

## **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 3**

The Proverbs constantly addresses us as dear children. “My son,” the son in whom the travail of the Saviour’s soul in making an atonement for sin through His sacrificial death upon the cross is dear to His heart and He perfecteth that which concerneth him (Psalm 138.8). Time and time again the believer is addressed as “My son.” For the principle of learning, the method the Lord uses is “precept...upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28.10) which the unwise reject, being bored with the whole idea, for “the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isaiah 28.13).

The ultimate end of wisdom is everlasting life in Christ. “Length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee” (Proverbs 3.2). A very easy to hand and practical example of this is the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20.12). As we saw before, the fulfilment of this promise must be distinctly requested and prayed for, “I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them” (Ezekiel 36.37). Of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment Paul writes that it is the first commandment with promise (Ephesians 6.2), that is, with a promise attached.

Mercy and truth are so fundamental to Christian character that they are spoken of, in picture language, as being so much part of us that they are enthroned in our very thinking (the neck supports the head) and our very affectionate emotions, for they are inscribed in our heart. These characteristics do in fact draw people to us, as it is written “so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3.4). It was this, no doubt, which caused the boy Jesus to be held in affection in the days before His public ministry, as we read in Luke 2.52 “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 4. 5-6). These memorable verses are worth learning by heart, for even in maturity we need to

be reminded from within that we need to acknowledge our heavenly Father in all our ways. They speak of the daily providences of God, which are most delightful to trace. “Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matthew 6.3) We should surely have more proficiency and find more delight in observing the providences of our God and acting upon them than in observing the weather, of which it is written, “He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap” (Ecclesiastes 11.4). We do not know best. And the more we like to be in charge of our own lives, the more we need to remember that our Creator is the best One to have charge of them. If we run past Him all our ideas, and pray concerning every issue, we may be certain that the unfolding of His providences (that is, the circumstances He provides) are precisely right. And if they seem adverse, it is for our good, though we would not have chosen it so, “for he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3.33).

“Be not wise in thine own eyes” (Proverbs 3.7). The Lord knows better than we do. We do not have a corner on wisdom, and in the multitude of counsellors there is safety (Proverbs 11.14). “Honour the Lord with thy substance.” The acknowledging of the goodness we receive from the Lord is the certain way to receive more blessings. Think how you respond to, what you think of ungrateful persons. “I won’t help them again,” we say. “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him” (1 Corinthians 16.2). It is to be the firstfruits of our increase – the first, not what is left over; put aside (laid by in store), if need be, for other causes than that which is put into the offering on the Lord’s Day.

“My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD, neither be weary of his correction: for whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3.11-12). The best opening up of these verses is that by Paul in Hebrews 12. 1-13 in which the Holy Spirit has inspired him to elaborate upon these verses that they may be spelled out to us. The Hebrews 12 passage should be read through carefully, studied, and prayed over before proceeding any further with this commentary, for I have not commented more, seeing that Hebrews is provided for us. Chastening is not easy to bear and we must not pass over these verses quickly, for real chastening itself may last correspondingly for some considerable time. We need to take these verses in, constantly, throughout any affliction. Let us reflect upon the delight our Father has in us that He should be so keen to remove all our imperfections.

After the misery of chastening, Solomon is moved by the Holy Spirit to describe the happiness of possessing wisdom. To possess wisdom is better than having lots of money, for its purchasing power is of things which money can’t buy. It is beautifully put, “She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her” (Proverbs 3.15). To possess wisdom in Christ is better than all

the world's goods; but, even then, it still brings other wonderful things in its wake. So its possession is good; but, further, its purchasing power is to buy pleasurable commodities. In Proverbs 3.16-17 length of days, riches with honour, pleasantness, peace, a full life, and happiness are all listed. Verse 18 speaks of the wisdom which is in Christ restoring what was lost in Adam, for Genesis 3.22 speaks of the loss of the tree of life. Proverbs 3. 19-20 remind believers that the foundations of their life are underpinned by the very same wisdom with which the earth was founded and the heavens were made; the depths broken up and the dew distilled. In wisdom we are held in an embrace as vast as the heavens; themselves a picture of the vastness of eternity and eternal love. Just as the depths are broken up, so the sinful heart is broken up and melted; as with the dew, the scriptures and the issues of life are distilled to perfect that which concerneth us (Psalm 138.8). Speaking of the glory which shall be in heaven one hymnwriter has written, "And there's another country I've heard of long ago, most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know...And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase, and her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths of peace". It is not an exact allusion, but, seeing that the glorious kingdom of our dear Saviour is made up of souls who have been trained by that very wisdom spoken of in the Proverbs, it gives beautiful expression to its outcome.

Keep wisdom always in view. Always act wisely. Always act in Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1.30). Then will relationships be kept soundly and church meetings kept graciously. We speak of those who are the soul of discretion. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Proverbs 25.2). The LORD promises to be the confidence of those who keep wisdom always in view. It is the blessing which "maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10.22). It is not said that David wrote Psalm 121. If he did, his son Solomon might especially value it. At all events, do read it through now in conjunction with verses 23, 24 & 26. It is equally possible that he may have learned Psalm 46 from his father, even if David was not its author, and verses 2 & 3 of that psalm should certainly be read in conjunction with Proverbs 3.25.

Most businesses operate with monthly invoices. Payment is expected within a month. Small businessmen have been made bankrupt when large agencies and corporations have delayed payment for contracts fulfilled for which they have borne the price of purchasing materials and labour in advance. Here is a principle for equitable business arrangements. But individuals should immediately pay for services rendered when they have the means to hand to do it.

There is much in Leviticus and Deuteronomy about how we should treat our neighbours. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments (Exodus 20.16-17) are perhaps the most famous expressions of this concern. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy

neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's." We will, for the most part, see more of our neighbours than most others. We should, as far as possible, endeavour to live peaceably with them. We should not cause them anxiety, certainly; and, hopefully, they will not cause us needless trouble.

Sometimes we find ourselves pleading with God about unjustifiable actions towards us that have caused us grief. David frequently does so in the psalms, for he frequently encountered this sort of behaviour. Precisely because we will do so too, the psalms are there to assist us in our turn. Psalm 35 shows us perhaps how we should not pray but rather leave the vengeance to the Lord. "Without cause they have hid for me their net in a pit" (Psalm 35.7) and in verses 4,5,6 & 8 he prays for retribution. Doubtless what David prays for will be their end, without repentance, but it is not for us to pray for it in Christ. There is a better way, but things that happen to us "without cause" are common. In Proverbs 3.30 it is being emphasised that **we** should not cause unnecessary grief to others. A schoolchild soon learns that if he is picked upon (fights or words) if he hits back (words or fights) he is the one that always seems to be caught and usually he hits back harder; harder perhaps than is proportionate. So the Saviour teaches turning the other cheek, going the second mile (Matthew 5. 39,41), as He also instructs us, "whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5.22). Prayer to our Saviour is the way to handle these things and find encouragement in our God notwithstanding man's inhumanity to man.

Envy, we say, is a green-eyed monster. If we have been kept under the thumb over a long period, we may wish for situations to be reversed so that we could have our turn of bullying. It is abomination. There is a better way, known to those whose lives are hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3), and therefore the springs of their actions (Psalm 87.7) are kept hidden from, are secret to the world at large. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91.1). "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psalm 25.14). From of old Job loved the secret experience, and we should treasure it too. "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me...as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle" (Job 29 2,4). He loved those secret preservations, secret providences – secret in the sense that they were known only to him, a bond between a loving heavenly Father and a devoted child.

The punishment of the old nature is that it has brought down upon itself a curse (Genesis 3. 14,17) and it follows that a punishment of curse follows all its evil ways. A believer should not only avoid the ways of the world (Psalm 1, 1-2), as far as possible consistently with the actual necessity of living in the world; but positively should

pursue within his own home and church - indeed, whatever might be described as a believer's habitation - such ways as God approves and will bring down His blessing.

All God's justice corresponds to the nature of the sin. "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (Revelation 16. 5-6). Also, "they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai" (Esther 7.10). So it is that God "scorneth the scorners". By contrast, God who resists the proud, "giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5.5). "He giveth more grace" (James 4.6). "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9.8).

We speak of promotion to glory, meaning that the saints leave this life for the presence and glory of God. There is no wisdom like the wisdom that embraces Christ Jesus our Lord. Daniel expresses the force of this exactly:- "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12. 2-3).