

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 24

24.1-2. Seeing that the theme of envy is repeated, it would be good to read again Psalm 73 which is the best commentary on the subject, and to pray that we should be delivered from any lingering trace of this insidious evil.

Psalm 17 13-14 also provides an excellent observation and prayer. "Deliver my soul from the wicked which is thy sword: (Perhaps the reading in the margin is meant - "by thy sword" that is, the word of God; perhaps if believers are disobedient the wicked are allowed to hurt us, as the enemy nations attacked the nation of Israel.) from men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life."

24.3-4. We may think of our individual families; we may think of a business "house;" we may think of a royal line (for example, the House of Windsor) – they are only established and maintained in the truest sense by the wisdom which Christ affords. A family that wastes its money on the non-necessities of life such as wasteful habits and luxuries will not be established. The prodigal son, though restored personally, lost his inheritance. However, when established, then the men of this world can garnish their homes. Believers will want to support the various spiritual interests of the kingdom, for they are looking, by Christ's wisdom, for treasure in heaven.

24.5-6. The conclusion of this couplet is well-known:- "in multitude of counsellors there is safety." The wisdom which is in Christ will lead committee members, deacons' and elders' meetings, church meetings to sure decisions. Unilateral decisions can sometimes be brilliant, and, equally, be led of the Lord. But for a congregation of the Lord's people or a Christian society, for example, there is safety; not in numbers, merely, but in the many-sided contributed advice which may then be considered and weighed as unto the Lord. Perhaps the Saviour refers to verse 6 in Luke 14 31-32, "what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"

24.7. The fool who has said in his heart that there is no God (Psalms 14,53) may be acceptable among the debased counsels of the worldly but the wisdom that is from

above (James 3.17) will always be beyond him until he repents of his great folly. James 3. 13-18 would make good and relevant reading at this point.

24.8. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (22.15). Mischief is perhaps here thought of as the seedling of evil. We tend to use the expression “getting into mischief” to indicate relatively lightweight sins; but, of course, there is really no such thing, for all sin is of a piece and one sin will lead to another.

24.9. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5.27-28). Now, for example, thinking murderous thoughts is not the same as actually committing murder. But thoughts may lead on to deeds. But the Lord who knows our hearts regards the thoughts as much as the deeds. He pondereth the heart (21.2;24.12). We are convicted sinners by thinking things which we never do.

24.10. Another famous proverb. It is somewhat reproachful, encouraging believers not to give up at the first sign of difficulty, or even when the way gets harder than we previously experienced. This is the time to lean heavily upon the Lord. At the end of life, when its battles are nearly done and we haven’t given in, the description in the Song of Solomon 8.5 will apply to us, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” The Lord speaks to Jeremiah in a somewhat similar vein, “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” (Jeremiah 12.5). “Gird up the loins of thy mind” (1 Peter 1.13). Think straight, with the Lord’s help; do not falter but let our thoughts of God’s omnipotence nerve our powers to new heights in His service.

24.11-12. We are inclined by nature to say (or think) “I didn’t realise” when we actually did realise or when not to have realised is most culpable. Or perhaps we say, “nobody told me” when actually we had heard indirectly and it was a convenient excuse. The principle, “if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it? And shall he not render to every man according to his works?” is attached here to the particular example of verse 11 but there are all sorts of situations where the principle applies. The Saviour is aware of our pretence to innocence and we should strive to avoid any semblance of excuses.

24.13-14. Do you have a sweet tooth? This is picture language for the delightfulness of the scriptures and the spiritual wisdom they impart. If we have a taste for sweet things it is the sweetest of all sweet things to love the scriptures and the Saviour to whom they point. “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psalm 34.8). These words were straight from the pen of David, Solomon’s father,

concerning his deliverance from one of his most fraught experiences. It is possible that he spoke of this often to his son, thereby giving him an affectionate regard for the metaphor of tasting. Too many sugary things may not be good for us. Solomon will later instruct us (25.27), "it is not good to eat much honey." But we can never have too much of the scriptures or enjoy too much of the lovingkindness and presence of the Saviour.

24.15-16. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. And, whether a wicked man reads this couplet or not, the fact of the matter is true. Rather this proverb is for the encouragement of the righteous; not the self-righteous but those whose righteousness is through the blood of the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand" (Psalm 37. 23-24). "The LORD upholdeth all that fall" (Psalm 145.14). That being the case, the wicked should look well to his own falling from which, without repentance, he will not rise again.

"Spoil not his resting place." Christ is our rest (Matthew 11.28-29)." There remaineth a rest to the people of God" (Hebrews 4.9). Christ cannot be destroyed nor can heaven. But peace in our hearts may be destroyed, as can faith at times. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18.6-7).

24.17-18. This is a common reaction in the believer's old nature. When someone who has hurt us is hurt we may smirk to ourselves and be pleased. "Love your enemies," said the Saviour, "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5.44-45).

24.19-20. Once again we are drawn to think about envy and that though evil men acquire things which we would like their future is not to be compared with that of a believer, and therefore a believer may gladly forgo what he thinks he would enjoy. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isaiah 3.10-11).

24.21-22. Solomon's father, David, who was a great king and entitled to deal with state affairs exclaimed, "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me" (Psalm 131.1). The only thing too high for King David would be the providences of God. Not only should a believer not meddle in matters beyond him; neither should he be a lover of change for

change's sake. This is particularly a temptation to a young believer newly enrolled in a church fellowship or a young minister but newly come to an established pastorate. In the case of the young minister it may mean that many will leave and that he will also be forced to resign thereby leaving behind him a severely weakened church fellowship. "Who knoweth the ruin of them both?" church and minister alike.

24.23. Seeing that the Proverbs is about wisdom, this verse seems to be drawing special attention to the immediately preceding and following verses. "These things also belong to the wise." My own opinion is that this is referring particularly to verses 21-26 where royal matters (21), national interests (24), and public counsels (26) seem to be at issue. However, the next chapter begins a new section with the word "also." It may therefore be that at this verse Solomon is tying some ends together and beginning his conclusion. The "also" would then run to verse 34.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7.24) where not persons but issues are in view. James 2.1 says, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." We must respect people, of course; it is favouritism that is in mind, especially in response to a bribe or the personal advantage gained from favouring the powerful or wealthy. "There is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2.11). The men sent to entangle Jesus spoke truly enough, though their aim was probably flattery, when they said, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men" (Matthew 22.16). They did not mean that He didn't care for people or take any notice of them. Simply that He was never deflected from the truth to please anybody. The judiciary should always be separate from political interests if justice is not to be warped.

24.24-25. People often complain about political correctness. There is a silent majority opposed to many laws which a minority sometimes seeks to impose. It is this that is in view. The one who makes black white will be cursed and abhorred. Those who publicly oppose such wrong will be blest of God. Again, maybe Solomon was acutely aware of the last words of David (2 Samuel 23.1). "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (2 Samuel 23.3-4).

24.26. We may smack our lips but it might be difficult to kiss them! We understand the expression. What is meant is not so much self-congratulation as the sense of wellbeing that comes from a job well done. As the Lord gives the wisdom to formulate our words, so He gives the sense of approval. "Because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge" (Ecclesiastes 12.9).

24.27. “The profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field” (Ecclesiastes 5.9). We are all dependent upon the “field”, that is, natural resources. In a modern consumer society, with many synthetics, we are apt to forget that we are sustained by the Lord’s continuing renewal of the earth. Most notably the input of the sun, and the provision of weather systems. We are taught priorities by these things. First of all to render thanks unto God. Secondly, that work comes before play, or pleasure; and even before shelter. We must distinguish between the necessities of life and its extras. But in all things “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6.33). “If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6.30-34).

24.28. There is much unnecessary, unprovoked evil in the world. Let us not increase it. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 5.22). “This cometh to pass (persecution for the sake of the gospel), that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law They hated me without a cause” (John 15.25 quoting Psalm 35.7,19) In two chapters time (26.2) we shall have “the curse causeless shall not come.” Justice and truth are the pillars of society; and as the church is the pillar and ground of the truth we should not heed even secondhand talk which might provoke opinions about someone unfairly and colour our thinking with nothing more than what is an unsubstantiated rumour.

24.29. Retaliation is not the mark of a believer. Human nature itches to hit back; and the one who retaliates is usually the one that gets caught. The finest exposition of these words which are, on the Lord’s authority, incumbent upon a Christian are to be found in Matthew 5.38-48 and should be read prayerfully at this juncture.

24.30-34. These five verses are a meditation upon idleness. Verse 32 gives us an insight into how Solomon received wisdom and how we, in our turn, may receive wisdom from the Holy Spirit. It is by considering well, by reflection, by meditation upon natural phenomena, things of everyday life and, most importantly, the Holy Scriptures. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground...” (Genesis 3.17-19). The Lord permits no escape. Our labour may not be in the field, but it is just as demanding, just as perpetually wearying. If we do not work, being idle, we should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3.10). Other circumstances beyond our

control, such as sickness and unemployment, may intervene. A traveller gets a move on before nightfall and so does poverty come upon a lazy person. There is an inevitability (or there certainly was in olden times and, of course, there still is in some places today) of a soldier or a brigand appearing on the scene with outrageous demands; so inevitably will a tattered life hasten towards the lazy one.