

## **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 4**

Solomon was an instructor to his children and also was taught by his own father. He bids us by the Holy Spirit listen to him as to a father in the faith. It is the Lord's divine way that instruction is passed on down the years. It gives the latest generation a sense of belonging to the earliest. It is the wisdom of every believer, whether fresh to the faith or a mature Christian, to "attend to know understanding".

The Lord Jesus prayed, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17.20). Paul writes **of** Timothy, "...I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1.5). Paul writes **to** Timothy, "...the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2.2). Always a succession of those taught in the word. And always by the same method that we have already encountered in Isaiah 28, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine?...for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (verses 9-10).

Good doctrine is paramount. It is to be found throughout the Bible. Paul was insistent that no other doctrine than that should be preached and goes on to say "neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith" (1 Timothy 1. 3-4). Jesus taught that religious traditions were misinformed if they transgressed the commandment of God (Matthew 15. 2-3) and should always be examined by that standard, saying, "in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (verse 9). In verses 5&6 of the same chapter he quotes an example of such an ill-usage and concludes, "thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition". Paul also writes "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy or vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2. 8-9). We see how endemic this is; we all bring many erroneous teachings over from our old life and Bible-based Christianity labours to discard them. If we claim to be believers but trust in non-

Biblical teachings we are likely to be deceived. And bearing in mind how terrible Satan's deceitfulness as the father of lies is we must be very careful.

"Let thine heart retain my words." Retention in the memory is important. But retention in the heart is of the greatest significance. To love the Lord and therefore to hold His word in great affection is the surest way to safety on our pilgrimage. Once again we remember that Christ is made wisdom unto us by God; He is the wisdom to Whom our hearts are led by the schoolmaster whose name is Law. Not only should we not turn from Him but should be kept by Him. Wisdom, such wisdom, is the principal thing – life is but loss without Him. With all our getting, nothing is achieved of consequence unless by Christ and for Christ. Promotion to the highest calling and all it entails, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3.14) and honour (Psalm 91.15) is the reward of embracing Christ and His wise counsels, guidance and help. True beauty, the beauty of holiness, will be seen in us by those with an eye for such things, but we will ourselves appreciate the splendour of such an ornament decorating our lives. We need no earthly medals or decorations.

The first commandment with promise is a promise of long life (Exodus 20.12) and so it is throughout the scriptures, as for example in Psalm 91.16. And everlasting life with Christ is the long life most to be desired.

We need to plead for our children, for they do not always take heed of good advice. It cannot be said, even, that Solomon was always wise to follow the instruction of his father David (Proverbs 4.4). Immaturity loves to explore away from the right paths; and middle years can still prove a temptation. But we are able to run the race that is set before us without stumbling following the directions of the Saviour. Our life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3). This is our life.

The Lord speaks of two ways. "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat...but narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7. 13-14). In Proverbs 14.12 and 16.25 the Holy Spirit will return to this theme, for it is so vital. So we have here, "Enter not into the path of the wicked" (verse 14) and "the path of the just is as the shining light" (verse 18).

We may choose an evil way and tread it secretly, no one knowing; but more generally it is evil company that leads us astray. But we are led astray first when we desire that company rather than Christ. Let there not be a parting of the ways between yourself and Christ. In the words of Joshua, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me, and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24.15).

The great attraction of the path of the just (that is, of those who are justified by faith) is that the way becomes increasingly brighter and the destination more visible to the eye of faith. Verse 18 is a memorable verse, such as may entice us to take this narrow way which few find. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

We must not be surprised or stumbled that ingrained sin causes some to turn to wickedness and violence. If we should be the victims, let our faith not be affected except to be strengthened in the Lord. There are those whose sole delight is to cause some to fall; whether to fall from the faith or to cause them hurt - and so long as there is sin in the world it must not surprise us.

The words of Christ's wisdom run counter to fleshly wisdom but they are life and health. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man..." (Matthew 15. 19-20). The thoughts which arise from the heart's affections direct our actions unless they are disciplined. From this fountain issue many evils, for our hearts by nature are impure.

There are not only issues of life but issues from death. "He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death" (Psalm 68.20). Once we pass from this earthly scene our souls are under the immediate command of God and the judgment which follows, to heaven or to hell. They are under His sovereign direction. Jesus sets this out clearly in Matthew 25. 31-46. The issues of life and the issues from death are of such life determining significance that we should attend to them very closely.

Next follows a catalogue (for easy remembrance) concerning mouth, eyes, feet and hand. Actually the heart was the first in this list because it gives direction to the important things which follow.

We are to let our words be considered and relatively few, not tumbling out about all sorts of things which may prove to be both ill-considered and ill-advised. Our words are not to be such that put a bad construction on everything or speech which perverts the true meaning, the received doctrine and may lead others astray.

We are not to be voyeurs, else like David in the matter of Bathsheba, we may be tempted to sin with possible dreadful consequences for those who love us as well as for ourselves. We are to consider, to weigh well, all our intentions and actions with their possible consequences. We are to keep to the path of life, turning not aside to by-path meadow. Isaiah describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit thus:- "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to

the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30.21). Blessed is the one who takes heed.