

## **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 26**

The first twelve verses of this chapter, with the possible exception of verse 2 where “fool” is not mentioned, contain a grouping of proverbs concerning fools. The wisdom of Christ turns us from natural foolishness, especially that carelessness concerning the welfare of our immortal souls which so characterises men and women. “Thou fool,” said the Lord Jesus Christ of the man who neglected his soul’s interests. Read Luke 12.16-21. The apostle Paul writes (1 Corinthians 1.18), “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.”

26.1. Snow and rain are wonderful provisions of the Lord but neither is appropriate to summer or harvest. Rain in harvest may not only hinder ingathering but damage the crops. Doubtless many readers down the years have smiled wryly to themselves recalling days when they have delayed harvesting because of rain, or worked through heavy showers while ingathering or lost valuable crops through downpours and have appreciated the parallel. Honour is not appropriate for a fool whose elevated position may hinder real progress, undo negotiations, spoil diplomacy and discredit his employers.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, “I receive not honour from men...How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” “He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true and no unrighteousness is in him” (John 5.41,44;7.18). “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not” (Jeremiah 45.5).

26.2. The Lord Jesus Christ, alluding to Psalm 35.19, said, “They hated me without a cause” (John 15.25). Birds fly purposefully when hunting or migrating but if they are simply enjoying thermals they stay in the same location. People may curse someone and declare, “may they rot in hell,” but the words uttered have no power to accomplish that end whether there is cause for such an imprecation or not, except that it may fasten upon a weak mind or guilty conscience. But if there is no reason for it the malice then fails of its purpose by the superintending power of a just God. Believers are not to curse, but rather “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5.44).

Though this proverb is the only one in this section not to mention “fool” explicitly, it is as foolish to act unreasonably as to have no purpose, no direction.

26.3. If a working horse will not pull, nor the ass be directed, then the use of the whip or bridle is sanctioned. So a fool, if he is to be brought to his senses, needs correction and may only understand the language of chastisement.

26.4-5. What may sometimes appear to be identical situations may need, under the wisdom of the Lord, to be handled differently. On one occasion contradicting a fool may embroil a believer in unseemly argument. However, if a foolish statement is left unchallenged he may persist in his pernicious statements, perhaps, to undermine the faith of some. At all times we need to answer carefully, in dependence upon the Lord.

26.6. There is an elegant contrast here between hands and feet. Modern English speaks similarly of “shooting oneself in the foot.” The message would have got there sooner if we had taken it ourselves. A useful hour could be whiled away looking up the word “feet” in a concordance and refreshing ourselves spiritually by looking up the references. Drinking is by nature more rapid than eating. The repercussions of sending a foolish man with an urgent message will soon appear. The messengers of the cross are neither to be foolish in their preaching or their methods nor tardy in their reaching the lost.

26.7. A parable told by a fool will fail to make its application and be totally irrelevant to the point in hand which is supposedly being illustrated.

26.8. A stone in a sling is to be fired and must be loose prior to being aimed. The carrying of stones to be used in a sling are not bound in the sling itself but carried in a pouch. It is counterproductive, not fit for purpose, to place a fool in a position of authority where direction and precision are needed.

26.9. The drunkard becomes insensitive and may not feel the thorn, nor its festering, until afterwards. A parable, which ideally makes a point explicit, is lost in the mouth of a fool. If it doesn't actually cause hurt and damage the cause for which it is uttered, it will prove unfeeling. 26.7 spoke of its irrelevance while this proverb speaks of its insensitivity.

26.10. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “Love your enemies, 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. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans also? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5.44-48).

The words of the Lord Jesus bid believers show the characteristic of their heavenly Father by not discriminating in their good behaviour towards all sorts and conditions of men. In this proverb the point is that the Lord knows how to distinguish and reward appropriately. This is also something believers should ask wisdom to be able to do in their dealings with people. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2.9).

26.11. This is quoted in 2 Peter 2.22. “It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, “The dog is turned to his own vomit again” (2 Peter 2.21-22). Here is an example of the Holy Spirit giving the definitive interpretation in the New Testament of an Old Testament passage and at the same time setting the Lord’s approval on the contents of the book of Proverbs and, indeed, of the whole Old Testament. A dog will sniff again his own foulness; a criminal will sometimes return to the scene of his crime to gloat; no good will come of it but a fool is incorrigible and will repeat his errors.

26.12. Using the illustration of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 18. 10-14 as an example one would suppose that there is more hope of the Pharisee being reclaimed than a fool.

26.13. Now we have three verses about the lazy man. There may or may not be a lion in the street (in the days when lions did indeed roam) but there is danger everywhere, even in staying at home. It is simply an excuse and should be recognised as such.

26.14. Do the hinges creak and groan? Then lazybones will find it a grievous thing to be disturbed and will turn over again. Are the hinges well oiled and turn smoothly? So will lazybones find it an agreeable thing to take one position on his bed and then another but not venture beyond it.

26.15. This proverb is virtually a repetition of 19.24 with the added mocking thought of the grief it causes him to move himself to action, even to the extent of the necessity of feeding himself. Clearly this is the way of self-destruction as he will soon be beyond help.

26.16. We have all met the idle person who brags about his homespun philosophy, though he knows nothing compared with the well thought out rationale behind the lifestyle of the industrious.

26.17. A passer-by runs the real risk of being bitten, scratched and savaged if he takes a dog by the ears. There is a real temptation to get involved in things which are not our concern, else this theme would not be so often repeated under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

26. 18-19. It is not good to joke about serious matters or to frighten people and then say, "I was only joking." The fear or surprise may cause a heart attack or much unwarranted heart searchings. It is a combustible matter, a dangerous thing, to stir up the cinders of fear in deep-seated issues. In ancient days a madman who was playing with fire and endangering lives had to be restrained by as many as it took before the matter got totally out of hand and destroyed a village.

26.20. Collecting wood was a frequent chore in woodburning communities so that the home fires could be kept burning. Strife is kept burning by retailing tales for gossip and believers should give a wide berth to anything that smacks of idle tales. The Holy Spirit has caused this to be written in the New Testament (1 Timothy 5.13):- "...not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not."

26.21. This proverb is concerned with the stoking of a fire already well alight. Where there is strife it is augmented and sustained by people of a particular disposition; those who love argument for argument's sake, or must always have the last word without which they cannot leave a matter alone.

26.22. When people relate personal affairs, whether true, false or containing some truth, but with a little embellishment, it embarrasses, hurts and undermines trust. It is in direct contradiction to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, a direct contradiction to the commandments of God, "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7.12).

26.23. A shard of a broken pot may be sharp. It is certainly valueless. No one would cover it with real silver, but in the interests of deceit a cheat might attempt to pass off an item glittering with silver paper (or its equivalent) as something of real worth. It might attract a child initially, but that is all. Insincere and damaging speech stoked by a furnace of evil thoughts within the heart is a cheap and malicious substitute for what thoughtful words and a kind heart could achieve instead.

26.24-25. To dissemble is to say one thing and mean another and by so doing pull the wool over someone's eyes, as we say. This is how the hatred which seeks only to damage and destroy lives expresses itself and the wise, but humble, believer should be aware of what lies behind it. It is poured forth out of a heart which is thoroughly evil and harbouring all manner of ruinous sins.

26.26. Just as Achan's sin of covetousness and disobedience to the Lord's commandment was revealed before the whole congregation, because of its damaging effect, before punishment was administered (Joshua 7), so concealed hatred will also be revealed. "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known," said the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 10.26).

26.27. There is a real risk that a pit will collapse on top of the digger and kill him. It is hard work pushing a boulder uphill and if the one who pushes tires it may run over him. The inference is that the intent of the pit is to trap and of the boulder to be hurled at someone. The damage will be done to the perpetrator, if not first, then in summary justice by the Lord. For as Haman was hanged on his own gallows (Esther 7.10) so the Lord returns sin upon the heads of those who commit it, except they repent.

26.28. Lies and flattery are united in their baleful effect upon those who are the subjects of it. We should repudiate lies, but ignore their hurt, and not be seduced by flattery, with the help of the wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.