

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 25

A new section of the Book of Proverbs begins here. We are told that the men of Hezekiah copied out these proverbs. It suggests that the proverbs which appear in chapters 25-29 are a selection, though it does not necessarily follow. In any case these men were guided by the Holy Spirit to include others of the 3000 Proverbs (1 Kings 4.32) which Solomon spoke and which were not already gathered in the earlier chapters. His speaking of them (rather than writing) mentioned in 1 Kings 4.32 suggests that they were assiduously taken down in his own time by the court recorders. Even so, this does not exhaust them all, for we still do not have 3000 of his proverbs.

Concerning the men of Hezekiah it would be good to read the life and times of Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 29-32. It would also be useful to read Isaiah 36-39 and 2 Kings 16.19-20.21. You would then have the whole Bible record. You would be able to compare the style of record in 2 Kings with 2 Chronicles. And also see how the record of Isaiah was copied by the men of Hezekiah, perhaps, into the court records; or was it the court records which the disciples of Isaiah used to incorporate among Isaiah's prophecies? At least, you would observe how collections were made and see how the Holy Spirit selected some (but only some) to be included in the inspired and infallible Holy Scriptures. Maybe, again only maybe, the men listed in 2 Chronicles 31.12-13 were the very men who supervised these things. What was true of Hezekiah was doubtless true of these men under his leadership, "In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart and prospered" (2 Chronicles 31.21). May we have the same attitude and approach to all our work and especially to that worship and service which we offer in the house of God.

It is my impression, which there is no need for you to share, that chapters 25-29 are of a somewhat more exalted and elevated standard, which suggests to me that for this collection in chapters 25-29 the best (as it seemed to them, and certainly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) of the remaining proverbs of Solomon of which they were the custodians was gathered together. Maybe they had charge of the totality of Solomon's proverbs, maybe not – we have no means of knowing. Their inclusion in the

divine record ensured their survival, for the others were destroyed; perhaps in the destruction of Jerusalem.

It seems to me (though I stress that this is only my personal impression) that for the most part these are, if not new themes, new ways of putting pithy sayings, which we have not already come across. Some themes, however, are repeated, perhaps more elegantly even than before. A number are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament, as we shall see.

In the days before printing, the copyists' work was highly prized. The scribes of New Testament times probably fulfilled much the same role. It was not only copying but their role as custodians of the sacred text (and of other writings) through their familiarity with the contents which entitled them to honour. This familiarity, this experience, this understanding of the meaning which enabled them not to be persuaded to change the text, was all very important in the transmission of all documents before printing. Just as we do not expect to find many printers' errors, so they ensured accuracy in all that they superintended.

25.2. The famous hymn says of God that He is, "in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes." And also, "Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee." He chooses to hide His person from sight; it is also the prerogative of God to forgive sins. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." (Isaiah 43.25; 44.22). However, God knows them all. He does not need to search them out. So that we see here, at one and the same time, what the honour of a king's rank is; but how far short of the glory of God he comes. He needs to search out what is "natural" enough to God. In the ability of kings, and those in authority, to get to the bottom of all matters of justice and to judge truthfully and accurately; and their ability to understand important matters lies their honour. Not simply in the trappings of monarchy or high office. There are wonderful things to be searched out not only by kings but by us all, especially believers. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein" (Psalm 111.2). The more we appreciate nature, providence and salvation the more we should seek to read up about them, to study and enquire after them to increase our understanding.

25.3. It is possible that Ephesians 3.17-19 is an allusion to this verse or, if unconsciously so, was there in Paul's well stored mind to be worked upon by the Holy Spirit, "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge..." The love which is in the heart of King Jesus is higher than the heaven for height and the earth for depth and is unsearchable.

25.4. When we come to study Proverbs 27.21 we shall see that some of the elements mentioned here are repeated, but with a different application. The removal of dross is the first element of the perfecting of our natures ready for glory. Dross is the impurity which clings to metal, the base metal, when it comes out of the earth. Whatever it takes to remove it, it must be removed before the precious metal is worthy of use or ornament. As much as is base that remains, so much is that which is precious diminished, debased. The hearts of believers are being purified – indeed, we purify ourselves, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3.2-3). The removal of dross in the life of a believer and the shaping of character are proceeding simultaneously in a way that is impossible with the metal from which this illustration is taken.

25.5. This verse draws a parallel with, indeed a conclusion from, the previous verse. The wicked courtier, advisor or privy counsellor is dross and the shaping of a kingdom in righteousness proceeds only when such dross is removed. In this particular a monarchy might be seen to be superior to a democracy, inasmuch as a single authoritarian ruler could act to depose such people whereas it is much more difficult for the leadership in a democracy to act, except in the most blatant of cases.

25.6-7. You will immediately recall Jesus’ words in Luke 14.1-11. His hearers, being chief Pharisees (Luke 14.1), would have known to what passage He was referring, especially in verse 10, “when thou art bidden go and sit down in the lowest room (place); that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship (honour) in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.” “In the place of” does not mean to take the place of, to replace, as it might do in modern English; but it means to join with them, to stand where they stand, and attempt to be involved with them in the affairs of state.

25.8. Getting involved in incidents or issues when they don’t concern us, is quite a temptation for some. It is also a temptation to put a point across without thought, only to find that the half had not been told us and we have to back down or brazen it out, neither of which is becoming. Still less is this appropriate in our dealings with a neighbour with whom we should dwell peaceably. “seeing he dwelleth securely by thee” (3.29).

25.9-10. Again it is a temptation to many to talk about neighbours behind their backs, and, if there is a grievance, it is a temptation to tell everyone else but him. In an echo of this proverb, the Lord Jesus Christ said, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matthew 18.15). It is never an appropriate thing to share with others, particularly in a loose, lighthearted way, secrets that should be kept closely

within a family. Husbands and wives should most certainly not share the secrets of a marriage with others, but the proverb goes way beyond that. We demean others if we betray personal failings, idiosyncrasies, known to us or shared with us as a mark of their trust in us. The one who hears us may do the same to us; or repeat the confidence back to the original person who will then know that only one person could have had that information to share and we will be shamed ourselves. Others knowing that we have publicized such things will not share their secrets with us.

25.11. Think of a solid silver goblet, tray or ornament with engravings pictured in pure gold. The silver and gold direct our thoughts to the value of the item, while the pictures direct us to its beauty. As the gold carving outweighs in value and greatly enhances the silverware; so appropriate and wise advice, whether cautionary or inspirational, turns the situation which is being addressed to a successful, peaceable and productive outcome, greatly appreciated and perhaps of more worth than can be expressed.

25.12. If we ask ourselves whether the golden earring which draws attention to the ear is of more value than the wonderful mechanisms of the ear itself we will readily understand that the loss of hearing would be greater than the loss of an earring. It is greater than money can buy. A wise reprover, faithful and just to show us our faults and make us see where they will ultimately lead, and to do so in a way which will be acted upon is a wonderful asset; but greater still is the life of the one who heeds the advice and is thereby preserved. It is all for his welfare.

25.13. Now “snow in summer...is not seemly” (26.1). It will both damage the crops and delay the harvesting, so this cannot be the meaning. I quote the explanation of Gill. “As snow, that in those hot countries used to be kept in vessels, in places underground, to cool their drink with in summertime; just as ice is kept with us in like places, for the same purpose; and then the sense is, as drink cooled with snow is very agreeable, and exceeding refreshing to those that labour in the field in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger...” His masters are relieved that the aim of their message was achieved. We are to be faithful messengers of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Read again Genesis 24 for a fine example of a faithful messenger. And, though it is not about a messenger, unless a king be thought of as God’s messenger, it would be a good time now to refresh ourselves with 2 Samuel 23.4. It concerns “refreshing;” the refreshing that a ruler brings to his people by justice.

25.14. The clue to the interpretation of this verse lies in 2 Peter 2.17 and Jude 12. Each, with slightly different wording, speaks of clouds without water. In each case it is false teachers who are being described by such words. It would be good to read the whole of 2 Peter 2 and Jude. False teachers claim teaching gifts, but they claim falsely. “They speak great swelling words of vanity” (2 Peter 2.18). “These speak evil of those things which they know not” (Jude 10). The verse can be interpreted in a much wider sense,

as of one bragging about his giving when his contributions are minimal. But by interpreting scripture by scripture, and comparing scripture with scripture, we see that the issue of false teachers and how to discern them is the most significant application of this proverb.

25.15. Perhaps Solomon had had such an experience; or learned it from his father in the matter of the numbering of the people (2 Samuel 24.2-4,10) and Abigail (1 Samuel 25.24-35).

25.16. Success goes to the head very rapidly. Praise turns our heads likewise. How to handle praise in particular is outlined in 27.21 but this proverb is more general. Enough is enough. A miser may hoard where it would be his wisdom to spend upon his welfare. A small business is successful, but over expansion changes its character and at length causes it to implode.

25.17. It is not good to live in one another's pocket, as we say. If we become tiresome, people will dread our approach and hate us and everything about us, including the Saviour we represent.

25.18. The 9th commandment reads, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20.16) so that first and foremost this is a sin against God. This proverb is designed to help us to understand the iniquity of our sin by making us see that if men, our neighbours especially, see us in such a light how terrible must we appear in the sight of God. The hammer blows of a false witness crush the spirit; his thrusts pierce and pain the heart; he is a poisoned arrow. Unreasonably, the common perception is that where there is smoke there is fire. And if a person's reputation is ruined by what the perpetrator knows to be lies, even if justice be pronounced it will take a lot of living down and the heartache will be a terrible burden.

25.19. A broken tooth and a foot out of joint, twisted or even broken, were in ancient days without remedy. Hill walking would become a most painful exercise; eating cold food excruciating while hard food would be impossible. And if necessity decreed that mountainous terrain must be travelled rapidly or only that which is cold or hard eaten in order to escape danger then, without speed, capture or death might ensue. To rely on an untrustworthy person at any time is irksome, but in time of emergency is disaster. We should not trust such nor be such ourselves. Let us be faithful and unwavering in our trustworthiness to the Saviour Who is Himself utterly to be relied upon.

25.20. There is a time and place for even the most justifiable of actions. Supposing even that a man's garment was forfeit for a pledge or a debt, a less damaging opportunity could surely have been found if there was kindness and sensitivity. It is perhaps sensitivity which is illustrated by vinegar upon nitre, where there will be a

chemical reaction perhaps of hissing or spitting, perhaps of smell. They do not mix. So there is an incongruity in the singing of a person who is contented and at ease in the presence of one who is sad and grieving. At the very least it is a thoughtless and inconsiderate action; at worst, deliberately designed to inflict physical harm and mental torture.

25.21-22. The Lord Jesus Christ says that we are to love our enemies; that is to say, we are not to make enemies. There are those who will make enemies of us and we are to deal with them kindly. Paul quotes this proverb in Romans 12.20-21 to show Christians how we are not to retaliate but to return kindness to those who harm us. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." To which Paul adds, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." As the good Samaritan said to the innkeeper, "when I come again, I will repay thee" (Luke 10.35), so will the Lord Jesus Christ at His return.

25.23. The north wind causes differing climatic conditions in different places. Who would have welcomed being on the receiving end of Christ's anger, as in Mark 3.5 and Luke 11. 37-54? Even the frown of a just person, or a withering look, will cause the fountain of malicious slander to be dried up, often instantly.

25.24. We have met this theme before and will meet it again. Sadly, It is a common enough observable experience to be used as picture language. What a believer needs in this wide and brawling world with all its rich accommodation, is time to be alone with the Lord, space to read the scriptures to encourage ourselves in Him, before returning to the world's complex and often anti-Christian values with equanimity.

25.25. We have recently considered cold waters in verse 13. What more reviving in this dry and thirsty land than the words and friendship of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ! "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is...Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Psalm 63.1,3). The Saviour is from heaven and brings His reviving words, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7.37-38).

25.26. The apostle James in his letter (3.11) mentions a corrupt spring. It cannot at the same place send forth sweet water and bitter. If there is mixture, it is corrupt. Where the good serves the bad, corruption holds sway in any walk of life. A believer should make a stand and not fall down before the wicked, for example in the observance of the Lord's Day.

25.27. Too much sweetness is sickly. It is a sickening sight to behold people only looking to show off and parade their abilities. The art of art is in concealing art.

Humility befits Christian men, women and children, remembering our Master “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 12.2).

25.28. If it is a believer’s shortcoming, he/she should make a great point of overcoming emotional outbursts, bad tempers, sour comments and the like with the help of this proverb. As a person might train in a gym, so we must train our spirits to be ruled and mastered, controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are otherwise defenceless against the wiles of men and devils.