

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 6

Sometimes a believer may commit himself rashly to some enterprise without consulting the Lord Jesus Christ and His wisdom. The first five verses of Proverbs 6 warn us in principle to pray without ceasing, but also provide a specific example. I suppose we are most likely to be familiar with the idea of suretyship from the use of the word “bail.” A friend deposits a substantial sum of money to be paid over if the person concerned fails to turn up (defaults) for a court appearance. The friend trusts that the accused will in fact turn up. But if for any reason he doesn’t, he is liable to pay this substantial sum. He will be a big loser, effectively all for nothing. This particular example fails in the sense that it would be impossible to withdraw once committed, so that the best advice is not to engage in such an agreement in any circumstances.

In very dramatic picture language, where Jesus might say “Behold” as in Matthew 6.26, “Behold the fowls of the air,” the believer is urged to observe carefully the business of the ant. Later, in Proverbs 30.24-25 it is written “there are four things which are little upon the earth but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.” Activity for the sake of activity is not recommended. But forethought and purposeful work is highly recommended and in it we are to be an example to others, as the ant is to the sluggard. Sometimes we have to work alone, or are trusted to work by ourselves or on our own initiative. A Christian young person entering sixth-form will now find there is much work to be done unsupervised, to be done as unto the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ is our Guide but He is invisible. We appear to have no guide, overseer or ruler. But one is our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be tempting to lie in bed. There is a gentle mocking here – “a little folding of the hands to sleep” – but the message is clear that it will inevitably lead to poverty. Opportunities and deadlines will be missed. And as certainly as there are travellers and armed professionals to be seen on journeys, poverty and need will approach towards the lazy one. As a traveller approaches or as an armed man, whether soldier or brigand, appears threateningly on the horizon to the one who, losing all sense of the Lord’s purpose for life, drifts into being, in current jargon, a couch potato.

We speak of naughty children, having in mind varying degrees of disobedience or wilfulness. The word means “of nought,” “of nothing,” with the connotation of accomplishing nothing of value, worthless, and, more than that, taking initiatives in all manner of corruption and evil. The speech of the worthless adolescent or adult is vulgar, and filth and empty words pour out in profusion. His body language is honed to innuendo, the “nudge, nudge; wink, wink” of those who do not actually say what they mean but we are to get the general impression of things immoral and illicit.

The Lord has given ten commandments, so we are not to understand this “six or seven” which commences in verse 16 as a complete list. Rather, it is a device to draw attention and the addition of a seventh (Six, did I say? No, there are seven) is designed to give us pause for thought. These things are the opposite of the wisdom that is in Christ; and we may pause over them in such a way as to seek the very opposite in Him. They are set out in a memorable way – six parts of our body are mentioned that we might link them and rehearse them in our minds by association with our physical frame. The seventh may, indeed, be a summary – it being a particular iniquity to exercise any or all of these vices against brethren whether they be close relatives or, most especially, brethren within the fellowship whom the Lord has loved and saved.

Pride here is linked with a haughty demeanour which may be strikingly revealed by our look. David, interestingly, speaks of the “foot of pride” (Psalm 36.11); the effect of pride is like a kick or a trip. Believers, on the contrary, are to be humble, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5. 6-7). The tongue speaks, of course, what the mind tells it to, so is not the first cause. However, the words which come against us or we speak against others is how we become aware of the hostility (or affection) that is in another’s heart and mind. James is directed by the Holy Spirit to draw attention a number of times to this. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” And, “the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell...the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be...Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom” (James 1. 19-20; 3. 5-13).

The hands are linked to physical attacks which may draw blood, to a lesser or greater degree even to the extent of manslaughter or murder. The first mention in scripture

sets the tone (Genesis 4. 10-11). “What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now thou art cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand...”

What the heart deviseth, the members accomplish. Sooner or later unbridled feelings will break forth if we allow them unlimited sway in the region of the heart. “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). Instead of the believers’ feet running to mischief, let them be wise and “run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12. 1-2).

Bearing false witness is a contravention of the ninth commandment and by definition incorporates lying. Its aim is to destroy another’s credibility, reputation, honour and position in the community. “Discord among brethren” is a memorable phrase to help us avoid all semblance of such activity. Never forget Psalm 133. 1,3. “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

“My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother.” These should be one and the same, and, that being so, a child should not find any chink to play one off against the other. Neither should a boy or a young man make any difference in his mind as to the obedience owed as much to mother as to father.

It is written “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119.105). The commandment of a mother and father should be in accordance to the word of God. They may have their ways of putting it across but it should be in perfect accord with the commandments of the Lord. So at all times, but perhaps most of all when a young person is leaving home and finding himself in a strange environment and exposed to temptations, the words taught sweetly by mother, or drummed into him by father and taught by the word of God, will be our “way of life.” Before sleeping, or while lying awake is a proper time of reflection; awaking is a time of consecration of the day; and going is the time to live by principle and at all these times the commandments which we have received at home are our preeminent guides.

They will keep a young believer in particular from gross and heinous sin. But the sin which the Holy Spirit keeps reverting to, because the commandment needs to be a foundation deeply laid, is that of the lusting after the strange woman. For, if transgressed at a time of inexperience and vulnerability, it will lead to ruin and, maybe, an early death. Since her allurements are constantly repeated, the Holy Spirit in constancy warns time and time again of the consequences which themselves are of lasting significance.

“The precious life” of the soul will be jeopardised and faith undermined, perhaps for ever. Poverty will ensue because the ramifications of probable compensation are extensive, whether to an aggrieved husband, as probable in the scripture example, or, in our own day, in payments to an abandoned young wife for maintenance of mother and child. The burning of a guilty conscience will be branded in the soul. In certain circumstances a thief is not despised. But an adulterer is despicable; in the eyes of his abandoned wife, his children who will resent that he walked out on their love and on their life; the one with whom he cohabits who may soon tire of him; and in the eyes of the community at large. Though a thief may restore sevenfold and in some measure make amends, there are no suitable amends for this. The price to be paid in loss of spiritual vitality, reproach, hatred (expressed in jealousy) and finance is of lasting consequence and the Holy Spirit reminds the believer that the price is too high to pay for a moment’s lust or a dalliance of what will prove to be comparatively of but short duration.

The expression “he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul” (6.32) is a powerfully arresting one. Jesus uses the same argument in Mark 8. 36-37, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” If the whole world will not suffice will one small pleasure of lust or, as Esau, one morsel of meat when faint? It is said of Esau whose valuation of his birthright was so dismissive (“what profit shall this birthright do to me? Genesis 25.32) that it was profanity to reject his God-given right, and that though afterwards he regretted it bitterly and tearfully there was no reversal of this sin (Hebrews 12. 15-17). When Esau declared “I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?” he was wildly exaggerating, being only hungry and exhausted. When we are really at the point of death, our rejection of salvation, our playing fast and loose with the pleadings of God in our heart from the scriptures and the preaching ministry of faithful pastors will come back to haunt us; and who can tell if the Lord will permit an eleventh hour conversion? It is a risky call.

Other strong words caution the believer from transgressing in this way. A wound, dishonour, reproach, jealousy, vengeance and an implacable foe for life who will on no account be bought off – such is the bondage of this sin. And, in their measure, all sins lead to their own Satanic bondage. May the Lord deliver us from all evil. But the message of Proverbs is that prevention is better than cure.