diligent businessman, tradesman, professional or labouring man will achieve expertise which will cause him to be sought after. He may receive a royal warrant or land an excellent contract or just be appreciated by his employer. There is a brilliant turn of phrase to describe this matter in Deuteronomy 28.13, “the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail.” The verse continues, “and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God.”