

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 27

27.1. "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Hebrews 9.27). God has made an appointment for us with death. Of that much we are sure. We do not know when it is, precisely so that we may be utterly dependent on Him for daily guidance. This is the believer's strength. "Boasting" of tomorrow is not so much bragging about it as assuming that we have a tomorrow. "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4 13-15).

The apostle Paul is careful about this. "I trust to tarry a while with you", he writes to the Corinthians, "if the Lord permit" (1 Corinthians 16.7). He does not know that he will necessarily be spared and have sufficient mental capacity to carry on writing his letter to the Hebrews, so he writes, "And this will we do, if God permit" (Hebrews 6.3). He does not know for sure that God might not appoint some other matter to intervene.

And he also writes concerning the most important matter of being saved that, seeing we do not know that we have a tomorrow, we should not delay to seek the Lord's pardon and salvation. "Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin...Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3.13,15).

A day may bring forth an accident, a heart attack, a stroke, a tragedy. Events may be life threatening and life changing. The Lord thereby keeps us on a short lead, so to speak, that we do not wander out of control. We do not have to worry about our future. We are simply required to lay it constantly before Him whose precise direction in all things overrules everything together for the believer's good and for the furtherance of His kingdom.

27.2. When the Lord Jesus Christ said to the centurion (Matthew 8.10), "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," that was unsought praise indeed. When He said to Nathanael (John 1.47), "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" that

judgment was spot on and unlooked for. When others praise us they may be being generous but their appraisal may be flawed. What we desire is the Master's, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," and to hear Him say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25.21,23,34). That is the ultimate praise. That is the ultimate reward.

27.3-5. It may take two to heave a stone. Wet sand is particularly heavy, retarding the progress of the walker. A fool is likely to be needlessly angry, being unable to judge a matter rightly, and cause harrowing and continuing grief. And if anger is hurtful, especially if it is out of order, how much more devastating is the envy, the unprovoked hostile jealousy, of the envious. We cannot help the gifts which the Lord has given us and if we have worked hard to achieve the fulfilment of the Lord's gracious provision it is galling to be the butt of unprovoked envy. On the other hand the one who harbours a secret passion which may issue, say, in stalking is likely to persist in being troublesome and it would have been better to have merited censure, over and done with in one face to face interview, than to endure unwanted and persistent adulation.

27.6. It is difficult to find a way of explaining to our friends the things they need to know before they suffer acute embarrassment or fall into deep trouble, but though it will be hurtful we owe it to them. They may not like it at first but this proverb encourages them to realise that it was in loyalty to them that such a course of action was taken out of love. It is no mark of love to be flattered concerning our weaknesses. This proverb calls to mind the betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot, to whom He responded, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22.48). That was treachery indeed!

27.7. If we have recently eaten our fill the very idea of eating more is too much to contemplate. But when a person through poverty is surviving on scraps he is likely to be so desperate as to eat that which is contaminated or poisonous. The spiritually hungry soul may turn to false teachings to satisfy inward cravings; and the rule of all learning, especially spiritual assimilation, is, "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28.10).

27.8. A bird on home territory is familiar with its surroundings. If it strays it may meet with unaccustomed and dangerous situations and meet fatal enemies of whose existence it was unaware. There is always danger in wandering off and running away from home. There is especial danger in throwing off the perceived shackles of being brought up in the faith. Some may not survive to replicate the experience of the prodigal son in coming to himself (Luke 15.17).

27.9. If we walk in the vicinity of orange blossom or lavender or any other sweet-scented herb it is a great delight to our senses. Good sensible advice and encouragement in pleasant conversation with a friend in the regular way of things

brings great spiritual and practical pleasure with it. It is faithful counsel which does not need to wound because it is not directed to our faults but to the ongoing discussion of how best to live our lives. It is a great joy when this is fulfilled within a marriage. It is supremely fulfilled in the spiritual fellowship of believers.

27.10. As children we are familiar with family friends, “uncles” and “aunties.” It is quite likely that in some cases we inherit the same affinity that our parents had towards them. Their interest in us while we were growing up radiated their love. We will later make our own friends, the friends of our mature years. We must keep up with our friends and show ourselves friendly (Proverbs 18.24) and above all cultivate our supreme relationship with the Saviour. It is good to be on excellent terms with our neighbours for, when things go wrong, our relatives may be far away and take some time to hear about our state and make arrangements to come, while our neighbours may offer instant help. These, perhaps non-Christian relationships, may in difficult circumstances be a means of Christ’s drawing them to Himself. People are often melted not by what we do for them but by what they can do for us when we are vulnerable.

27.11. The apostle John wrote (3 John 4), “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” There may be those who criticise our children to our face but if we know that our children have made a good and sound choice we can dismiss such reproaches. Of Moses it is written, doubtless when the Egyptians criticised him for forsaking their culture for the people of God, that he esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Hebrews 11.26). When the cause is right the reproaches may be borne - for ourselves or for our children.

27.12. This proverb is identical to 22.3. When the men of Hezekiah copied out these proverbs (25.1) they must surely have been aware of the repetition; and under the influence of the Holy Spirit repeated it. Repetitions are for emphasis or because there is a double need to deal with a common situation or to meet and deal with a common error. It is a believer’s wisdom to avoid trouble where he can. There may be a time when it is right to heed the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples (Matthew 10.23), “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” while on another occasion it may be right to remain. “Wisdom is justified of her children” (Matthew 11.19) where the outcome vindicates the decision, especially when there had been conflicting advice or criticism. Do re-read the comments on 22.3.

27.13. You might as well give your garment or money away if you stand bail out of misguided affection or trust for someone you don’t really know or have an illicit desire towards. Their aim is to cheat.

27.14. Some like to rise up early and some to stay up late. But Christ would urge us by these wise words to be always most considerate for others. However good the reason

("blesseth"), however hearty the intention ("with a loud voice"), the "wakey, wakey, rise and shine" approach is not welcome. Its very inconsiderateness nullifies every good intention. "Let not your good be evil spoken of" (Romans 14.16).

27.15. Cold, uncomfortable, miserable, soaking, unrelenting - none of us likes such a grey day nor likes to face such continual verbal abuse.

27.16. Her continual argumentativeness betrays her unwanted presence to all. The wind ruffles everything and penetrates clothing; there is no way in which it can be restrained let alone hidden. As soon as somebody with a strong scent enters the room unseen people are aware of his/her presence. So an argumentative person thrusts her presence upon all however unwilling or unwitting they are to be party to her rancour.

27.17. As a carborundum used to be used to sharpen a scythe or a sickle and was a familiar agricultural tool to a bygone generation so the mental stimulation, spiritual encouragement and irresistible persuasion of a friend enables even the highest achiever to press still further forward. Not only does it spur to greater achievement but it also gives the greatest pleasure.

27.18. God kindly establishes the principle for the Levites who had no portion that they were to eat certain portions of certain offerings presented by the worshippers (Leviticus 6.16,26; 7.6,31,32). Paul elaborates on this principle (1 Corinthians 9.11) "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" The author of the Proverbs writes in the Song of Solomon 8.12, (talking to himself, as it were) "Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred." That is to say, one fifth is the proportion that the keeper should retain, while the rest should be paid to the owner. We owe the Saviour our very souls; but we are permitted to live unto Him as we please according to the direction of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. "Ye are not your own...ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6. 19-20). "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1.18).

27.19. We see our own reflection in water and the stiller the water the truer the reflection. In the peaceful relationship of a true friend we see our own dearest values likewise esteemed and our hearts are knit together. The believer sees in Christ, as he reads of Him in the Gospels and throughout scripture, the fulfilment of all his truest aspirations for his own character and of his desires for true living and for eternity.

27.20. Until the Lord returns and "the earth...and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3.10) there will be no end to destruction. All the days of an unredeemed man's life he will see "must have" things which he covets, and even a

believer, being in Christ, may have to resist steadfastly the inner sense of dissatisfaction which was his inheritance in Adam.

27.21. The most valuable metal must be submitted to the furnace to remove all dross, and silver must have its pot in which to be refined. Praise must be submitted to the fire. It is but dross if it goes to a person's head and gives a sense of self-importance. But if it spurs him on to greater and more self-effacing achievements then it polishes his character and burnishes his work.

27.22. There are a number of terms here which have largely vanished from use. To bray is to crush or beat. A mortar is a hard container – hard enough not to be destroyed itself by pummelling. A pestle serves rather like a cook might use a whisk. It is a solid instrument to crush corn for making bread. The crushing of wheat releases its goodness and energy for human consumption. The battering or chastisement of a fool does nothing to change his foolish character.

27.23. The subject introduced at this verse continues to the end of the chapter. We keep a toddler on a short lead to keep him from danger. A wise elderly person living alone keeps the alarm within reach. It is wise to exercise detailed care in the things which belong to our livelihood. The Christian pastor should understand and care about the issues which the Lord's people face; health, jobs, the raising of their children, fears and decisions - as far as in him lies and just so far as the brethren are willing to confide.

27.24. Seeing that nothing lasts long, and even estates and nations which stretch from generation to generation will not last for ever, it is wisdom to work hard and make every effort to improve and enjoy them to the best of our ability. Churches that were once sound, and therefore flourishing, soon become a shadow of their former selves if they admit error, immorality or simply carelessness about the practice of their faith into their lives.

27.25 Our author writes in Ecclesiastes 3.1, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." There is a time to gather the herbs for garnishing and for remedies; for gathering hay to feed the cattle; for shearing the sheep and slaughtering the lambs for food; for raising and selling livestock. If these are diligently attended to there will be more than enough for the homeowner, his family and those who depend upon him. Of the virtuous woman it is written, "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness" (Proverbs 31.27). Whatever needs to be done in the household of God, conducting worship and preaching, ordinarily or at weddings or funerals; whatever service may be offered in Sunday School or on the diaconate or eldership; whatever behind-the-scenes service may be needful, let us "look well" to our service in the Lord in all things.