

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 23

23.1-3. The train of thought now begins to be rather more extended than in recent chapters. This triplet speaks to us about appetite. The gratification of any of our lusts is an unbecoming spectacle and those who see us greedily going about our pet habits will downgrade us in their estimation. That is not a good Christian witness. Those who are in authority may take advantage of our evident weakness for their own ends. We have all heard of spies entrapped by spies of the opposite sex engaged in counter espionage. There are indeed very dangerous, if not deadly, situations to which we may be thus exposing ourselves. The Saviour's servants should not be sitting at table with Satan's servants and putting themselves at risk by being indebted to them.

23.4-5. As we have already seen, and it needs to be often repeated, "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" (1 Timothy 6.9). It was the folly of the rich young ruler (Mark 10.17-25) that though he valued eternal life enough to beseech for it, if it was going to be at the cost of his wealth and the position which his wealth entailed, it could only take second place. And though he was in touching distance of the Saviour's love (Mark 10.21) he rejected it in favour of continuing in his wealthy lifestyle. Wealth and honour is indeed a heady mixture!

All the media advertise and exalt the trappings of wealth and encourage getting rich. This is what is meant by man's wisdom, "thine own" wisdom. It is marvellous picture language which challenges us not to set our eyes on that which is not, in the sense that it soon vanishes; as speedily as an eagle makes off with its prey. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6.19-21). Psalm 49 also warns us severely (16-20), "Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. He shall go to the

generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.”

23.6-8. Jesus said (Mark 7.21), “out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts...an evil eye...” He also asked the question, in a parable, of those who murmured saying, “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” The reference is to jealousy and envy; it might also include those who look upon others to trap them or destroy them, for whatever reason. Christians are urged not to get closely involved with such for the trap will surely be sprung. As the little bit of cheese in a mousetrap will be the mouse’s death for so little gain of such short duration, so the morsel on offer is only on offer to bait a victim to destruction.

23.9. We have met this theme and will meet it again. It would be casting pearls before swine (Matthew 7.6) to speak the gospel to a drunkard while he is drunk. But leave a tract with him, or speak when he is afterwards sober, and the result might be different. The wise evangelist will look to the Lord for sensible and opportune moments.

23.10-11. This is a return to 22.28 but with a different lesson. It teaches us that the same illustration or text may serve to illustrate different truths. As when Jesus, in similar teaching but on quite different occasions, spoke of the poor (Luke 6.20) and the poor in spirit (Matthew 5.3). Not only should the distinctions of ownership not be blurred, but trespassing on another’s property with damage in mind, especially when, as being fatherless, they cannot defend their rights, is expressly forbidden. God is their kinsman, the One with the right to redeem. His promise is to defend them and it is folly to mess with Him. The Saviour is the kinsman Redeemer of His children by His blood and it is written, “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety...” (Psalm 12.5).

The Lord pleads the cause of the afflicted (22.23). He pleads the cause of the fatherless. Therefore we should never defraud the defenceless in any way; we should not do it at all, or anything similar, but we particularly bring down the wrath of God if we attack those whom He defends. He pleads our cause, too, and invites us to plead our cause with Him. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1.18).

23.12. This is a familiar theme but because of our natural lack of purpose and concentration, particularly in the spiritual life, it needs often to be repeated by the Holy Spirit. Here the emphasis is on application; as it was said to Timothy as a young minister seeking to benefit others and helping them in the Christian faith, so it needs to be said to us in our spheres, “study to show thyself approved unto God” (2 Timothy 2.15) where the word translated “study” means “hasten,” or “give application to”, and is translated in 2 Timothy 4.9 as “do thy diligence.” The natural heart is prone to light

things and immaterial matters. We are to take our growth, and that of others, in the faith seriously.

23.13-14. A child needs to know parameters of behaviour and the sooner they are learned, by and large, the sooner they are accepted. It is no kindness to allow behavioural matters to drift. A brief punishment, soon over, is best for the child and has lasting good effects. It is not a popular doctrine today and, as in many other things which remain acceptable, the misuse and abuse by some has brought an attempted blanket ban on corporal punishment. Wild undisciplined children will father wild, undisciplined adults who, when their turn comes to mould society, will bring about the “perilous times” spoken of in 2 Timothy 3.1 when Biblical truths will all be scorned. More importantly, a conformity to the requirements of family and a learning within the family circle that these are the ways to happy society are foundational in giving the understanding that the same will be true of the family of God.

23.15-16. A child who grows up being biddable, affectionate and obedient is a delight to parents and will be drawn closer in their affections. They will share more of the family issues with them and their progress will be a joy. Nowhere is this more true than that they should become believers and that they should no longer need to be taught to know the Lord, for they walk with Him themselves (Jeremiah 31.34). “Reins” means “kidneys” (as in the renal department of a hospital). We are all familiar with the constant need to go to the toilet when we are approaching something which is affecting us emotionally, such as an examination, an injection, a visit to the dentist. While that may not be quite so apparent when the news is good, the expression is put for anything that moves our emotions. Parents and delighted Christian friends will be affectionately moved to observe the progress of youthful understanding. Concerning the twelve year old Lord Jesus Christ, it is written, “all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” and “his mother kept all these sayings in her heart” (Luke 2.47,51).

23.17-18. The link is “heart” between this and the previous couplet. “Thine heart,” “my heart”, and now again “thine heart.” The classic passages concerning envy are the Psalms 37 and 73. “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like grass, and wither as the green herb” (Psalm 37.1-2). The verses which follow present a highly desirable positive response to replace such envy. Psalm 73 gives us a picture of the battle in the heart of one who finds it his/her besetting sin to be envious. “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73.3). It is a struggle to overcome and brings with it (as does all sinful reaction) a sense of shame. “If I say, I will speak thus (as in the previous verses); behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me” (Psalm 73.15-16). The whole matter comes to a climax with the same conclusion as in

Psalms 37 but attained with much more difficulty. The Psalms 37 and 73 describe the end of the wicked; our proverb that of the overcoming believer, “for surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.” “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth” (James 3.14). All our actions, not only against envy, are to be in the fear of God continually – “all the day long.”

23.19-21. From verse 15 we have the former style of pleading once again. “My son” and then the pleas of father and mother. The second of these pleas begins here. Wisdom to resist the temptation of alcohol and feasting. “Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh” (20). As James writes, though in another connection, “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3.15). “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4.3-4). “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying” (Romans 13.13).

23.22-23. The most precious possession is truth; and the most precious truth is the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Absolute values are not currently popular; and each of us is inclined to try to wriggle out of uncomfortable truths about ourselves. Invest in it; let truth be our most precious commodity. We are not to give up the truth for any expediency or convenience; to get us out of trouble, to curry favour or for any other reason. Wisdom, instruction and understanding are all ways of coming to the truth or, in the case of wisdom, practising the truth. To abandon these founding principles of life taught by a wise father and mother is to despise what they stand for. However much we may say that we love and respect our parents if we do not accept the truth of their teachings, most especially those rooted in the scriptures which make us wise unto the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, then we do despise and dishonour them in effect.

23.24-25. Nothing gives more lasting pleasure to a parent than to see a child converted and going on with the Lord Jesus Christ. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4) wrote the apostle John about those who had believed through his preaching and instruction and for whom he was a father in the faith.

23.26. This verse was a favourite text of the preachers of an earlier generation. Not Solomon but Christ is seen to be the speaker and a direct appeal is made in this verse for the affectionate allegiance to the person and gospel of the Saviour for life and eternity.

23.27. The rightful affections of the heart of a child should be towards their parents. When the independence of youth rightly approaches, that affection should be sustained and the parents' values espoused more strongly than ever, if they are right values. That affection should not be transferred to tempting lusts. A believer must not give way to temptation but hold his/her affection to the Saviour fast to the end. The dual temptations of harlotry and alcohol are repeated in these ensuing verses. The pleading of Christ is constant that we are to maintain our vessels pure. It is wonderful picture language of our bodies being maintained like a container kept spotless to carry pure and life-giving liquid. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4.4, "every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour."

What a loathsome reputation it is for a whore that her lifestyle and allurements be described as a "ditch." They are also described as a pit so narrow and so steep that there is no room to manoeuvre a way out to extricate oneself.

23.28 Her judgment before the Lord is great, for she has deliberately trapped the unwary and introduced such to her wiles. She is to a degree responsible for their downfall. Only the Lord knows how to apportion sentence when two share sin.

23.29-30. There is a remorseless mocking here – but totally with the aim, by ridicule, of making the sinner turn from the ruin of strong drink, and one who is not yet addicted from careering headlong down that path. For some the first drink may be too late. Six consequences of overmuch drinking are set before the would-be addict for consideration. It is a way of misery, sadness, arguments, tears, unnecessary blows from fighting and inflammation of the eyes. The throng of those with bottle or can in hand at all times is where these debasing characteristics can be constantly seen. Who in their right mind would want to join them? It comes not of deliberate intent mostly, but drink by drink by drink. It may afflict those who dally with the bottle at home as well.

23.31-35. There is an attraction in the colour, be it red or amber "nectar," when the desire is awakened. The colour and the foaming all prepare the weakened palate. The time to look away is instantly, for its bite leads to hallucinations and uncontrollable experiences, none of them pleasant. It is as reckless and stupid as lying on an inflatable in the swell of the sea or, (thinking of sailing ships), rolling with the tide exposed to high wind where the motions and buffetings may most be felt – atop the mast.

There is a sort of anaesthetic. Though there would not have been seasickness or buffeting but for the unnecessary and reckless flouting of danger, yet there has been a real beating and a battering and a sickness of their own volition. No sooner is the experience recovered from than it must be embarked upon once again. Such a person is incorrigible and this is where the attraction of strong drink may ultimately lead.

