# WRITINGS OF GEORGE LAWSON

by George Lawson

*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by George Lawson, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

38 Chapters

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Chapter 1

# 01.00. A Practical Exposition of the Book of Proverbs

A Practical Exposition of the Book of Proverbs By George Lawson, 1821

Chapter 2

# 01.00i. Introduction

INTRODUCTION. Of Augustus Caesar it is said, that when he read the works of men of learning and genius, he used to extract such precepts as might prove useful to him in his government. This part of his conduct manifested wisdom; the precepts thus collected, served to assist him and his ministers in managing the affairs of the empire. But the necessity of our imitating this part of his conduct, has been in a great measure superseded by that Spirit of truth, under whose guidance Solomon wrote his Proverbs, and transmitted them to future ages for their instruction in righteousness. In this little book there appears more wisdom than in the combined monuments of Greek and Roman learning. The wisest of men wrote it, and his object is to make us wise. But a greater than Solomon is here, for Wisdom speaks in her own person. The first nine chapters are a preface to the book. In it Solomon recommends to our study, that wisdom which he designs to teach, and insists on some of her most useful precepts.

# 01.01. Proverbs 1

Chapter 1.

Proverbs 1:1-33 In this chapter, Solomon gives us an account of the writer, and the design, of this book. He recommends the fear of the Lord, a dutiful regard to the instructions of parents, and diligence in guarding against the temptations of bad company — as principal parts of wisdom. It is concluded with an earnest call to the unwise to learn wisdom. Let us hear, first, what Solomon has to say, for recommending this much neglected book to our attention.

Proverbs 1:1. "The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel." This book consists of proverbs, which are wise, and short sayings of great use to direct us in the conduct of life. Proverbs were much valued in ancient times. But no proverbs deserve so much esteem and attention as these, for they are the proverbs of Solomon, another name almost for wisdom. In his days he was honored like an angel of God, for his understanding. All kings that heard of him, admired him, and thought themselves happy if they could hear some of his wise instructions. The Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear his wisdom; although she had not heard the half of what she found to be true concerning him — yet even these imperfect accounts were such as to exceed her belief. Did she come so far, upon uncertain reports, to hear his wisdom? And shall not we receive with gladness his instructions, since he has come to us, to be our teacher? We have no need to cross dangerous seas, and travel into distant countries, to hear the lectures of this divine teacher — he cries to us in our streets, he talks with us in our closets. He died some thousands of years ago — but he yet speaks.

Though Solomon had been the son of some poor herdsman — his wisdom would have entitled him to our respect. But this wisest of men, was the son of the best of men. He who was raised on high — the anointed of the God of Jacob — the man after God’s own heart — was his father. This wise son enjoyed all the advantages to be expected from the instructions and the example, the prayers and the blessings, of so good a father. Solomon was a prophet, and the son of a prophet — he was the son of the best of kings; and of the many sons whom God had given to David, he was chosen to fill his father’s throne.

Great men are not always wise — and except from their own subjects, the words of kings are seldom entitled to more regard than those of other men. But it was in Israel, where God was well known, that Solomon was king — and he was advanced to that dignity, because he was the worthiest of it in the kingdom.

These words are the instructions of that king who excelled all the kings of the earth in wisdom and grandeur. This great prince is our teacher; but not he alone — the only wise God here condescends to become our instructor. He, then, who disregards this book, despises a greater than Solomon. This book is the work of a noble writer, and truly it was written with a noble design.

Proverbs 1:2. "To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding." To give us the knowledge of wisdom, and that instruction by which knowledge is conveyed into our minds.

For man is born without wisdom, and without instruction must continue foolish all his days. The words of understanding are the instruction of wisdom, and this book will lead the simple and inexperienced to perceive these words. But what sort of wisdom is it that Solomon means to teach in this book? The best kind of wisdom!

Proverbs 1:3. "To receive the instruction of wisdom; justice, and judgment, and equity." The careful reader of this book will receive the instructions of that wisdom which directs men to practice justice, regulated by discretion, and tempered by moderation and mercy. It teaches us our duty to God and man, and leads us in every good path. Solomon could have given us lectures on Astronomy and Poetry, on the nature of birds and beasts, and everything that attracts the curiosity of men — but as the wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, he is directed by the Spirit of God to give us in this book the instructions of divine and moral wisdom, to remain for the use of men until the last posterity.

They thought themselves happy that were admitted to hear the discourses of this great philosopher, while he lived among men. But the best of his instructions are left on record for our benefit. The best knowledge is the knowledge of God, and of Christ — who is his representing image to men; and holiness, which is the image of God in men. The most necessary truths are first to be learned, and these are clearly represented in this little book. But who are the people that may receive benefit from it? This you may learn from the next verse.

Proverbs 1:4. "To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion." Plato wrote on the door of his Academy, "Let no man unskilled in Geometry come hither." Solomon writes the very reverse on the door of his school: "Let the simple man who is easily deceived come hither — and he shall learn that prudence which is necessary to preserve him from the snares of the destroyer, and is yet fully consistent with integrity. Let the young and inexperienced come and learn knowledge and discretion." Which of us does not need prudence to preserve us from the wiles of the great deceiver and his agents? This book not only teaches — but gives prudence to the simple. When its truth enters into the soul, and takes possession of the heart through the grace of the Spirit who dictates the Scriptures, and makes use of them as his instrument of illumination — then the simple are made wise, and the hearts of the rash understand knowledge.

It would be our happiness if we understood our own simplicity, that we might thankfully receive the instructions of wisdom, and fervently pray for the Spirit of God to open our ears and seal our instructions. If any man would be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

People to whom books are dedicated, may be expected to give them a careful perusal. Solomon dedicates this book to the young, as well as to the simple. He knew that young people stand in great need of advice and direction, and earnestly desired to do them good; and could they be persuaded to accept Solomon as their teacher — he will speak to them with the kindness of a father, and communicate to them knowledge and discretion. But is this book of no use but to the unwise and the untaught? It is of great use to the wise also — and if men are truly wise, they will value it above much fine gold, and by the diligent use of it, will greatly improve in wisdom.

Proverbs 1:5. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." This book contains wise counsels for directing a man under every perplexing difficulty in the way of peace and safety, and enabling him to give the most seasonable

and prudent counsels to others. How precious are wise counsels! and what a treasure is a wise counselor to his friends and neighbors! This book will also enable a wise man,

Proverbs 1:6. "To understand a proverb, and the interpretation thereof — the words of the wise, and their dark sayings." The dark sayings of fools and triflers are not worth a thought — but the dark sayings of the wise are worthy to be studied until we obtain a complete knowledge of their meaning. For they are dark at first hearing only, on account of the sublimity of their views, and the force of their manner of expression, which contains much useful instruction in small compass. Are we old or young, wise or unwise? Here is milk for babes, and strong meat for those who are of full age. Here are plain instructions for the ignorant — and depths of wisdom proper to exercise and enrich the minds of the most intelligent. Let us attend, and learn, and practice.

It is Solomon the son of David, and king of Israel, who speaks. He speaks to the simple and inexperienced — and to the wise. He speaks of the most important points of truth. And a greater than Solomon is here. Christ spoke by his Spirit in the prophets, and he still speaks from Heaven to us — he speaks by his word and by his Spirit. He opens the understandings of men, that they may understand the Scriptures. Christ is the Word and the Wisdom of God — and he is made to us wisdom. Let us depend upon him as our wisdom, that his Spirit may write in our hearts the things written in this book. So shall we be the epistle of Christ, written not with pen and ink — but with the Spirit of the living God — and our lives will be living commentaries on the proverbs of Solomon.

Some of the most necessary parts of wisdom are explained and enforced from Proverbs 1:7-17. The first of these is that,

Proverbs 1:7. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." The fear of the Lord, so often recommended in this book, is not that fear which has torment in it, and is excluded by love. Rather, it is that fear which is joined with faith, and keeps it from degenerating into presumption — while faith keeps fear from sinking into despondency. It is a lively impression of the excellency of God upon the soul, whereby a man is disposed to walk before him unto all pleasing — and to put far away everything provoking and offensive to the eyes of his glory. It is therefore justly made to signify the whole of religion in the heart and life of man.

Great commendations are bestowed on "the fear of the Lord" in Scripture. It makes a chief part in the noble characters of Abraham and Job, and here Solomon tells us that it is the beginning, the ground-work, and the comprehensive sum of all true knowledge. He who lacks the fear of the Lord, does not know him — and he who knows not God, knows nothing as he ought to know it. He knows neither his business in life, nor his happiness. A rational creature without the fear and knowledge of God, is like a soldier who never saw a sword, or a lawyer who never read a law of the land. But he who knows the Lord so as to fear him — knows Christ, through whom we see those glorious perfections that are the object of our reverence. He knows his duty and happiness — and he is on the plain road to the knowledge of everything necessary to make the man of God perfect.

Let no man say that this kind of knowledge deserves not our study, because it is generally despised. It is indeed despised — but by whom? The wise man tells us, "But fools despise wisdom and instruction." Who would despise a diamond, because an idiot would not give his rattle for it? It

is no dishonor to the divine wisdom to be despised by any man — but it is the utmost dishonor to any man to despise the wisdom of God. He is an unreasonable and foolish man who has not the fear of the Lord. The next part of doctrine taught by the wise man, respects the reverence due to the instructions of parents.

Proverbs 1:8."My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother." This exhortation speaks to us as unto children. Solomon is entitled to the authority, and addresses us with the tenderness of a father. If such, then, is the affection with which he addresses us — then surely we owe him the reverence of children.

God is our heavenly Father. All his precepts are the expressions of divine goodness, and we are unnatural to our Maker if we forget them.

It is here supposed that parents will instruct their children. They are monsters rather than parents, who do not love the fruit of their own bodies. Love will dispose people to do all the good they can to the objects of it — and the best thing that can be done for children, is to teach them the fear of the Lord. To be careful about providing the supports of life, or raising portions for children, without taking care of their souls — is like taking care of the clothes, and being indifferent about the body that wears them.

"O you people," cried an ancient philosopher, "why do you toil in raising estates for your children, and neglect to prepare them by needful instructions for enjoying them?"

Mothers are to instruct their children, as well as fathers. Solomon gratefully remembered the instructions he received in his younger years from Bathsheba — and the last chapter of this book contains the noble instructions which a wise king had learned from his mother. Perhaps the reason why the names of the mothers of the kings of Judah are recorded along with their characters is, because the lessons and example of their mothers had a considerable influence in forming their behavior.

Children are required to hear, and reverence, and obey the instructions of their fathers. Next to the duties we owe immediately to God, the commandments require us to obey our parents in the Lord. He who despises his earthly father, is no doubt a despiser of the heavenly Father. A proper regard to the wise and godly instructions of parents, gives a happy presage of good behavior in after life. Vice and ruin, on the other hand, are the ordinary consequences of disrespect to these natural guardians of our tender years. The sages of heathen antiquity, though themselves born of women, usually held them in such small respect, that they almost confined to the father, precepts that regarded filial duty. The more enlarged wisdom of Solomon, however, pleads the cause of the mother in forcible words. The instructions of a mother are to be considered by us as a law that we are never to forsake. When old, she is still entitled to our respect; and we are never to leave those good paths into which her affectionate care has directed our steps. But what advantage is proposed to us by attending to the voice of parental admonition?

Proverbs 1:9. "They will be a graceful ornament for your head, and a chain to adorn your neck." Young people are generally fond of fine clothes, and of ornaments to their bodies — but with regard to this, Solomon here sets their notions right. Reverence to parents, a dutiful regard to their instructions, and the wisdom which is learned from them — is by far the most beautiful ornament. It will make the face to shine; it will be a chain to adorn the neck; it will be a graceful ornament,

more beautiful than a crown of gold, to the head. With such ornaments was our Lord himself arrayed, while he dwelt among us. He was subject to his parents — though himself their Maker and Savior. Young people are generally disposed to hearken to advice — but because human nature is in a corrupt state, they are generally more prone to follow bad advice than good.

Having therefore exhorted them to reverence and to obey God and their parents, Solomon now proceeds to warn them against hearkening to the enticing words of seducers to sin, Proverbs 1:10-19.

Proverbs 1:10. "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent!" Sinners have generally so much of the venom of the old serpent in them, that they do not wish to go unattended to Hell — but desire to make others as much the children of the devil as themselves. Sinners, after complying with the suggestions of their tempter, generally proceed from evil to worse — until they become devils themselves, and aid their master in ruining others! The young ought to remember that they will meet with evil advisers — and if so, how firmly should they resolve, through the grace of God, to hold on in the way of virtue, and to refuse the least compliance with that advice which causes to err from the words of knowledge! Solomon arms us against these deceivers, by making us acquainted with their subtle devices.

Proverbs 1:11. "If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause." These are not the express words of seducers — but a translation of them into the language of truth. They will say, 'Come let us pick the pocket of some covetous miser, who has made himself rich by cunning, and scraped money together by such cowardly practices, as cannot expose him to the vengeance of the law.'

Solomon does not tell us the express words of the tempter — but puts into his mouth such language as expresses the real meaning and tendency of his solicitations. When transgressors varnish over their crimes, it is our part to pluck off the false covering, and to represent sin to ourselves in its true colors, and in its tendency to other iniquities of deeper aggravation. When the drunkard invites us to go to the tavern, and drink a cheerful glass with him — let his words sound in our ears as if he had said, 'Let us go to the tavern, and there drown our reason, and make ourselves monsters!' When another desires us to take a hand at cards — let us take his meaning to be, 'Come, let us rob our friend of his money, without incurring the pains of law!'

Perhaps those men whom the tempters here spoken of wish to rob or kill — may be like themselves, strangers to every good way. But they are innocent in comparison with those pests of society, who plot against their property or their lives. The treasons of Abner and Amasa, did not exempt Joab, their murderer, from the guilt of innocent blood.

These tempters to iniquity will try to persuade the inexperienced, that there is no danger of being detected.

Proverbs 1:12. "Let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole as those who go down to the pit!" That is, 'We shall manage matters in such a manner, as that there cannot be even the possibility of detection. So well concerted shall our plans be, that the thing will be as effectually concealed from public view, as those bodies which are covered by the grave.'

Vain hopes! Can men flatter themselves that they shall escape the righteous judgment of God? Even in this life, murderers seldom escape punishment. But what though men neither see nor suspect? Conscience sees, and the great Avenger of blood sees. The assembled world shall know their crimes, shall hear their sentence, and witness their punishment! The devil told our Lord that he would give him all the kingdoms and glories of the world, if he would comply with his persuasions. The ministers of Satan in like manner endeavor to persuade men that they will obtain much advantage by sin, that the gains of it shall fill all their treasures, and every corner of their houses.

Proverbs 1:13. "We shall find all precious wealth, we shall fill our houses with spoil." These promises are lies; or if such treasures are procured, they will last but for a moment. What profit had Judas the traitor in his thirty pieces of silver, though paid him to the last farthing? Though thirty thousand talents of gold had been his reward — they could not have soothed his racked conscience, they could not have retained his breath when his own hands had applied the halter; they could not have preserved his soul from going to its own wretched place. The profits of sin are the worst of losses!

These wretches, abandoned as they are, have yet the effrontery to pretend a regard to honesty, and a generous unselfishness in their mutual dealings —

Proverbs 1:14. "Cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse." Let the security and profit of our way of living induce you to join our society. We shall lead a cheerful life, we shall faithfully share our gains, and none shall lack while another has. In what manner ought a young man to act, when offers so tempting are made to him?

Proverbs 1:15. "My son, do not walk in the way with them, refrain your foot from their path." Let us attend with filial regard to the kind advice of a venerable father, who tells us, that we must not only shut our ears against these ensnaring words, and resolve to keep the path of innocence — but shun their company, and avoid those places which they haunt.

If we knew a place that was said to be a haunt of fiends and infernal spirits — we need not shun it, for these terrors are but creatures of imagination. But places frequented by men who have the devil in their hearts, and who hire their tongues to the devil for the purpose of deceiving their fellow-men — such places are dangerous indeed! All of us have corrupted natures ready to be inflamed! How foolish is the man who, carrying gunpowder, enters a blacksmith’s shop, where the sparks fly from the anvil in every direction! But may we not take a single turn with them? No!

Proverbs 1:16. "For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood!" Let us never forget the evil that is in sin. However men may dress it out in beautiful colors — sin is the very quintessence of wickedness. All men see a great deal of evil in some heinous crimes — but the God whose judgment is always true, sees more evil in the least sin, than we are able to see in the greatest sin. It is a dangerous and detestable thing for a man willfully to transgress the smallest commandment of the law of God. But the men of whom we now speak, are desperately bent upon sin. Their feet run to evil — and that of the most damnable sort, for they make haste to shed blood. Perhaps it will be said, that they have no design to load their souls with such bloody crimes — but only to cheat or rob somebody who well deserves to be plundered. But let us remember, that no man becomes desperate in wickedness all at once.

Hazael had no intention to murder the king of Syria, or rip up pregnant women; he would have abhorred the thoughts of such wickedness, until self-interest and ambition uniting, gradually hardened his heart, and prepared him for perpetrating without remorse, deeds of darkness and of horror!

Young sinners are like travelers, who at first setting out cannot bear a speck of mud to alight upon their clothes — but who in the course of their journey become inured to bad roads, and can allow themselves, without feeling uneasiness, to be all bespattered with mire. They are like silly birds, who allow themselves to be ensnared by the arts of the cunning fowler.

Proverbs 1:17. "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Birds have not the gift of reason, to warn them against the snares of the fowler. But how lamentable is it, that men, whom God has made wiser than the birds — should be as easily deceived as the silliest of these animals, and that in matters of greater importance! Do not reply, that the snares are set, not for the sinner himself — but for those whom he intends to destroy. It is for his own life that a sinner spreads his nets!

Proverbs 1:18. "And they lay wait for their own blood, they lurk privily for their own lives!" It is not the sufferer of evil, so much as the doer of evil, who is hurt. Whom did Judas destroy by his treachery? The death to which Jesus was sold, was glorious to himself. But the treason which Judas wrought, was his own destruction! Abel lives and speaks, and his name is embalmed in the memories of the godly. But the life which his murderer led was more miserable than death, and his name is remembered only to be execrated. The sinner designs harm to his neighbor — but all things are under the direction of the just Lord, under whose administration mischief recoils upon its author, bringing him to the scaffold here, or to Hell hereafter! But is such the natural tendency of covetousness? Yes!

Proverbs 1:19. "So are the ways of every one who is greedy of gain, which takes away the life of the owners thereof." "Take heed and beware of covetousness!" said he who knew the heart of man, and the native tendency of every vice. Covetousness is a mother of abominations and miseries. Those who are determined to be rich, would have money by honest means if it could be gotten — but at any rate they must have it. If it cannot be had to fill their desires (which indeed are insatiable) by fair means — then it must had by chicanery or thievery. When the conscience has been brought to this, it is prepared for advancing in wickedness, until at last it offers but small resistance — even at the commission of crimes, from the very thought of which their author would once have shrunk! The last step in vice is less painful to a man, than the first departure from honesty.

If the eyes of these pests of society were not altogether shut, they would see that a man’s life depends not on the abundance of his wealth. In their own hands, wealth becomes a sword to slay its owner. Can they anticipate comfort in that ill-gotten wealth which has proved fatal to its honest possessor? We must therefore flee from unrighteousness, and stand at a distance from the way of sin. Everyone who would tempt us to evil, is to be looked upon as an emissary for Satan!

Sinners are addressed, through the remaining part of this chapter, by Wisdom herself, who speaks to men in sincere and solemn language.

Proverbs 1:20-21. "Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words." How can wisdom cry out? Is not wisdom a quality, and not a person? Wisdom cries to men when God speaks to them — for he is the fountain of wisdom. The words of men may be wise — but when God speaks, Wisdom itself addresses us! He opens his mouth in infinite wisdom, and speaks to us by him who is the Word and Wisdom of God. He who despises that wisdom which is from above, despises the Father and the Son, and brands the emanations of unsearchable wisdom, with the imputation of folly!

Wisdom desires to be heard, and therefore speaks not in secret. She does not whisper in the ears of a few favorites — but in the public places of resort. She proclaims her interesting truths to everyone that will listen. She cries outside — in every place where a crowd is likely to be collected, in the streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the gates, the place of judgment, and in every part of the city. No disobedient sinner can make a valid excuse for his conduct. The voice of wisdom is heard everywhere. It sounds from the pulpit. From every creature it is heard. The word is in our very hearts — and conscience echoes the voice to our souls. Let us go where we will, we must hear it — unless we willfully shut our ears. And what does she say?

Proverbs 1:22. "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity, and scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge!" 'Had I a mountain for a pulpit, and a voice capable of reaching to the ends of the world,' (said a venerable father), 'I would preach on that text: O sons of men, how long will you love vanity?'

Wisdom proclaims the like words to all the world as far as her voice is heard. If people ruin themselves by their folly — it will be no excuse to them that they were cheated by the great deceiver. Who will excuse Eve for hearkening to the voice of the serpent, or Adam for hearkening to the voice of his wife — in opposition to the voice of God? The simpleton and the fool are justly condemned, because they love simplicity, and hate knowledge. So strongly are they bent upon their foolish courses, that every suggestion of the devil meets with a cheerful compliance. Sin is loved with the whole heart, and those truths which might be the means of salvation, are the objects of extreme aversion.

Many are so mad upon their idols, that they take pleasure in scoffing at holiness, and at the preachers and professors of it! Some run to such a pitch in wickedness, as to jest with the Word of the Most High God, though it would be safer far to sport with fire and death! Were the Physician of souls like earthly physicians — he would leave such creatures to pine away in their sins until their obstinacy terminates in eternal damnation. But O how merciful is he! He is in earnest with them when he urges them to betake of his beneficial medicines. It is a grief to him that they will not come to him for health. He cries to them,

Proverbs 1:23. "Turn at my rebuke! Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you." The lovers of folly must turn — or perish. For Christ is an all-sufficient Savior from sin and wrath — but he will deliver none who continue in abominations: "Unless you repent, you shall all perish!" The lovers of sin, and those who delight in scorning, are graciously called by him to turn — a plain evidence that there is pardoning and saving mercy for these worst of sinners! Even scoffers at religion are among the number of those sinners whom the Son of Man called to repentance, when he came to seek and to save the lost.

Such profligates have for the most part an intention to turn from their evil ways at some future but indefinite period — but if they turn not at present — then they refuse to hear the voice of wisdom. "Turn!" says the Wisdom of God, "at my rebuke!"

"Today," says the Spirit, "if you will hear my voice, harden not your hearts." We harden our hearts when we intend to take our pleasure in sin today, though we resolve to hear the voice of God tomorrow. The reproof of wisdom is a means of alarming us, and of impressing our souls with a sense of the necessity of turning. If we harden our hearts against these reproofs while they are sounding in our ears — then the impression is not likely to be deeper or stronger when the bustle and noise of the world have helped us to forget the solemn admonition.

It is at the reproof of the Word of God, that we are called to turn. It is brutish for a son to despise the reproof of a parent. It is devilish for a creature to despise the reproof of its Creator! It is a sin which devils could never commit — for a guilty creature to shut his ears against the reproof of a Savior, who addresses us in earnest and affectionate language, and calls us to turn our feet from the paths of death. But how can fools turn? Are they not infatuated by sin? Are not their affections possessed with the love of it? "Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you," says the Savior. By his influences, you shall be enabled to understand my words, and to comply with them.

Let not sinners imagine that it will excuse them to say that they had no ability to repent. They were not called to turn by any power of their own — but in the strength of divine grace. They were unwilling — and therefore unable. Their sins were so dear to them — that they disliked the reproofs of Christ, and resisted his Spirit. Our Lord does not make a jest of the lovers of sin, when he calls them to turn. His invitations do good even to sinners — or the fault is their own. Do we then feel the necessity of turning — and yet an unconquerable aversion to it in our hearts? Let us plead for the abundant communications of the enlightening and renewing Spirit. If people are made heartily willing to submit to his influence — it is a happy presage that he will be granted, or rather a sign that he has already begun to work. But there are many so foolishly devoted to sin, that they reject the counsel of God, and instead of welcoming the Spirit, resist his motions until they provoke him to depart. The doom of such people will be very terrible — but very just.

Proverbs 1:24-27. "But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke — I in turn will laugh at your disaster! I will mock when calamity overtakes you — when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you!" Do none then, or next to none, regard the admonitions of wisdom? Strange! Are men enemies to themselves? Are they in love with destruction? Is it their joy to please the devil, and to cross the benevolent intentions of a Savior? Was the devil crucified for them? Or do they think the eternal burnings, and the pain of condemnation — are more tolerable than the tears of repentance or the self-denial which Jesus proscribes?

John complained that so few believed his report: "No man receives his testimony." How wonderful is that grace, which continues to deal with men, when it is so ungratefully despised! The sin of unbelief and impenitence is exceedingly great. Various are the forms of expression by which in the passage before us, the wickedness of it is intimated, and the offence which it gives to him who comes in the name of the Lord to save us, pointed out. It is a refusal of divinely gracious offers and advice; a disregard of the most earnest importunities of the wisdom of God; a total contempt of all

the counsel of that wonderful Counselor who is given to be the leader and commander of the people; a stubborn opposition of the will to the most needful and beneficial reproof.

Hear, O heavens, and be horribly afraid! Rational creatures rebel against their benevolent Creator! Diseased sinners scorn the great Physician, and refuse to accept that sovereign cure for all their maladies, which he so graciously offers! But let sinners remember, that there is justice as well as grace in the Most High God. Justice shall avenge the contempt of mercy!

Sinners feel some presage of that vengeance in their own guilty conscience. Fears of punishment often make them uneasy. They would gladly persuade themselves that these are but the terrors of a distempered imagination. Yet the day is coming when they will find them to be terrible realities! No passion is so tormenting as fear — and no fear can equal the power of God's anger! The fear of sinners shall come upon them, and their feet shall slide in due time. It shall come like a desolating judgment, which with resistless violence, lays waste a country. It shall come like a raging tempest, and a furious whirlwind, at once sweeping away every comfort and every hope! Then shall distress and anguish seize upon the mind of the stubborn transgressor, when he feels himself involved in remediless sorrow. This threatening will have its great accomplishment in the everlasting world, when the torrents of wrath shall swallow up the impenitent sinner, and the whirlwind of fury shall beat upon him with ceaseless violence. Wrath and indignation shall press him down in the lake of fire! Anguish and despair shall prey upon his soul, without the intermission of a moment! No ray of hope shall ever enter the abodes of darkness and of horror. But will the poor victim of suffering find no pity from the benevolent Savior? No! says the Spirit of God, 'I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes!' With relentless eye shall he behold that terrible vengeance which now overtakes the wicked!

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked — but rather that they should turn and live — yet he will take pleasure in the death of those who turn not, for in this manner is his justice glorified, and the dishonors done to his love are repaid. God took pleasure in bruising his own Son — and he shall laugh at the pain of the wicked. But may not prayer avail in this deplorable condition? By no means!

Proverbs 1:28. "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me." The prayer of faith is ever heard, and those who seek God shall find him, when they seek him with all their heart. But the prayers of these desperate rebels are like the howlings of a dog. They are cries extorted by strong necessity, and intolerable anguish. They are the cries of such as sought not the Lord while he was to be found, nor called on him while he was near.

Sinners miserably delude their own souls by proposing to live in the indulgence of their sins — and die in the exercise of repentance. True repentance is never too late — but late repentance is seldom true. Christ is not every day hanging on the cross — nor are thieves every day converted, and sent from the place of punishment to the paradise above. Prayers are of no use in the eternal world. The day of grace is at an end, and the wretched shall cry in vain to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lord God and of the Lamb.

Behold, now is the accepted time, now the Lord waits to be gracious. But the day is coming that is cruel with wrath and fierce anguish! No place shall then be found for mercy, though sought with an ocean of tears! But why does he who takes pleasure in the voice of prayer, and listen so

graciously to the cry of the supplicant — why does he refuse to accept the petitions of those who are reduced to such an extremity of distress? The reason is,

Proverbs 1:29-30. "Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD — since they would not accept My advice and spurned My rebuke!" The punishment is indeed tremendous — but the sin that cause it is atrocious! It is no less than a contempt and hatred of the counsels of the Lord. What is this, but an undeniable proof of enmity against God himself? And will not God avenge himself of his enemies? When men do not chose the fear of the Lord — but prefer the base pleasures of sin — they give plain proof of their hatred to God. How can they escape the damnation of Hell?

If we think that the punishment is greater than the sin, the reason is, that we are under the power of iniquity. Self-love disposes the malefactor to prescribe to his judge. Let us impartially consider what malignity lies in impenitence, and what a multitude of wickednesses are contained in the rejection of God’s great salvation — and we must acknowledge that the ruin of sinners is entirely owing to themselves! God is not to be blamed — but on the contrary, he will be eternally glorious as their avenger. His insulted mercy will be glorious in the punishment of its despisers. His justice shall shine in dispensing to the workers of iniquity the wages of their wicked works! "They despised all my reproof!"

Proverbs 1:31. "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." They laughed at God’s threatenings, as if they had been idle tales — and God shall laugh at them! They despised his counsels — and he shall despise their prayers. They were always rebellious, and continued unchanged under all admonition — and God will prove an immutable avenger, and will pay no regard to their cries for help. They took pleasure in sin — and God will take pleasure in punishing them on account of it.

If a man plants and dresses a poisonous tree in his garden — it is just that he should be obliged to eat of its fruit. If our vine is the vine of Sodom, and our clusters the clusters of bitterness — we must leave our complaint on ourselves — even if we must drink until we are drunken, and fall, and rise no more.

Sinners never think they have drunk deep enough of the poisoned cup of sin — but they shall at length be filled with it. Then shall it satiate them — when they find that intolerable misery is its native consequence. That cup which now delights the lover of evil — will then be found a cup of fury, and the wicked of the earth must drink it down to its bitterest dregs!

Proverbs 1:32. "For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them!" The sins of men, unless pardoned through the blood of Christ, shall be their destruction. For he who turns away from God — turns his back upon eternal happiness. And he who cherishes iniquity — warms in his bosom the most venomous of serpents!

Lost sinners owe their ruin to . . . their willful hardness of heart, their abuse of divine mercy, and their indifference to God’s salvation.

It may be alleged, that sinners often prosper — but their prosperity is a part of their misery, for it will increase their guilt, and render their damnation terrible. It nourishes their wicked affections, and tends to inspire them with pride and insolence, with sensuality and earthliness of mind. It is so

strong a temptation, that our Lord has declared it almost impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. This saying has been justified by fact. In times of persecution, the prosperous have been ordinarily the apostates who made shipwreck of faith — while the poor loved the world less, and stood out more firmly against temptation.

If the prosperity of fools leads them to the indulgence of sin, and the neglect of holiness — it renders their damnation more certain and more dreadful! Their provocations are like those of the Israelites, who provoked God, by turning the Egyptian gold and silver, which he had given them — into an idol of jealousy.

They are like the impious ingratitude of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, whom God raised to a throne — but who degraded God into the image of a four-footed beast! When the favors of God are turned into means and instruments of unrighteousness — Oh! what wrath is then treasured up against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God! But the prosperity of the wise has a very opposite tendency. When they act like themselves, it excites their gratitude; it stimulates them to serve God more effectually and to do good to men more diligently.

Wisdom teaches those who hearken to her voice, to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. So that while riches serve to expose the folly of the foolish — they prove a crown to the wise. But though disciples of Wisdom should never attain prosperity, they are happy. For says Wisdom,

Proverbs 1:33. "But those who hearken unto me shall dwell safely, and be quiet from the fear of evil." Those who love knowledge, and chose the fear of the Lord, and value the instructions of wisdom more than thousands of gold and silver — are the men who hearken to Wisdom, Proverbs 1:29-30.

Many of these once loved folly, and took pleasure in scorning — but they have received the atonement, and all their unrighteousnesses are blotted out. They now share in the privileges of the children of wisdom — and while prosperous sinners are set in slippery places, they dwell safely, for they dwell in God, and God dwells in them. They are safe from the devil, and from the power of sin, from death and from Hell. They may endure tribulation in the world — but in Christ they shall have peace. They enjoy quiet consciences, and pleasant hopes.

They are quiet, not only from evil — but from the fear of evil. They may indeed have fears — but they are clouds that shall soon be blown away, and followed by everlasting serenity. Even while these fears continue, they have a refuge where they can find safety, and hopes sufficient to give them such happiness as worldly men cannot enjoy amid their ill-grounded confidence.

Paul had often fightings without, and fears within — but this was his comfort, that nothing could separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

Let us examine ourselves impartially, whether we are the despisers of wisdom — or the lovers of wisdom. The question is not, whether we attend the means of grace, and make a profession of religion. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things. Ananias and Sapphira parted with a considerable share of their substance. But do we chose the fear of the Lord? Do we value Christ above the whole world? Do we prefer holiness, in its most painful exercises — to the most pleasant sins? Are we yet despisers of wisdom? Then let us tremble at the vengeance threatened!

Let our prayers ascend up on high, that the Lord by his Spirit would open our hearts that we may attend to the dictates of heavenly wisdom. Are we lovers of wisdom? Then let us bless God who has opened our ears to discipline, and instructed our hearts. Let us thankfully rejoice in the blessings that Wisdom bestows. Let us testify our regard to Wisdom, in the manner directed in the following chapter. In vain do we pretend to religion, unless that which we call by this honorable name, is approved by that Word whereby we must be judged.

# 01.02. Proverbs 2

Chapter 2.

Proverbs 2:1-22

Wisdom is an excellent thing, therefore get wisdom. But how shall we get wisdom? or in what shall the attainment of it profit us? You have an answer to both of these questions in this chapter. How shall we get wisdom? The wise man answers,

Proverbs 2:1-7. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless. He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous."

It is not enough for us to attend the public ordinances of God, and to read a chapter or two of the Bible at home every day — but we are required to receive the words of wisdom, to keep them in our hearts, and apply our souls to them. We are to receive the words of our heavenly Father, with reverence and love, with faith and diligent attention. No gift is so precious as that knowledge which God imparts to us in the scriptures, and we ought to receive it with eagerness — like that keenness which the covetous man shows for gold and silver. And as he who receives money is careful to store it where he may find it when he has occasion to use it — so in like manner it befits us to store up in the midst of our heart, the instructions of wisdom, collecting and hiding the precious treasure, until the word of Christ dwells in us richly in all wisdom. When we give due attention to the word of truth — it will dwell . . .

in our minds — dispelling ignorance and error, and communicating that light which is necessary to direct the whole of our conduct;

in our memories — affording a constant supply for spiritual meditation, ready for use on every emergency;

in our wills — to guide their choice and inclination;

in our affections — to direct their motions, to curb their extravagance, and to inflame their ardor towards spiritual objects;

in our consciences — to preserve alive the impressions of the divine law, and to direct them in judging of the spiritual state of the soul. The senses of the body minister to the soul. The ear must be inclined to wisdom, that we may learn it. The eye, surveying the wonders of God’s hand, furnishes the soul with apprehensions of his power and wisdom. But the ear is that learning sense by which the richest treasures of spiritual knowledge are admitted into to the soul. As the mouth

tastes the food of the body — so the ear receives and tries those words which nourish the soul.

We attend to our friends or neighbors when they are informing us of some new thing. We count it good manners to listen, when nothing is to be heard but dullness and insipidity. Shall we not, then, attend to Him who made the ear, when he condescends to speak to us, and to disclose truths of eternal moment? While our ears are attentive, our hearts must be applied to wisdom. Angels, who are so much our superiors, apply themselves to the learning of it. They are already replenished with the stores of truth — and yet the desire to pry deeper into the mystery of wisdom. Great as was the measure which Solomon had received — yet he still continued to apply his heart to it. Surely, then, the wisest of us ought to apply our whole hearts — for what is so needful to us, and so valuable in itself? But after all our application, we have understandings so dark, that the Bible must remain a sealed book unto us — unless our eyes are enlightened to discern the wonders of God's word. With our instructions, therefore, earnest prayer must be mingled, that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation may illuminate our understandings, and fit our souls for receiving and retaining the truths of God.

David was wiser than his teachers — and yet he still lifts up his voice for wisdom to the Father of lights, and pleads, with fervent importunity, that God would open his eyes, and not conceal his laws from him, nor take the word of truth out of his mouth.

Let us, in imitation of such a holy example, earnestly pray that we may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God; and particularly, that we may be furnished with all that wisdom and knowledge that is requisite for directing us in our respective stations and circumstances.

Solomon was already a wise man — yet when commanded to chose what he would have, he chose a greater measure of wisdom, of that wisdom especially which would be most useful for him in governing the kingdom of Israel. With this petition, God was well pleased. He gave him not only what he requested — but everything most highly valued by men. But while we cry after wisdom, and depend on God to bestow it on us, it would be presumptuous to neglect the means of obtaining it. We must seek it as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure. We every day see with what anxious diligence men seek for silver. They fatigue their bodies, and waste their spirits; they destroy their health, and expose their lives; they even wound their consciences, and expose themselves to shameful deaths and everlasting misery — that they may load themselves with shining clay. Shall the professed disciples of the great Teacher set less value upon knowledge, than other men set upon silver?

David well knew the value of this knowledge, and esteemed it above thousands of gold and silver. Job prefers it to everything that dazzles with its luster the eyes of mortals. It is therefore highly reasonable, that we diligently and carefully use all those means which God has appointed for this end; that we hear sermons with earnest attention; that we read and search the word of God, and make it the subject of our frequent meditation; that we make use of edifying conversation; that we go to the wise, who have the law of God in their hearts, so that their mouth speaks wisdom, and their tongue talks of judgment. To the use of such means of improvement as these — we must add prayer for the divine blessing, to render them effectual to our instruction and salvation. Truth is like a mine, more precious than that which is the depository of gold and of diamonds. Had any of us such a precious treasure as this in our garden, we would not travel over the ground for pleasure — but employ ourselves day and night in digging, until our houses would be enriched with the

precious store. Why, then, are we careless about that which will enrich us to eternity, and fill all our treasures?

You see the means to be used by us for attaining wisdom. Our ears and hearts must be employed in the search. We must lift up our voices to the Author of wisdom and seek for it with all the desire of our souls and with such earnest endeavors as men use in digging for hidden treasures. Through the blessing of God, the search shall be successful; for "then shall you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

It is plain that those who employ themselves in the diligent pursuit of wisdom, have been already blessed with some degree of true knowledge — for how could they value so highly that with which they were altogether unacquainted? He is already wise, who prefers heavenly wisdom to every earthly object; and he shall be wiser still, for to Him who has shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. The fear of the Lord, and the sound knowledge of God, are inseparably connected. The fear of God is not a blind and tormenting passion of the soul — but a holy and delightful grace, founded in true apprehensions of the solemn and lovely glories of the divine nature — and disposing him who possesses it, to walk with God. The knowledge of God regulates this fear, and preserves it from sinking into terror, or degenerating into superstition — but guides it to express its power in checking and subduing every corrupt affection, and animating the soul to every instance of obedience.

If men are careless about wisdom, and use no diligence in seeking it — they make it evident that they are destitute of the knowledge and fear of the Lord. They have not, and from them shall be taken even that which they seem to have. The efficacy of every means of knowledge is from God, for "the Lord gives wisdom; out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding." Every beam of reason in men, is communicated from the wisdom of God. The simplest of the mechanical arts cannot be acquired unless men are taught of God. How, then, can we expect to understand the mystery of the divine will, without spiritual light communicated from that God who is the Father of lights, and the author of every good and perfect gift! Knowledge and understanding comes out of the mouth of God. By his Spirit, he bestows upon us this blessing through his word, for it is the inspiration of the Almighty that gives understanding to men.

Experience, however long; observation, however close; human teaching, however skillful — can do nothing to supply us with true knowledge, without the influence of that Spirit which rested upon Christ as a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and which is given by him to all his followers in their measure. The wisdom that God in his kindness bestows upon men, is sound and substantial. There are many kinds of knowledge of little importance. The knowledge which some possess, tends only to vex and disquiet them — or to inspire them with vanity and self-conceit. How different the knowledge that God imparts to the diligent students of wisdom! Far from perplexing or elating — it fills their understanding with the most pleasant truths, and directs them in the everlasting way. But who are the blessed people that are favored with this divinely excellent wisdom? "The Lord lays it up for the righteous." God is said to teach sinners in the way; for man’s unworthiness does not exclude him from divine mercy. Saul the persecutor had the Son of God revealed to him by divine grace, and neither his stubborn prejudices, nor his cruelty to the church of Christ, could shut out the beams of heavenly light. Sinners are invited to Christ as the light of the Gentiles, and the salvation of the lost; but here it is said, he lays it up for the righteous. Sinners and fools may have

it — but the righteous shall have it. They are already made sensible of their need of it, and desire it more than silver and gold. They ask it from God, who gives liberally to all men, and upbraids not, and it shall be given them. The Lord lays up this wisdom for the righteous. There are infinite stores of it in his possession, and they are all treasured up in Christ, and out of his fullness shall the righteous receive supplies suited to their exigencies. To encourage God's people to expect all needful supplies of wisdom from him — let them consider his peculiar regard to them, and the constant protection he has engaged to afford them.

Proverbs 2:7-8. "He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless — for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones." There are many adversaries that would destroy them if they could, and these are too strong for them. But there none like unto the God of Jeshurun — who rides on the heavens in their help, and in his excellence in the skies. While therefore they are walking to their eternal home, they may sing in the ways of the Lord. Mighty is their protector. In the shadow of his wings, they may trust — and to his faithfulness they may look as their shield and buckler. The most dreadful enemies of those who walk uprightly, are those who endeavor to turn aside the way of their paths — but against these enemies, God is a mighty defense, for he keeps the paths of wisdom and righteousness. He is a fence about their ways, and a wall of fire around those who walk in them. The devil casts his fiery darts — but they are safe from the arrow that flies by day, and from the noisome pestilence. No weapon formed against them shall prosper. They are commanded still to trust in the name of the Lord, and their faith is like a shield that will quench every fiery dart. The world displays its terrors and its charms — to terrify or allure them into the paths of sin. Against this, as well as the adversary formerly mentioned, they must exercise vigilance. Still, however, in the hottest part of the combat they may be of good cheer — for the Captain of their salvation has overcome the world, and shall make them to share in his victory through their faith. Their own remaining corruptions give them many alarms. Nor is it astonishing that they feel alarmed when ready to halt by its influence, or powerfully solicited to turn aside unto the flowery but destructive paths, where poisons grow and serpents haunt. But their fears shall not overpower them, for the Spirit wars against the flesh, and shall prevail. What says their Almighty guide? "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

Those who walk in the paths of judgment are God's saints. He has beautified them with holiness, and he acknowledges them as his own property. They are his portion and the lot of his inheritance, his treasure and his glory — and he will allow none of them to be lost. Every one of them shall be hidden in the day when he makes up his jewels!

Let us ask for these good old ways, and walk in them, and we shall find rest and safety for our souls. They are safe paths when God guards them, and preserves the way of those who walk in them. No lion, no ravenous beast is found there. The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. But it is our duty, while we trust in God to guide and preserve us, to make use of our eyes. None of Zion's travelers shall be found lacking in the end — but many who thought themselves in the good way, shall fail of the end of their hopes, because they entered not in at the gate, neither trod the narrow path. He who is born of God keeps himself pure — that the wicked one touches him not.

We cannot by our utmost care keep ourselves in safety; but a true dependence upon God will dispose us to be as sober and vigilant as if we had none else to keep us — while we yet trust entirely in God, and not in ourselves — knowing that if left to ourselves one hour, we must surely perish. The lovers of wisdom are furnished with the best wisdom, and led into those paths of holiness where safety is to be found. In order to persuade us to hearken to the instructions of wisdom, the wise man adds,

Proverbs 2:9. "Then shall you understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yes, every good path." There is no end of the commendation of the ways of wisdom. The fear and knowledge of God is not only the beginning — but the perfection of wisdom. But the lovers of wisdom have those instructions also which are necessary for guiding them in their behavior toward men. They are taught how to walk justly and wisely, and in what manner to behave in every affair. When a traveler is going to a distant place, it is pleasant to him to be informed that his way is safe, and that it may be found without difficulty. Now, as the way of holiness is the way of peace, so the scriptures give us sufficient directions for every step of it. Are we at a loss about our duty in any case? We may then safely infer, either that we have forgotten what our directory says — or that we are not skillful in applying it. Our carelessness in the study of this rule of life may often put us to a standstill — therefore we ought to have it daily in our hands, and to meditate on it day and night, so shall we find it a counselor in all our straits. The Spirit is promised as our guide through this world, and he directs us by his word, opening our minds to understand it, and directing our conduct in the way that it prescribes. Is the saint at a loss with regard to the way of duty in any particular instance? Let him pray, as David did in such cases — and like this holy man, he shall be led in the way of truth. Solomon has instructed us how to obtain wisdom, and in part shown the advantages of it. He insists on this last point through the remaining part of this chapter, telling us that it will preserve us from the snares of wicked men and women, Proverbs 2:10-19, and lead us in the way that has been followed by the saints in every age, who have found it to be the way of happiness and joy, Proverbs 2:20-22. Wisdom will be a preservative from the worst dangers!

Proverbs 2:10-11. "When wisdom enters into your heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto your soul, discretion shall preserve you, understanding shall keep you." That we may enjoy the advantages of wisdom, it must enter into our heart, which is naturally disposed to enter sin and folly; for man, however fond he may be of the reputation of wisdom — is born like the wild donkey’s colt. Some receive the words of wisdom into their ears — but understand not what they hear. Others hear and form clear apprehensions of what they hear — so to be able to talk of them, like Balaam or Judas, and instruct others. But the children of wisdom not only hear and understand — but love the truth. The Spirit of God writes it in the inward part; then it comes to them in power and in the Holy Spirit — and the testimonies of God are received by their hearts with pleasure and joy. Knowledge becomes sweeter than honey dropping from the comb, and is esteemed more than necessary food.

Paul counted everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. When Jeremiah found the word of God, he ate it, and it was to him the joy and rejoicing of his heart. The pleasure that saints take in knowledge, is very different from the transient affection experienced in the word by those hearers whom our Lord compares to stony ground. These false believers were moved and transported by the novelty of the truth, by the prospect of deliverance from Hell and possession of Heaven which it presented to them — but they had no spiritual apprehensions alone

of its divine glory, nor any deep-rooted affection to it. They still loved the world more than the testimonies of God, and this reigning earthliness of spirit, in time choked the beautiful springing of this seed in their souls. But those into whose hearts wisdom enters, have their eyes opened to see its glory — and the affections sanctified to relish its genuine sweetness. They rejoice in the truths that oppose their most darling corruptions. They take pleasure in the way of God's testimonies, as well as in the glorious prospects which they present. They heartily esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right — and delight in the law of God after the inward man, because it is pure and spiritual. They delight in it, though it forces them to confess that they are carnal, and sold under sin. This wisdom entering into their souls, furnishes them with understanding to see their way, and discretion to manage their affairs with prudence and judgment to the end. This understanding and prudence is an antidote against the poisonous infection of evil men and strange women. It is, first, a means of preserving us from the snares of wicked men.

Proverbs 2:12-15. "Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways."

Such is the portrait drawn by Solomon of those wicked men by whom his pupils are in danger of being seduced, unless furnished with wisdom to avoid the snare. They speak perverse things; they pay no regard to truth — but their tongues speak lies.

Among these pests of men, none are such virulent pests of everything that is good, as those who once made a profession of religion — but have left the way of uprightness to walk in those miserable and gloomy paths — which begin in the darkness of the mind, and end in the darkness of Hell! The stings of conscience which such people experience, instead of reclaiming them, tend only to irritate their spirits, and inflame them into fierce enmity against religion.

If, instead of being pierced with such stings, their consciences are hardened enough for the blackest sin — they are prepared not only to do evil — but to work it with both hands greedily. They rejoice in the service of Satan, and no greater pleasure do they know than that which arises from seeing that his interests flourish, that his kingdom prospers.

Such people are crooked in their ways. The only straight way is the way of uprightness — but that sinners leave, and wander into paths where they are bewildered and lost. They know not where they go, because darkness path blinded their eyes. One sin leads them on to another, and that to a third — until at length they run into wickednesses of which they could not have thought without horror when first they set foot in these deceitful paths. These miscreants are froward and stubborn in their ways — and why? Habit has become a second nature to them, their hearts are become impenetrably hard, and armored against admonition.

Yet look back to their early days and you shall find them to have evinced tempers and dispositions very different. They would then have abhorred gross impieties, and were not without impressions of the necessity of virtue and holiness. But the unwearied adversary of mankind spread his toils around them, and employed such men as they are now become — to efface every good impression, and to lead them on, by slow and imperceptible degrees, to those lengths in wickedness at which they have now arrived. Had they been armed with the instructions of wisdom, and employed these in their own defense — what different people might they now have been!

While they would mislead us by their persuasions — let us learn instruction from their miserable situation, and thankfully improve those means which God has afforded, to keep us out of the paths of destruction.

God is our preserver — but he has been pleased to appoint the instructions of wisdom as our great defense against these instruments of wickedness. The knowledge of the truth, and the cordial love of it — will open our eyes to our danger, and possess our hearts with a settled aversion to the practices of the ungodly. As our Lord repelled every temptation of the devil by the word of God — so when it abides in us, it will enable us to meet every temptation of the old serpent, and of his instruments, with safety and steadfast resolution.

Grace in the soul is weak of itself — but the seed of God shall remain forever. The powers of Hell shall never be able to extinguish it utterly — for it receives new supplies from the fountain of grace.

Secondly, Wisdom, by its instructions received into the heart, will preserve us also from the malignant influence of wicked women.

Proverbs 2:16-19. "It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life!"

It is a great happiness for young people to escape the snares of the harlot, in which so many have been entangled and lost. A true love to the word of God is eminently fitted to secure such a happiness. There is no viler object in nature, than an adulteress. Her beauty is but a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout! Though born and baptized in a Christian land — she is to looked upon as a heathen woman and a stranger. And as self-made brutes are greater monsters than natural brute beasts — so baptized heathen are by far the worst of pagans! Her words may be sweet and soft to the inexperienced ear of a thoughtless youth — but she is only flattering with her lips. Honey and milk seem to be under her tongue — but it is the cruel venom of dragons! She is monster of ingratitude to that husband who was the guide and protector of her youth. All the fervors of her first love are forgotten. She returns the most cruel treatment, for all that fond affection by which he bound her to him in the most endearing obligations. But her profaneness is still more shocking — for she violates that sacred bond which was instituted by him whom she presumes to call her God — and regards not the marriage oath which she swore by his great and solemn name. Shall a woman unfaithful to the best and kindest of friends — a wretch that commits perjury without remorse — prove faithful to any man? When she speaks fair — believe her not, for there are seven abominations in her heart! Miserable are those who trust to her alluring professions, for there is scarcely a hope that they will recover themselves from the snare of the devil! Her house is full of the pestilence of sin, and will infect everyone who enters with a mortal and almost incurable distemper! The mind is darkened, and the conscience deadened — the affections, too, are sunk into sensuality! How then can they again take hold of the paths of life? No doubt there is virtue in the blood and Spirit of Christ for the remission of the greatest sins, and the purification of the most defiled souls. It is even admitted, that whoremongers have been made illustrious monuments of the power of divine grace — but let it be remembered that these are miracles of grace. Who would cast himself into a deep pit, in the hopes of coming out alive, when almost all who fell into it were dashed in pieces or buried alive!

Whoever pleases God, shall escape from this devouring pit! Let us therefore cleave to God's judgments, and follow their direction, and keep at a distance from the place of temptation.

How worthy of our imitation is the example of Joseph, who was tempted day by day — but hearkened not to his mistress to lie with her or to be with her, because he would not sin against God. But wisdom will not only keep us from the paths of the wicked — it will also lead us in the way of good men.

Proverbs 2:20. "Thus you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the path of the righteous." It is not enough to refrain from wickedness — we in also work righteousness. We profess to be the servants of God — and it will be no sufficient excuse for a servant that has slept all day, to say that he did no mischief.

There are two ways, in one or other of which all men walk — the narrow way that leads unto life, and the broad way that leads to destruction. In the former way few walk — but it has been trodden by the feet of all who are worthy of our imitation. In it Abraham, and Job, and David walked — while those whose memorials are now perished, or whose names are remembered only to be execrated, were traveling in the broad way that leads to destruction. Which of these classes of people do we chose to follow in our course of life? If the former, we must take our directions from the wisdom taught by Solomon, and the other inspired writers. Those venerable men who have obtained a good report, and who through faith and patience inherit the promises — were close students of the word of God, so far as they enjoyed the benefit of its instructions. And by faith in its doctrines and promises, and a constant regard to its precepts — they obtained their good report. Happy shall we be if, like them, we esteem the word of God more than our necessary food and keep the judgments of God still in our view.

Proverbs 2:21. "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the blameless shall remain in it." They shall enjoy a long and a prosperous life, as far as it is for their real advantage, in that good land which God bestowed on his people — and shall, even when they are dead, possess it in the persons of their posterity, who are blessed for their sakes. Sinners enjoy not this happiness,

Proverbs 2:22. "But the wicked shall be cut of from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it." Must not the righteous leave the earth too? Yes! But the earth is a very different thing to the righteous, and to the wicked. To the wicked, this world is all the Heaven they ever have. To the righteous, this world is a place of preparation or Heaven. Death is a kind messenger sent to the righteous by their heavenly Father — calling them to the possession of their eternal inheritance! To the wicked, death is a messenger of wrath, summoning them to the abodes of misery! Death is the beginning of happiness to God's people — but the final conclusion of all that the wicked counted their happiness. To the righteous, death is a translation to a glorious eternity. To the wicked, it is everlasting destruction and woe. And is it all one to us, whether we share with the wicked in the miseries of their latter end, or with Zion's travelers in those everlasting joys that shall crown them when they attain the end of their faith?

# 01.03. Proverbs 3

Chapter 3.

Proverbs 3:1-35 This chapter contains a variety of useful precepts enforced by the strongest motives. First, To remember and keep in our hearts the things written in this book, Proverbs 3:1-2.

Proverbs 3:1. "My son, do not forget my law — but let your heart keep my commandments." This inspired teacher is to be reverenced as a spiritual father. His word is to be regarded as a law publish by Solomon — but binding on us by the authority of God. We must never forget this law — but make it familiar to our memories, that we may have a guide ready to direct us in every situation in which we may be placed; and when we treasure it up in our memory, we are to keep it in our heart. Richly does it deserve to form the object of our constant love, and the subject of our meditation all the day. Our obedience to it must proceed from the heart.

What is the difference between godly men, and false pretenders to religion? To the latter, the religion which they have is a burden — to the former religion is a pleasure. To the one the law is a disagreeable restraint — to the other God’s commandments are not grievous, for they rejoice in the way of his testimonies, more than in all riches. Self interest dictates to us the propriety of keeping God’s commandments:

Proverbs 3:2. "For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to you." A long and happy life is the desire of all men, and riches and good physicians appear to them the most likely means of obtaining it. But religion is better than all the gold and physicians in the world, for it has the promise of this life, as well as of that to come. Solomon knew well that godly men sometimes die young, while the wicked live, become old, yes, mighty in power; but still he asserts and often repeats the promise of long life which belongs to godliness. Surely, then it is not without meaning and truth. The godly shall enjoy life as far as it is really a blessing in their particular circumstances — the meaning carried beyond this, would convert the blessing into a threatening. Peace is enjoyed by the godly, even that of God which passes all understanding, and it keeps their hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Outward prosperity is enjoyed by them, as far as it is consistent with their spiritual interests. Tribulations and enemies they may meet with — but they live in peace. Though slaughtered by the hand of violence, or the sword of war, they die in peace. And when they die, they enter into everlasting peace. The second precept in this chapter, is one requiring us to live in the exercise of mercy and truth:

Proverbs 3:3. "Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them about your neck, write them upon the table of your heart." Mercy and truth are to be exercised by us in every part of our fellowship with our fellow-creatures — however defective they may be in the practice of these virtues to us. They are to be tied about our necks as a precious ornament, to be worn through life, and made visible to all men. Our light should shine before men, not for our own praise — but for the glory of our heavenly Father. But it is not enough to practice mercy and truth, so as to obtain a character for fidelity among men. Our outward acts must proceed from the heart. As the law of

commandments was written upon tables of stone — so is the law of Christ written on the fleshly tables of the Christian's heart, by the Spirit of the living God. As workers under the Spirit, we are required to write the law of kindness and of truth upon the tables of our heart, by maintaining deep impressions of it, by meditating upon the peaceful motives that should excite us to that virtue, and by endeavoring, through the grace of Christ, to have our hearts habitually disposed to all those duties which are the natural fruits of love and integrity.

Proverbs 3:4. "So shall you find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man." God is well pleased, not only with the reverence and love which his people show to himself — but with that generosity and mercy, that sincerity and faithfulness, which they evince to their fellow-men.

Mercy and truth are glorious perfections in the Deity, perfections which shall be forever praised as the springs of our felicity. Of these, the mercy and truth found in wisdom's disciples, are to be regarded as a faint imitation. God is greatly delighted to find in his children this his true, though imperfect image. To the merciful, he will show himself merciful — and those who deal truly, are his delight. He not only smiles upon them with the light of his countenance — but gives them favor in the sight of men also.

Kindness and truth are qualities so amiable as to engage the esteem even of those who are too selfish to practice them. They attract the good-will of men. They procure that good name which is better than precious ointment. That understanding which is good in the sight of God and man, is another fruit of the constant practice of mercy and truth. A good understanding appears already in his behavior — but it is also promoted by it; for the practice of what we know, tends greatly to render our knowledge more clear, and certain, and extensive. The next precept is, to depend on God, and not on our own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding." To trust in God, is to depend on him for bestowing on us every needful blessing, and preserving us from all evil.

Faith in Christ for eternal life is included in this dependence on God, for by him we believe in God. But we are commanded to trust in God for everything necessary for us in this life also; for the Lord God is a sun and shield, he will give grace and glory, and every good thing. O Lord God Almighty, blessed is the man that trusts in you! This dependence on God is to be exercised with all our hearts, our judgments being persuaded that God is the only and the all-sufficient object of confidence, and our souls resting with full satisfaction in his power and faithfulness. This holy exercise is fully and clearly exemplified to us in many of the psalms of David. While we trust in the Lord, our hearts must cleave to him, and renounce every sublunary dependence. To divide our confidence between God and the creature, is to lean with one hand upon a rock, and with the other hand upon a broken reed!

David charges his soul to wait upon God only, for his expectation was from him, and from none else. We must not make our own understanding a staff to our hearts. Dependence on our own wisdom, will lead us from trusting in God, to make lies our refuge, and to adopt unhallowed means for the attainment of our wishes. When men reject the testimony of God concerning Christ, when they depend on their own righteousness and strength instead of Christ, or on creatures rather than on God for help in difficulty, or when they expect to obtain pleasure or profit by sinful means — it is

evident that they are departing from God, through an evil heart of unbelief, and trusting for the direction of their behavior to their own corrupted minds. Do we trust in God, and not in ourselves? It will then give us much pleasure to know that we are directed and encouraged to make known all our affairs to God, according to the following words of the wise king:

Proverbs 3:6. "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." God is well acquainted with all our affairs — and yet he graciously requires us to present them to him in prayer, and to ask from him direction in the management of them, that we may be guided by his providence and Spirit, according to his word. The saints have found much relief in their perplexities, by spreading their case before him, and petitioning this verse for their help. But times of distress are not the only seasons in which we ought to apply to him, "Be anxious for nothing, (says Paul,) but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make known your requests unto him." We are every day to pray that our steps may be so ordered, as that we may not be led into temptation.

Joshua in the midst of his prosperity erred, by neglecting to ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord, because he thought the matter so clear, as that he might safely trust to his own understanding. Our encouragement to this duty is a promise that our path shall be directed. Having showed to God our way, we must wait on God for direction — not by a voice from Heaven, or by a new inspiration — but by his Spirit enabling us to understand his word, and apply it to particular affairs, and by his providence making the way where we should walk clear before us.

Thus will our path be so directed, as that we shall be preserved from falling into sin, from meeting with temptations that might prove too hard for us, and from being subjected to more than needful calamity.

What a pleasure is it to have a wise and kind friend to consult with in all our affairs! but how much sweeter the pleasure, that we know where to find God, that we are invited to go even to his throne of grace, and to utter all our words before him! When we interest God in our affairs by prayer, we may cast away every care, and walk on cheerfully, believing that he will guide every step of our journey. For his eyes are not only upon the way of his people — but upon every step of it. But when we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, let us be sure to do it with self-diffidence, and with sincere resolutions to adhere to that way which will be pleasing to God.

Proverbs 3:7. "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil." Vain man would be wise, although man is born like the wild donkey’s colt. The world is full of wise men, or of men that would be thought wise. But we cannot be truly wise unless we become fools, renouncing all dependence on our own wisdom, and depending with humility upon the Lord, for those supplies of wisdom that are necessary for enlightening our minds and directing our paths. When we pretend to ask counsel from God, while we have a secret dependence upon ourselves, and a reserved determination to pay no regard to his word or providence if it should cross our own desires — we play the hypocrite with God, and cover over that self-confidence which he abhors, with false professions of faith and resignation to the will of God. A high opinion of men’s own wisdom is so dangerous, that Isaiah pronounces a heavy woe upon it. We are not indeed to pull out our own eyes, to renounce our own understandings, or to believe contradictions. But we ought certainly to keep our rational powers in subjection to the word of God, to be sensible of our great liableness to err, and of our absolute need of divine direction, especially in those matters that concern religion.

That we may have our paths made straight, we must also fear the Lord and depart from evil. To those who fear the Lord, is addressed a promise of divine teaching. The fear of the Lord has a native tendency to prevent men from turning out of the way of truth. By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil. It acts as a sentinel to the soul, which keeps temptation from entering. God makes use of the grace of fear, as well as that of faith, in repelling temptation, and in subduing corruption. "I will put my fear," says he, "into their hearts, and they shall not depart from me." Abraham displayed his fear of God, as well as his unconquerable faith, when nothing could for one moment withhold him from obeying the strangest command which mortal ever received. "Now I know that you feared God," said the angel, "seeing you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." The fear of God preserves men from bodily disease, as well as from sin.

Proverbs 3:8. "It shall be health to your body, and marrow to your bones." The bones are the strength and fence of the body. The fear of God is health to the outward, as well as to the inward man.

Health is an object of desire to all, and the wise man will not only use medicines when sick, for the restoration of it — but will attentively consider what food and what exercise are the most proper for preserving health in the body, and marrow in the bones. The spiritually wise will remember, that in God’s hands is our life, and breath, and all our ways — that diseases are his servants, which come and go at his pleasure — and that the surest way to health is to walk before him unto all pleasing. Does he then enjoy health? He has a blessing along with it. Is he the victim of disease? It will be more beneficial to him, than is to the wicked his unsanctified health. Religion has a natural tendency to impart health and vigor to the body, because it preserves a man from those distempers which proceed from unsubdued lusts, and diffuses over the mind that calm serenity and heartfelt joy, which even upon the body exercise a medicinal influence.

We are next required to be liberal in the service of God.

Proverbs 3:9-10. "Honor the Lord with your substance, and with the first fruits of all your increase. So shall your barns be filled with plenty, and your vats will brim over with new wine." Earthly substance is necessary for the use of our bodies — but we are called to make a nobler use of it than the mere service of the outward man. We are to honor the Lord with it, making no use of any part of our increase, until we have set apart a reasonable proportion of it for the service of God.

God needs nothing at our hands; but for our own benefit, he will have us to render back a part of all he gives to us, for the decent support of his worship, and for the maintenance of the poor. Is it any hardship to give a part to him, from whom we have received all? Can we make a better use of our wealth, which is often a snare and a trap to men — by serving God, and thus making to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? By this means we honor the Lord. He is the Creator and Redeemer of our souls and bodies, and therefore we are to glorify him with our bodies and our souls, which are his. Our substance is his also, and we must honor him with it by a liberality in his service, proportioned to the extent of his bounty. By the practice of this duty, we show our faith in his providence and promises, our love to God, our gratitude for his goodness, and our preference for his service, to that of mammon. In this manner we justify our profession of the gospel of Christ, and others are made to glorify God, while they enjoy the benefit of our ministrations to this purpose. By the neglect of this duty, we are guilty of robbing God himself of that rent which he requires from us as his tenants. We dishonor him by showing that we love the

world better than his service, and that we trust more to our money chests, than to his promises. Has he not assured us, that instead of being losers, we shall be great gainers by what we bestow upon him? Liberality on God's account brings down the blessing of providence to such a degree, that our barns shall be filled, and our vats need enlargement.

God has the sun, and winds, and rain, and creatures of every description, in his hand; and these he manages in such a manner, as that none shall be a loser by him, nor a gainer by withholding from him.

Robbers of God are visited with a curse, which like a moth wastes, or like a fire destroys, their substance. Liberality opens the windows of Heaven, destroys the devouring locust, and turns the barren field in a delightful land. Health and riches are the advantages that attend the fear of the Lord, and liberality in his service. But we must not imagine that these blessings are promised without a reservation of the cross, when God sees it needful for us — nor suppose that God is unfaithful when he administers correction to his children. This truth is inculcated in the next instruction of the wise king, which teaches us how to behave under afflictive providences.

Proverbs 3:11. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction." This exhortation, like many of the others, speaks to us as unto children; and it is a piece of ingratitude in the children of wisdom, to forget it, by allowing it to be obliterated from their memories, or to produce no practical influence.

We are here warned against despising divine rebukes, or fainting under them. The rebukes of providence are despised, when people do not regard the supreme hand that afflicts them; when they do not consider the design of God in afflicting; or when, through stupidity of mind or hardness of heart, they neglect to comply with it. This is a great affront to God. It is as if a child would say his father when he strikes him, "I do not care, do with me what you will, I shall behave no better than I have done."

Ahaz was a very wicked man — but nothing showed the stubbornness of his heart so much, as his walking contrary to God, when he sent sore distress upon him.

God's people may fall into this sin, sleeping like Jonah amidst the storm that God sends to testify his displeasure with them. But those whom he loves — he will awaken out of their sleep; and this he sometimes does by terrible tempests of outward calamity or of inward terror, sufficient to arouse them from the deepest slumber. As the lively Christian is thankful for the least mercy — so the afflictions which others despise are improved by him, as calls to serious thought.

Afflictions may be despised in another sense, which seem to agree better with the argument used in the following verse. Men despise them, when they do not value them as necessary and useful. We need afflictions — and yet we are ready to think that they might be very well spared, and the work designed by them effected by gentler means. This notion is to be rejected by us with abhorrence, because it implies a bad reflection upon the wisdom and love of our heavenly Father, who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; though now for a season, if need be, he afflicts them, because the beneficial consequences are far more than sufficient to counterbalance the pain of it.

Weariness under the divine correction is another fault, which we must avoid with care. Our hearts must not fret against the Lord, nor allow questioning thoughts to spring up, for God never exceeds the due measure in distressing us. No ingredient is poured to the cup of affliction — but by infinite wisdom and grace! Nor shall the rod of Jehovah rest upon the lot of the righteous, longer than need requires.

Weariness will make the heart to sink like a stone, and produce harsh suspicions of the divine goodness. It will disqualify the mind for relishing the consolations of God, and answering the designs of the Almighty. To keep our minds from fainting, let us consider who it is that corrects us. It is the Lord, and all flesh must be silent before him, and receive what disciplines he is pleased to appoint, with reverence and resignation. It is the Lord, let him do unto us what seems good in his sight. He is excellent in judgment, and great in justice, and cannot do wrong to any of his creatures. But it is a sweeter consideration, that he is a Father, and chastens us in love.

Proverbs 3:12. "For whom the Lord loves he corrects, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights." God intends, not to destroy us — but to reform us. Correction is one of those privileges that belong to the family of God. Christ himself, though a Son in an infinitely higher sense than we, though altogether free from the need of correction — yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Christ was the first-born among many brethren, and we are predestined to be conformed to him in sufferings and in holiness. The sorrows which we endure are means appointed for making us partakers of God’s holiness. Earthly fathers correct their children, in order to drive away folly from them; and that misguided lenity which withholds the rod, is but cruelty in disguise.

Now, we yield reverence and submission to earthly parents; how much more do we owe it to that heavenly Father, who exercises love infinitely wiser and greater than theirs! He knows that the greatest afflictions have not so much bitterness as the least sin, and he loves his children too well to spare correction when it is requisite to purge away their sin. The best commentary we can have on this text, is that given by Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews. Did we understand it aright, we would bless God for correction, as well as for smiles — and the wormwood and the gall of our miseries would be turned into honey and the honey-comb. Whatever corrections the children of God suffer, they are still happy, and it is our duty to believe them so. Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects! Nothing can make that person unhappy who is possessed of wisdom, as the inspired philosopher tells us in the next part of this chapter. In it he again recommends wisdom to our esteem and pursuit, Proverbs 3:13-26.

Proverbs 3:13. "Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding." Where shall wisdom be found, and who is the man that gets understanding? Wisdom is to be found in the Bible, and in Christ, who is revealed in it. The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. All the treasures of wisdom are hidden in him, and he communicates this precious gift by his Word and Spirit, to those who apply to him for this purpose. And while they diligently make use of the prescribed means, they increase in wisdom, and with it their happiness increases too.

None can tell how happy is the man who finds wisdom. They are accounted happy who possess large quantities of gold, or silver, or precious stones; but these lose all their value when brought into comparison with this heavenly treasure!

Proverbs 3:14-15. "For she is more profitable than silver, and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her!" Silver is much esteemed by men, and gold is almost adored by them. Rubies are still more precious, and perhaps there are some things still preferred to these shining stones. But all of them together, are not to be named in comparison with wisdom. He has no true judgment of the real value of things, who would give a grain of true wisdom for a mountain of diamonds!

Earthly riches are for the body — wisdom is for the soul. Earthly wealth may enrich a man for the space of threescore and ten years — but wisdom will enrich a man for numberless millions of ages.

Gold and rubies are the true riches in the eyes of erring mortals — wisdom and grace are the true riches in the eyes of Christ. If we follow his judgment, the diseased beggar Lazarus was incomparably happier than the rich man who was clothed with purple, and who fared sumptuously every day. A venerable father, when he saw Rome in its splendor, took occasion to contemplate the ineffable glories of the Celestial City, compared with which Rome itself was but a pitiful village. The Scripture teaches us, when we are charmed with the luster of earthly riches — to consider how incomparably these are surpassed by the excellency of wisdom. He is not a true Christian who would not wish to be rich in faith, rather than in silver and gold; for every one that partakes of heavenly wisdom is enlightened by the Spirit of God, and disposed, in his judgment of the value of things, to listen to the instructions of God in his word. The excellency of wisdom further appears in the gifts she bestows. She is a munificent princess, holding in both hands the richest presents, to be given to her servants.

Proverbs 3:16. "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand are riches and honor." A happy life extended to old age is given to the lovers of wisdom; or if cut off in the midst of their days, they are no losers. They cannot even in this case complain that God is unfaithful to his promise, for in the eternal world they enter on a state of life which excels the present as much in value as in duration.

If a man promises to give us fifty acres of ground in a barren country — and instead of them gives us ten thousand acres in a fruitful soil, watered by the river of God, and blessed by the smiles of Heaven, he is not worse — but a great deal better than his word.

Riches and honor are given in the same sense as length of days. When Solomon testified his high regard for wisdom, God bestowed upon him the riches and glory of this world. But experience taught Solomon that these things did not make him wiser, or better, or happier.

Let us, from the history of the wise man, learn to implore the accomplishment of this promise in a spiritual sense. There are eternal treasures and unfading diadems reserved for the wise in the eternal world. There they will be so rich, that the streets of the city are paved with pure gold. There they will be so honorable, that they shall sit with Christ Himself on His throne! But as great as are the advantages, as splendid as are the honors which wisdom confers — the world is generally prejudiced against it, and with the idea of its being burdensome and unpleasant.

Worldly pleasure appears so desirable, so essential indeed to human happiness, that for this sole reason multitudes abhor the thoughts of becoming religious. In order to remove this mischievous prejudice, Solomon assures us, that religion is not less conducive to pleasure, than it is to honor

and wealth.

Proverbs 3:17. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Do not call religion Marah — but call her Naomi, for she is in every respect desirable. True, indeed, it is no rare occurrence to find a religious man leading an unpleasant life — but this is to be ascribed to his own mistakes and selfish dispositions — and not to religion, than which nothing tends so much to render the present life a scene of happiness.

It is pleasant to enter into wisdom's ways by believing in Christ. It is pleasant to go on in these paths, by walking in him who is the new and living way. In God's presence is that fullness of joy into which those travelers shall enter at the termination of their journey. Even now some drops of those rivers of pleasure enter into their souls, and give them more delight than the highest earthly enjoyments can impart to those whose portion is in this life!

It will readily be admitted, that some of wisdom's ways are pleasant — but are they all so? Yes, all her paths are peace itself, for salvation, as well as the effect of it, is peace.

There is peace and pleasure in repentance, which is sweetened by the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ — so that the true penitent enjoys more satisfaction in one hour's mourning, than the votary of worldly pleasure in twenty years' carnal gratification!

There is pleasure in self-denial, for he who practices it knows that he is the true self-seeker; and of this he is assured by the word of Christ.

There is pleasure and peace in bearing the cross of Christ, for it is made light by the Spirit of Christ, and the prospect of sharing with him in his glory.

There is pleasure and peace in tribulations, because when they abound — consolations abound much more by Christ.

There is peace in fighting the Lord's battles against the mightiest enemies — for the Christian soldier fights under the banner of the Prince of Peace. His feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. The God of peace will bruise every enemy under his feet.

More exquisite is that pleasure which the mortification of one sinful desire produces — than that which results from the gratification of a thousand. Should the Christian be called to die a violent death, there is peace in his latter end, as we find there was in the death of the good Josiah when he fell in battle. The pleasures of the world are like the gleams of a wintry sun — faint, and feeble, and transient. The pleasures of religion are satisfying and eternal. The calamities of this life are not able to interrupt, far less to destroy them. This is verified in the experience of everyone whose soul is under the lively influence of that faith which constitutes an essential part of religion.

David, though in deep waters, yielded not to desponding thoughts, believing that the Lord would yet command his loving-kindness. Though about to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he saw no ground for the fear of evil.

All the exercises, all the privileges, all the hopes of religion — are full of pleasure. Even the trials to which religious men are exposed, afford pleasure — if not while they are felt, at the farthest when they come to an end.

Such is the pleasure and peace with which wisdom is attended, that,

Proverbs 3:18. "She is a tree of life to those who lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retains her." Nothing in the present state of the creation is sufficient to furnish a proper emblem of the happiness that wisdom affords, and therefore the wise man goes back to the state of the world under innocent Adam, comparing the delights of religion to the fruits of the tree of life. For the sin of Adam we were driven from Paradise — and our approach to the tree of life in the midst of the garden forever prevented. But the second Adam has opened our way to a better paradise, "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations!" The branches of this wide-spreading tree bend down to this lower world, and those who are wise unto salvation sit under its shadow with great delight, while its fruit is sweet to their taste.

If we wish to eat of these delicious and soul-reviving fruits, we must take fast hold of wisdom, and keep that hold against all the enemies that would tear it from us. To wisdom we must cleave with purpose of heart, when the devil and the world would persuade us to forego some part of truth or duty, or to make some small compliance with sin — in order to serve some worldly end. "To Him who overcomes, he will he give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God!" To all the great things that have been said of wisdom, let us add the glory which belongs to wisdom, as it appears in creation and providence.

Proverbs 3:19-20. "The Lord by wisdom has founded the earth; by understanding has he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew." Knowledge and wisdom belong to God in their highest perfection, and shine forth in all his works. By his wisdom he established the world, and formed every creature beautiful in its kind. By his knowledge, the heavens and the earth, and all their inhabitants, were formed into one universe, which incessantly proclaims the greatness of its Creator’s wisdom. The language of every creature when considered by itself, and especially when viewed as part of the grand system, is, "We come forth from the Lord Almighty, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom." The world could never have afforded us a convenient dwelling-place, had not the depths been broken up by God, and the waters separated from the dry land, to be laid up in the vast repository of the sea, or to flow along in rivers for our benefit.

It is divine wisdom which draws up the moisture from the earth in waters, and exhales it in vapors, forming them into clouds — and then distilling them in dew, or pouring them down in rain — that food may spring out of the earth for man and beast. This wisdom calls for our gratitude, and praise, and imitation. We cannot pretend to make or govern a world — but we are enjoined to manage our own concerns with wisdom. The God whose understanding is infinite, has dignified us with rational powers, and directed us to that wisdom which is proper for us. When he displayed the wonders of his infinite understanding at the creation of all things, he said unto man, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom — and to depart from evil is understanding." He is the giver of wisdom, and he gives it from his own exhaustless stores. Every beam of wisdom in man is a ray from that eternal Sun. And the divine image, which we lost by our folly in departing from God, begins to be renewed in us when we attain that knowledge and wisdom so earnestly recommended by the royal teacher. Is wisdom so incomparably useful and excellent? Let us then listen with reverence to the instruction that again speaks to us as unto children.

Proverbs 3:21. "My son, let not them depart from your eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion." There are some kinds of wisdom highly esteemed by the world — yet some of these are so far from being useful, that they are brutish folly. No wisdom is sound, but that which is taught by the word of God, and approved by him who is the Author of wisdom, and who has given us plain marks for distinguishing it from that wisdom of the world which is earthly, sensual, and devilish. This sound wisdom makes us discreet and prudent, and guards us against that selfish deceit which has so often assumed its name. This sound wisdom and discretion must be like frontlets before our eyes, that we may keep them always in our view. Then will our steps be ordered in God's word. For by what means shall we purify our way? By taking heed thereto, according to God's word.

There are many adversaries who would rob us of this treasure, and we are but too ready to let wisdom slip out of our hearts. For this reason, we need to be frequently reminded of our duty to keep it. If we retain sound wisdom and discretion in our minds and hearts, if we uniformly exhibit them in our practice — we shall certainly find that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Proverbs 3:22. "So shall they be life unto your soul, and grace to your neck." Fools can scarcely be said to live; they neither glorify God nor enjoy him, so that they are dead while they live. But the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom gives life to those who have it. It imparts to life that happiness, which alone renders it worthy of the name. True wisdom is real life, communicated from him who is the quickening Spirit, to those who were dead in trespasses and sins. It is an ornament of grace to the neck, which renders the lowliest beggar who possesses it, more noble than the mightiest monarch, who is acquainted with no brighter ornament than his regal crown.

Safety is another of the great advantages which always attend wisdom.

Proverbs 3:23-24. "Then shall you walk in your way safely, and your foot shall not stumble. When you lie down, you shall not be afraid; yes, you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet." While we keep sound wisdom and discretion, we are safe by the protection of the Almighty. We are safe whether we walk in the way, or sit in the house, or repose on the couch. No evil shall happen to the just; even those events which are evil to others — are sanctified and blessed to them.

"He shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways, lest you should dash your foot against a stone." Happy it is to be the care of angels — but happier far to be under his protecting eye who is the keeper of Israel!

We must remember, that this promise has a direction embodied with it, "You shall walk in your way." Satan endeavored to cheat our Savior out of this important part of the promise, that he might cheat him out of the benefit of it altogether. But Jesus knew well the regard due to every jot and tittle of the word of God. We are required still to keep the way of the Lord, and in the affairs of life to attend to our own concerns — shunning the character of busy-bodies, by not meddling in the affairs of others. In the calling with which we are called, let us abide with God, and we shall dwell in safety under the shadow of the Almighty.

Sleep commonly flies from the victims of wretchedness and calamity; but quiet and peaceful are the slumbers of those who can lie down in safety, because the Lord sustains them. Even in the prospect of danger and distress, they can repose in calm serenity, for Jehovah gives his beloved sleep.

Such were the calamitous circumstances of David, when exiled and pursued by his unnatural son Absalom, that all the people who were witnesses of his banishment, wept for him. Yet what says David himself? "I laid me down and slept; I awakened, for the Lord sustained me." When the most prosperous sinners lie down to rest, they need covenant protection, and know not but they may open their eyes in Hell! The servant of God knows, when buried in the arms of "Nature's sweet restorer" — that he is under that guardian eye which neither slumbers nor sleeps!

There may be seasons in which the good man cannot enjoy pleasant slumbers. But what does he lose, if by the thoughts that Wisdom suggests, he enjoys a feast of holy contemplation — more refreshing to him than sleep is to others! In order to enjoy this tranquility of mind, we must believe the promises of God, and by the exercise of holy confidence, banish those fears that would distress the soul,

Proverbs 3:25-26. "Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared."

Sudden fears are attended with a stupefying influence upon those who lack faith — but far different is the fact with regard to the righteous. The righteous man is as bold as a lion, for he knows, like the three children in Babylon, that the God whom he serves is able to deliver him — or to render him happy, though the desolation of others should involve the destruction, not only of all his outward comforts — but of his mortal life. The Lord is a sure ground of confidence in the worst of times. Our proper exercise in such seasons, is to trust in the Lord, and to pour out our hearts before him, knowing that he will be a refuge for us. This comfortable doctrine is illustrated and enforced in almost every Psalm. May not one, then, exclaim with the royal philosopher, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding!" The way in which wisdom leads us, is attended with every blessing, and free from every evil. Or if there is any evil in it, so wonderful is the providence of God, that it is turned into good. Thus is Sampson's riddle verified to every afflicted saint. May our lives be those of the righteous, and our last end theirs! The wise man next directs us, to make no unnecessary delay in the performance of any good work.

Proverbs 3:27. "Withhold not good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it." To do justly, is one great point of religion. We ought not unnecessarily to delay giving every man his due, for the delay of justice is temporary injustice. When we owe money to our neighbors, which they require from us at present, and we, though able, defer payment until afterwards, we are plainly guilty of injustice; for a man has the same right to his property now, that he will have a year hence.

We find men keeping in their own hands, the hire of the laborer — and we reprove them for it. The same censure may be applied to those who refuse to pay just debts, or to restore to its rightful owner any piece of lost property which they have found. We are not to do what we will with that which is not ours, nor are we to owe to another anything but love. We owe love and the proper fruits of it to our fellow-creatures, according to their necessities and characters, and our connection with them. And we transgress the rule of righteousness, if we withhold even from our enemies that which is due to them by the law of Christ; for many things are to be reckoned just debts from us on Christ's account, which they have no title to claim for their own sakes.

It may be difficult for us to render to others what is due to them by the laws of justice or charity; but the question is not, whether it is easy — but whether it is in the power of our hands, to render unto others that good which is due to them. The fruits of love are often labors — but they are such labors of love as those which our Redeemer cheerfully performed for us — nor is any man a loser by them. What is in the power of our hands today — may not be in our power tomorrow — therefore we ought not to delay the performance of any good work.

Proverbs 3:28. "Do not say to your neighbor: 'Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow' — when you now have it with you." Delays in any part of duty, furnishes a strong presumption that we do not perform it cheerfully. We are commanded, not only to do good works — but to be ready to do every good work. We are commanded not only to show mercy — but to show it with cheerfulness. He who gives speedily, gives twice — but he who gives with slow reluctance, gives in part a denial.

Much of the benefit is often lost to the receiver, and much of the gratitude to the giver — by telling our neighbor to come back later. There is a manner of giving which ill accords with that kindness and mercy which should dispose us to give. Airs of superiority assumed even to the lowliest of our fellow-creatures, are unfitting to the Christian. For however inferior to us in point of station in life, they are still our neighbors, and God commands us to love them as ourselves.

God often delays answering our prayers — but he is infinitely and essentially superior to us — yet his delays are all in wisdom and love. When it is fit that his petitioners should receive what they ask — he gives before they ask — or while they are yet speaking, he hears. In one case, the wise man allows us to defer giving. When we have it not by us, and when we cannot give at all consistent with more urgent duties — we may refuse to give. But still we must have hearts to give, were it in our power. And if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not. The next direction is against doing evil to our neighbors.

Proverbs 3:29. "Devise not evil against your neighbor, seeing he dwells securely by you." Our fellow-men are our neighbors, and we are destitute of the love of God, if we feel no love to them. If the practice of evil is an index of what passes within the heart — then we must conclude that man to be wholly destitute of love, who can willfully hurt those whom he is required to love as himself. Such a man cannot surely pretend to religion; or if he does, he is at best like a tinkling brass, or a sounding cymbal — for his professions are emptiness and hypocrisy. At the day of judgment, they shall be doomed to Hell, who did not serve their neighbor in love! (See Matthew 25:31-45)

Where, then, must those appear whose practice was quite the reverse? All injurious people are wicked, and the more contrivance there is in any evil that we do, it has so much the greater malignity in it. It is criminal to devise evil against any person — but it is double iniquity to hurt those who dwell securely by us. For this in effect is a breach of trust, and an indication of a heart base and depraved beyond the common pitch of human wickedness. The meek and the quiet of the land are the people who dread no injury from us, as they plot none against others. And the Lord Jesus, to whom all judgment is committed, is the Redeemer of all such people. He has pronounced a blessing on them, and will avenge them of their enemies; for with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.

We must not even contend with our neighbors by hard words, when they have done nothing to provoke us; otherwise we are volunteers in the devil's service — sinning without putting him to the trouble of tempting us.

Proverbs 3:30. "Strive not with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm." If a man has injured us — we ought to forgive him. Do we believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven us ten thousand talents — and shall we reckon it a hard matter, at Christ's command, to forgive our brother a few pence? If the unforgiving shall never enter into Heaven — what curses shall forever lie upon those who are guilty of unprovoked injuries! Railers and revilers stand excluded from the kingdom of God, and the admission of injurious people, like Saul the Pharisee, into the kingdom of God — is to be regarded as a miracle of mercy. It may possibly be alleged, that injurious people are often prosperous in the world.

It may be so in some circumstances, yet,

Proverbs 3:31. "Envy not the oppressor, and chase none of his ways." Imagine not that a man can be happy in the enjoyment of that which he has gained by dishonest means. Envy or admiration of his success, might lead us to imitate his unrighteous behavior. Though his wine sparkles, let us remember that there is poison in the cup!

Proverbs 3:32. "For the perverse are an abomination to the Lord; but his secret is with the righteous." That man who is detested by the Lord, is so far from being happy, that he is miserable and accursed. Can he know true happiness, who is looked upon with an angry countenance by him whose smiles are Heaven, and whose frowns are Hell? Such is the situation of oppressors of every rank, from the mighty Nimrods of the world, who employ themselves in general massacres and desolations — down to the petty personal oppressors, who grind the faces of their poor neighbors, and by adding field to field, to the ruin of many families.

"But his secret is with the righteous." They enjoy a fellowship with God unknown to the world. He reveals to them the secret mysteries of grace, refreshes their souls with the manifestations of his special love, and blesses their substance by the unperceived workings of his gracious providence. God not only enriches them with his goodness — but treats them as friends, and to them all his paths are mercy and truth. The blessing of God upon his people, and his indignation toward his enemies — spread through their dwellings, rendering them happy or miserable. The cottage of the godly is a quiet and pleasant habitation. The palace of the wicked is blasted by a secret curse!

Proverbs 3:33. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked — but he blesses the habitation of the just." Happiness or misery lies in the blessing or curse of God. When you behold the magnificent structures in which the wicked dwell, let not your thoughts be lost in wonder, or your hearts rankle with envy. They are fabrics, stately indeed — but not solid. You may pronounce them cursed. The curse of God has often destroyed the timber and the beams of the most towering palaces; often has it kindled a fire, by which they have been destroyed to the lowest foundation. Such dwellings as these are houses of infection, for the leprosy of sin has taken possession of them, and it can be ascribed only to God's wonderful mercy, if the children and servants in them escape the plagues prepared for their lords. By the blessing of the Lord, the poorest cottage is converted into a dwelling of joy and praise. We read of whole houses that have been blessed for the sake of godly servants — how much more may the divine blessing be

expected, where the masters are pious, and make their dwellings a little church, where the melody of thanksgiving and the voice of prayer are daily heard! The blessing of God, which is daily asked, shall not be refused. The members of the family are blessed with instructions and examples that must produce good effects on them, unless they harden their hearts like a rock. The holy conversation of good wives may be a means of winning their husbands. Many children and servants have found the greatest reason to thank God for the appointment of their dwelling in a family of saints. From among the wicked, we find that proud and haughty scorners are singled out as special monuments of the vengeance of God.

Proverbs 3:34. "The Lord mocks proud mockers — but gives grace to the humble." It is pride that makes men mockers and scorners. When men have an overweening conceit of themselves, they are likely to behave insolently to others, and contemptuously to God himself. But on such arrogant worms of the dust, Jehovah looks down with contempt, and makes them objects of derision to all men.

We read in scripture of many, whom the pride of their heart and actions, brought to the lowest disgrace. Nebuchadnezzar, and Haman, and Herod, and the proud Pharisee — are set forth for examples, to show us that these men stand not on an even place, whose hearts are not kept low by that grace which cherishes humility. That God whose eye turns away with disdain from the splendor of haughty princes, and the diadems of imperious kings — looks with kindness upon the lowliest of those who walk humbly with their God. He visits them in mercy, and refreshes their spirits with his love. He gave them that grace which makes them humble, and he gives more grace.

God bestows grace on men, that he may be glorified. The lowly, who are made sensible of their emptiness and guilt, are the people who will ascribe praise to him, for the least of his favors. In them he will display the excellency of his love, and enrich them with his blessings in this and in the everlasting world. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." With the lowly is wisdom, and,

Proverbs 3:35. "The wise inherit honor, but fools shall be put to shame!" Some by their birth and fortune inherit high sounding titles, and celebrated kingdoms. But if they are not wise, their lofty situation is the theater of their dishonor.

Those who are blessed with sound wisdom, have an inheritance of honor in reserve, compared with which the crowns and scepters of the world deserve not a name. The prudent are even at present crowned with knowledge — but the happy day is coming when those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and those who have turned others to the wisdom of the just, as the stars forever and ever.

Fools are fond of honors — but all the honors they can enjoy are like bubbles when they glitter in the sun. They shall be promoted, indeed — but their exaltation shall be like that of Haman, who was exalted when he was hung upon a gallows fifty cubits high. Their shame shall be conspicuous to the world, when they shall be covered with everlasting disgrace, and become an abhorrence to all.

# 01.04. Proverbs 4

Chapter 4.

Proverbs 4:1-27

In this chapter, Solomon renews his exhortations to us to get wisdom, Proverbs 4:1-13, and to avoid temptations, Proverbs 4:14-19. The chapter concludes with a short sum of practical religion. In his exhortation to wisdom, Solomon makes use of many of the same motives by which he had already recommended it. Solomon had a heart filled with knowledge, beyond all the sons of men; and he could have charmed and astonished us by the discoveries of new truths in every sentence. But he had wisdom to manage his knowledge, and therefore prefers those discourses which are solid and useful — to those which, by their dazzling brilliancy, are fitted only to produce admiration and wonder. He desires not our applause — but our benefit. His aim is not to shine — but to instruct. He was a wise householder, instructed into the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, and brings out of his treasure old things as well as new.

God speaks to us more than once or twice by this inspired penman, and shall we not listen to his voice? We have precept upon precept, and line upon line — and if we do not receive instructions pressed upon us so warmly — we must go and fall backwards, and be broken, and snared, and caught. May God open our hearts to hear what is said by him who was the wisest of men, and who spoke under the guidance of unerring Wisdom.

Proverbs 4:1. "Listen, my children, to the instruction of a father; pay attention and gain understanding." Our Lord teaches us to pray to God, as children to a father. Have we such confidence toward God — and shall we not attend with the reverence and love of children, to him who addresses us with the infinite tenderness of a heavenly Father?

Some have lost their fathers; some have fathers who give no food to the souls of their children. There is a Father who will take up these orphans, and supply than with the best and kindest instructions. He calls upon all of us to attend to his understanding, for he still opens his mouth in wisdom through Solomon. That blessed God who makes the sun to shine upon our world, has caused this luminary still to shine for enlightening the souls of men. It was in mercy to Israel that the sun was made to stand still upon Gibeon, that the people might avenge themselves of their enemies. But it is a richer favor, that this light still shines, to direct our paths in wisdom and safety.

Let us hear what he can say in recommendation of what he inculcates upon us.

Proverbs 4:2. "For I give you good doctrine, do not forsake my law." There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" But they do not know what is good for them, and allow themselves to be deceived with shadows rather than realities. Here God shows us what is good, and gives it to us.

All the things that men can desire, are not to be compared to good doctrine. But is it befitting in a wise man to commend his own discourses? Solomon might well commend them, for they are not

his — but God's, and God is graciously pleased to commend them to our acceptance. He calls us to buy wisdom without money, and reveals as much earnestness in recommending this precious merchandise, as if he were to be enriched by the price. Were a thousand volumes to be written in commendation of this holy book, they could not say so much for it, as it can say for itself in a few words. God is not only the author — but the recommender of it. He calls it good doctrine, and requires us not to forsake it in our practice. To despise it, is to despise the authority and love of him who guided the pen of Solomon in writing and commending it to us. To forsake his law, is to forsake the king's highway, which is ever under his eye and protection — and to turn into those paths which are haunted by ravenous beasts. The words of Wisdom here sounding in our ears, are the words, not only of Solomon the wise — but of David, the man after God's own heart. He delivers to his children, what he heard from his blessed father, by whom also the Spirit of the Lord spoke.

Proverbs 4:3-4. "When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said: Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live." His parents had, in his tender years, instructed him in the principles of religion; and the reason why they did so, was, that they loved him — for the best evidence of parental love is to instruct, and when necessary, to correct children.

Solomon was the best loved son in the family, and the greatest pains were employed in training him up in the way wherein he should go. Of him, accordingly, we find, that his parents had more joy than of all the rest. His mother gave him instruction, as well as his father. Her sin had lost her a child — but her religious care was rewarded with double comfort in the best and dearest of her sons. Were there more women of the spirit of Bathsheba, and Lois, and Lemuel's mother — we might hope to see a greater number of Solomon's, and Timothy's, and Lemuel's in the world.

Solomon communicates to his children the instructions which his father had given him. We do injustice to our children, if we do not endeavor to leave them that estate which our forefathers acquired for their posterity. It is a more grievous iniquity, if the fathers do not transmit to their children those pious instructions, which in their tender years they received from their own parents. Families are reckoned honorable, when a rich estate passes from father to son, through many generations. But it is a far more lovely sight, to behold the same faith dwelling in a rising family — which dwelt in their mother, and father, and remote ancestors.

We have a specimen of David's instructions to Solomon in the twenty-eighth chapter of the first book of Chronicles. The reading of it is sufficient to warm our hearts, and make us wish to hear more of the venerable king's instructions to his son. Solomon, who did not forget what his affectionate father said, gives us more of them in this place. Let us hear them with reverence, that we may not be found despisers of him — by whose direction David spoke, and Solomon wrote.

Proverbs 4:4. "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live." Children must attend to the words of their pious parents, and treasure them up in their hearts, to be observed in their lives; for it is no vain thing — but their life, to which they are called to hearken. When our fathers leave us money or land, we will not part with these gifts of their love — but the instructions of life are more precious than any earthly heritage. The wisdom which Solomon learned by his father's counsels, was better than his kingdom. When tested by God, it appeared that he valued an increase of wisdom, above an addition to his dominions, or his wealth, or even to

the years of his life.

Proverbs 4:5. "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them." How earnestly are we called to seek after wisdom, until we find it! It would be a happy token of getting it — were we so deeply convinced of its value; as to make the attainment of it our grand concern. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled. If we cry for wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding — our cries shall not remain unanswered. The success of Solomon's petition is recorded as an encouragement to our prayers and our hopes. It is not enough to get wisdom — we must also use it, and walk in its ways. They are all pleasantness and peace — but pain and misery will meet us, if we turn either to the right hand or to the left.

Proverbs 4:6. "Do not forsake her, and she shall preserve you; love her, and she shall keep you." There are some who think it necessary, in particular cases, to forsake wisdom, lest their strictness should expose them to damage. But David here tells Solomon and us, that this must be a dangerous error. The way of duty and of safety is still the same. Those who walk by faith will believe this, though it appears to such as walk by sight, an absurdity contradicted by a thousand facts.

It is incomparably safer and happier, to lose our credit and our life, by cleaving to the truths and ways of Christ — than to preserve both by base compliances with the enemies of the truth. That we may not forsake wisdom, we must embrace and love her. A miser will never forget where his treasure lies, and he will lose his life sooner than be robbed of his precious store. The love of wisdom will in like manner induce us to lay it up in our hearts, and to keep fast hold of it in defiance of every danger. When people receive not the truth in the love of it — they provoke God to leave them to the influence of strong and soul-ruining delusions. When we receive it into our hearts, it makes us strong and victorious over the wicked one.

Proverbs 4:7. "Wisdom is the principal thing — therefore get wisdom; and with all your getting get understanding." David had got wisdom and understanding by meditating on God's testimonies, and he found it the principal thing. His crown and palace were not comparable to it in his eyes. Setting so high a value upon it himself, it was his great desire that his beloved son should get it also. And those parents who are possessed of David's spirit, would rather see their children wise unto salvation, than rich and great in the world. Evil parents are not so bad as to refuse bread and fish to their children. Good parents use every means to make them sharers of that wisdom, which they have found to be their own happiness.

Whatever we get, let us get wisdom. I remember to have read of two religious women in the reign of Queen Mary of England, who parted with a considerable portion of their estate, for a few leaves of the Bible. Those who look upon the bargain as a foolish one, have little knowledge of the worth of the scriptures. If a man has acquired thousands of gold and silver, and is without wisdom — he has but gained thousands of shining nothings. If he has acquired wisdom, and nothing besides — he has gained the one thing needful. Having gained wisdom, we ought to value her as she deserves to be valued.

Proverbs 4:8-9. "Esteem her — and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor." All that truly know wisdom, must embrace and exalt her. The only reason why any treat her with indifference, is

that they are entire strangers to her. None knew her better than David and Solomon — and we hear how eloquent in her praises they are. We must prize wisdom as a pearl of inestimable value, and we must testify our regard for her:

by growing in grace and in knowledge;

by improving every means and opportunity afforded us of increasing this divine treasure;

by valuing, for the sake of wisdom, the teachers and lovers of it;

by earnest endeavors to make our friends and neighbors sensible of its value;

and, in a word, by giving it the throne of our hearts, and the government of every action of our lives.

Those who honor wisdom, obtain the noblest honors; for by wisdom, they are promoted. Their heads are adorned with a diadem of beauty, and a crown of glory is delivered to them. None are so apt to be vain of earthly honors as those who, like David, are unexpectedly raised to the possession of them; or who, like Solomon, surpass in majesty all their contemporaries. Yet we find, that neither David nor Solomon was greatly charmed with the luster of a crown. The reason is obvious — their eyes were open to the glories of true wisdom — and all the glories of earthly kingdoms were lost in the superior brightness! They would rather have exchanged conditions with the poorest saint in Israel — than with the most magnificent monarch in a land where God was not known.

Solomon received and readily assented to his father’s good doctrine; we need not wonder therefore that he prayed for wisdom rather than for long life, or glory, or power. He had learned not only that wisdom was a nobler possession than any of these things — but that it brings these along with it. If we receive in faith and love these instructions of the holy man — then our desires will be like his.

He who is told of a rich treasure hidden in his ground, will soon make it appear whether he believes the report. He who believes the report of God concerning the excellency of wisdom, will dig for it as for hidden treasure.

These are the instructions of David to Solomon, which he communicates to us. Solomon now appears again to address us in his own person.

Proverbs 4:10. "Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of your life shall be many." Who is the man that desires to live long, that he may see good? Let him hear and receive the sayings of David and of Solomon. There are few men that do not wish to live long — but there are few also, who can trust as much to the counsels of the sovereign arbiter of life an of death — as to the counsels of a good physician. Many shorten their days by seeking to the physicians, rather than to the Lord. A wise man would not chose, for the sake of a long life, to expose himself to guilt and misery. But Solomon, in his prescription, consults our holiness and happiness, as well as the length of our lives.

Proverbs 4:11-13. "I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction,

do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life." In our journey through life we have great need of one to guide us — for it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. God alone can lead us in a safe way, and he does it by his Spirit through his word. This inspired writer does not only teach — but guide us. He is like a companion in our journey, who points out every step that we should take, and every step that we ought to avoid. The way in which he leads us, is the way of wisdom — for we are taught to keep our great end constantly in view and to adopt the proper methods for reaching it.

It is a right way, for our personal interest and duty are jointly pursued — and every point is gained, when these two most important objects are combined. Our duty to God and to man, and to ourselves, are all clearly explained by this divinely instructed teacher.

It is a straight way — a way in which we shall not be hampered, and in which we shall not stumble.

Those who walk in the ways of sin and folly, imagine themselves to be the only people that enjoy liberty. But how vain the thought! They are very slaves, for they are in bondage to impetuous passions, which prescribe service hard and impossible to be performed. One of the tyrants contradicts the orders of another; and though one should gain the sovereignty, and crush every insurrection of the rest — the servant of sin is still straightened, because conscience terrifies him, or divine providence crosses him in his pursuits.

He, on the contrary, that walks in the way of God’s precepts, is at liberty; for though he is in the strait way that leads to life, that way is broad enough to allow him all the room that a reasonable being can desire.

We taught to manage our civil and spiritual business with ease and safety, and to avoid everything that might encumber or ensnare us.

Stumbling-blocks lie before us in our journey through life, and those who have not a skillful guide often fall upon them to their hurt. Sometimes we are under the necessity of running, and there is then most danger of falling into sin and mischief, when, without being allowed time to deliberate, we must instantly resolve upon one of two courses that lie before us — or must act with vigor and alacrity, at the risk of being hurried forcibly along by our passions, without time to take due care of our steps. In such cases as these, it is needful to have religious principles rooted in our hearts, and religious knowledge stored up in our minds, which through divine grace will prevent us from adopting any course of action displeasing to God, and enable us to determine by what means we may best consult the glory of God and our own real interest. When we act with resolution, and show our fervent zeal in religion — this knowledge and wisdom will preserve us from those dangerous extremes which have so often brought dishonor on religion and the professors of it.

Many temptations surrounded David in the days of his youth and he was sometimes ready to slip with his feet; but he meditated on God’s testimonies, and in all his ways acknowledged God, and the Lord directed his steps and enlarged them under him. If at any time he stumbled, the reason was, that he lost sight of that word which was the light of his path — but he was never left to turn aside from following the Lord.

Let us therefore receive the instructions of life with all the desire of our hearts. Let us value them as our life, and abhor sin and folly more than death! That we may keep fast hold of instruction, and

walk in this straight way in which we shall not stumble, it is necessary to keep out of the way of evil men.

Proverbs 4:14-15. "Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way." We must not have fellowship with wicked men. Their course and company are to be avoided. We must not much as enter into their path, or if we have entered, we ought instantly to turn out of it. Their path is to be avoided by us when we are at a distance from it. It is unsafe to pass by it, lest we should be tempted to take a step or two in it. When we find ourselves near, it is our duty to hasten away until we get at a distance from danger. This wise leader calls out to us with a loud voice, to keep at a great distance from the way of evil men. He calls as if it were a haunt of robbers and murderers — and so indeed he may, for those who would rob us of our purity and peace, are more dangerous than those who would rob us of our money! The sins to which they would tempt us by their example and persuasions, may prove the destruction of our comforts and our souls. We pray to be kept from temptation, and our practice ought not to contradict our prayers. Otherwise it is evident that we mock God, by asking from him what we wish not to have. No wonder that the wise man is so peremptory in urging us to avoid the society of the wicked,

Proverbs 4:16-17. "For they cannot sleep until they do evil; they are robbed of slumber until they make someone fall. They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence." These are faithful servants of him who is a murderer from the beginning, and their pleasure lies in doing evil. It is their food and their drink to do the will of the wicked one. They exist on robbery and spoil, and if they have not been eating the bread of wickedness, they retire to their beds with the reluctance of those who have been unable to procure for themselves necessary food.

These wicked people may teach us how zealous we ought to be of good works. Why should the servants of the best Master labor in his service with less fidelity and resolution than those who serve the devil, and work for his poor wages? If we have David’s spirit, we will not give sleep to our eyes, nor slumber to our eye-lids, until we have done the work of the day for God. The faithful followers of Christ will count it their food and their drink to do the will of their heavenly Father.

He was a heathen — but he had the soul as well as the heart of an Emperor, who said on the evening of a day in which he had not done any good, "Friends, I have lost a day."

There are many whom it would be difficult to persuade to manifest the same zeal in the service of righteousness, which these profligates discover in the service of iniquity. But it may reasonably be expected, that we should flee their company when their wicked character is laid before us. Let us not form the mistaken idea, that the worse they are, we are in the less danger of imitating them — for the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Of little sins we are not afraid — but say within ourselves, "These sins are attended with little danger, are they not little ones? Surely our souls shall not die though we fall into them."

We are as little afraid of great sins, because we think them so shocking that we cannot fall into them.

Frequently does it happen, that laboring under such misapprehensions as these, men lay down their heads upon the lap of temptation, and awake like Sampson with their locks shorn, in the hand of their enemies! To these enemies they are captive, and to this punishment God has given them

up for neglecting to follow his counsels, and preferring to them the instructions of those who cause to sin.

There is as great a difference between the path of the just and that of the wicked, as there is between light and darkness.

Proverbs 4:18-19. "The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter until the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble." The righteous man possesses an understanding brightened by the rays of divine truth, for the Sun of righteousness has shone into his soul. His heart is beautified by the light of purity, diffusing a pleasant luster around him in his conversation. His spirit is cheered with the light of joy and consolation from the countenance of God. This light is not like that of a candle which burns itself away into darkness — but like that of the morning sun, which shines brighter and brighter, until it blazes with meridian splendor.

Christians increase in knowledge, and grace, and happiness, in this world, and are perfected at death and the resurrection. Clouds may indeed obscure their brightness, and thick darkness may occasionally cover them. Their progress may be suspended, like that of the sun in the days of Joshua; or they may go backward, as the same glorious luminary did in the days of Hezekiah — but these days of threatening aspect shall not extinguish their light. The Lord will make their light to spring forth speedily, and their darkness as the noonday. He will remove or turn back in their progress, the causes that obstructed them, and he who began the good work in them will perform it until the day of Christ.

Then shall they shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, for the Lord shall be to them an everlasting light. They shall see God as he is; they shall love him to the utmost extent of their capacity, and enjoy full satisfaction in the presence of him who is the fountain of life. The wicked travel in darkness all their days. This is true, not only of those rebels against the light who abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness — but of all who do not follow him who is the light of the world, and live without that love which is the distinguishing mark of the disciples of Christ. Unbelievers may have some glimmerings of light in their minds and consciences — but these are not sufficient to keep them from walking in darkness. Their eyes are evil, and their whole course of life is full of the darkness of ignorance and error, of misery and sin. So great is this darkness, that they often stumble and wound themselves without knowing the cause of it, or even that they are wounded. Hence arises their ignorance of their need of healing. The wise are not ignorant of Satan’s devices, and when they fall they are instructed to avoid the stumbling-block by which their fall was occasioned. But it is the misery of fools walking in darkness, that being insensible to the means of their seduction into sin, they fall again and again by the same instruments of temptation! Instead of learning caution by their sins, one fall is the occasion of another, and perhaps a worse fall.

There is indeed a great difference between the darkness of their path — and that region of darkness to which it leads. Their minds being blind, there is no light within them; still, however, the light of Christ shines around them, and they are called upon to give it admission. Arise, shine, for your light is come, O you who long dwell in darkness! If you are deaf to the voice of him who has come to shed light into your souls — you know not when your feet may stumble upon the dark mountains, and your souls drop into the regions of eternal darkness, where there is not the light of

a candle to mitigate the horrors of the gloom!

If, after all that our wise instructor says, we still chase the path of evil men, let us hear the sentence of our Judge. This chapter is concluded with a short but comprehensive sum of practical directions — but before addressing them to us, the preacher again summons us to attend:

Proverbs 4:20-22. "My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body!" When a preacher has truths of great importance to communicate, and sees many of his hearers asleep, he endeavors to rouse them up. Just so, this wise man, knowing that we are dull of hearing, frequently renews his calls to us to hear and treasure up his words. It is our duty to be frequently summoning the powers of our souls to attend with reverence to the word of God, our Maker and our Judge, and to pray to God that he may open our ears to discipline, and seal our instruction.

He who has ears, let him hear. Let him place these necessary instructions before his eyes, that they may be a rule to his life, and let him lay them up in the midst of his heart, believing them to be the faithful sayings of God, and loving them with a cordial affection, because they are more precious than gold, and sweeter an honey from the comb. The motives that call for our attention are exceedingly powerful. It is a father who speaks. The things which are spoken are of quickening and invigorating virtue. They are life to such as find them, and health not only to the soul but to the body; not to a particular part of it — but to all the flesh. A medicine effectual to the cure of a single member might soon enrich the inventor of it. Here is a medicine for all the body — and yet the physician who prescribes it without reward, and finds so few willing to make use of it, that he must proclaim its virtues again and again. He speaks once and again — but man perceives it not. Are we then dead not only to every generous principle — but to every feeling of self-interest? Have life and death become matters of indifference to us? Is it all one in our eyes, whether we enjoy health in our bodies and souls — or pine away under the power of deadly distemper? Here is healing balm. Here is a physician of infinite value. Attend to the directions which he gives for the management of our whole life. The Lord is our keeper; and in the history of Peter we are furnished with a melancholy proof, that unless he keeps us, our care of ourselves will be unavailing. But if we commit the care of ourselves to God by a lively faith, it will not make us careless about ourselves, for God keeps us by his power through faith, by putting his fear into our hearts, and by exciting into activity those beneficial graces. If God keeps his fear alive in our hearts, we shall be powerfully disposed to guard our hearts and tongues, our eyes and feet from evil.

We are here instructed by Solomon in what manner to manage this important affair.

Proverbs 4:23. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The heart is the fountain of vital action. It is out of the good treasure of the heart, that a good man brings forth good things — and out of the evil treasure of the heart, that the evil man brings forth evil things. No actions can be good unless the heart is good — any more than the fruit can be good, when the tree is corrupt. The heart of Simon Magus was not right with God, and therefore his professions were hypocrisy. This corrupt fountain must be purified by the Spirit of Christ — or the streams issuing from it will be corrupt and poisonous. But even when purified by renewing grace, it is not altogether pure. Such is the remaining tendency to corruption, that the heart must still be kept with all diligence.

We ought carefully to keep our tongues and hands, our eyes and feet — but above all, we ought to keep our hearts. This will be the best means for keeping all the rest, and without this, however well our external behavior is regulated — we are but corrupt and false-hearted professors of religion. That our hearts may be kept, we must observe them with a watchful eye, and endeavor to be well acquainted with their leading principles and their inward workings.

It is a shame for one who knows many things, not to know himself; and the chief thing about ourselves to be known is the heart. With a strong hand must the heart be ruled; and it ought to our constant endeavor to subject to the word of God, our every imagination and reasoning, every opinion and thought, every inclination and affection. A neglected garden will not be so full of weeds — as a neglected heart will be full of vain thoughts and exorbitant passions, hateful to God, and dangerous to our own happiness and peace. The heart must also be guarded against those dangers that perpetually threaten our best interests. It is like a besieged city attacked by mighty and cunning enemies, and in danger of being betrayed by a treacherous traitor within.

It is a great encouragement to us in performing this difficult duty, that our labor shall not be in vain. Numerous the promises made to us of assisting grace, and if we suffer from a surprise of the enemy, Christ prays that our faith will not fail. The tongue is that member of the body which communicates most readily with the heart. For this reason it is to be regarded as its most active instrument, either for good or evil service; therefore, in the next place —

Proverbs 4:24. "Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips." A twisted mouth is a great deformity to the countenance — and a perverse tongue is a more ugly blemish to the heart. The tongue is a world of iniquity, and needs a world of care to manage it! We must not only refrain from evil discourse — but put it far from us, avoiding every thought and feeling that might set an evil tongue in motion, and refusing to listen to evil speakers, that we may not be tempted by them to spread their corrupting speech. It is a sad thing to think evil, for that corrupts ourselves; but if we have done foolishly in thinking evil — let us lay our hands upon our mouths, lest we corrupt others also.

We must repent bitterly of evil imaginations — but the manifestations of pardoning grace restore complete comfort and calm serenity to the wounded spirit. But when we have given our tongues a license, whereby others also have been drawn into sin — we must remember that, though pardoning mercy may clear our consciences from the terrors of guilt, deep remorse must still be felt for the irreparable injury done to others. Who can tell how far its baneful influence may have spread? The commandment of God must also give direction to our eyes.

Proverbs 4:25. "Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you." Sincere views in the course of our life to the great end of our being, is a necessary part of religion — and without these there is no truth in our religious profession. The Pharisees abounded in prayers and giving of alms; but the praise of men was in their eye, and our Lord tells us that they had their reward. Their desire was to be seen and honored by men, which they no doubt by their religion obtained — but it was all that they obtained by it.

Jehu thought himself a very zealous man — but he took no heed to walk in the way of the Lord with all his heart; and it is testified of him that he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam all his days. He did many good things — but his eyes looked aside to his honor and profit. All the

splendid actions he performed, were but so many splendid sins.

None of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself. The glory of God must be our great aim — otherwise it appears that redeeming grace has not taken effect upon us.

Heaven is in the Christian's eye — and from it his views must never be turned aside to the world. No doubt the enjoyments of the world may be sought by us — but still in subordination to the hope of our heavenly calling. Heaven is our home — and earth is our inn. If the world is our home — we are not strangers and pilgrims here, neither are we citizens of Heaven.

We must not, under the pretense of serving God, make earthly motives our end — otherwise we are guilty of that kind of sacrilege which is of all others the worst — that which consists in alienating God's own service from him. It is not less dishonorable to God, when in our zeal for the accomplishment of good ends, we have recourse to means disapproved by him — for the command of God combined with his glory, must be ever kept in our eye. Our actions must be all ordered in the word of God.

Proverbs 4:26-27. "Ponder the path of your feet, and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil." Consideration is one of those things in which man excels the irrational animals, and it is absolutely necessary in the religious life. If we do not think like men, we never please him, who made us wiser than the beasts of the earth! If we do not walk wisely — we can with no propriety be numbered among the wise. Our actions will be weighed by God in an even balance at last, and it is necessary for us to weigh them now in the same balance. As we ought to compare our past actions with the word of God, in order to know what occasion there is for repentance. So in like manner those actions which we design to perform, that we may know whether it is lawful to perform them or not. This is necessary for the direction and establishment our ways. Those who do not ponder their paths are like a waves of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed hither and thither. But in the hearts of such as receive and apply it to the cleansing of their way — the word of God has an establishing efficacy. Our ways ought to be stable and consistent. It is disgraceful for men to have their religion modeled and varied by their company and circumstances of life. Let us resemble, not the flexible willow — but the stout oak. Our goodness, if like the morning cloud, is no goodness at all, for the path of the just is as the morning sun. To be unsteadfast in God's covenant, is to be treacherous to God. The truly righteous man is faithful unto death. His frames of mind may vary, and his steps may sometimes be seduced from the straight way — but the Spirit of God will restore his soul, and make him again to walk in the paths of righteousness.

David slipped with his feet, and he once turned aside — yet he could say in truth that he had not wickedly departed from his God. He finished his course with joy, and received the crown of life.

It is dangerous to turn either to the left hand or the right from the way of God's commandments. On each side of the King's highway are those crooked paths, which are full of precipices and pitfalls.

Men may be destroyed by being over-righteous, as well as by being wicked overmuch. The Pharisees in the days of Christ's flesh, sinned as much by adding to God's law as by taking from it. To add to God's precepts, is a reflection upon the wisdom of the Lawgiver. To violate them, is an insult upon his authority.

It commonly happens, that when men have the presumption to make some new articles of religion, they make compensation to themselves for their additional restraints on their liberty, by straitening the law of God in some other points — and thus make it on the whole much easier to flesh and blood, than it was made by God. Our foot must be removed from all evil. Sin must not be indulged in thought, word, or action. No degree of this abominable thing is to be allowed in our practice.

Saints have fallen into some of the greatest sins — but is inconsistent with holiness to take liberty in the least sin. Even the garment spotted by the flesh must be hated by us. From this whole directory, we may see our need of pardoning mercy; for which of us can say, "We have made our hands clean, or kept our tongues from every evil thing?" But the blood of Jesus is a fountain opened to cleanse from all sin. Without renewing grace, our labor in guarding our hearts, and restraining our tongues and feet from evil, will be as vain as to attempt washing an Ethiopian white. The old heart cannot be reformed — but God has promised to give us a new heart, and to put a new spirit within us. With our vigilance — faith and prayer must be joined.

# 01.05. Proverbs 5

Chapter 5.

Proverbs 5:1-23 The wise man gives us this chapter, as an antidote against those youthful lusts by which so many are ensnared. Let such as are tempted by their own hearts or by the agents of Satan, to sins of immorality, seriously consider its contents, and pray that God may bless them for their benefit. None of us are superior to all temptations of this nature; let us therefore give heed to the things that are spoken, in order to represent the danger and mischief of impurity, and to show us in what manner to avoid it.

Proverbs 5:1-2. "My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge." The wisdom which Solomon teaches in this chapter cost him dear; but if we attend to his instructions, we shall have them at an easy rate. It may save us much bitter repentance, and preserve us from some of the most dreadful dangers. For it will teach us that spiritual subtlety and discretion, by which, like David, we shall become wiser than our enemies, and be enabled to escape their snares.

Attention will enable us to keep knowledge in our hearts, for a wanton imagination, ever dictating corrupt conversation to the lips, proves the beginning of ruin to many. They accustom themselves to speak of things not fit to be named among Christians; and from foolish talking, and impure jesting, by which they corrupt themselves and their companions — they proceed to the works of darkness. When the word of God enters into our hearts, it will banish all pollution from the tongue, and dispose us to entertain our companions with that discourse which is good for the use of edifying. Thus our own hearts will be more deeply impressed, God will be honored, and others guarded against the snares of the destroyer. Now it is of great importance for men, especially in their younger days, to furnish themselves with preservatives from that word which is able to keep us, against the snares of the immoral woman. Solomon had already warned us against her; but he is directed by God to do it a second time at greater length.

Proverbs 5:3. "For the lips of a immoral woman drop as a honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil." She talks of nothing but love and pleasure, and perpetual delights. To hear her, one would suppose that she possessed the most generous and unselfish spirit. Her tongue is taught by him who betrayed Eve to paint the vilest sin with the most beautiful colors, and to conceal all its deformity and danger. But it is the part of a reasonable creature to look beyond the present moment, and to consider the outcome and end of things, as well as their beginning.

There is sweetness indeed in the mouth of this immoral woman,

Proverbs 5:4. "But her end is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edge sword." The venom and sting of a serpent is concealed under the honey of her lips! Those who repent of their immorality will experience far more bitterness, than ever they tasted of pleasure in their unlawful gratifications. But few get so well off, and if people continue hardened, the end is more bitter than death! It is like a two-edged sword, which wounds and destroys both soul and body at once!

Proverbs 5:5. "Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold on Hell." She is on the highway to eternal ruin, and thither she is carrying those who listen to her bewitching voice. Her house is in the suburbs of the place of destruction, and her steps take hold of Hell.

David was in great fear when he said to his friend, "As the Lord lives, there is but a step between me and death." But there is not even this small interval between the steps of the immoral woman and Hell. They already take hold of it. But may not people, when they see this danger before their eyes, make a timely retreat to the paths of life? No. In most cases this is not to be expected.

Proverbs 5:6. "She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not." When men enter into a course of sin, they have no intention to be damned. They intend only to indulge themselves in the pleasures of sin for a time — and then to return to the paths of life. Millions of souls have been seduced to everlasting destruction by this one temptation of the old serpent, "You shall not die although you eat; grace is free, and there is abundance of time to repent."

Solomon gives what may repel this temptation, by letting us know how foolish it is for men to flatter themselves with the hope that they shall be truly disposed and enabled to repent of their sin.

"Her paths are crooked, but she knows it not." She can form her mode of behavior into a hundred different shapes, to entangle the heart of the lover. She spreads a thousand snares, and if you escape one of them, you will find yourself held fast by another. She knows well how to suit her words and behavior to your present mood, to lull conscience asleep, and to spread before your eyes such a mist, as shall prevent you from being able to see the paths of life.

If you ever think of the danger of your course, and feel the necessity of changing it, she will urge you to spend a little time longer in the pleasures of sin. If her solicitations prevail, if you linger within the precincts of guilt — your resolutions are weakened, and your passions gain new strength.

What is the awful result? The devil obtains more influence; conscience, forcibly repressed, ceases to reclaim with so loud a voice; God gives you up to the lusts of your own heart, and leaves you to chose your own delusions.

Attend, then, to the wisest of men, who instructs you to keep free of these dangerous temptations!

Proverbs 5:7. "Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say." If a father saw his son walking on the edge of a precipice — how greatly would he be alarmed! How loud would be his cries! And if the adventurous youth still kept his dangerous post — the father would fly to him, and try to force him from the brink of destruction. No less earnest is this kind instructor to save us from impending ruin. His words are cries — they have life and power in them. He is deaf who will not listen; he is stubborn who will not comply.

Proverbs 5:8. "Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house." But what need is there for so much preciseness? May not a man be permitted to talk with her, merely by way of amusement? Is it unlawful to drink a glass in her house, and to satisfy our curiosity by observing what passes in it, and by what arts she contrives to seduce those who are less established in virtue than ourselves? Yes, it is unlawful to have the least interaction with her. By the requirements of the ceremonial law, no man was to be in the same house with a leper. The moral law forbids us

to enter into a house full of the leprosy of sin. Her house is full of snares, and her hands are as iron bands. The devil glances in her smiles, and lurks in her dress and in her motions. He is there, ready to discharge at you his fiery darts of temptation! And to aid his efforts, you have much combustible material in you.

Dare you then delude yourself that the fire of licentious passion shall not be kindled, and blown up into a flame that you cannot quench! The devil will tempt you enough, without own help. To tempt is his business. As you love your life and your own soul, give him no assistance in the work of destruction.

Proverbs 5:9-11. "Lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich another man's house. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are consumed." A good name is better than precious ointment — but this abominable sin is the ruin of a good name. The reputation of David and of Solomon was greatly sunk by it. By immorality, has the honor of thousands been irrecoverably lost! A pure life is a great blessing, and may be regarded as the foundation of every earthly blessing. But immoral people part with everything that renders life worthy of the name, and in a literal sense, they often give their years unto the cruel. Their lives are lost in the pursuit of this sin by the just vengeance of God, by its native consequences, or by the base incidents to which it exposes those who practice it. And for what are these years given away? Did men generously part with their lives in the defense of their country or for the sake of a generous friend — the loss would be amply compensated by honor, and by the pleasure of a good conscience. But how infatuated are they to give their years unto the cruel, who conceal a selfish and malignant heart under the mask of love!

All unlawful love is hatred, and all tempters to it are cruel enemies to our happiness. Shall we then gratify wicked enemies — at the expense of honor and life, and everything dear to us? These false friends and malicious enemies rob you of your honor and life, with as much eagerness as if they could enjoy these precious blessings of which you are deprived. Their real views, however, are directed to your money or estate — and why should men give away fruits of their own labor and toil? Or if they wish to be rid of them, why should strangers be filled with them, rather than friends?

Some are so foolish, as to live in the lust of immorality, to save the necessary expenses of a family. But observation, as well as Scripture, might convince them of their error. The followers of vice are often attacked by poverty, which comes upon them like an armed man; and how distressing is poverty to those who have indulged themselves in lewd courses, contracted insatiable desires after carnal pleasure, deprived themselves of their friends, and disqualified themselves for any business that might retrieve their circumstances, or supply their needs!

Poverty is still more distressing when it is attended by weakness and disease — the natural consequences which Providence has annexed to those courses by which men dishonor God and themselves. When the body is tortured, and the spirits dejected by the loathsome distempers which sin brings in its train — their conscience, which was formerly trampled under foot, rises up and regains its power, and inflicts severe vengeance for the injuries it has received. Then, O profligate sinner, you will mourn!

Proverbs 5:12-14. "You will say: How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst

of the whole assembly." Religion has received many testimonies in its favor from enemies, whose hearts have at last forced them to curse the day when they were so mad, as to turn a deaf ear to its friendly voice! The word of God read and preached, is God's appointed means of keeping or reclaiming men from sin, and in a Christian land, the votaries of vice are rebels against the light. They are, to their own loss, fatally successful in fighting against that God who opposes their wickedness by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and preached by the ministers of God.

It is not in vain for ministers, and parents, and tutors, to use means for acquainting young people with the Scripture, and imprinting it upon their hearts. The confession of profligates, when arrived at the end of their career, makes it evident, that if anything would have proved effectual to preserve them from ruin, it would have been the instructions and reproofs of parents and teachers. Such means have no doubt been the instruments of preserving many, and reclaiming some. The confession of the wretch tortured by his conscience, is not introduced by the inspired sage as the humble confession of a penitent, who looks for pardon through the merits of Christ. How greatly are they deluded who think that misery can produce true repentance, or that sorrow pressed out of the soul by distress of body and anguish of conscience, are signs of real grace! People may cry out of their folly, and warn others, and beg others to pray for them — and yet, like Simon Magus, remain all the while in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity!

Sinners who will not comply with the calls of God, may now make them the object of their scorn — but at the latter end, when conscience shall preach with a voice louder than any minister, sorrow shall be their inevitable portion. Then, in the breasts of desperate sinners — despised admonitions shall burn like raging fire! Then shall multitudes of iniquities, once overlooked, present themselves like so many dismal apparitions to the eyes of the sinner, and make him a terror to himself. The pleasure derived from the present moment is nothing. Our enjoyment is derived from the recollection of the past, or from the prospect of what is to come.

Sensualists cannot flatter themselves so grossly, as to fetch any pleasure from that part of life which they have already spent — but their hopes are ever on the wing to seize on anticipated pleasure. It frequently happens, that when their course is run, and lust can no longer be indulged, their attention is forced back on the scenes of life, through which they have already passed. When in this manner they are brought to recollect their numberless sins, and to forebode the punishments that await them — their souls are convulsed with remorse, and horror takes full possession of them:

"Wretched creatures that we are! Our impetuous passions have hurried us into all wickednesses — those only excepted, which our powers were too feeble and narrow to add to the rest. Would to God we had been brutes, or could yet have our portion with them, to be turned forever into earth and rottenness! O that we had been heathens, and had never heard the gospel of Christ, and the law of the Most Holy God! Our abominable iniquities are dreadfully aggravated by the opportunities we have had of being present in the assemblies of Zion, and receiving the instructions and reproofs of life. Instead of deriving benefit from the ordinances of God's worship and the communion of saints — we have exposed ourselves to the reproach of the whole assembly of the pious. By our example we have grieved some, and caused others to stumble. Our Hell must be heated seven times more than the Hell of heathens!" The words in the 14th verse

may be translated, In a moment I am in all evil. 'I am suddenly punished with all the plagues threatened by the ministers of God, and made a spectacle of misery and horror to the whole congregation.'

It is an aggravation of that misery which is the fruit of a man's own ways, when publicity is one of its attendant circumstances. Those who will not believe the threatenings of God, shall feel them. There are no free-thinkers in Hell, and but few on a death-bed. How happy are those who are preserved by the grace of God from laying up treasures of wrath against the last days, and planting thorns to line their death-bed pillows! To avoid immorality, let every man have his own wife, and let him love her as himself. This remedy against such a vice Solomon illustrates in a beautiful allegory.

Proverbs 5:15-19. "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer — may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love."

Children are in the language of Scripture sometimes compared to waters. We find Solomon in this passage comparing both wife and children to fountains; for there is as great a difference between the joys of lawful and unlawful love — as there is between the waters of a clear spring, and those which are drunk out of an impure and poisonous stream.

Let every man, to avoid immorality, have his own wife. Then may he reasonably expect to have children who shall be like olive plants around his table, or like fountains dispersed in the streets — pleasant to others, and likely one day to become comforts to their neighbors as well as to their parents. Is not this far better than to have a bastard progeny imposed on him, which he does not know — and yet cannot deny to be his own?

Husbands ought to praise God for virtuous wives, and to observe their good qualities, and call them blessed. They ought to love them as themselves, to wear a cheerful countenance in their company, to take pleasure in them as the companions of their youth, to rejoice in their love, and to treat them with the tenderest affection. They ought to view them with feelings of delight. The pleasant roes are the delight of their masters, who are charmed with that gentle and insinuating manner of behavior which nature teaches them. Much more may it be expected, that this human creature will be dear to our souls, whom God has given us to be the solace of our lives. In old age, when their beauty fades, the kindness of youth is to be retained for them, more especially if they retain those amiable virtues which fade not with the complexion of the countenance.

Wives are to be hated in comparison with Christ; but the sake of Christ, they are to be loved with an affection so ardent, that other women, however beautiful, may appear in their presence like painted flowers.

It is the duty and the interest of wives, to be adorned with those beauties which will render easy the duties which their husbands owe them. It is indeed the duty of husbands to love their wives, for the sake of God's command, and Christ's example; but it is very difficult to love, where this pleasant affection is not engaged by lovely qualities in the object.

Why should husbands and wives tempt one another to sin against God to their own harm? This cordial love in the married state, will produce pleasures far sweeter than were ever found in unlawful love; and what chiefly recommends them is that they have no sting attending them — and give no offence to God, our Witness and our Judge.

Proverbs 5:20-21. "Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife? For a man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths." Is it wise for men to affront their Judge, and to provoke the vengeance of an Almighty arm? Will they prefer these poor, and spiritless, and unsatisfying pleasures which he forbids — to those pure delights which are licensed by God’s goodness? Remember, sinners, that God is present in your hidden retreats of wickedness! You see him not, because you are blind — but your stupidity cannot banish an omnipresent Deity! Your bars and bolts cannot exclude him who fills Heaven and earth. Darkness hides nothing from him of whom it is said, "The day is yours, the night also is yours."

Why should men dare to affront Jehovah, their Maker and their Judge, by doing that in his presence, which they would be ashamed to do in the presence of a child?

God will not be mocked. He will punish the wanton glance, and the lustful thought. Where, then, shall they appear who indulge themselves in acts of criminality? Will a thief steal in the presence of the judge — and yet hope to escape vengeance? And shall abandoned sinners flatter themselves with the thought of escaping the damnation of Hell, from Him who will come to judgment, and will be a swift witness against adulterers?

Sinners think that they will repent, after having for a while enjoyed the pleasures of sin — pitiable delusion!

Proverbs 5:22. "The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast!" Sinners will find, when too late, if God’s wondrous mercy does not prevent it — that the sorrow which springs from self-love, is a very different thing from repentance, and that it is not so easy a matter as the devil told them, to repent and to venture their salvation in the hands of a Redeemer.

They now look upon saints as slaves who live an unpleasant life — but time will convince them, since admonition cannot, that they themselves are the slaves, bound in the strongest and most ignominious chains! They are fettered by wicked affections, and they have neither power nor will to assert their liberty. The cords of their own sins shall hold them fast, until they are cast into that prison from whence there is no release. This is a wretched condition — but they may thank themselves. Their own hands forged the chains which are riveted upon them. They refused that glorious liberty proclaimed to them in the word of Christ. The sinner flattered himself that he did not refuse redemption, he only delayed the acceptance of it. But such delays are refusals in God’s estimation. To the sinner they are for the most part fraught with ruin.

Proverbs 5:23. "He shall die without instruction, led astray by his own great folly." He despised instruction during life, and he shall die without it. He expected, that when his mortal life would draw near its close, good ministers would attend him and pray with him. He shall either lack that comfort, or it is to be feared that it will not be blessed to him.

None but God can awaken a sleeping and stupefied conscience; and when it is awakened, its clamors drown the voice of him who says, "Believe Christ, and you shall be saved." In his amazing folly, he goes astray in his crooked ways, and is led forth in the first rank of the workers of iniquity. Let those who are not yet tainted by this vice bless God, and let them watch and pray. Let the guilty tremble and mourn — yet despair not. The arm which rescued Solomon is not weakened. The blood that cleansed the Corinthian whoremongers has lost none of its virtue.

# 01.06. Proverbs 6

Chapter 6.

Proverbs 6:1-35

In this chapter we are cautioned by the wise man, against rash suretyship, idleness, mischievousness, and especially against impurity, together with a variety of other sins, exceedingly hateful to God.

Proverbs 6:1-5 contain a warning against suretyship.

Proverbs 6:1-2. "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have struck hands in pledge for another, if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth" God graciously directs our temporal affairs by his providence, and condescends, in his word, to give us instructions concerning them. If we do not regard these instructions, we need not be surprised though his providence convinces us, by dear-bought experience, of our folly and sin.

God forbids us to become a surety, even for a friend, (except for some weighty reason,) and to strike hands with a stranger, in token of our becoming bound for our friend’s debts. Men who think only of the present time, are generally too rash in undertaking; but they ought to remember, that the time to come is before them, and will be present time when the time now present is past. If the money were to be paid just now, they would hesitate and deliberate before acting, lest they should wrong their families; but Solomon tells them, that men may ensnare and entangle themselves with the words of their mouths, as well as with the works of their hands. This consideration may alarm those who have already implicated themselves by such engagements. This kind teacher, therefore, puts them on a plan to get free.

Proverbs 6:3. "then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor’s hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor! By rash suretyship, you put yourself into the power, not only of the creditor — but of the debtor, for whom you are bound. You lie at his mercy. He has it in his power to make you hurt severely for your foolish kindness to him. The world is full of complaints about ungrateful men, who have basely abused, to the hurt of their benefactors, the goodness they have experienced. Endeavor, therefore, by the humblest behavior toward your friend, to induce him to take the proper steps to bring you out of your present embarrassed situation; for if you peevishly reflect on him as the means of bringing you into it, he may be provoked to use his advantage to your loss. The wise man is very urgent with his scholars to take this step.

Proverbs 6:4-5. "Give not sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-lids. Deliver yourself as a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler." A gazelle and a bird are creatures destitute of reason — yet when entrapped by the arts of the sportsman, they will try every method of escape, and make no delay in using every effort for regaining their freedom. May not equal prudence and attention to their own interests, be expected from reasonable

creatures! But what is the great importance of this precept, that Solomon will not allow his disciple to rest until he is free from these rash engagements? Has this precept any connection with our spiritual interest? It has! It is a part of the eighth commandment, and though men regard it rather as a loss than a sin to endanger their outward estate, it is both a sin and a temptation. Men who once seemed upright in their dealings, have brought reproach upon religion, by living and dying in other men's debt, and by having recourse to unjustifiable methods, suggested by distress, to relieve themselves. The effect of suretyship, even with the most upright men, has often proved hurtful to their souls, embittering their days, and unfitting them for the cheerful services of religion. It has frequently rendered them unable to perform those services to God and to his church, for the sake of which a competency of the good things of life is to be valued. We are the servants of Christ, and must not disqualify ourselves for his service, by making ourselves needlessly the servants of men. The precept here given may remind us, how foolish it is for us to make ourselves debtors to divine justice, to please any friend in the world. When one tempts you to commit any sin, however small, consider whether it would be wise in you to make yourselves debtors even to man on his account. As we are all in debt to God, let us give no sleep to our eyes, until we implore his mercy. How powerful must be that lethargy which closes in sleep, eyes that shall awake in Hell, if another day of life is not granted by the abused long-suffering of God!

We may be ashamed to humble ourselves to our friends, or our applications to them may be fruitless. But God is equally glorious in majesty and mercy. He delights in forgiving thousands of talents. The wise man next proceeds to warn us against the vice of slothfulness, to which he was a constant enemy.

Proverbs 6:6. "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise." God has taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the birds of Heaven. But the sluggard does not equal in wisdom the least of insects! He complains that he is not able to work — but has he less strength than an ant? "The ants, (says another wise man), are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer" — they therefore shall be his judges.

Why has God made such a multitude of creatures, that are of no use to man? Why has he made some that destroy his property? This is a vain question. We are sure that God has made them all in wisdom, and that he has made some of them teachers of wisdom to us. The ant devours some part of our sustenance — but it will pay us well for it, if we are wise enough to improve by its lessons. Every ant-hill is a school, and the wisest of men gives these little animals a testimonial, recommending their instructions to us. That man makes a god of his belly — who thinks no creature of any use to us but such as gives us its flesh to eat, or its labor to provide for our sustenance or comfort. The wisdom which some of them teach is far more valuable than the food with which they supply us.

Other creatures are teachers to us as well as the ant. Look on the whole brute creation, O atheist, and confess their Maker! Go to the oxen and the donkeys, O unthankful man, and be wise to acknowledge your Benefactor! Consider the birds of the air, you who are of little faith, and trust the providence of God!

Why does the wise man single out the ant as a teacher of wisdom to the sluggard? Agur gives us one reason in Proverbs 30:1-33 — their weakness, which may render the sluggard ashamed of his silly excuses. Another reason we find assigned by Solomon in this place.

Proverbs 6:7-8. "It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest." The bees are a very industrious people — but they have a queen to require their labor, and if she dies they will work no more. The ant has no guide to set her example, no overseer to inspect her work, no ruler to exact her task — and yet she does not neglect a day in summer, when the sky clear; or in harvest, when the grain can be had in plenty. She improves every opportunity to store up provisions, that she may spend the days of cold and scarcity in comfort. And what is the result of all her toil? In winter she enjoys plenty, when other creatures are pinched with poverty, or perish with cold and hunger.

We have guides to set us a good example. We have overseers and rulers appointed us by the King of nations and the King of Zion. Yet how many sluggards are to be found among us, who spend their days in vanity! They are like butterflies, which fritter away the best days of their existence, when they ought to be like ants, allowing no summer day to pass unimproved.

These little animals have knowledge of the times, and are wise to improve opportunities. They join with the stork, and the crane, and the swallow, in reproving those who know not the judgment of the Lord, and neglect the duty of the day in its day.

There are sluggards who bring misery upon themselves in this world. There are far more who bring eternal misery upon their souls, by neglecting the happy opportunities afforded them by the long-suffering of the Lord, of securing their everlasting interests.

They see many days of the Son of man, and enjoy the beams of the Sun of righteousness. They are called with a loud voice to arise and shine — but they are less concerned about an everlasting duration of happiness or misery — than the despised ant about the provisions of a few months! How will they mourn at the last, and say, "The summer is past, and the harvest is ended — and we are not saved!" The sluggard will not awake from his sleep to go and learn wisdom — but the wise man goes to him to break his slumbers.

Proverbs 6:9. "How long will you sleep, O sluggard! When will you awake out of your sleep?" It is a great waste of time, to spend more hours in sleep than are necessary. Yet from the practice of how many does it appear, that they have adopted the maxim of the Indians, that:

Rest is better than work,

and lying is better than sitting,

and sleeping is better than waking,

and death is better than life!

It is a shame for men to give up to sleep, more than a third part of their time — but it is not less so to spend our waking hours in doing nothing, or in doing what is frivolous or unprofitable. All the world would despise a man who would keep his bed from morning until night, though in the possession of perfect health. But in what respect is he better employed, who trifles away in idleness every hour of the day?

He is still worse — for lack of employment and weariness of life will lead him to seek relief in impertinent and mischievous talk, or in sensual indulgences, or in meddling with the matters of

others. If a man of rank should come to the sleeper’s bedside while he is dozing away the morning-hours, and should call him to rise, it might be expected that he would be covered with confusion, and instantly shake off the bands of slumber. But here the wise king comes and draws aside his curtains, and expostulates with him, "How long will you sleep, O sluggard!" The sluggard’s ears are heavy with sleep, and cannot hear. Solomon cries again, "When will you awake out of your sleep?" Does the sluggard now hear? The voice is loud enough to pierce his ears — but he hears as if he heard not. He is nailed to his bed by sloth — and though conscious that he should arise and walk, he pleads hard for a little delay.

Proverbs 6:10. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." He forms some faint resolutions to awake, and it is only a short respite from that torment that he begs, "a little sleep." If that is too much, "a little slumber;" or if even that cannot be granted, "a little folding of the hands to sleep," is but a moderate request. The sluggard himself cannot vindicate his sloth, and is resolved to shake it off — only he will not do it presently. From time to time he defers the hated reformation, and what is the consequence?

Proverbs 6:11. "So shall poverty will come on you like a bandit, and scarcity like an armed man." The house of the sluggard is the haunt of poverty, and it comes not like an invited guest, whose visit is expected — but like a bandit, whose approach is unforeseen. It comes like an armed man, and gains an easy victory over the slumbering sluggard. Had he been awake and busy, he might easily have defended himself against its assaults.

Sleep, sloth, and delay, are the thieves of time. By them vigorous bodies have been often enervated, shining talents covered with rust, estates melted into nothing! And what is a thousand times worse, millions of souls have been betrayed into endless perdition! The Spirit of God says, "Today, if you will hear his voice." The sluggard is not at leisure today — but he will hear it tomorrow. Tomorrow comes — but the cause of this delay still exists. A thousand tomorrows pass away, and the sluggard is never awakened to wisdom. At last the king of terrors seizes him with irresistible violence, and hurries him to that place of darkness where there is no work, nor device, nor counsel. The soul must then appear before the solemn all-knowing Judge; and what excuse can be made for these delays of complying with the voice of the great God?

If a king were to call us to come to him, in order to receive some great favor at his hands, we surely would not show so little respect to royalty, and so little regard to our own interest — as to defer compliance with the kind invitation from day to day. Is the majesty of earthly princes so much revered by us? Yet to the majesty of Heaven’s great Lord, it bears only the same proportion that a spark does to the sun. The idle man is bad — but the mischievous man is still worse. Indeed it generally happens, that he who is enslaved by the one of these vices, becomes in process of time the slave of the other also.

Proverbs 6:12-15. "A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, who plots evil with deceit in his heart — he always stirs up dissension. Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy." The mischievous person casts off the yoke of God — but he remains the willing and active servant of the devil. He rebels against God beyond his might, and beyond nature presses the members of his body into the service of iniquity.

He not only speaks — but walks with a corrupt mouth, making a constant trade of slandering his neighbors, and spreading dissension. His tongue is a world of iniquity — and yet it does not serve him sufficiently for expressing the wickedness of his heart. To supply its defects, therefore, he makes artificial tongues of his eyes, his fingers, and his feet. By winking with his eyes, by stamping with his feet, and by pointing with his fingers — he shows the scorn and the malice which he bears towards others, and conveys his instructions to his accomplices in wickedness.

It is the malice of his heart which employs all the members of his body, as the instruments of his unrighteousness. His heart overflows with malignity, and is still running over into the words and works of mischief. The greatest miser takes some rest for his body, from the toils by which he expects to enrich himself; but the heart of this profligate wretch takes no rest from the contrivances of wickedness. He is perpetually torturing his own brain, in devising methods for destroying the happiness and the peace of others.

What will be the end of a fiend like this? He shall, while dreaming of success in his hellish plans — fall a prey to some unexpected calamity. He may possibly flatter himself with the intention of repenting of his misdeeds, before called to that war in which there is no discharge — but he is suddenly and irremediably broken!

He lived like a devil clothed with flesh, and his soul shall be chased out of his body, to dwell with its kindred devils! He who does evil to others — does a thousand times greater hurt to himself. O my soul! Do not enter into the secret of such creatures.

Blessed be God, who checks that corruption which abounds in the hearts of men, and makes the earth a habitable world. Who could live an hour in peace, if God did not provide for our safety, by his all-governing providence? To God must our safety be all ascribed, since evil spirits, numerous and crafty, constantly traverse our earth, and men whose hearts are filled with all iniquity, abound on the face of it. The mischievous man is a compound of vices abhorred by the Lord!

Proverbs 6:16-19. There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:

haughty eyes,

a lying tongue,

hands that shed innocent blood,

a heart that devises wicked schemes,

feet that are quick to rush into evil,

a false witness who pours out lies and

a man who stirs up dissension among brothers!"

Every sin is hateful to God. The sins enumerated in this passage are not mentioned, because there are not others as hateful to God — but because they are nearly allied to that vice which had been last reprobated by the wise man, and are generally found in the character of the mischievous person. They are all abhorred by him who is the guardian of his creatures, and the avenger of injuries done to his saints.

Pride leads the van of this troop of iniquities. Its palace is the heart — but its throne is erected in the eye, whence it looks with disdain upon men, and pours defiance towards Heaven. The proud man is not only a rebel to God — but a usurper of his dignity. He would be a God to men — but the living and true God looks upon him with contempt and indignation, and spurns him into Hell. A lying tongue is abhorred by men, because it tends to the dissolution of society. The devil was a liar from the beginning, and is the father of lies. It is by means of lying, that this adversary of man carries on his work. The God of truth hates liars. He has barred the gates of Heaven fast against them, for none of them are his people.

Murder is a crime against which the first law enacted after the fall was passed. Providence seldom allows it to escape unpunished in this world. Mighty tyrants, who shed the blood of the innocent without fear of human vengeance — do not escape punishment from the King of nations. The wicked Emperors of Rome; and many persecuting and bloody kings, are instances of this truth. They shed the blood of men — and God gave them blood to drink. A heart that devises wicked schemes. That murder which lies hidden in the heart, or breaks forth only in the tongue — does not escape the eye and the vengeance of the Almighty God. The first motions of sin in the hearts of men, are offensive to God. How greatly then must he abhor that heart, which employs itself in contriving wickedness, and forms deliberate purposes of sin! A royal chamber, filled, like that of Pharaoh, with frogs and vermin, is not so loathsome as a human heart — which should be the residence of God, but is filled with evil imaginations and hellish contrivances. It may well be called, like Babylon in ruins, a habitation of devils, and a house of every unclean and foul spirit.

Feet that are quick to rush into evil. Sin is bad enough when men venture upon it with reluctance and fear — but when they are cheerful in the practice of it, and thus run swiftly to mischief, it is a sign that they are veterans in the devil’s army, and have in a great degree conquered their consciences. The feet of such transgressors shall slide in due time, for the things that shall come upon them make greater haste than their feet can possibly do, either to do evil, or to escape the punishment which is their due. A false witness who pours out lies. A man who speaks lies is the most dangerous pest of human society. Who can insure any man’s life or fortune, or character against his tongue — which is like a two-edged sword; or against his throat, which is an open sepulcher, to swallow up everything dear to men? But the God whose solemn name is profaned by these enemies of mankind, holds them in abhorrence, and will by no means permit them to escape punishment. A man who stirs up dissension among brothers. The sowers of discord among brethren, are worse than those who set fire to the houses of their neighbors! They kindle flames which burn with unrelenting fury, and set on fire families and provinces, and sometimes even nations themselves. They not only sin, but, like Jeroboam the son of Nebat — they cause multitudes to sin, destroying that love which is the soul of every commandment, and disseminating those corrupt passions, which prove incentives to all the works of mischief. The God whose commandments are all included in love, and who sent his Son to be our peace — cannot but abhor these sons of Belial. Surely he will make their mischiefs to recoil with an awful vengeance upon their own heads. The wise man proceeds again to warn us against the snares of the immoral woman; but first he renews his call to attend to those instructions which are the only effectual preventives from her dangerous artifices.

Proverbs 6:20-21. "My son, keep your father’s commandments, and forsake not the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart, and tie them about your neck." The inspired writer

takes it for granted, that the instructions of parents will correspond with the law of God. Can it be supposed that parents will give stones instead of bread, or serpents instead of wholesome nourishment — to their children? If they do, they are not to be obeyed, for they act not as parents — but as enemies! The children of Jonadab denied themselves, for many generations, some of the pleasures of the land of Canaan. This they did from a regard to the advice of their progenitor. But when the commands of our earthly parents only enforce those laws of our heavenly Father which are designed for our own benefit — every motive of interest and duty, whether divine or human, concurs to enforce our obedience. These laws ought to be bound continually upon our hearts, that they may be ever present to our souls. The ancient Israelites wore them on their garments — but let us wear them on our hearts, and tie them about our necks as the most precious ornament. We must read the instructions of God, and hear the good instructions of men, with attention. We must transcribe them into our hearts, and meditate upon them, and make them the guide of our lives. Hereby much good shall come unto us.

Proverbs 6:22. "When you walk, they will guide you;

when you sleep, they will watch over you;

when you awake, they will speak to you."

We derive much enjoyment and security from having a companion who can entertain us with agreeable conversation, guide us in doubtful paths, and protect us from impending dangers. All these valuable purposes are served by the word of God. When we walk, it will be our guide, and enable us to avoid every bad step. It will lead us in safety to the land of uprightness, at which none can arrive, who walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of their flesh and their mind. When we sleep, it will keep us. There is nothing improbable in supposing that foolish and distressing dreams may be prevented, by the sweet composure which God’s word imparts to the spirit. But be this as it may, we know well that the providence of God will perform the promises of the word of God. By it we shall be preserved from the pestilence that walks in darkness, and from the malicious snares of those invisible enemies who are awake when we sleep, and who, when not checked by the power of God, have methods of disquieting our minds and destroying our peace in the season of rest.

Job’s imagination was harassed by the devil in his sleep. That, however, was an extraordinary case, and even then, the rage of that cruel enemy was under restraints. The word of God will be an entertaining and useful companion to us, when we awake from sleep. It will talk to us of the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the grace of our Redeemer. It will give us the best advices about the business of the day, and teach us to order every step with discretion. If we cannot sleep in the night, it will suggest meditations far more pleasant to our minds, than is refreshing sleep to the body of the worn-out laborer.

How does the law of the Lord answer all these purposes?

Proverbs 6:23. "For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life." It is necessary to have a lamp, when one is in a dark place. The law of God is a lamp to dispel the darkness of this world, and to guide our steps in safety. But as it may be compared to a lamp, because it gives us light in the night — so also to the sun, because it is the light of the world. Christ, who is the Sun of righteousness, shines upon us by the word of his

grace, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of every useful truth, and guiding us in safety to a better world.

If we shut our eyes on this light, we walk in darkness; but those who walk under its beams, have the light of Heaven shining on their paths. The places that lack this light, are the dark places of the world; and the souls that receive not the rays of this luminary, are but dungeons in which the day-star has not risen.

It will be allowed, that the doctrines and precepts of the word of God are useful and pleasant as the light — but are not the reproofs of it very disagreeable? No; the reproofs of it convey necessary and most beneficial instruction. They are like the admonitions of a kind father, who will not allow his son to follow those courses which he knows would be his ruin. The reproofs of the law may alarm and terrify — but they are not to be less valued on that account. The threatenings of Hell guard the way to Heaven, and strongly urge us to keep the King's highway, the only way of safety. The admonitions given us against sin, have a powerful tendency to keep us from the paths of the destroyer!

Proverbs 6:24. "To keep you from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a immoral woman." The insinuating language of a wicked woman is nothing but flattery. She professes the fondest love — but she designs the gratification of her own detestable passions, and the serving of her interests, at the expense of what is most valuable to her fond admirer. Her tongue is full of falsehood. By her fair speeches the unwary youth, whom she wishes to seduce, is in great danger of being entangled, and is therefore in great need of some effectual preservative.

Now, the only effectual preservative against the dangers of temptation is the word of God. A good education, a sense of honor, the principle of self-interest — may have some efficacy towards this end; but the great means blessed by God for this purpose is his own word, which is the sword of the Spirit, by which he enables us effectually to resist and baffle, not only flesh and blood — but principalities and powers.

Every part of the word of God serves to promote purity in all its branches. No passages of it are more effectual to preserve us from fleshly lusts, than the warnings of Paul to the Corinthians, and those of Solomon in various parts of this book. Solomon knew well from experience, that it is extremely dangerous to give sin indulgence in the heart, though we design not to practice it. He therefore warns us against lusting after the beauty of the immoral woman in our heart.

Proverbs 6:25. "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes!" The beauty that sparkles in the eye of a virtuous woman is a lovely ornament. The beauty of the immoral woman is a temptation to the foolish — yet to others it appears like a beautiful garment on a body covered with loathsome sores, or a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. The lust of the heart is adultery in the sight of God, and it were better to have our eyes plucked out, than to have our hearts inflamed with lust! But impure imaginations do not ordinarily rest in quiet. They push on the man that harbors them, to outward acts of sin. When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth misery!

Proverbs 6:26. "For the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life!" Poverty is an object of horror to the greater part of men. The desire of removing or preventing it, is the grand spring which keeps the world constantly in motion. But the adulterer

drives on furiously towards it, for though as much afraid of it as other men, he is hurried along in his wild career by tyrannizing passions that have blinded his eyes, and taken possession of his soul to such a degree, that he must have them gratified, though ruin is the inevitable consequence!

Life is so precious, that a man will give all that he has for it. Yet the infatuated immoral man sells his life at a cheaper rate than a wise man would sell his dog! He flatters himself indeed that he shall escape vengeance; but the scripture assures us that such hopes are self-delusions, and that a man may as well expect to remain unhurt though he takes fire to burn himself; or walks on burning coals.

Proverbs 6:27-29. "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished."

Sodom and Gomorrah are standing illustrations of this solemn truth. You say, "The burning of these cities was a strange act, scarcely anything similar to it has happened since." But God has set forth these cities as an example, making them to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire; and impenitent sinners will find at the last, that those who despised the words of Solomon, and of Christ himself — shall suffer more severely than the cities of the plain, whose iniquities were not so terribly aggravated by despised means of instruction and reformation. Stealing is a detested sin, and exposes men to severe punishment; but it is much less heinous than adultery, nor will the punishment of it be so great.

Proverbs 6:30-35. "Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house. But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away; for jealousy arouses a husband’s fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is."

Theft is a sin deservedly abhorred, and those who are guilty of it expose themselves to contempt and indignation. Yet when necessity tempts a man to steal, he is the object of pity rather than of scorn. No necessity can excuse any sin — but apparent necessity may extenuate it. This plea, however, cannot be urged to palliate the crime of adultery, which is always the effect of a wicked disposition, and an impure imagination. When a man steals, it is perhaps to appease the cravings of hunger, which is an appetite too fierce for human nature to oppose. But immoral actions are the gratifications of brutal lust, and tend not to the preservation — but to the destruction of the life.

Yet a thief must suffer, although he is pitied when hunger urges him on to steal. He shall restore manifold, according to the law; and if he cannot make the ample restitution required, he must give all the substance of his house.

How then does the adulterer hope to escape a much more grievous punishment, for a crime which can admit of no reparation? A thief may steal for lack of bread — but the adulterer sins because he immoral. He exposes himself to a deadly wound from a jealous husband, or an avenging magistrate. He contracts a blot upon his name which adheres to it indelibly, and spreads itself even to his children. He may give all the substance of his house to the man whom he has injured — but it will not be accepted as an atonement for his life; for a fire of jealousy is kindled, which can

be quenched only in his blood. This argument may be supposed to have little weight among us, who punish theft more severely than adultery. But when crimes that deserve death escape punishment from men — then God, the King of all nations, punishes them by his providence, and sometimes with greater severity, because his earthly ministers neglect to show his resentment of them.

Earthly magistrates often punish thieves and highwaymen more severely than adulterers — but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge! We may without presumption suppose, that even in this world he often brings them to a gibbet, by allowing them to imbrue their hands in blood, or to commit other capital crimes. The Bible assures us, that God often punishes one sin, by permitting the transgressor to fall into another; and particularly, that God has given up men to immorality, for the indignities they have done to his own name, and along with it, to other iniquities that bring vengeance in their train.

If these sinners escape outward punishment, let them remember how terrible that destruction is, which God has designed for them, and how impossible it will be to escape from the Judge of all. They complain that they cannot extinguish their burning lusts — but it shall be more impossible to extinguish the fire that shall never be quenched!

# 01.07. Proverbs 7

Chapter 7.

Proverbs 7:1-27

Solomon was deeply impressed with a sense of the evil of immorality. Nor was he less fully convinced of that danger to which young men are exposed, from the temptations presented by those agents for Hell, who, lost to all sense of shame and interest, throw themselves headlong, and as many along with them as they can, into an everlasting Hell — and all for the momentary gratification of a base and brutal passion! On this subject he had already said as much as might have served to guard any man against this danger, who was not under the influence of a very debased mind, and a very depraved heart. But he wishes to penetrate the heart of the most hardened, to rouse the most inconsiderate of men to serious thought. He thinks that too much cannot be said on a matter of such concernment to us.

We have in this chapter an affecting illustration of the danger of youthful lusts. The mode of instruction to which our teacher in the present instance has recourse, is the narration of a piece of history or parable, (for it matters not which), of the most instructive kind. Will anyone dare to venture on temptations that lead to impurity, after Solomon has set before his eyes in so lively a manner, the danger of so much as going near the harlot’s house? Then he is as inexcusable as the man who dances on the brink of a precipice, when he has just seen another, who ventured to display his courage in the same manner, fall headlong from his place, and dashed to pieces on the rocks below — the sad victim of his own rashness and folly! The danger of wicked courses should mightily recommend to us the word of God, which is able to keep us from falling, and to which self-ruined sinners give testimony, when they must acknowledge too late, that their misery began with their disregard to that blessed book.

What would men not give for an antidote that could preserve them from every bodily disease? If any person, possessed of such a medicine, were to perish by some fatal distemper, in consequence of neglecting to have recourse to it — surely his fate would excite no commiseration!

Proverbs 7:1-5. "My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your kinsman; they will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words." When a man has got possession of some precious jewel, he will deposit it in some place secured from the predations of thieves. The words of God are infinitely more precious than diamonds, and ought to be laid up in our hearts, and kept with constant diligence and caution. They are to be kept as our life, for we are but dead men if we lose them, and they are the effectual instruments by which God is pleased to quicken men to newness of life, and to nourish, and strengthen, and preserve their souls. Without them, the life of the body is no better than a dream.

It is our advantage which God has in view, in furnishing us with a rule of conduct. "Be holy," is the sum of the whole law — and the law's excellency is, that it is as good as it is holy and just. Those, therefore, who neglect it — regard lying vanities, and despise their own mercy.

God expresses that regard which he has for his people, and that compassionate care which he exercises over them, by affirming that he who touches them, touches the apple of his eye. No less regard is certainly due on our part to that divine word of his, without which our souls must remain in darkness. The eye is a most precious member, and the apple of the eye is its most precious part. The Author of the body has guarded that part of it with a natural fence, and no less vigilance is exercised by us in its protection. We will not, if possible, permit the smallest mote to fall into it. With equal care ought we to observe the law of God, and to avoid every temptation which might induce us in the smallest degree to transgress its commandments. The law is to be fixed as a ring upon our fingers, that it may constantly present itself to our view, and deeply impress our hearts. These are the living tables, on which the statutes of the Lord are to be inscribed, that every inward power may be wrought into a suitableness unto them.

We take great pleasure in the society of amiable friends. Wisdom ought to be our most beloved friend, and our constant companion. With this best of friends, let us daily converse, and thus shall we be preserved from the danger of infectious company, and the allurements of seducers to vice.

Those who love understanding, and call wisdom their sister, are acknowledged by our Savior himself as his dearest relations. When we familiarize ourselves to wisdom, and treat her as a kinswoman — we shall find ourselves great gainers by it. She will preserve us from the immoral woman, and from her flatteries. The charms of wisdom will sink her beauty into deformity. The music of wisdom's voice will render us deaf to the most inviting eloquence of her who would tempt us to forget the covenant of our God. Her lips drop as a honey-comb — but wisdom assures us that her end is bitter as wormwood. But those who reject wisdom, will find this tempter too cunning for them. Of this Solomon gives us a proof from his own observation. He was a wise observer of men and their ways, and the result of his observation, as well as the wisdom which he learned by experience, he has communicated for our caution and instruction.

Proverbs 7:6-10. "At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men — a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent!"

Though this story were to be considered as a parable, the instruction it contains is grounded on the observation of Solomon. He was, no doubt, acquainted with many who owed their ruin to the arts which are here described. People of every age, and gender, and condition, ought to watch against the temptations incident to their particular situations, for the great master of deceit knows how to suit his temptations to the different tempers and circumstances of men.

Young people, whose passions are warm and whose experience is little — are easily seduced into those sins which gratify the lusts of the flesh. The man whom Solomon observed going towards the house of the immoral woman, was a young man. He was void of understanding, for he had not supplied the lack of experience on his own part, by the instructions of the aged, or of the word of

God.

If young men would be prevailed on to read and study the Book of Proverbs, they would not deserve to be classed among the simple ones — for it gives wisdom to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion. This young man had no intention to pollute his body with acts of wickedness, (Proverbs 7:21) — but in the evening he wished to have a little amusement; and, forgetful of the danger of going near the dwellings of the wicked — he went in the way that leads to the harlot's house!

We ought daily to pray that we may be preserved from running into temptation; for if we invite our enemies to spread their snares for us — then how can we expect to escape? The time of work was over; and for the purpose of recruiting our strength and minds, a little evening's relaxation is allowable. Those amusements, however, that lead us into the company of the wicked, are exceedingly dangerous. In our evening walks, let us avoid the places where we are likely to meet with devils, possessed indeed of human shapes — but not of human hearts!

Isaac goes out at the evening-tide, to converse with himself and his God, and God sends him a virtuous wife. This poor simpleton goes out to walk in the purlieus of vice, and, behold, he meets with a common harlot, dressed out with that gaudiness of attire which befitted her wicked dispositions — for sometimes the dress of the female is like the sign-post hung out before the house, telling what is within. Her heart was subtle, for she possessed the art as well as the venom of the old serpent! Her temperament accorded with her dress and her heart.

Proverbs 7:11-12. "She is loud and defiant, her feet never stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks." Her vociferous tongue is the token of her imperious and stubborn spirit. She loves to reign, and cannot brook subjection to the guide of her youth; thus exemplifying a spirit completely opposite to those godly women who call their husbands lord. But clamorous and stubborn as she is at home, (where indeed she is seldom to be found), she has the art, when she comes abroad, to fashion her speech to her designs. With soothing words and insinuating flattery, she seduces the unhappy victim of her wiles. She is fierce, like a tiger — but when a purpose is to be gained, can assume all the meekness of a lamb. She hates her own house, because she abhors useful labor, and holds her husband in detestation; but she is still roaming about those places where she may meet unwary travelers. Like a wild beast of the desert, she constantly prowls about those places where a prey may be expected.

Let women that desire to be thought virtuous, be keepers at home! Let them beware of eating the bread of idleness, which, though not always, is oftentimes the companion of profligacy, and never the attendant of virtue.

Thus was the unwary youth caught by one but too well versed in the arts of seduction.

Proverbs 7:13-20. "She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows. So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon."

Modesty is the lovely ornament of the female gender — and nothing can be more hateful than a woman that has renounced it. When this fence of virtue is demolished, profligacy is the natural and unavoidable consequence. The words and the behavior of this abandoned creature are alike shameless. Yet, with marvelous inconsistency, she pretends to be religious. The feast which she intends for her lover, is that part of the peace-offerings which, according to the law, she had reserved for herself and her friends, after paying her vows to the Lord.

It is strange to tell — and yet certainly true, that there are people who endeavor to join together the service of God and Belial. They must have their passions gratified, and in all other things they will be obedient to the dictates of conscience. But those who think that they may sometimes eat a little poison, provided they take wholesome food at other times — and yet live and enjoy tolerable health, are not more foolish.

God is glorious in showing mercy to sinners — but he will show none to sin. She pretends a special and tender regard for this miserable youth, whom she wishes to draw into her snares, and has the address to avail herself of an accidental meeting for the proof of it.

Words are very cheap, and the warmest professions of kindness are for the most part the most insincere. The old serpent made use of this artifice to deceive our common mother, Eve. There is nothing that renders the young a more easy prey to deceivers, than their inexperience of the emptiness of the professions of many. This abandoned woman artfully entangles the heart of the simple youth, by promising him everything that can afford delight to any of his senses. She will entertain him with the delicate provision of which feasts were made, after performing the ceremonies of religion. His eyes shall be entertained with the sight of furniture, equally valuable for its materials and workmanship. The bed is decked with the finest linen, and the whole house perfumed with fragrances, emitted by the most fragrant flowers. All these pleasures, she informs him, may be enjoyed in the most perfect security, for her husband is gone far from home; and it is certain that he will not return until the time appointed, for he has a great deal of business to transact, and has carried a great deal of money with him, to bear his expenses, and to employ in trade.

Beware of those sins that are represented to you as pleasant sins. They are more dangerous than others, because they most easily gain the heart, and most powerfully guard it against repentance. Eve found that the pleasure of forbidden fruit was only an introduction to horror and remorse! Our hearts must be guarded against the admission of sin, by stronger motives than the fear of detection and disgrace; for artful solicitors to evil will easily baffle such restraints as these.

Joseph might have expected his master’s disfavor by complying with the desires of his mistress — but the motive that induced him to decline her company was irresistible, "How can I do this great wickedness — and sin against God?" But the unhappy subject of the wise man’s story was not a Joseph.

Proverbs 7:21. "With persuasive words she led him astray — she seduced him with her smooth talk!" There is a force in words, which it is often almost impossible to resist.

Good words have a wonderful virtue in them to work upon the mind, and a great part of the good which we are called to do in the world, is to be accomplished by means of that little member — the tongue. But corrupt minds are often found to have greater influence in persuading men to sin,

because human nature is depraved, and needs only a temptation to draw men to the practice of the worst of evils! No words have greater force in them to persuade men to sin, than the flatteries of the immoral woman. Therefore the apostle Paul, who directs us to strive against sin, calls loudly to us to flee youthful lusts. Such lusts can scarcely be conquered but by flight, because the temptations to them, when they meet with a simple mind and an impure heart — are like sparks of fire lighting upon fully dry stubble! The force that is in the tongue of the immoral woman, will not excuse the deluded youth; for his yielding to her is to be attributed to the depravity of his own heart, which inclines him to prefer the advice of a wicked woman, to the counsels of the Supreme and Eternal Wisdom. When a thief is arraigned before a magistrate, he is not allowed to escape punishment, because it appears that he had such a propensity to steal, that he could not find in his heart to resist the influence of a temptation.

Proverbs 7:22-23. "All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose — till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life!"

Poor deluded creature! The cursed enchantress persuaded him that she would conduct him to a paradise; but he soon finds his feet entangled in the stocks, and bound with fetters of iron! He is more brutish than the ox, which will not without reluctance go to the place of slaughter — but must be forced and goaded onward by its driver. He is sillier than a bird, which will not sit to be shot — but flies from the appearance of danger. Whereas he willfully sets himself up as a mark for the arrows of divine justice! A bird may indeed fly into the snare, for it has not the gift of reason — but for men to hasten into a snare, there is no excuse. God has made them wiser than the birds of Heaven.

It was a good maxim, said to be delivered by an eastern sage, "Do nothing until you have well considered the end of it." The judgment to come will be soon present, and by the exercise of reason and faith, we should make it now present to us. The pleasures of sin will then be seen in a very different light. They will appear to be remorse and anguish, varnished over with a little transient pang of delight that never reaches the heart, or at least plays only on the surface of it. Were a man to live as long as Methuselah, and spend all his days in the highest delights of sin — one hour of the anguish of Hell which must follow, will far outweigh them.

What must we do in order to avoid that infatuation which is so common, and which is attended with consequences so awful?

Proverbs 7:24-25. "Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths!" Let us give the most earnest heed to these warnings, that are addressed to us with such urgent and repeated importunity — and let us guard our hearts and ways with all diligence. Indulgence given to any impure imagination, is an indication of a sensual heart, and an introduction to a licentious behavior — which will in all probability lead to a miserable end!

Proverbs 7:26-27. "Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to Hell, leading down to the chambers of death!" When but one of the disciples was to betray Christ — all of them were anxious lest they should fall into such a horrid sin. When not a small number — but multitudes, have fallen by the force of temptation into immorality, and

when the same depraved disposition continues in men, and the same temptations expose them to danger — shall we not fear, and depart from the evil?

Men have been wounded and slain by the arts of the immoral woman, who seemed to possess resolution and strength to support themselves against the most dangerous assaults. David was sorely wounded — and Sampson was slain. When cedars are shaken and fall — it is time for the fir trees to be afraid. It is a dangerous piece of self-confidence in us to imagine, that we are possessed of more strength than Sampson, or endowed with more steady virtue than David.

Immorality is not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit — but it is ordinarily a sin unto death. He who has entered on a course of it, is on a staircase that leads down to death and Hell! The descent makes the brain so giddy, that power is seldom left to make a timely retreat. They are gross self-flatterers, who imagine that they may go on for a time in sensuality, and stop short, and repent when they please. Who but God can say to the waves of sin, "Hitherto shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud swellings be stayed!"

David repented, and was pardoned, and so we hope was Sampson. The three children were cast alive into a burning fiery furnace, and came out unsinged — but we will not cast ourselves into the fire, in hope that the same miracle will be wrought for our deliverance. May the Lord keep us from temptation, and pluck out hardened sensualists as brands out of the fire!

# 01.08. Proverbs 8

Chapter 8.

Proverbs 8:1-36 The grand question in this chapter is: What are we to understand by that wisdom which is here introduced, recommending her instructions to us? The fear of the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom. But the wisdom that speaks in this passage appears to be a person — and it is disputed whether we are to understand it of Christ, the great Fountain of wisdom, or of the noble quality of wisdom, represented by a strong eastern figure under a personal character. This wisdom has been generally understood in the Christian church to mean the Lord Jesus Christ — the Word (Logos) spoken of by John, who ascribes to him under that name several of those glories which are here ascribed to wisdom. There are some things spoken of men in the prophetic passages of Scripture, too great to be understood in their full meaning of any of the sons of men — except the man Christ. These we are taught by the Scriptures of the New Testament, to understand of him who is the glory of our race, to whom all the prophets bore witness.

Now, if Solomon says concerning wisdom, things that are true to their full extent of signification in Christ alone — may we not with good reason conclude, that the Spirit who directed his pen, meant to lead our thoughts to the personal Word of God, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom, and to whom the church of Israelites and Christians is indebted for all the discoveries that were ever made? The voice of Christ is the voice of wisdom itself. The wise will hear, and will increase their learning — and fools only will despise this wisdom and instruction. Surely they cannot be reasonable creatures, who resist the fervent eloquence and the persuasive arguments addressed to us in this chapter.

Proverbs 8:1. "Does not wisdom cry out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" Our consciences bear testimony to this truth, that wisdom not only speaks — but cries to us with a voice like the sound of a trumpet! If we do not hear, it is because our ears are shut, or because we turn them away from the truth, to hear the alluring and enchanting voice of sin and its servants. How shall they excuse themselves, who give ear to the voice of the cunning serpent — rather than to the voice of the Eternal Wisdom? But where does wisdom put forth her voice?

Proverbs 8:2-3. "On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud!" If we do not hear the voice of wisdom, we have only ourselves to blame. Her pulpit is erected in the high places, and her voice is heard from afar. She preaches at the places of concourse, the gates of the city, and in the places where roads meet. At our very doors we may hear her publishing her precious doctrines!

Ignorance, when chosen and willful, will by no means excuse us. If we are in darkness, it is not for lack of light — but because we hate the light, and by winking hard, exclude its beams.

Why should we not use all due pains to find wisdom, when wisdom uses such pains to find us out, and to proclaim her necessary instructions in our ears? Surely our Lord Jesus was willing to communicate his saving instructions, when he preached in mountains and in fields, in public roads

and in deserts, in synagogues and in ships — inviting men to receive his salvation, and pressing them to repent. Nor is the voice of wisdom in our days become more feeble, or heard in fewer places. Unless we are stupidly inattentive, we may still hear it sounding in our ears, whether we are at home or abroad, walking in the fields or sitting in the church. The voice of the gospel, the voice of providence, the voice of conscience, the voice of honest friends — is a cry of wisdom, to which we do well to take heed, for to all of us she speaks.

Proverbs 8:4. "To you, O men, I call out! I raise my voice to all mankind!" The mercy of God is sovereign — and therefore the sons of Adam are called to repentance. But to the angels that fell, no voice of mercy was ever heard. They were nobler in their origin, and more excellent in their natures. But the Son of God loved us, just because he would love us, and was made wisdom and righteousness unto us — and not to angels.

There are many of the sons of Adam, that never heard the calls of wisdom; but all within hearing are called, and earnestly importuned to comply with the call. Let us not then give reason for that complaint, "When I called — why was there none to answer." The disobedient and unbelieving shall be tormented in Hell with a soul-rending remorse, which devils and heathens cannot feel. Say not that the calls of wisdom are not to you, because you are fools — for to such she speaks!

Proverbs 8:5. "You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding." Those who are easily seduced, those who live under the power of error and sin — are called to hear the wisdom which is from above. Your case, O you simple ones, is not hopeless! Eternal Wisdom is your teacher, and calls you to learn; and to none does wisdom say, "Seek Me in vain!" The teacher is the Lord our God; and he teaches to profit, because there is power and light in his words, and in the Spirit who accompanies them. Have you been foolish and disobedient? You are called to turn to the wisdom of the just. There is pardoning mercy revealed to encourage you to turn to the Lord — there is converting power in the words of wisdom. Your situation is bad — but not desperate. Hear the words that are spoken to you, and let them sink into your souls!

Consider the excellencies of the words, and of the speaker of them.

Proverbs 8:6. "Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right." Where the words of a king are, there is power. The words of wisdom are the princely words of the eternal King. As the sun and moon, these works of God’s hands, are more excellent than a machine or clock made by some human workman — so is the word of God more excellent than the sayings of the wisest and greatest of men. The same divine excellency which appears to reason’s eye in the works of God — appears to the eye of faith in the word of God. In the words of the wisest philosophers and most eloquent orators, there are some good and some bad things. There is dross mingled with their silver — but all the words of wisdom are right words, they are like silver seven times purified. They are spoken in perfect righteousness and faithfulness.

Proverbs 8:7. "My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness." Why do we not all believe the words of Christ? Heaven and earth shall pass away — but not one jot or tittle shall pass from his word. Let us never again be so impious as to suspect the faithfulness of his promises, or the sincerity of his invitations, or the truth of his precious doctrines. We believe the word of an honest man — and Christ is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness. All lying is wickedness in his esteem, and is abhorred by his heart.

If we believe the word of a man who may lie — shall we disbelieve the word of Him who cannot lie, nor allow liars to stand in his presence? We attend with diligence to the words of a man famous for wisdom and integrity — but all the words of Christ are the words of wisdom itself, and the things spoken are upright words of truth.

Proverbs 8:8. "All the words of my mouth are righteous — none of them is crooked or perverse!" One of the characters which our Lord takes is, "I who speak in righteousness." Eternal righteousness is in our Lord Jesus Christ, and shines in all his administrations and in all his words. God has given us in his word, a representation of the righteousness of his own nature and will, and framed it as a rule of righteousness to us. Those are crooked and perverse, walk in ways not authorized by this rule. By the degree of our conformity to it, are our improvements in righteousness and true holiness to be estimated. There is righteousness in the promises and doctrines, as well as in the commands of it. God's words of grace are spoken by him in his holiness, and are therefore to be received with an unshaken confidence. Has God promised us eternal life, and called us by his word to depend on his Son for salvation? We may safely venture our souls upon the faithful word of Jehovah. To doubt whether these addresses to us are sincere or not, is to suspect that there is something crooked or perverse in the faithful sayings of God. But is it possible for us to understand the words of wisdom? Yes.

Proverbs 8:9. "To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge." The words of wisdom are a great depth. In them are mysteries which cannot be fully comprehended; for we find that the all-wise God has laid up in every part of Scripture, stores of wisdom too deep for mortal minds to fathom. There are some passages of Scripture, especially in that part of it which was written after the time of Solomon, in which are things hard to be understood — and yet all the words of wisdom are here said to be plain to the discerning. The meaning is, that everything necessary for faith and practice is clearly revealed in the Bible by the great Author of it, who meant not to insult our ignorance — but to instruct our minds, by that sacred book. When we are walled with difficulties, we ought not to quarrel with the Bible — but to ascribe it to our own stupidity or sloth. If, after the due use of means, some parts of Scripture still continue dark to us — let us bless God that the needful doctrines contained in them are in other passages taught with sufficient plainness. But if these words are plain only to the discerning — then of what service can it prove for simple and foolish people to attend to them? Fools are called not only to hear — but to receive wisdom from our great Teacher, for none teaches like him. But the entrance of God's word gives understanding to the simple, and the Spirit of Christ makes them wise unto salvation, who were born like the wild donkey's colt. The words of God meet with reproach and banter from some, who would found a reputation for wit upon wickedness; but wisdom will be justified by her children, and her words will be esteemed to be right concerning all things by those who find knowledge.

What improvement should we make of these commendations given to the words of wisdom? We ought to receive them with superlative esteem.

Proverbs 8:10-11. "Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold — for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her!" We profess to prefer wisdom in our judgment to the most valued things upon earth — but we are hypocrites, if there is not a consistency between our profession and our practice. If wisdom is

better than silver — we must receive it rather than silver. And if it were put to our choice whether to be rich or holy — we ought not for a moment to hesitate in deciding. It is actually put to our choice, whether we will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness — or the delights of sense, and the riches that shine to the eye of flesh.

If we are resolved at any rate to be rich; if we value the means of enriching ourselves with gold above the means of grace; if we grudge the necessary expense that may attend the means of religious instruction — then we choose gold, and not wisdom. The truly wise have some degree of Paul's spirit in them, and are taught by God to count everything loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord.

Silver and gold are good things, under the direction of wisdom. But they must not be the chief object of our esteem; for if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Luther, having received large presents from some princes of Saxony, protested that he would not have them for his portion. If gold or rubies are equal to wisdom in our judgment — then we have not the mind of Christ. That we may be disposed heartily to prefer wisdom to everything that our eyes have seen, or our minds have imagined — let us hear and believe what more can be said on wisdom's behalf.

Proverbs 8:12. "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion." For the Son of God to reveal his own glory to us — is one of the innumerable instances of his condescending grace. Had he not manifested his own glory to us, we would, to our loss, have remained forever ignorant of it.

Prudence is the companion of wisdom — and infinite prudence was from eternity familiar to the personal Wisdom of God, who abounded toward us in all prudence, in the contrivance of that glorious plan by which the wisdom of God is raised to the highest pitch in the salvation of men. For the Word was with God, and was a sharer in the glory of his eternal purpose of grace.

Consummate prudence and divine invention shine with illustrious splendor in the whole administration of our Lord Jesus Christ, and out of his treasures we receive all that prudence and skill that is necessary for us, while sojourning in a world full of enemies and snares. Who would not rather go for water to a fountain that ever flows — than to an intermittent brook that often disappoints the thirsty traveler? The Son of God has the fountain of life with him, and in his light shall we see light.

Perfect purity is another excellency of our divine Teacher, and his instructions have a sanctifying effect upon us.

Proverbs 8:13. "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech!" Some men refrain from evil actions, through fear of shame or punishment. But true wisdom teaches men not only to refrain from evil — but to hate it, through the fear of God. Then we are possessed of this gracious principle, when we abhor not only evil actions, but evil words and dispositions. Pride and arrogance, wickedness in the course of the conversation, and perverseness in spirit — are equally abhorred by our Lord. Such as have received his instructions into their hearts, cannot love that which is declared in every part of his word to be utterly offensive to him. Were anything deserving the name of wisdom to be found anywhere else, we might with

less damage despise the word of exhortation — but Christ claims it as his peculiar excellency:

Proverbs 8:14. "Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power!" Bildad had referred Job to the wise men that lived in the days of old, as the oracles of wisdom, for determining the disputes between Job and his friends. Job acknowledged that the ancients had some degree of wisdom — but would not implicitly submit his understanding to their maxims, because there was no comparison in this respect between the wisest sages, and the Ancient of days.

What is the wisdom of philosophers, who frequently became vain in their reasonings, and ruined men by their philosophy and vain deceit — to the wisdom of the Eternal Word? But why should we speak of wise men, when the holy angels are charged with folly? There is no sound wisdom but in Christ, or from him, who is the Fountain of human reason — and the Author of all that true wisdom which is in man. Whether these great men made their celebrated discoveries by the mere force of their own genius, or by the help of tradition — it is plain that their light was but a ray from that true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.

Counsel is his, for he is the wonderful Counselor, between whom and his eternal Father, the council of peace was formed, and who by his counsel, conducts us in the right way to happiness. The very quintessence of wisdom is his. He is understanding itself, and his eyes penetrate to the bottom of the deepest mysteries!

Blessed be God that such a person is made to us wisdom! Wisdom is better than strength — and yet wisdom needs strength to execute its plans. The eternal wisdom of God is joined with omnipotence. The eternal Word is the Almighty, by whom all things were made, and all the purposes of grace effected. He gives courage and power to all that learn wisdom from him, so that a man of understanding increases strength. Where counsel to contrive and wisdom to propose the noblest end, understanding to discern the true nature and tendencies of things, and strength to execute, concur — there can be nothing lacking. The wisdom and power of kings, and of those who have power delegated from kings, is derived from him.

Proverbs 8:15-16. "By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth!" Eternal wisdom has devised government — and determined the people to be entrusted with it. From the same source is derived all the majesty, and wisdom, and righteousness which ever appeared in the world, to adorn the thrones of princes. When David governed the people of God according to the integrity of his heart — when Solomon governed the same nation with wisdom and righteousness — they were indebted for all their noble qualifications to that Word of God, by whom all creatures were formed, and from whom all light is derived. When magistrates of inferior rank distinguish themselves by their wise and righteous administration — they owe their glory and usefulness to the same fountain of wisdom.

Those princes that are strangers to the name of Christ are the ministers of his providence, and are furnished from his treasures with every ornamental and useful qualification which they may possess.

If we admire the courage and the generosity and wisdom of Cyrus king of Persia, we ought to give glory to the King of Israel, by whom that heathen prince was guided. The histories of every nation, through the light of this text, may lead us to contemplate the excellency of the Son of God, from

whom every good gift comes. All the wisdom in the world must be ascribed to him — but none of that folly which always is mixed with wisdom in men. His treasures of wisdom are not diminished in the least degree. Let the simple ones apply to him with faith and importunity, and they shall be made wise unto holiness and salvation, for says Wisdom —

Proverbs 8:17. "I love those who love me, and those who seek me early shall find me." All of us profess to love wisdom — but few justify this profession. We do not truly love that person whose friendship we do not seek to share, and whose company we do not desire to enjoy. We do not love Christ if we do not seek him with our hearts, and with all earnestness of heart, desire fellowship with him in his wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Those who seek him are accounted by him lovers of his name — and this love to him is a proof that they are loved by him. He loved them — before they loved him. His good-will disposed their hearts to love him, and he takes pleasure in that love which was kindled by himself. He will not disappoint those ardent desires which were excited by his Spirit. He has been found by those who did not seek him — and will he hide himself from those who do seek him?

Young people have good encouragement from this Scripture to seek wisdom. Christ was kind to those young children that were brought to be blessed by him. He loved a young man who came to ask him what he should do to inherit eternal life — although he did not show a proper regard to Christ's answer. It is mentioned as the honor of Josiah king of Judah, that when he was young, he sought the God of his fathers. The word translated seek early may be rendered seek earnestly or diligently. All the true lovers and seekers of Christ shall find him, and find inexpressible happiness in him. They are sharers in his fullness, and he opens all his treasures to them!

Proverbs 8:18-19. "With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver!" On whom do the kings of this world bestow their gifts? On their own friends — or on strangers and enemies? On their friends, no doubt, unless they are restrained to do otherwise. No motives of that kind can direct the managements of the eternal King. The silver is his, and the gold is his — and he would give silver and gold to all who love him — even if he sees it better for the greater part of them to lack these perishing riches. It is not for lack of riches and honors to bestow. It is not for lack of love to his people, that he does not bestow on every one of them crowns of gold, and mines of precious metals. The riches of Christ are incomparably more valuable than gold and silver. His justifying righteousness, which is upon all those who believe — enriches them forever, though formerly they were indebted millions, and unable to pay one farthing to the justice of God! The grace of the Spirit enriches them above what the finest gold or the choicest silver could ever do!

These shining metals glitter in the eye — but they cannot shed joy or contentment in the heart. The only use that riches can answer, is to help us to be content — but even here riches can do little, while godliness does all, and is justly esteemed great gain.

How wisdom enriches men, we are more dearly told in the next verse.

Proverbs 8:20-21. "I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing wealth on those who love me, and making their treasuries full." Great was the favor bestowed by God on the children of Israel, when he conducted them through the wilderness to the land of promise by a pillar of cloud and fire. Had he left them to their own conduct, they must have lost themselves, and

perished in that land of deserts, of pits and serpents, of drought and of the shadow of death.

Neither could we find the way to the celestial city, without the Captain of salvation, who is given by God to be a Leader to the people. He leads us in the paths of righteousness for his own name's sake, and in the midst of the paths of judgment, keeping us from every dangerous mistake, and preserving us from the snares which on each side of our way are spread for our feet. Our great Teacher leads us in this way, to enrich us with the most precious substance. The followers of Christ shall be no losers by him. They shall not inherit the wind, nor possess for their portion those unsubstantial things, of which it is said — "they are nothing," because they are not the true riches. But they shall possess, by the right and tenure of the children of God, that which is durable and solid riches. The fashion of this world passes away — but he who does the will of God abides forever, and shall be forever rich, for all his treasures are filled by the wisdom of God. In this world, he receives every needful supply, and can say in truth that all things are his. In the eternal world, every craving shall be fully satisfied, and no uneasy desires shall remain.

Blessed are the lovers of wisdom, though the world may account them poor. Have they no silver or gold? The apostles for the most part had none — and yet they made many rich. The angels have none, and desire to have it as little as we desire to have our treasuries filled with gravel! Saints are like angels, rich in heavenly treasure — and while God is rich, they shall not be poor.

Here is a short way of becoming rich, and here covetousness is a virtue. These blessed treasures of righteousness and glory were designed for the possessors of them before the foundation of the world, and God entered into a covenant of grace with his own eternal Son to provide them. For Christ existed from eternity, and before all worlds he was appointed to be the Author of our salvation, and rejoiced with his Father in the prospect of it.

Proverbs 8:22. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." The Son of God was begotten by the Father before all worlds; and if we may speak it with reverence, it was the unspeakable blessedness of the most holy God, that he possessed a Son the same in essence with himself, and the brightness of his glory, by whom he designed to make and govern the world, and to show the glory of wisdom in repairing the ruins of it. When the eternal decrees of God were framed in his infinite mind, before any of his creatures were made — the Word was with God, even in the bosom of the Father, and the purpose of God was purposed in him.

Proverbs 8:23. "I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began." It was a profane question which a philosopher once asked at a Christian: What God was doing before he made the world? But we have here a serious and delightful answer to it. The Son of God was ordained before the foundation of the world to be the Author of wisdom and salvation to us, and he accounted it his glory to be the foundation of the counsel of God in the administration of grace. The eternal power and Godhead of Christ are enlarged upon by himself at great length in the following verses.

Proverbs 8:24-25. "When there were no oceans, I was given birth — when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth!" The antiquity of his existence, of his generation by the Father, and his appointment to be our Redeemer — are expressed in the same language in which the unbeginning duration of the Godhead is described.

Proverbs 8:26. "before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world." The Wisdom of the Father was in the beginning — but had no beginning to his own existence. The Father himself did not exist before the only-begotten Son, and he who spread abroad the earth by himself, without the assistance of other beings, or the agency of instruments — did not create the world without the everlasting Word.

Proverbs 8:27. "I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,"

Fashioning the great mass of earth and water by a divine architecture, into the most regular form.

Proverbs 8:28-29. "when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth." Then was I by him. The power and wisdom of God appeared in the order and stability which he gave to the various creatures, as well as in the formation of them. He separated the waters below. from the waters above the firmament, and fixed both in their respective places. He confined the waters of the sea within their proper channels, and appointed foundations to the earth, that it might not be removed.

It is our duty to consider the works of God with attention, and to contemplate them in their different parts, which make one beautiful whole! Every one of these parts is fitted to excite our veneration for the great Author of nature — the three-one God. When we survey the earth and the waters, the mountains and the valleys, and consider that they had a beginning — we are led by the Scripture to adore the Word which was with God, and was God — when these creatures that make so good a figure in our eyes were nothing. When we consider the wisdom and power that shine with amazing luster in the fabric of the world, let us raise our thoughts to the Son of God, by whom God made the world, and by whom he has now recovered it from the ruins that were the fruits of our sin.

If we reverence the wisdom of the aged, what reverence is due to the unbeginning Word, who condescends to reveal to us the Father, and to disclose the secrets of his wisdom! When we behold the immense repository of waters, and the spacious earth, when we lift up our eyes to the lofty mountains, and to the immeasurable circuit of the heavens — can we forbear saying: What is man, that he who is before all these things, and by whom they all hold together — should regard him with such astonishing favor! How ungrateful must we be, if we turn a deaf ear to the merciful instructions of our Divine Teacher! But let us admire, with increasing wonder, the glory and grace of Him who speaks to us from Heaven, when we hear him declaring his infinite happiness in the bosom of his Father.

Proverbs 8:30. "Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence." The blessedness of rational creatures lies in their fellowship with God. Those are blessed, whom God makes to approach to himself; and the nearer the approach, the greater the blessedness. But there is infinite blessedness in the Godhead itself, and in that divine and incomprehensible fellowship which the Son of God enjoyed from eternity, while he was in the Father’s bosom, as his only-begotten Son. The Father was in the Son, and the Son in the Father, and both in the Spirit, and the Spirit in both, and they were infinitely blessed in one another!

These things are so mysterious to us, that it is safer to adore and wonder — than to speak. But one thing we cannot overlook, that when we consider the infinite happiness of the Son of God, in his oneness of nature with the Father, and in that infinite nearness of person to him, which must be inferred from the unity of essence, and mutual relation of the Trinity — we must be amazed to think that he bestowed a thought upon men — upon creatures whose apostasy and wickedness were foreknown by him. Before the world began, he thought upon men with compassion, and rejoiced in the purposes of his love concerning them.

Then, (says he,) was I by him,

Proverbs 8:31. "Rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind." It was infinite goodness to rejoice in the prospect of those holy angels, whose dwelling was assigned to them in Heaven, beside the throne of God. But he also delighted in the prospect of that grace and salvation that was designed for lost men, through the sufferings to be endured in that human nature which was pre-ordained for him. Did our Lord Jesus think upon us with compassion and love, before the foundation of the world? Let our thoughts be often employed in contemplating that amazing goodness, and in tracing up redemption and the blessings of salvation, to the fountain whence they proceed! Shall we, from day to day, put off the thoughts of Christ, and defer that regard and obedience which is so entirely his due — when he thought on us with pity, before we or the world in which we dwell had a being?

Proverbs 8:32. "Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways!" We must not give unto him the hearing of the ear only — but the hearing of faith and obedience also. The blessing is upon those who are not forgetful hearers — but effectual doers of his word. We are under infinite obligations, from the greatness and the eternal grace of Christ, to hearken unto him — and our duty and interest are here the same. Our observation of his ways is not the foundation or cause of our blessedness, for that was designed for us before we could do good or evil. Our holy dispositions are not the cause — but the effect of the purpose of grace in Christ Jesus. Yet because they are the effect, they are also a proof of our happy interest in it. Are they blessed that keep the way of wisdom? Then,

Proverbs 8:33. "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not." If we hear instruction with faith and reverence — then we shall be wise. If we refuse it — then are fools, and must continue to be so. Christ is the only author of wisdom, and it is by the hearing of faith, that he conveys wisdom. The word is the good seed, and if it is not sown in the heart — then how can we expect a harvest? But it is not enough that the seed is sown. Should it be presently picked up, or should no fruit be brought forth to perfection — the sowing of it will be of no avail. We are required, not only to hear instruction — but to hold it fast in our hearts and practice. The man that does so, is truly wise, and receives blessing from God.

Proverbs 8:34. "Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Those who desire favors from the great, wait upon them day by day, and think themselves happy if they can at length obtain a favorable answer to their suit. With how much greater reason do we wait at the posts of Wisdom’s doors, in expectation of the most necessary and important blessings! Happy were Solomon’s servants, in the opinion of the queen of Sheba, because they enjoyed the privilege of daily hearing that celebrated prince. We are happy — if we knew our own happiness — who are admitted to hear the instructions of Him who is Wisdom itself.

His palace is erected among us, and it is a greater happiness to stand at the door of it, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

David desired one thing, and what was it? Not that he might enjoy a long and undisturbed possession of his throne — but that he might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, and enjoy the blessed views and discoveries afforded in the sanctuary. The God of mercy waits to be gracious to us, and we ought to wait for him, attending those ordinances where he is pleased to display his glory and love, with unwearied diligence, earnest desire, and lively hope. The man that waited thirty-eight years at the pool of Siloam, was well rewarded at last, when he received vigor to his body. But they enjoy greater happiness, who wait for God in his appointed way. Christ is found by those who seek him.

Blessed are those who find him,

Proverbs 8:35. "For whoever finds me finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord." He who has the Son has life, and he who has not the Son of God has not life. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul — but by sin he died, and we all sinned and died in him, and must have continued forever in a state of death — had not another Adam appeared who was made a quickening Spirit. Whoever believes in him shall not die — but have everlasting life.

Even in this land of darkness and death, believers enjoy a true and happy life — for they are delivered from condemnation, and entitled to the heavenly life. They are made free from that principle of corruption, which is called the law of sin and death, and made alive unto God and holiness. They enjoy that which is better than life — the loving-kindness of the Lord; for through Jesus, the Father looks upon them with a pleasant countenance. The smiles of God make Heaven, and those who obtain favor of the Lord have a Heaven upon earth. But miserable are the despisers of the wisdom and grace of Christ.

Proverbs 8:36. "But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all who hate me love death." Those who despise Christ’s gospel, or reject his salvation — are sinful rebels against him who is the Supreme Wisdom, and the fountain of happiness to men. They are haters of Him who is love itself. Such ungrateful rebels are as great enemies to themselves, as to Christ. They murder their immortal souls — they love those sins which are death and damnation in disguise. Sinners against Christ shall receive a reward of vengeance suited to the blackness of their guilt, and shall, through eternity, have no room to complain of their Judge. Death and life were set before them — and they chose death, and shall forever eat of the fruit of their own choice. Consider these things, O unbelievers! If you will not now consider them — in the latter days you shall fully consider them!

# 01.09. Proverbs 9

Chapter 9.

Proverbs 9:1-18

The happiness of the followers of Christ is not entirely reserved to the eternal world. Even in this life, they are admitted to a feast of fat things.

Proverbs 9:1. "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars." The church of Christ is a house, wherein he dwells and takes pleasure. It must be a glorious edifice, for wisdom is the builder of it. It is a strong and durable building, for it has many pillars, hewed out, not by, the wisest of kings — but by the wisdom of God. Here there is abundance of soul-nourishing provision; for,

Proverbs 9:2. "She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table." We shall surely be satisfied with the fatness of God’s house, with that flesh which is given for the life of the world, and with that spiced wine which is the blood of the New Testament. Does Christ give us his own flesh and blood, to nourish and refresh our souls? Then what grace, what comfort, what privilege, will he withhold? He is most willing to communicate this provision to us.

Proverbs 9:3. "She has sent forth her maidens; she cries upon the highest places of the city." The followers of the Lamb are called virgins, to denote their purity. Ministers also must be pure in their doctrine and behavior. The voice of these maidens, is the voice of that wisdom which sends them. It is she who gives the invitation by their mouth; and she does it in the most public and audible manner, crying with a voice like that of a herald from the highest places of the city. But who are invited to this feast?

Proverbs 9:4-5. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed." The simple and unwise are welcomed to this feast. They are called not only by the servants — but by the master of the feast, to partake of these precious provisions. The poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind — those who have no money, and those who have spent all their substance for things that do not profit — are graciously invited to come, and eat and drink abundantly, by receiving Christ and his salvation, as they are freely offered in the gospel. But we cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table — and the table of devils. When we come to Jesus by faith, and partake of his precious blessings, we must forsake the society and the course of the foolish.

Proverbs 9:6. "Leave your foolish ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding!" The companions of fools shall remain forever in the congregation of the dead. But in the way of understanding there is life, and no death. Do we abhor death, and love life? Then, if we believe the words of Christ, we will forsake the foolish, and go in the path of understanding. But may we not associate with the foolish, in order to reclaim them. There are two sorts of foolish people. Some have naturally a pliable and modest disposition; though destitute of the grace of God; or though

conversant in the ways of sin, they are not yet hardened in sin by long practice. There may be some hope of making good impressions on the minds of such people as these. But there are others who are stubborn and determined sinners. To them, in ordinary cases, there is no hope of doing any good.

Proverbs 9:7-8. "Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker — or he will hate you." If we reprove the profligate sinners that mock at everything sacred, we are not likely to benefit them — but to procure hurt to ourselves. Such men, when we have irritated them by our admonitions, will pry into our characters with all the keenness of malice and revenge. Few characters can stand the scrutiny of a malicious eye. So that instead of serving them, we shall be in danger of losing much of our usefulness to others, by making them our enemies. Yet reproofs are like pearls when they are administered with the meekness of wisdom, and met with an obedient ear.

Proverbs 9:8-9. "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." There is scarcely a man so wise and holy as not to need instruction and reproof. Wise men are not above reproofs — but they know their need of them, and are disposed to receive them with meekness, and to improve by them, and to love and thank their reprovers. The wise and the just man are the same in the view of Solomon, for this is a fundamental maxim in his writings —

Proverbs 9:10. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Solomon knew how to appreciate that wisdom which directs men in the prudent management of their own concerns, and in the wise administration of public affairs. But he rightly judged that religion is the true wisdom, and that, compared with it, all other kinds are vanity and folly. He examined with the eye of the prince of philosophers the objects of nature; but the knowledge of the most holy God, was in his estimation true understanding. This kind of knowledge excels the other as much as the light of the sun the glimmer of a glow-worm. He who knows God in truth, is possessed of a never-ending life.

Proverbs 9:11. "For by me your days shall be multiplied, and the years of your life shall be increased." It is not for God’s benefit — but for ours, that he invites us to receive wisdom.

Proverbs 9:12. "If you are wise — your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker — you alone will suffer." God can receive no additions of blessedness by our wisdom, though he delights in it. He cannot lose his glory by our contempt of his gospel and laws. The ministers of wisdom will rejoice in our compliance with their calls — but the profit or the loss of our behavior under a dispensation of the gospel, must be felt by ourselves. Life and death are set before us. May God grant us a disposition to pursue life.

Another offer is made us of entertainment — but alas of how different a kind! It is made by the harlot, against whom we need to be often warned.

Proverbs 9:13. "The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge." She is foolish, ignorant, and stupid to the last degree, for she buys a moment of empty delight — at the expense of everlasting burnings. She is impudent and clamorous. The damned in Hell are afraid that their companions should come to their place of torments. But this shameless creature earnestly calls others to share with her in those pleasures which are followed by everlasting

sorrows"

Proverbs 9:14-15. "She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way." They are evil times, when tempters to sin are permitted to hunt so avowedly for prey. Let well-meaning people, in such a time, watch and pray against temptation. These are the people whom the foolish woman solicits, and too often with success.

Proverbs 9:16-17. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" They are surely stupid, who believe that there is any pleasure in those things that are forbidden by God, and afraid to appear in open day. Yet such is the corruption of the hearts of men, that they relish things so contrary to reason, as well as to Scripture. We are naturally prone to things forbidden, and until our souls are renewed by the grace of God — can taste an unaccountable sweetness in that which is poison to the soul" But when we are restored to a sound mind, those delights only will be relished, which consist with a pure conscience, and the dignity of a rational and immortal soul.

It is through blindness and inconsideration, that any man is entangled in the snares of the foolish woman!

Proverbs 9:18. "But he does not know not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of Hell." We are naturally starving creatures, and cannot find happiness within ourselves. As every man must have food to satisfy the natural cravings of hunger, so every soul must have some gratification to its desires of happiness. Wisdom and folly each spread a feast for men. The question is: Whose guests shall we be? Did we possess any wisdom, or any true and well directed self-love, it might be easily decided. The entertainments of wisdom, are soul-quickening provision. Those who hear her calls, shall eat that which is good, and their souls shall live forever. The guests of wisdom are in the heights of Heaven. They feast on the hidden manna, and on the fruits of the tree of life. The provisions of the foolish woman are a deadly, though perhaps a slow poison. Her guests have their portion with the wicked giants, who brought on the world a universal deluge, and with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, who are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Let us consider where Joseph now is, and what blessings are come upon the crown of the head of him who so bravely resisted temptations the most alluring, and the most threatening. Let us, on the other hand, remember Sodom and Gomorrah, and chose our portion with the one or the other. Be astonished, O heavens! that men should be so cruel to their own souls, as to deliberate a moment in so clear a case. Today let us hear the voice of wisdom.

# 01.10. Proverbs 10

Chapter 10.

Proverbs 10:1-32

Salvation is by grace through faith. This faith works by love, producing universal obedience to the law of our Creator and Redeemer. This law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, and published with more particularity in this divinely inspired body of Christian morality. Let us study it with attention, and pray that the Spirit of Jesus may enable us to understand and practice it.

Proverbs 10:1. "The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son brings joy to his father — but a foolish son brings grief to his mother." The first nine chapters are a prefatory address. Now begin the proverbs, (or masterly sayings,) properly so called.

Weighty sayings deserve and gain regard. But how shall we sufficiently esteem the proverbs left us by Solomon, which is almost another name for wisdom itself! By this inspired philosopher, Divine Wisdom speaks to every generation. Were the first of these proverbs to have its due influence on mankind, the world would be greatly reformed and blessed by its efficacy. A great part of our race are parents — all mankind are, or have been children; and by Scripture both parents and children are directed. Parents are instructed to use all possible means to make their children wise. But how shall they effect this? Is it not the prerogative of God to give wisdom? No doubt. But he makes use of proper and appointed means for this purpose. Would you then derive comfort from your children? Instruct, reprove, exhort them, pray for them, recommend true religion to them by your example. For thus says the Author of wisdom, "Train up a child in the way wherein he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." But if in some rare instance he should depart from wisdom — then your souls will not on that account be stung with self-accusations.

Remember, you that are children, how greatly you are indebted to your parents, and how much their comfort is bound up in you. Be wise, seek useful knowledge, and search for it as for hidden treasure! Walk in the fear of the Lord. Let prudence and discretion, (such as Solomon teaches,) appear in every part of your conduct. So shall your father and mother greatly rejoice, and bless the Lord on your account. But if you are foolish and unruly — you grieve their spirits, and wound the souls that love you with the dearest affection. Consider that your mothers bore you with sorrow. Why should your lives also be a continual source of pain to their tender hearts! Or why should the anxieties of your fathers on your behalf, be rewarded with the cutting view of your ungodly lives!

"A wise son brings joy to his father — but a foolish son brings grief to his mother." Though he should in no other way express his contempt for her — his foolish behavior is a plain proof that he does not value his mother’s happiness.

Proverbs 10:2. "Ill-gotten treasures are of no value." Ill-gotten riches are called treasures of wickedness. It is an opinion generally held by men, that riches, in whatever way procured, will do

them great service. If, therefore, they cannot come at the possession of them by honest means — then they will scrape them together by any means in their power. But here the Spirit of God tells us, that if a man should heap up immense riches to himself, they will profit him nothing. And how can they? They are cursed to him. If a moth in his substance, and stings in his conscience, and the damnation of Hell — can bring any advantage to the robber and extortioner — let them rejoice in their portion.

"But righteousness delivers from death." No righteousness but that which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, delivers from eternal death. However, he is a gross deceiver of his own soul, who pretends to be clothed with it, while be continues to live unrighteously. By righteousness, we give to everyone his due; first to God, and next to men. This righteousness is a preservative from death and misery of every kind. How?

Through the gracious protection of Him who keeps the path of the righteous, as the wise man tells us in the next words:

Proverbs 10:3. "The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry — but he thwarts the craving of the wicked." But was it never known that the just man perished by hunger? Are ravens always commissioned to feed the people of God in times of famine? God has them at his command, if he sees it proper to make use of them; and when he pleases, he can administer to his people's necessities as easily by miracle as by the use of ordinary means.

Let them, then, joyfully commit the care of their bodies to his mercy. So long as his infinite wisdom shall see their continuance in life fit for them, their bread and their water shall be sure; and though their bodies should in some rare instances be pinched with hunger, he will nourish their souls with bread which the world knows nothing of. But the wicked are not so. While the righteous are sure of being satisfied in days of famine, the wicked are near to ruin in their greatest abundance — for the Lord casts away that which they call their substance. Many of them will take care not to spend it upon riotous living, and harlots. None of them will part with it, from motives of generosity and charity. But while they grasp it fast with both hands — God will pull it out from between their fingers, and toss it irrecoverably from them. Should they even be permitted to hold it all their days — death, that terrible messenger, shall at last drag them from it! Nor shall their glory descend after them to the grave — but that wickedness by which they acquired it, shall lie down with them in the dust, and torture their souls in Hell.

You see from this verse, how it comes to pass, that righteousness delivers from death — and that treasures of wickedness are so unprofitable. But let none from these truths conclude, that honest labor is useless. God takes care of his people — but he makes use of their labors in the performance of his promise about their provision. Whoever indulges himself in idleness, may expect poverty as a matter of course; for,

Proverbs 10:4. "Lazy hands make a man poor" Idleness was never designed for man. Adam in paradise, was to dress and keep the garden. Why should men expect any good from slothfulness, since that doom was pronounced, "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread!" Show me a slothful man, and I will show you a wicked, a poor, and a miserable man.

"But diligent hands bring wealth." Riches are dispensed by God at his pleasure, and he commonly gives them to the man employed in honest industry.

How then do we see some men laborious — and yet poor? Perhaps they trust too much to their own labor. Perhaps they are earth-worms, abhorred by God. Or if they fear the Lord, and look to him for a blessing on the labor of their hands, he sees that riches are not the best thing for them. To prevent pride and vanity from being increased in them by the wealth of the world — he keeps them poor, designing to bestow upon them the better and enduring substance. Would you complain of one, who promised you one acre of ground, and gave your instead of it a hundred acres in a better soil? But are not some indolent people enriched by unexpected means? No; at least their wealth is not substantial nor enduring. It is worse than poverty. Let us, therefore, be at once fervent in spirit and diligent in business; and if we would deserve this character, we must carefully improve the proper seasons of profitable labor; for,

Proverbs 10:5. "He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son." Summer and harvest are the fit seasons for raising and gathering in the fruits of the field. He who improves these and similar opportunities for honest gain, does honor to himself, and to those parents who had the care of his upbringing. He who neglects them, is like one who sleeps all the time he should be working. It would be a shame for a man in health to spend all his days in bed. The idle man might as well be there, for anything he does out of it. He brings disgrace to himself, and to his father, who ought to have trained him to habits of prudence and diligence. Are prudence and diligence so commendable, when employed about the food that perishes? How much more necessary and profitable are they, when we are called to labor in the strength of divine grace, for the food that endures unto everlasting life! He who trifles away the acceptable time and the day of salvation, is a thousand times more foolish, then the man who defers the reaping of his fields until the end of December.

Riches are the ordinary fruit of labor — but the fruit of righteousness shall be peace and every good thing; for,

Proverbs 10:6. "Blessings are upon the head of the just." The just man is not only commended by men — but by God. He not only expects — but possesses blessings. He is not only enriched — but crowned with blessings coming down from the Father of lights. He shall not be confounded — but his mouth is opened to bless the Author of his blessings.

"But violence covers the mouth of the wicked." The covering of Haman’s face, was a badge of his condemnation. The violent man is condemned already, and when the Judge of all shall return his violent dealings upon his own head, his face shall be covered with confusion, nor shall he be able to open his mouth in extenuation of his crimes. The happiness of the just, and the misery of the wicked, is not confined to this life. The just man shall not all die. His spirit is life because of righteousness; his body shall sleep in Jesus; and,

Proverbs 10:7. "The memory of the just is blessed." His name shall live when he is dead. The remembrance of him is dear to his friends, and honored by the wise. A good reputation brings honor to God, and prolongs the influence of his good example. His good works not only follow him — but live behind him. As Jeroboam made Israel to sin after he was dead, so the good man helps to make others holy while he is lying in the grave. Should it so happen that his character is mistaken in the world, or should his name die out among men — it shall yet be had in everlasting remembrance before God; for never shall those names be erased from the Lamb’s book of life, which were written in it from the foundation of the world.

"But the name of the wicked shall rot!" It shall either perish, or be covered with disgrace. Have they performed great actions, or built stately monuments to perpetuate their name? These may be useful, indeed, to keep up and to recall their infamy to recollection. The names of the Alexanders and Caesars of the days of old, are honorable among bad judges of character. Among the wise, leopards and other voracious beasts are accounted no less deserving of glory and fame.

Proverbs 10:8. " The wise in heart accept commands." All men desire to be accounted wise; but who is truly a wise man? Solomon being judge, the man is wise who receives commandments. He will not admit of any lord to his conscience — but the Judge of all — yet he hearkens to instruction from all who are authorized or qualified to give it. He receives with meekness the instructions of parents and teachers, and yields a cheerful submission to lawful authority. He is much readier to hear than to speak, and his feet stand upon an even place.

"But a chattering fool comes to ruin." Loquacity is a sure sign of vanity and folly. This kind of fool, in his endless talk, speaks many vain and sinful words — for which he must give an account. He speaks many proud and senseless words — which bring upon him contempt. He speaks many rash, malicious, and provoking words — which lay him open to hatred and mischief. Sooner or later, his ungoverned tongue must fall upon him with unsupportable weight, and hurl him to ruin!

Proverbs 10:9. "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out." Men’s characters are discerned by their lives. The good man walks uprightly, for he regulates his steps by the unerring rule, and constantly endeavors to follow it, unbiased by self-interest or honor, persuasion, terror, or example. He abhors deceit in his dealings either with God or men — but speaks as he thinks, acts as he speaks, and makes the example of Christ his constant pattern. This man walks securely, or confidently. None of his steps shall slide. If he should fall, he shall not be utterly cast down. If he meets with enemies, and tribulations — he receives joy from the testimony of his conscience. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, to which he runs and is safe. The hypocrite walks in crooked paths. Like Judas, who put on a cloak of charity to hide his covetousness — he conceals the selfish principles which regulate his behavior under the appearances of piety, prudence, and other good qualities. But he cannot hold the mantle so tight about him, as to conceal from the wise observer, his inward baseness. It will occasionally be shuffled aside, it will at length drop off, and he shall be known for what he is, abhorred by all men, and punished by God with other hypocrites!

Proverbs 10:10. "He who winks maliciously causes grief." He who winks with the eye, either in derision of his neighbor, or to give a signal to his associate in mischief — is the cause of sorrow to another, which shall return upon himself. For he who does a bad thing to others, in whatever way he does it — is doing a worse to himself. Better to suffer an hundred wrongs, than to commit one.

"A chattering fool comes to ruin." Such a fool is often boasting that he is no hypocrite; but his plainness is no virtue, nor shall it make atonement for the follies of his mouth. The scorner, the plotter of mischief, and the chattering fool — shall be involved in equal misery.

Some ancient translations read the verse thus: "He who winks with the eye causes sorrow; but he who reproves causes safety." In this contrast, winking with the eye is the gesture of one who hides his eyes from his neighbor’s fault, because he is unwilling to risk his favor by administering necessary reproof. Such a man is not a true friend, for he allows sin upon his brother, when he

might, by faithful admonition, have prevented it. And he who does not prevent sin when it is in his power, is the cause of grief, the sure consequence of sin. But he who faithfully reproves, causes safety to his friend, and shall, in the end, receive more thanks than he who winked with the eye, and flattered with the mouth.

Proverbs 10:11. "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life." Much is spoken by the wise man about the government of the tongue — but not too much, for he who learns effectually to bridle his tongue is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. The mouth of a righteous man utters words which are refreshing to the downcast, as cold waters to a thirsty soul. His wise and edifying conversations, through the Divine blessing, promote the spiritual interests of the hearers. Let our speech, therefore, be always with grace, seasoned with salt.

"But violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked." The mouths of others are like a standing pool; nothing but insipid trash is to be found in them. They are too frequently like a poisoned fountain, tending to corruption and death. But the violence breathed from the mouths, or executed by the hands of the wicked — shall bring upon them condemnation, and stop their mouths with shame!

Proverbs 10:12. "Hatred stirs up dissension." Hatred is so hateful a thing, that no man will acknowledge it in himself — but by its fruits you shall know it. What else is it that induces men to provoke their neighbors to wrath and contention, by expressions of contempt, by base insinuations, by cutting reproaches, by opprobrious names, by recalling old faults to remembrance, and raising up to view what seemed buried in the grave of forgetfulness? Can the man who indulges in such practices, be justly regarded as a child of the God of peace, or a follower of Jesus, who showed such love to his disciples, after all of them had forsaken, and one denied him in the day of his distress?

"But love covers all sins." All sins! What a strange word is that! We think it a great deal to cast a mantle over seven offences of our brother — to hide from our eyes, and drop from our remembrance, not a few nor a great number of offences — but all sins is a hard matter.

Yet what are all the sins of our brother, by which he has offended us — compared with our sins against God? Why should not he to whom ten thousand talents are remitted — readily forgive his brother a few pence? Examine yourselves, whether love or hatred reigns in your souls.

Proverbs 10:13. "Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning." He who is wise in heart will receive reproof. That is one mark of a wise man — but he shows his wisdom in speaking, as well as in hearing. Wisdom seals not up — but governs the mouth, and dictates to it useful words. On whatever occasion you consult the possessor of it, you will find wisdom, whether you want instruction, or direction, or comfort. Should you consult him about matters that come not within the compass of his talents, even then he will evince his wisdom, for it is the part of a wise man not to deal in things too high for him. The wisdom of his heart and tongue is his safety and honor — "but a rod is for the back of him who lacks judgment." How can he escape an ignominious punishment, when by his unbridled mouth he makes both God and man his enemy? "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the fool’s back!" A bridle was necessary to govern donkeys when men rode on them — a rod is equally necessary for fools. It is not by words — but blows, that they must be managed. They deserve the scourge, and sooner or later they shall have it.

Proverbs 10:14. "Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin." Here we learn how the lips of the wise are furnished with wisdom. Their heart is a storehouse, in which they lay up a treasure of it. How do they come by it? By reading the Bible, by meditating, by hearing sermons, by holy conversation, by observation and experience, by prayer, and by faith in Christ, who is made of God unto us wisdom. And when they have found it, they take care not to lose it — but lay it up in their memories and hearts, where it is kept to be used by themselves, and communicated to others.

Such men are in the way of happiness — but fools lay up lies and vanities, and idle, malicious stories, which furnish a large supply for their mischievous tongues, so that they are not far from ruin, for of the fruit of their mouths shall they eat.

Proverbs 10:15. "The rich man’s wealth is his strong city." Can this be true? Yes, if you will believe himself. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit. It is not a strong city — but his strong city. He thinks it will prove a sufficient defense to him from that destruction which his mouth has merited. You see how justly the worldling is called an idolater, for he makes not God his confidence — but trusts to a thing of nothing; for his riches, if they are a city, are not a strong city — but a city broken down, and without walls.

How hard is it for rich men to obtain an entrance into that city that has foundations, when it is a miracle for a man that has riches, not to trust in them! But are we to suppose poor men exempt from the temptation to idolize gold and silver? No, for "The destruction of the poor is their poverty." That was a good prayer, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Poor men, by envying the rich, by cringing to them, by discontentment with their lot, by despondency and fear of ruin — do often make themselves as wretched and vile, as the rich who boast of their wealth.

Proverbs 10:16. "The wages of the righteous bring them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment." The advantage of diligence has been already explained — but there is a very great difference between the righteous and the wicked in this as in other things. To the pure all things are pure — but to the defiled and unbelieving there is nothing pure. The labor of a righteous man is blessed by God, and tends, not only to procure the necessities of life — but to make his life comfortable, and to lengthen its days. Nay, it has a favorable influence upon his eternal life, for it is a preservative from temptation; and the performance of a duty, part of the fruits of which are lent unto the Lord, are to be repaid with abundant increase. The fruit of the wicked man’s labors, on the contrary, tends to sin; it does so, whether it be hoarded up by his covetousness, or spent in the gratification of vanity and luxury. With all your getting, get righteousness, which will make your labor pure and profitable. Without it, even your ploughing is sin; and your gains are loss to your souls.

Proverbs 10:17. "He who heeds discipline shows the way to life." A wise man will heeds discipline — but it is not truly received if it is not kept. The instructions received from parents, ministers, and wise men, must be esteemed as a treasure, laid up in our memories, followed in our lives. He who heeds discipline, is in the way of happiness. His present life is safe and joyful; his soul is prosperous; death is his passage to eternal life. Hereby do we know that we know Christ, if we keep his commandments.

Reproofs are necessary for us on many occasions, and the wise man who heeds discipline, will receive them with meekness and thankfulness; and improve them for his humiliation and correction.

"But whoever ignores correction leads others astray." He is like a sick man to whom a kind physician prescribes some medicine of powerful virtue — but bitter to the taste. So foolish, however, is he, that he will rather risk his life, than follow the prescription.

Proverbs 10:18. "He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool." He who indulges so wicked and dangerous a passion, is a fool, whether he conceals it under the mask of friendship, or reveals it by reproaches and calumnies. It must neither be concealed nor published — but suppressed and extinguished. To conceal it like Absalom, is to nourish a fire within us, that will consume our vitals, and prove mortal in the end. To utter it in slander, like Shimei, is to set on fire our dwelling, which may soon involve us in the flames.

Proverbs 10:19. "When words are many, sin is not absent." And that of many different kinds. Expressions of vanity and pride, of ill-nature and impiety, of rashness and inconsideration — never fail to proceed from the lips of a man who loves to hear himself talk. Even foolish talking, and inconvenient jesting, and idle words, are sinful, being forbidden by God.

If we profess wisdom, we must govern our tongues, and think before we speak. Time and place must be regarded by us, and we must sometimes refrain our lips even from speaking good. Men often sin by a multitude of words in praying, in preaching, and giving advice.

"But he who holds his tongue is wise." He reveals his modesty and self-command. He keeps himself innocent from much sin, and prevents many dangers to which perpetual talkers expose themselves.

Let us not carry this maxim to excess. There is a time to speak, and if our words are well ordered, they may be very useful; for,

Proverbs 10:20. "The tongue of the just is as choice sliver." His conversation is useful, and very precious, not only like silver — but choice silver, which has been well purified in the fire. Our tongues deserve not this praise, unless they are refined from vanity, malignity, and falsehood, in all its diversity of forms.

How eagerly would we court the conversation of man possessed of endless treasures and unwearied liberality, freely imparting to every petitioner! The conversation of a wise and righteous man, is still more valuable, for he distributes treasures of knowledge, more precious than gold and rubies. If his tongue is like choice silver, his heart is still richer in value, for that is the good treasure out of which he brings good things.

"But the heart of the wicked is of little value." It is worth less than nothing, for folly and malignity have possession of it, and his tongue is furnished from that bad treasure with froth and wickedness. If he speaks anything good, it is but silver dross, covering a useless potsherd. Let us therefore avoid the company of the wicked, which can do no good; but let us endeavor to derive pleasure from that of the righteous; for,

Proverbs 10:21. "The lips of the righteous feed many; but fools die for lack of wisdom." Food is better than silver, which is useful as a medium of commerce — but which cannot satisfy hunger nor preserve life. Useful discourse is precious like the finest silver, and nourishing to the soul as food to the body. Knowledge, faith, charity, and every holy disposition, is increased by it. The righteous man feeds many with knowledge, for he finds it sweet to himself, and wishes not to eat his morsel alone. His heart is a storehouse of provision for the soul, and like a hospitable landlord, he delights in distributing it to others. But the wicked die for lack of wisdom. Knowledge is no less necessary to the soul, than food for the preservation of life. Fools therefore are in a bad condition, for they neither have knowledge nor hunger after it, otherwise they might be supplied from the lips of the wise. Therefore go from the presence of a foolish man, when you perceive not in him the lips of knowledge. But abide by the righteous, for the words of their mouth, when they speak like themselves, are better than necessary food.

Proverbs 10:22. "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it." Men generally wish to be rich. But what is the surest way of having such a wish gratified? Diligence is necessary — but not to be depended on; for without the blessing of the Lord on our labors, we may rise early and stay up late, and oppress our bodies with toil, and our minds with anxious care, and after all continue in poverty. But the blessing of the Lord is that which alone makes a man rich. If it should not enrich him who enjoys it with gold — then it will enrich him with what is far more precious — wisdom and grace. This blessing confers riches and preserves them — without exposing to harassing cares, their natural and common attendants. When riches bring with them vexations and fears, we would be better without them. Who would chose to lie on a golden bed with thorns spread under him, and thorns for his covering? But the blessing of the Lord is a hedge about all that a righteous man has. His labors are pleasant, his gains are safe. His portion is beyond the reach of danger; and his heart is preserved from vexation, in getting, or keeping, or using, or loving the world, because the Lord is his confidence. The belief of this proverb would sweeten our toils, and make us spiritually-minded about earthly things, and eradicate every dishonest disposition. No man can look for the divine blessing on the work of fraud.

Proverbs 10:23. "A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct." That man has arrived at an advanced stage of folly, who takes as much pleasure in evil conduct, as if it were an agreeable amusement. This, however, is to be expected in its natural course. Sinners at first feel much uneasiness from the operation of fear and shame — but they are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, until at length they not only cast off all restraints — but become impudent in sin, and think it a manly action to cast away the cords of God, and to pour insult and abuse on their fellow men! But it would be far safer to sport with fire than with sin — which kindles a fire that will burn to the lowest Hell! It may now be a sport to do evil — but in the lake of fire and brimstone it will be no sport to have done it.

"But a man of understanding delights in wisdom." And therefore it is impossible that he should be so infatuated with sin. He is deeply sensible of the misery and ruin that is in sin. His delight is in holiness — and in the exercises of holiness, he experiences that heartfelt pleasure, which the sweetest sins could never afford!

Proverbs 10:24. "What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted!" It is scarcely supposable that a wicked man can wholly rid himself of fear. His terrors may be suspended — but they are like a sleeping adder, which will awake and pierce his heart

with a venomous sting! The fears of the wicked are not only in his imagination. Ten thousand times greater misery than he can imagine, is appointed to him for the portion of his cup, by the irreversible sentence of his Almighty Judge! His guilty conscience does sometimes torment him with fear where no fear is — but if he escapes the hand of man, he shall fall into the hands of the living God! If he is not struck down by the storm of lightning — his day will come to drop into Hell. But let not the righteous be afraid — his desires are pure, being regulated by the will of God revealed in his Word. The God who hears prayers will grant them — if not at present, yet at the time most suitable in the judgment of Infinite Wisdom. If what he wishes is not allowed, his desire is yet granted, for whatever he desires is with this reservation, "If it is agreeable to the will of God, and conducive, all things considered, to his best interest." We read of righteous men desiring things which they did not immediately obtain — but they obtained all that was good for them at that time, and in the eternal world were satisfied to the utmost desire of their hearts.

Proverbs 10:25. "When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever!" We have no reason to envy the wicked the figure they sometimes make in this world. The prosperity of the wicked is but like the bluster and noise of the whirlwind, which is soon over. His happiness and his fame are transitory. He shall indeed survive the grave — but annihilation would be a blessing to him, for he shall continue to live in Hell only to be miserable! The righteous man, on the contrary, is like mount Zion, which can never be moved. He is a living stone built upon the Rock of ages, for he is kept by the power of God, and neither principalities nor powers, nor life, nor death, nor any other creature — shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Almighty grace is his strength and refuge. As the rock remains the same when the whirlwind has spent its force — so God’s people, having His protection, shall enjoy unimpaired happiness — when the prosperity of the wicked has come to a perpetual end!

Proverbs 10:26. "As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes — so is the sluggard to those who send him." On any errand. It is a great point of prudence to chose proper people to transact our business, especially if it be an affair of consequence. A man must feel great vexation when he finds his affairs deranged or ruined, and his wisdom called in question — through the stupidity and negligence of those whom he trusts. Solomon showed his good sense by choosing men of activity for his service, as we learn from the history of Jeroboam. This proverb is of use to direct us in the choice of magistrates, ministers, or wives; and to excite us to shake off slothfulness in the service of our Master who is in Heaven, and who will cast the unprofitable servant into Hell!

Proverbs 10:27. "The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short." Some sins have a natural tendency to shorten men’s days. Sometimes their sins bring men to the gallows. All wicked men provoke the wrath of him in whose hand is our life and breath. The contrary virtues have an effect directly the reverse. But did not the wicked Jeroboam live to be old — while the only righteous person in his family died in youth? True — but the saint that dies in youth, has lived as long upon earth as infinite wisdom saw it good for him, and his spirit is still life because of righteousness. Whereas, if the wicked man should live to be a hundred years old — he is accursed. Even in this case, his life is a shadow, and a thing of nothing. Could your physician give you a prescription for lengthening out your days to any term you please, you would think no price too high for it. Here is a tried receipt for making you live as long as it can be good for you to live. Shall we trust physicians more than the Sovereign of life and death?

Proverbs 10:28. "The hope of the righteous is in the Lord." From him they hope for every earthly blessing that appears to infinite wisdom really good for them, and they shall not be disappointed. But the great object of their hope is everlasting life — and how can they fail of obtaining it? Their hopes are founded upon the word of a God who cannot lie, upon the inviolable oath of Jehovah, upon an all-sufficient Savior, and upon a covenant that is everlasting, ordered in all things and sure. This hope shall be inexpressible and inconceivable gladness. Great things are said of the joys and glories of the heavenly world — but they are spoken in the language of men. The tongue of angels could speak greater things — but angels themselves cannot conceive that fullness of joy which the blessed shall possess ages hence.

"But the hopes of the wicked come to nothing!" The hopes of wicked men are contracted within narrow bounds. The objects of their hope are things which the unerring Word calls vanity and vexation of spirit. They may obtain the body of their wishes — but alas without the soul.

Happiness is the object of hope to all of us. With a view to this, we seek the riches and honors, and the pleasures and friendships of this life. But should we possess the richest abundance of these things, and not find happiness in them — what does it profit? But if the wicked man should have his belly filled with worldly treasures, and should rejoice in them — his hope shall nevertheless come to nothing. Misfortune or death shall rob him of all that he placed in the room of God — and the remembrance of former pleasures shall greatly embitter his miseries.

There is one dreadful ingredient of torture which the poor man that goes to Hell will not experience — the remembrance of prosperity enjoyed and abused. Does the wicked man expect Heaven? How terrible will be the punishment of his presumptuous hopes, when he shall be hurled down headlong into the depths of despair!

Proverbs 10:29. "The way of the LORD is a refuge for the righteous, but it is the ruin of those who do evil." Christ is the way, into which the upright man enters by faith, and he walks in it by holiness of life. He hates all deceit — and hypocrisy is an abomination to his soul. While other men strengthen themselves in their own imaginations by fraud and cunning — he derives all needful supplies of grace from him in whom all fullness dwells. The testimony of his conscience emboldens and invigorates his soul, and he waxes stronger and stronger.

He is weak in himself; but his dependence is not on himself — but on God. Out of weakness he thus waxes strong, surmounts every difficulty, and turns to flight armies of aliens. How weak was Peter when he denied his Lord! But the way of the Lord was strength to him, and when near the end of his pilgrimage, he looked forward to the death of the cross with as much composure as a man does to taking off his clothes when retiring to rest. Upright men, when feeling the weakness of their own strength, are sometimes filled with anxious thoughts, lest they should become weary and faint, and fall before their enemies. But through the grace of Christ, their strength shall increase, and shall be suited to their needs. They shall reach in safety the end of their journey, and be more than conquerors. But what shall be the end of those who walk in crooked ways, and endeavor to secure their wishes by deceit and iniquity? Ruin and destruction shall be their portion. Destruction and misery are in their ways. If they cannot now see this, they shall feel it at the end of their journey!

Proverbs 10:30. "The righteous will never be uprooted." The righteous man is founded upon the Rock of ages, for his dependence is placed upon a better righteousness than his own. He is guarded by Omnipotence. Death and Hell may rage, and seem to prevail — but he is safe from every real evil. He may be removed to another land, or to the eternal world — but Heaven is his country, and the mightiest of his enemies are unable to prevent his entrance into it, or to banish him from it.

Even in this world the enemies of the righteous have not the power of which they imagination themselves possessed. Neither Chaldeans, nor Sabeans, nor devils, could deprive Job of a camel or a sheep, without the permission of Him who would allow no evil to befall that righteous man, without making it work for good.

"But the wicked shall not inhabit the earth." Is Job then mistaken when he says, "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked?" No. It is given into their hand for a little moment — but they are frequently driven out of it by visible judgments. At the best, when a few years are gone, the king of terrors shall chase them away to Hell, and those who made shipwreck of faith or a good conscience for the treasures of earth — shall make shipwreck of these treasures also.

Proverbs 10:31. "The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out." Our first care must be to keep our hearts with all diligence; and our next to govern our tongue, which will otherwise be an unruly evil, full of deadly poison! The tongue will best be governed, when the heart is well furnished with wisdom, for the mouth of the just brings forth wisdom, as naturally as a good tree brings forth good fruit. Wisdom is said to be a tree of life, and this tree of life brings forth the fruits of holiness in speech and behavior, not once a year — but every day. How valuable would a tree be thought, that would bring forth the most delicious fruits in such abundance, and such frequency! When our speech is with grace, and seasoned with salt, it ministers grace to the hearers, and keeps ourselves from mischief.

"A perverse tongue will be cut out." It provokes God, and it oftentimes provokes men. Perverse talk may escape punishment from man — but it shall not escape God’s righteous judgment, who will cut out their tongues, and make them fall upon themselves!

Proverbs 10:32. "The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse." How is knowledge ascribed to the lips of the righteous? Because their lips are directed by their hearts. They speak not thoughtlessly — but intelligently. Their lips are not devoted to flattery, nor do they slavishly comply with the sentiments and humors of men. They know when it is fit to speak, and what is fit to be spoken. They know how to address people of different dispositions, in a different manner, so as to please them — or what is of more importance in their estimation, so as to serve their best interests.

It is said of a certain General, that he had such a grace in his manner of behavior, that a suppliant who had met with the refusal of a petition from him, returned better satisfied than he would from another who had granted the solicited favor. A prudent Christian has so much grace in his speech, that his reproofs and rebukes often gain him more favor and esteem, than others gain from their insinuating address. But the wicked man speaks the words of deceit and folly and perverseness — for what can be expected from a bad tree but corrupt fruit? And what shall be the end of a corrupt tree — but to be cut down, and cast into the fire?

# 01.11. Proverbs 11

Chapter 11.

Proverbs 11:1-31

Proverbs 11:1. "A false balance is abomination to the Lord." Commerce is a blessing of great value to men. In the same light are we to consider the invention of weights and balances, by which it is facilitated. These are instances of the divine goodness, for God has taught discretion to the merchant as well as to the gardener. But by corrupt men, these, as well as every other instance of the goodness of God, have been abused. While God furnishes them with the means of practicing justice — the devil teaches them to turn the instruments of righteousness into the means of defrauding one another. False balances are not only hated — but abhorred by God. They are abomination itself in his eyes. But what is the meaning of this? Is the Lord's indignation excited against pieces of wood or of stone? No, this manner of expression points out the greatness of his displeasure against such as use them, and shows that such instruments of iniquity should be dashed in pieces. As money was weighed in ancient times, bad money comes within the compass of this proverb. But not to limit its operations, we must observe, that villainy of every kind, and that especially which is committed under guise of justice — is condemned by it. As no iniquity is so odious to God as that which is cloaked by religion — so that injustice is the most detestable in his sight which is masked by hypocritical pretenses of fair dealing. How deep in the pit must that man sink, who is borne down by this double load of guilt in one sin! Or if this is not heavy enough, oppression of the poor, whose cause God has promised to avenge, will fill up the measure of the sin.

"But a just weight is his delight." For the righteous Lord loves righteousness, and beholds the upright with a pleasant countenance. Honesty in dealing, though not an infallible mark of true piety — must always form a part of it.

Proverbs 11:2. "When pride comes, then comes disgrace." The contrast between the two branches of this verse gives us this meaning. Pride is joined with folly — and ends in disgrace. The humble man is wise, and shall be exalted to honor.

Pride consists in an immoderate self-esteem — and places its happiness in esteem and honor from others. No sin is more foolish than pride! It springs from ignorance of God, of ourselves and other men — and by the very means which it uses for the accomplishment of its ends, ensures disappointment. In seeking glory — it finds disgrace. Pride made Nebuchadnezzar a brute. Pride destroyed Herod with worms. Pride turned Lucifer into Beelzebub. By other sins, man rebels against God — by pride, he usurps God's crown and dignity. No wonder, then, that God looks upon all those who are proud, and disgraces them.

"But with humility comes wisdom." Humble men think of themselves as they ought to think. They desire that God may be honored, even at the expense of their own honor. Yet they shall be exalted by him to the highest glory. Christ humbled himself, and was highly exalted, and became the

brightest example of what he so often declared, "He who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Proverbs 11:3. "The integrity of the upright will guide them." "I will teach you," says David. And what are the great lessons that he introduces by this preface? They are truths which the generality of mankind suppose they have already learned: it shall be ill with the wicked — and well with the righteous. Solomon knew that but few had learned these instructions sufficiently, and therefore we find that on them, he insists at considerable length.

Sincerity is one eminent branch of the godly man's character, and is of great use to him, for it guides him in a safe way. The upright man earnestly desires to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. While others regulate their behavior by their interests and passions, and the course of this world — the upright man endeavors to know the will of God, and to comply with it in every instance. Nor does he deviate from this role, even when it leads in direct opposition to his dearest interests and friendships. Conscious that he cannot direct his own steps, he humbly commits himself to Jesus, who is given to be a Leader to the people, that he may be led by his Spirit to the land of uprightness. Thus the upright man is kept from every dangerous mistake.

"But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them." Their deceitful conduct shall be, not only the cause — but not unfrequently the means also, of their destruction. Nathanael was a man without deceit. We accordingly find, that though prejudiced against Jesus of Nazareth, his sincerity appeared in the means which he employed to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, and he was led by it in the right way. Christ's enemies were men of perverse spirits. They crucified him with a view to maintain their honor, and preserve their nation — but by their perverse conduct both were destroyed.

Proverbs 11:4. "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath — but righteousness delivers from death." "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing," said the wise man, in a preceding part of this book. But mistake him not — he did not say that well-gotten treasures profit much. Though we should allow that they are of some little use in the time of prosperity, they are altogether useless in the time of calamity. When God punishes a land — riches only make their owners a fairer mark, and a richer booty to the spoilers. When conscience stings — its wounds are poisoned by reflections on the abuse of riches. They make death more terrible. To the wicked who possessed wealth, it shall be said at the last judgment, "I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat." Nothing of the world shall follow them to Hell — but the bitter remembrance of the good things they possessed, and the guilt contracted by the influence of such a possession.

"But righteousness delivers from death." In Jerusalem's day, the poor and the righteous alone escaped. The righteous shall not be held by the first death, nor touched by the second death.

Proverbs 11:5. "The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness."

If the righteous man should turn aside from the right way, he shall not wander to destruction. His righteousness will rectify his way. He cannot enjoy pleasure in the way of sin, for it is contrary to the tastes that have been excited, and are still preserved, by the Holy Spirit. When Christ's sheep wander into the paths of sin and error — the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and his grace shall reclaim them. But the wicked wander from mountain to hill, until they fall irrecoverably into the pit of destruction!

Proverbs 11:6. "The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them; but transgressors are trapped by evil desires." "Who can harm you, if you are followers of that which is good?" Righteousness disposes men to walk unblamably and inoffensively, so that none but savages will hurt them. There are such savages among the sons of Adam — but their mischief shall come down on their own head — while the righteous are delivered from their malice; for they wait on the Lord, and keep his way, which is the way of life and peace. They cry unto God, and God delivers them, not only from their troubles — but from all their fears. Christ is the Captain of their salvation, and he will lose none of his soldiers. Though they should lose their lives in his cause, they are still overcomers. Were it possible to obtain a medicine of universal efficacy, who would not endeavor to gain possession of it? Or who would drink a poison always mortal, except when a remedy were speedily applied? There is no trouble from which righteousness does not deliver — nor did any one ever meddle with wickedness — but to his own sorrow.

Proverbs 11:7. "When a wicked man dies, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of unjust men perishes." Men derive almost the whole of their happiness, from the hope of some future good. The wicked man laughs at the righteous, because he lives by hope. The wicked man himself does the same, with this difference — that while the hopes of the righteous are eternal, those of the wicked are bounded by time. The expectation of the one has for its object things heavenly and durable — while that of the other is fixed on objects circumscribed by the present life. The present situation of the wicked man never yields him the pleasure which he wishes and expects — but there is ever something in view, in which, could he but obtain it, he would find rest. If his hopes are deferred — his heart is sick; if they are accomplished — he is still unsatisfied; but he comforts himself with some other hope, like a child, who thinks he sees a rainbow on the top of a neighboring hill, and runs to take hold of it — but sees it as far removed from him as before.

Thus the life of a wicked man is spent in vain wishes, and toils, and hopes — until death kills at once his body, his hope, and his happiness.

Wicked men may indulge themselves in hopes of eternal happiness too. They cannot deny themselves to be sinners — but they hope that they are not sinners of the worst sort, or at least that they will amend, and fly to Christ, and be as happy through eternity as those who are so foolish, or so timorous, as to come into the Lord’s vineyard in the morning, and bear the burden and heat of the day, and have no better recompense in the evening, than those who began to work at the eleventh hour.

Such hopes are highly pleasing to the devil, who keeps his slaves quiet by means of them, until they are brought into the same hopeless condition with himself! Were the sun literally turned into darkness, and all the worlds now enlightened by his beams, into dreary dungeons — it would not be so shocking, as for one immortal soul that looks for happiness, to be drowned in eternal despair!

Proverbs 11:8. "The righteous man is rescued from trouble, and it comes on the wicked instead." Though Solomon celebrates so frequently the happiness of the righteous, he by no means insinuates that righteousness will exempt men from adversity. Christ himself suffered, and shall we claim uninterrupted prosperity? The wicked often possess wealth and ease, when the saints of God are beaten with the storm of adversity — but it shall not be always so. The saints are delivered, and misery comes upon those who despised and hated them. But there is this

difference between the troubles of the righteous and those of the wicked. The righteous have first their evil things, and when they receive their good things, the remembrance of former distress fills them with additional satisfaction. They rejoice, like the weather-beaten mariner who has escaped from the waves and tempests. The wicked have first their good things, and the remembrance of them envenoms their misery, and is oil to the fire where they are tormented. The wicked never comes out of trouble. This proverb is often true in a more literal sense, for the wicked frequently comes into that very trouble from which the righteous man is delivered. The Philistines came into David's place, when Saul was pursuing him in the wilderness of Maon. Haman and his sons were hanged on the gallows designed for Mordecai; and the enemies of the Jews perished on that day which was expected to be fatal to the Jews. Herod thought to have destroyed Peter — but God put Peter's keepers and Herod himself in his place. The Jews, in the days of the apostles, persecuted the Christians; but the unbelieving Jews were put into their place, when the Roman eagle was brought to devastate their land and sanctuary!

These things are done by God, as often as he sees it proper for his own glory, and for the advantage of his people.

Proverbs 11:9. "With his mouth the hypocrite destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape." There are so many mischiefs in the tongue of a wicked man, that it is called a world of iniquity. None of them, however, is so bad as the deceit that is in the mouth of the hypocrite, whose tongue is like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Abner's hands were not bound when he was engaged in fair battle, and we find, that over Asahel, though a mighty and a swift enemy, he gained an easy victory. But how different was the fate of this victorious champion, when attacked by Joab! Then he died as a fool dies, and for this reason — he was deceived by the ensnaring professions of friendship made by his treacherous assailant.

Such is the difference between an open enemy and a false friend. Many souls have been ruined by the mouth of the hypocrite, while the servants of Satan have artfully disguised themselves in the dress of the ministers of righteousness, and by fair words, and saint-like speeches, deceived the hearts of the simple.

It was an ordinary prayer of King Antigonus, "Deliver me from the hands of my friends!" When asked why he did not rather pray for preservation from his enemies, he answered, "That he guarded against his enemies — but could not guard against hypocritical friends." Have we then no defense against them? Yes, knowledge is a defense against this worst of dangers. Joseph and David were guarded by this armor, and were safe. The knowledge of the truth will preserve our inward man, and as it is attended with prudence and integrity, it will in like manner greatly contribute to our present safety.

Proverbs 11:10. "When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy." The righteous fear God, and live in the practice of justice and charity towards men. These virtues procure the esteem, even of those who have no experience of the power of religion — therefore, when it goes well with them, their neighbors rejoice. But when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy, because they were living plagues, and employed their prosperity and power for the gratification of their own selfish and unrighteous passions.

There was great joy in Judah when righteous princes were raised to the throne, or good ministers entrusted with the management of affairs. When bad kings perished, their memories were infamous, neither were they honored with a place in the sepulchers of the kings.

Righteous men are actuated by nobler motives than the applause of men — and yet they must regard the good-will of others, as a means of being useful.

Wicked men, on the contrary, are like swine, of no use until they die; and their perishing is not a misfortune to others — but a relief.

Proverbs 11:11. "Through the blessing of the upright, a city is exalted." No wonder that the advancement of the righteous is a cause of public joy. Their prayers, their holy lives, their counsels, and their example, is a public blessing, by which the city is exalted, for some of the sinners in it are reformed. The young are allured by the beauty of goodness, virtue is encouraged, vice is discouraged, and the city becomes, as far as their influence extends, a habitation of justice.

Just so, righteousness exalts a nation. But though inveterate corruptions should, in a great measure, obstruct their patriotic exertions — yet a city is preserved from ruin, or at least its ruin is deferred, on their account. A cloud of wrath hung over Judah in the days of good Josiah, and the corruptions of the land were too obstinate to be thoroughly removed by him — yet the threatened wrath was suspended until he was laid in the grave. God, as we are told, then sought for one to stand in the gap, to turn away his anger from the guilty land — but found none, and so his anger was poured out upon it to the uttermost.

"But the city is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." Their mouth is a pestilence, which infects their neighbors, until the fatal venom of iniquity corrupts the whole of the community, and ruin becomes inevitable! Or else their counsels prove destructive to its welfare or existence. Have we any generosity of spirit? Then it will inspire us with heartfelt joy to be instruments of happiness to all around us. Though we should be little better than savages, it must fill us with horror to think of ruining others as well as ourselves. Let us, then, depart from evil, and do good. As far as our connections are within the compass of our choice, let us form them upon this maxim.

It is good to have the heirs of blessing, and the instruments of blessing to others — for husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbors.

Proverbs 11:12. "A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor." No human creature is to be despised, for he is our neighbor. He is our own flesh, our brother, sprung from our common father, Adam. We must honor all men. Men were made in the image of God; and though that image is now lost — it is still a sufficient evidence of the sinfulness of despising, as well as of murdering, our neighbor, who was made in the image of God. We cannot say whether the people whom we are tempted to despise, are not in that happy number of the chosen of God, for whose sakes the Son of God has dignified our nature by assuming it, and whom he will again beautify with that glorious image which was effaced by the fall. Do you allege that your neighbor is worthy of contempt, on account of his poverty, or some remarkable weakness, by which he is rendered ridiculous? I ask you whether he is a fool. You say, No. Then confess that your contempt ought to rest on yourself; for Solomon says you are one — and lack of wisdom is far worse than the lack of riches, or beauty, or polite accomplishments.

Although it is a sin to despise any man, yet, wicked men are to be comparatively despised. The vile person, though clothed with purple, and adorned with shining talents, is to be despised — in comparison with the man that fears the Lord, though poor and scorned as Lazarus.

None are so contemptible as the contemptuous! They are so void of sense, that they make themselves the objects of scorn or indignation, by publishing their insolence in the disparaging of their neighbors.

"But a man of understanding holds his tongue." He will not expose himself to the hatred of men, or to the condemnation of Hell, by saying to his brother, Raca! And if he is insulted with the contempt of others, he returns not abuse — but pity. Should some mud stick to his clothes, he will not defile his hands by throwing it at his adversary — but rather leaves it until time makes it easy to be brushed off.

Proverbs 11:13. "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret." Much of our wisdom lies in the prudent choice of friends. A well-chosen friend sweetens the present life, and assists us in our progress to a better. An unworthy friend will bring on us disappointment, vexation, and remorse. But what sort of people are we to avoid or to chose for our friends? We must not chose one that takes pleasure in telling everything he knows. You may be sure that such a one will betray your secrets; for though he should have no malignity of disposition, his delight to tell every private story that he has picked up, will prove to him an irresistible temptation to expose you. The Scripture, however, does not condemn all revealing of secrets. There are some secrets which the laws of justice and charity bind us to reveal. But it is a proof that a man has no command of his tongue, when he can risk the uneasiness and displeasure of his neighbors, by publishing matters which can be of no benefit to him to whom they are communicated. But that man is to be chosen as your friend, who is of an honest and faithful spirit. Your heart will be relieved of its sorrows, by pouring them into his bosom; and you may rest assured that he will cause you no uneasiness by blabbing what you would not have the world to know.

Here we see that a well-governed heart will govern the tongue. An unrestrained tongue is an evidence of levity, or of some worse quality in the heart. And if the heart is faithful — then the tongue will be cautious and friendly. The communication between the heart and the tongue is so easy, that the one will certainly discover the quality of the other, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Proverbs 11:14. "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure." In our private concerns it is dangerous to trust our own wisdom, and it is our interest to advise with wise and faithful friends, in every important affair of life. But in the affairs of countries, public calamity must be the inevitable consequence of the sovereign’s being not wise enough to know his need of asking and following the advice of wise men. If he asks the advice of wise men — and yet follows that of fools, he is no better than Rehoboam, who by such conduct divided his kingdom, and but for the kindness and faithfulness of God to David, in reserving two tribes to his grandson, would have lost it all!

Solomon had wisdom not only to teach — but to practice this maxim. He had wise counselors under whom his kingdom flourished, and their counsels might have preserved the kingdom in the hands of his son. But God confuses those whom he intends to punish; and there is not a plainer

evidence of confusion than when men presume on their own judgments, or prefer the counsel of the vain and foolish, to that of the sober and the wise. Great is the judgment with which God visits a land, when he removes wise and faithful counselors from the management of its concerns. In our intercession for kings, then, let us pray that God may furnish them with good counselors, and with wisdom to make a proper use of them.

Proverbs 11:15. "He who puts up security for another will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe." Friendship or charity may, on some rare occasion, make it our duty to become surety for one that is not a stranger; but still our friendship must be guided by discretion, that our own peace, the welfare of our family, and our ability to pay our just debts, may not be brought into danger.

"He who puts up security for another will surely suffer for it" for he will lose his money, and involve himself in difficulties, or at least feel many anxious thoughts until relieved from the rash obligation. Or should he escape all these misfortunes, the same levity of mind that induced him to become bound for another man’s debts, will entangle him in new engagements, so that he must have extraordinary good fortune if he never suffer for it.

"But whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe." This is comparatively sure, for perfect certainty is not in earthly things. He is at least secure against those self-reflections which sting the mind of the thoughtless squanderer, who signed away his peace and property, the talent of beneficence entrusted to him, and the bread of a family dependent on him — because, forsooth, he could not utter the word NO, to one who seemed to trust his generosity.

He who conscientiously observes this and other rules of Scripture about his worldly substance, keeps the way of the Lord. And the man who, while he does so, trusts in the Lord — has promises respecting earthly things, that impart a security to which other men have no parallel. If the Scripture condemns those who risk their substance by a species of prodigality that has in it a tincture of generosity — then how worthy of condemnation are those unfaithful stewards of providence who spend their Master’s substance on gambling, or on riotous living and harlots — thus using the bounties of God for the service of the devil, and for ruining their own souls and the souls of others!

How infinite was the grace of him who became surety for enemies! He was sure to be impoverished and to suffer under unknown agonies in our world — though possessed of unsearchable riches. How small, when compared with this, was the generosity of Paul in becoming surety for a poor slave — or of Dion in risking his life for his friend at the court of Syracuse!

Proverbs 11:16. "A gracious woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth."

It is not a set of fine features, or a blooming complexion, that makes a woman gracious — but faith in Christ, and the fear of God; prudence and modesty, humility and attention to the duties which she owes to her husband and her children. A woman beautified with these lovely graces, is possessed of true honor, for such ornaments are of great price in the sight of God himself. If she is in the married state, her possession of such virtues will be the means of conferring upon her husband more happiness than a king’s crown could bestow! But the children of the serpent would rob the daughters of Eve of their honor. Partaking of the subtlety and malice of their father the

devil, they would, for the sake of a little contemptible gratification — turn the paradise of the gracious woman into a dreary desert. As strong men will not allow their riches to become a prey to predators — so a gracious woman will hold fast her virtue against those villainous spoilers, who would rob her of the ornaments. That she may be successful in holding fast her virtue, she must commit herself to the keeping of the Seed of the woman, who was manifested to bruise the head of the old serpent, and to destroy the works of the devil.

If Eve in her perfect state could not protect herself from the serpent when yet young, how shall the fallen daughters of Eve protect themselves against that old serpent, who, by the diligent practice of nearly 6000 years, has now become a proficient in the art of tempting! She must read the Bible, guard against idleness, and shun the society of the wicked, as she would a house infected by the pestilence.

If in a single state, she must show all deference to her parents, and care for the things of the Lord. If married, she must care for her husband how to please him, and by her dress and behavior prove herself a daughter of Sarah. Let her, in a word, treasure up the instructions of Lemuel’s mother in chapter 31. On them, let her form her character; and by them, regulate her general deportment. Then, shall her husband and her children, her neighbors and acquaintances, yes, and her own good works also, praise her in the gates. Nor shall her honor be confined to herself — but her husband shall be honored with her.

Proverbs 11:17. "A merciful man benefits his own soul." It is the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which we must look for eternal life. He who has this hope in him, will compassionate the distressed, and endeavor to imitate that mercy on which all his hope depends. And God is so full of mercy, that men shall be no losers — but great gainers, by that mercy which they show to others. Though it should be considered in no other light than a debt which they already owed to God and to their fellow-creatures — yet the gracious rewards of the merciful man are rich in this world, and at the last day they shall be so transcendently great as to fill with amazement the happy receiver. That they may be losers by the exercise of mercy, and that they know not what they may need for themselves, are the only objections which men can urge against it. But if they really believed the Bible, they would show mercy, because they know not what they may need, and would regard such loss better far than gain.

"But a cruel man brings trouble on himself." Why did not the wise man say, "his own soul?" He knew that a cruel man cares nothing for his soul. If you would obtain a hearing from the merciless man, say nothing about his soul. He values it less than his dog! But if you could convince him that his lack of mercy will be hurtful to his flesh, he would think a little about his ways. And it is evident from Scripture, that his flesh, no less than his soul, is under a fearful curse. He shall have judgment without mercy.

How awful is this sentence, when even merciful men need infinite mercy to save them! But who is the cruel man? Scarcely any person will take with this detestable character. Julius Caesar, who had been the death of many hundred thousands, did not think himself a cruel man. Hazael, a few hours before he murdered his master, could not believe himself to be such a dog as to be cruel. But the contrast in this verse teaches us, that to lack mercy, is a sign of cruelty. He is not the only great transgressor who strips the naked — but that man also who gives no bread to the hungry, nor water to the thirsty.

Proverbs 11:18. "The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward." Solomon's heart was as large as the sand on the seashore. He could have amused and surprised us with new discoveries in every proverb — but he was directed by the Holy Spirit to seek our profit rather than his own fame, and to inculcate again and again the same interesting and necessary truths, that we may learn and practice them. That sin is attended with extreme misery, and righteousness with great happiness — he has already informed us at considerable length; and we here find him resuming the subject, dilating upon it, and exhibiting it in a variety of lights. If we consider our ways, we shall find that there is no vain repetition in his words, for none of us have been sufficiently attentive to them. If we had, no motives, however alluring or terrifying, would have reconciled us to any neglect or violation of the divine law. The ground that is particularly bad, must be ploughed over and over, to prepare it for a crop.

"The wicked man earns deceptive wages." None would be so rich and happy as the servants of Satan — were his promises all performed. But the misery is, that he will promise kingdoms, though he cannot, like Chaldean robbers, have a single sheep without the divine permission. And what is worst of all, those who trust his promises are paid with fire and brimstone! The devil was a liar from the beginning — and yet so infatuated are men, that they will trust him more than the God who cannot lie! The devil places pleasure and profit before them; God, by the threatenings of his word, sets an everlasting Hell before them. But they will venture through it, in order to enjoy the vanities with which the great tempter allures them. They have the presumption to think, that by their plausible pretenses they shall not only be able to cheat their fellow-men — but to elude the all-seeing eye of God, while, alas! the devil is cheating them to everlasting misery"

"But he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward." All men are sowing seed in the course of their lives. Wicked men sow the wind — and shall reap the whirlwind. Righteous thoughts, and words, and actions — are seed that shall shoot up in inexpressible happiness. The sower must wait and exercise great patience — but the harvest shall abundantly recompense his patience and his toil. He may sow in tears — but he shall reap in joy. He may be at much expense, and so was Isaac, when he sowed much grain in a time of famine. The good patriarch might be a little straitened while his grain was growing in the fields — but the Lord gave him a hundred-fold, and will give much more than a hundred-fold to the sowers of righteousness — a hundred-fold in this life, and in the world to come, life everlasting! Who would not expend more seed than he could well spare, on so fruitful a field! Gardeners may be disappointed of their hopes, and through adverse providences, the harvest may become a heap in the day of desperate sorrow; but if there is truth and righteousness with God, or certainty in the word of the faithful Witness, the reward of the sowers of righteousness shall be sure.

Proverbs 11:19. "As righteousness tends to life, so he who pursues evil, pursues it to his own death." Our best life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ, on whose righteousness our title to it stands. Our personal righteousness is the proof of our title, and our preparation for the possession of it. He, therefore, who lives in the practice of sin, that only evil, "pursues his own death."

It is natural to all men to hate the devil, and death, and Hell — yet so infatuated are wicked men, that they willingly serve the devil, and love death, and push on towards Hell, though God thunders in their ears this awful sentence, "He who pursues evil, pursues it to his own death." And there must be truth in it, if God is the Sovereign of life and death; for,

Proverbs 11:20. "The LORD detests men of perverse heart but he delights in those whose ways are blameless." There is inexpressible malignity in sin, for the most merciful God threatens, and detests, and curses, and will destroy those who live in it!

Uprightness is a noble quality, for the Lord greatly delights in it. God boasted, if we may speak so, to the devil of Job's invincible integrity. Christ speaks of an upright Nathanael, as a wonder in the world. How wonderful is the grace of God, that takes such kind notice of grace so imperfect as that which may be found on earth! It is but a faint and sullied beam from himself, who is the Sun of righteousness.

How forcible motives are these to deter men from sin, and allure them to holiness! Are we men — or are we stones? We show ourselves to be so, if we are impressed, neither by the tremendous denunciations of God's displeasure, nor by the displays of his loving-kindness. Sinners flatter themselves with the blasphemous hope that God's threatenings shall be wind, and that by some means they shall escape the vengeance of the Lord. But hear, O sinners! believe and tremble!

Proverbs 11:21. "Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished — but those who are righteous will go free." If all the wicked on earth should combine with all the devils of Hell, to prevent the execution of judgment — it would only be a combination of dry thorns against the devouring flame. Do sinners imagine that they shall be safe, though so many dreadful threatenings stand pointed against them? Let them read with horror that portion of Scripture contained in Deuteronomy 29:18-25. The man that hardens his spirit against these words, is an infidel indeed! But upon mount Zion, and upon Jerusalem, shall be deliverance, and the righteous shall enjoy it, and their offspring with them. No believer in Christ can secure his unbelieving children — but present deliverances are often granted to the ungodly seed of the godly. That blemish in David's line, king Ahaz, was not utterly destroyed, because God would still give a lamp in Jerusalem to his servant David.

Proverbs 11:22. "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." Solomon does not deny that beauty is an amiable quality, for he compares it to a gold ring. But he denies that beauty without discretion can render a woman lovely. The nature of a swine is not altered by its being adorned with nose rings, such as those which some of the ladies of Zion used to wear. It is still, with all its decorations — a swine; it loves the mire, and its ornaments, instead of concealing its ugliness — only render it so much the more an object of scorn and of ridicule. Every eye will be attracted by it, and every beholder astonished by so unnatural a conjunction of vileness and adorning. A beautiful woman may be admired for a time — but when her vanity and folly are detected, admiration is turned into loathing.

If beautiful women would gain and preserve the honor that belongs to the gracious woman — let them beware of those who are disposed to flatter. When their flatterers compare them to angels, and speak of their lilies and their roses — let them remember that a wiser and more honest man compares beauty, without discretion, to a gold ring in a swine's snout. Look to your face in a looking-glass, (said one of the wise men of Greece), and if you have beauty, disgrace it not by an unfitting behavior. But if you are ugly, make amends for it by the beauty of your life.

Proverbs 11:23. "The desire of the righteous ends only in good — but the expectation of the wicked ends only in wrath." A righteous man will not indulge the natural desires of the flesh and of

the mind — but will endeavor to limit his wishes by the rules of the Bible. In consequence, indeed, of the remaining darkness of his mind, and distempers of his heart — he may desire things not good for him; still, however, it is his wish that nothing may be granted him, inconsistent with the will of that God, who knows infinitely better than his people do, what is good for them; and who will give them what is good, though they ask not for it; and who will keep back nothing needful for them, however averse to receive it they may be. For this reason it is that the desire of the righteous shall always end in what is good for them, for their desires are presented to that God who has assured them, that if they ask anything according to his will, he hears them. No righteous man would for a world consent that these words, "according to his will," should be dropped from this promise of Scripture. The righteous man is happy when his desires are either granted or refined.

"But the expectation of the wicked ends only in wrath" — whether gratified or disappointed. The Israelites had meat to satisfy their lusts — but leanness was sent into their souls, and the wrath of God soon squeezed out all the sweetness of their quails. They, at another time, desired a king, and God gave them a king in his anger — but took him away in his wrath. "But the expectation of the wicked ends only in wrath." Here is misery — but it is not all their misery. The perfection of it is, that their "expectation is wrath."

Proverbs 11:24. "One man gives freely — yet gains even more; another withholds unduly — but comes to poverty." Liberality is one eminent branch of the character of the righteous — but because there are many objections in the heart of man against the practice of it, urgent motives are here addressed to us. The instructions delivered in this and the four following verses, will, if they are but believed, be a sufficient answer to every objection.

There is one who scatters his substance by profusion and luxury. That man diminishes his substance until it comes to nothing. But he who disperses by giving to the poor, by liberal distributions for the support of the commonwealth in times of danger, or for the service of religion — shall increase his substance. He is like the gardener, who sows with good will and unsparing hand, that precious seed which is to produce a joyful harvest. It is God who gives us all that we enjoy, and by his secret blessing, or by remarkable interpositions of providence — the liberal man is often made to abound in riches, and enabled more and more abundantly to serve his fellow-men.

Abraham sat at his tent-door to watch for travelers, and those who came, he urged to partake of his bounty, with more earnestness than other men beg an alms. Job never ate his morsel alone; and the latter end of both these men did greatly increase. Of all the rich men who have come to poverty, I never heard of any that was ruined by a discreet liberality.

"Another withholds unduly — but comes to poverty." Men may give something to the poor — and yet be impoverished, without being exceptions to the truth of this proverb; for though they give some small matter of their superfluities — yet they withhold more than is fit. They are like a gardener sowing an acre with half a bushel of grain, who will soon reduce his substance to nothing. What will become of him who is so far from being generous, that he is not just? He withholds of that which is right, and brings the roll of God’s curses into his house, to consume the timber and stones thereof.

Proverbs 11:25. "The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he who waters shall be watered also himself." He is not the truly charitable man, who has an open purse — but not a charitable heart. The thoughtless prodigal, when he is scattering his money, may bestow his share upon the indigent; but though he should give them all he has, it will not prove him possessed of the grace of charity. The godly man not only gives his bread — but draws out his soul to the hungry. He knows the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was rich — and yet became poor for our sake; and his charity, produced by this knowledge, is suitable to the design of the gospel, for it is out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. The man of liberal soul shall be made fat. He prospers in his soul, and if God thinks it good for him, he shall prosper in his body and in his circumstances also. He waters others with the blessings of his bounty, and he shall be watered himself with the blessing of Divine mercy, until he become like a watered garden, or like a spring of waters, whose waters fail not.

Say not, then, that you would be liberal if you could. Every man who has a liberal soul, however little his purse be, shares in the blessedness of the liberal. Two mites from a poor widow, will be as acceptable in the temple-treasury, as two pounds from one who abounds in wealth! The poor who pour forth prayers for those distressed people whom they have not money to relieve, are liberal in the sight of God. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not. Did not charity forbid, a Christian would be glad on his own account that there are very poor people in the world, for in relieving their necessities, he does a thousand times more good to himself than to them. That saying of Christ is certainly true, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

People may exercise charity in selling as well as in giving, for,

Proverbs 11:26. "People curse the man who hoards grain." Bread is the staff of life. The king himself is served by the field. But the gardener, or trader in grain, must not withhold or sell merely as it serves his own interests — but must consider himself as a steward in God’s great family, and use that talent with which he is entrusted, for the benefit of others, as well as for his own advantage. He must not withhold his grain from the market, in order to increase the price, and enrich himself at the expense of the poor, and the risk of their life and health. If he does so, he counteracts the kind design of Providence in making the grain spring out of the earth, and discovers a mean, selfish, and unfeeling heart. He grinds the faces of the poor, and tempts people to murmur at the allotments of Providence, and to utter imprecations against himself. Thus he at once shares in the guilt of their curses, and exposes himself to the effect of them; for though such curses are very sinful, the sin lies chiefly on the inhumane object who was the tempter to them, and they are not to be ranked among the causeless curses which shall not come. When defrauded laborers, or the oppressed poor, cry against the author of their distresses — the cry enters into the ears of the Lord Almighty. Much more will he hear the cries of a whole province or people, against him who is the instrument of withholding from them the necessities of life.

"But blessing crowns him who is willing to sell" — when it was in his power to enrich himself by withholding. Although he takes a reasonable price for this useful commodity, he yet exercises more useful and extensive liberality, than he who bestows his superfluities to feed a few of the indigent. It is not said the people shall bless him. Men are more ready to curse their oppressors, than to bless their benefactors. Besides, they may think it superfluous to give both a price and a

blessing for their food. But we are not to serve men chiefly from a regard to their thankfulness — but to look above them, to that God who delights in liberality, and who will not fail to recompense it in its different expressions of giving, or lending, or selling.

Though no blessings should reach the ear of the man who generously sells — they shall descend from Heaven upon his head. God looks down upon men, and considers all their ways; whatever, therefore, our business is, it is our duty to perform the offices of it with a view to the glory of God. And God is glorified when we do all our works in charity, endeavoring faithfully, in our respective stations, to serve our generation according to the will of God. When we look, not only on our own things — but also on the things of others, we are serving ourselves most effectually; for,

Proverbs 11:27. "He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it." God is infinitely good, and is still doing good from Heaven. He gives us rain and fruitful seasons; yes, he has bestowed upon us the inestimable gift of Christ, and salvation through his blood. Surely the consideration of God's goodness to us, might dispose us to labor diligently in promoting the good of other men, though in doing so we should be obliged to forego much happiness of our own. But God in his goodness has provided a sufficient answer to all those objections against serving others, which are taken from our own selfish interest.

He who diligently pursues good, may put himself to much toil and expense; but he obtains favor, and that is an abundant recompense for all the labors and sufferings of love. He will likely have the favor of men, for when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him — but he is sure of the favor and blessing of God. But when a man seeks evil, it is questionable indeed whether he shall effect his malicious purpose — but it is certain that the evil he does to himself is greater than that intended against his neighbor. The just Lord is known by the judgment which he executes, in causing the contrivers of evil to fall into their own snares.

Proverbs 11:28. "He who trusts in his riches shall fall."

After all that Solomon can say, many will still trust to their chests and to their riches, more than to the promises of God. Their money is their strong castle in which they hope to be safe — and the fountain whence they expect supplies of comfort. A text in the Proverbs is not so good as a full purse, and therefore they will not part with their money to others — but will keep it for their own use.

Confidence in money is a sin that has produced much sin, prevented many acts of goodness, and will, at the day of judgment, be found a general article in the charge against the wicked. The Scripture frequently warns men against this instance of idolatry, and calls on ministers to preach against it.

Those who trust in riches shall fall like the flower of the grass, or like the leaves of a tree. Their riches shall leave them; or if they should die in the midst of their wealth, they can carry nothing of their glory along with them. Their wealth cannot keep them from falling into Hell, or mitigate the horrors of the infernal lake of fire.

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with

many griefs!" 1 Timothy 6:9-10

"But the righteous shall flourish like as a branch." The righteous man does not trust in unfaithful mammon — but in the name of the Lord. He thinks the promise of God better security than the earth can afford, and trusts his money in the hands of him who says, "He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will recompense again what he has given unto him." This man shall not fade like the leaves — but shall flourish like the branch of a tree. A branch may appear withered during winter — but it drops not from the stock, and in the spring it revives and grows. So the righteous man, though he meets with seasons of affliction, shall revive and flourish. He is engrafted into the true Vine, and partaking of his vital influence, shall abound in the fruits of comfort and righteousness. At death he shall be transplanted into the celestial paradise, where all the trees of righteousness shall flourish in immortal beauty!

Proverbs 11:29. "He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise." The eye of God is ever upon us, and He observes how we behave in our different relations. He punishes with disappointment, poverty, and disgrace — the man who is a scourge instead of a blessing to his own family. A man is a plague to his family:

when he is of a domineering and quarrelsome temper — bursting into passion at every trifling omission of his will and pleasure;

when by covetousness — he oppresses his servants and children with bondage and hard labor, scarcely allowing them to enjoy life;

when by prodigality — he wastes the bread and portion of his children;

when, by his disregard to mercy and justice — he brings the curse of God on himself and his house;

when, by impiety — he neglects the spiritual welfare of his family, and encourages them in evil by a bad example. The troubler of his house shall possess vanity, disappointment, and misery. The evils that he brings to his dependents, are doubled to himself. Those who might be his best friends — he makes his enemies. And his vices, so troublesome to others — produce in the end torment and ruin to himself. He has all the marks of a fool, and through the natural consequences of his folly, and the merited judgment of God — he is likely to be reduced to a slavish dependence on the wise of heart, who show their wisdom by such a government of their families, as promotes the holiness and happiness of those whom Providence has entrusted to their care.

Providence does not always bring these punishments upon men, lest we should forget that there is a judgment-day coming. But they are often inflicted as a pledge of what all people of like behavior are to expect at the great day of accounts.

Proverbs 11:30. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life — and he who wins souls is wise." The righteous shall flourish as a branch, and they bear the fruits of the tree of life, for they are engrafted in Christ, and derive supplies of spiritual influence from him. No fruit-bearing tree that is seen in our cursed earth, is a sufficient emblem to represent the excellency of the righteous man. He is like that noblest tree of paradise, which was planted by the hand of God himself, and was distinguished above all the trees in the paradise of God. His fruits are such as tend to produce and nourish a nobler life than any of the trees of the garden of Eden. Christ is indeed the life of souls —

and those who are not united to him, continue in death. But he is pleased to honor faithful ministers and edifying professors, by making them instruments of imparting his best blessings unto men. It is for this reason that diligent ministers are said to save themselves and their hearers.

How excellent is the righteous man above his neighbors! His gracious words, his holy conversation, his prayers, his admonitions and instructions, are means of rendering service to others, more valuable than silver, or gold, or life itself.

Let Christians therefore endeavor to be fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and labor to win souls to their Redeemer. Even women, who are not allowed to speak in the church, may by this means share the reward of those who turn many to righteousness. Perhaps they may save their husbands or neighbors, and allure to the faith of Christ, those who did not obey his word? They are wise who are wise unto salvation; how truly wise, then, are those who are instruments in converting and saving the souls of others from death!

They are by the world counted wise, who, by means of their skill in business, leave their friends rich. But they shall at the great day be declared by the Judge of all wise, who can say, "Behold I, and the children which you have given me!" These are my joy and crown of rejoicing. Happy are all those who shall be able thus to speak on that eventful day, which seals the characters of men.

Let us also learn from this passage, to value friendship and conversation of the righteous. If we knew of any tree that bore fruit which could prolong the life of man to a hundred years, it would be esteemed more valuable than the treasures of kings, and we would spare no trouble or expense to have it transplanted into our gardens. What value, then, should we put on those whose fruit is the fruit of the tree of life, and whose conversation is instrumental in saving souls from death!

Proverbs 11:31. "Behold, if the righteous receive their due on earth — how much more the ungodly and the sinner!" This verse is introduced by a word that calls for our attention, and contains an observation which explains all the proverbs which express the happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked — and answers an objection against them which naturally springs up in our minds. It is evident from experience, and Solomon himself observes it — that there is a righteous man to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked — and a wicked man to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. How, then, can it be said of the righteous, it shall be well with them; and of the wicked, it shall be ill with them?

We are to remember that the righteous need trials, and deserve chastisements. David suffered many afflictions — but he acknowledges that his sin and folly were the causes of them; and it was necessary, in order to keep the enemies of the Lord from blaspheming, that he should suffer in his person and family, when in the matter of Uriah he had turned aside from following the Lord. But the recompense of the sins of the righteous is confined to this life. They may suffer much severe correction — but there is no condemnation to them; for Jesus delivers them from the wrath to come and in his blood they have a complete pardon of their iniquities. So that their calamities are not the effect of divine wrath — but trials of their faith, or the corrections of a father.

Now, if the righteous are chastened so severely, how dreadful is the condemnation of the ungodly world! If fatherly corrections break the bones and drink up the spirits of God’s people — then what imagination can conceive the horrors of that inflamed wrath which is the portion of the wicked!

Believers smart for sins committed through infirmity, fully forgiven through the blood of Christ, and sincerely lamented by themselves. But who knows the power of God’s anger in crushing the wicked, when the day of grace is past, and the time is come to make the praise of God known in the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction! "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved — then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

# 01.12. Proverbs 12

Chapter 12.

Proverbs 12:1-28

Proverbs 12:1. "Whoever loves instruction, loves knowledge; but he who hates reproof is brutish." Pythagoras took to himself the name of Philosopher, or lover of wisdom, rather than the name of wise man, which had been assumed by the sages before him — because he thought that the greatest men might, with more propriety, be called seekers, than finders of wisdom.

If a man is a lover of knowledge, though much ignorance still remains with him, he is in the sure way of finding it. But is there any man so foolish, and so like a beast, as not to love knowledge? Solomon tells us, that those who love instruction, love knowledge; but those who hate reproof are brutish. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves by this mark. The lover of knowledge will take pleasure in the Bible, and in sermons, and in conversation with the wise. He will be glad of reproofs, which serve to convey the most seasonable and necessary instructions, though in a manner so mortifying to human pride, that they are not relished but by those who prefer their real good to the applause of men. The lover of knowledge will count that man his real friend, who honestly tells him his faults, and would would to be a member of that family and church which is governed by the rules of Christ. For though he values liberty, he does not place it in being allowed to do evil when he pleases, without check. But he who hates instruction, and cannot endure the reproof of love — is brutish. He is like the horse or the mule, which bites and kicks at the man who performs a painful operation upon it, though absolutely necessary for removing a dangerous distemper. Or he is like a dog, or sow, which will show as much rage at the man that casts a pearl before it, as if he were killing it with a stone. He is surely a brute, and not a rational creature, who has swallowed poison, and will rather allow it to take its course, than admit the necessary relief of medicine, lest he should be obliged to confess his folly, in exposing himself to the need of it.

There is an indisposedness among professors of religion, to receive Christian reproof. Drunkards and swearers often reveal less displeasure against a reprover, than some that consider themselves first-rate Christians. The man, therefore, that ventures on the friendly office of admonition, must exercise much prudence, and show, by his manner of dispensing it, that he is constrained by love, lest he irritate instead of reforming. Asa was a godly man — and yet he was angry at a prophet of God for reproving him. He certainly ought to have made Asaph’s confession, "Thus foolish was I, and ignorant — I was as a beast before you!"

Proverbs 12:2. "A good man obtains favor from the Lord, but the Lord condemns those who devise evil." We are to show forth the virtues of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, by endeavoring to shine in the exercise of such Christian graces, as correspond to those attributes of God that shine with resplendent luster in the work of our salvation. The exercise, therefore, of charity and goodness, is highly befitting those on whose account such miracles of goodness and love have been displayed. A godly man forms no devices for serving himself, to the

harm of his fellow-creatures. Could a window be opened in his breast, you would see love ruling in his heart, and disposing him earnestly to wish for the spiritual and temporal advantages of his neighbors, and to imitate our gracious Savior, who went about doing good; for the Spirit of Christ is in him, and the fruit of this Spirit is in all goodness.

He does not value himself on this account, as if there were any merit in paying a debt which he owes to men on God’s account. All his hopes are founded upon that infinite goodness, which provided salvation for self-ruined sinners — yet his goodness is well-pleasing unto the Lord, who blesses him with the smiles of his countenance, and will remember him concerning all his works, and all his thoughts and designs of love, according to the multitude of his mercies.

We must not do as others do to us, nor be discouraged in the practice of goodness, by the unthankful returns which we meet with from ungrateful men — but perform our duties to our fellow creatures, from a regard to God, and with a view to his acceptance through Christ. Is the praise or gratitude of men worthy to be the subject of a thought, when we read that a godly man shall obtain favor from the Lord? If our goodness is produced by a regard to men, it is not goodness — but selfishness in disguise, and truly its whole reward is from men.

"But the Lord condemns those who devise evil." Such a man may be artful enough to disguise his selfish plans, under the mask of religion and benevolence, like the old Pharisees. But the eyes of the Judge of the world are like a flame of fire, they pierce into the secrets of every soul, and there is no dark design harbored, which shall not be completely disclosed in the day of Christ. When our Lord was upon earth, he revealed and condemned the corrupt hearts of many hypocritical rogues — and at the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, no vain pretender to goodness shall stand in the congregation of the righteous. Even those who refused to minister to the necessities of others, shall be commanded to Hell. How shall they escape, whose hearts were pre-occupied with wicked devices, to the ruin or damage of those who were made of the same blood with themselves!

Proverbs 12:3. "A man shall not be established by wickedness." A man sometimes appears to be established, and often hopes to be so by wickedness — but it is all a delusion. Had Zimri peace, who founded his throne on treason? A man may with more reason hopes to build himself a secure house upon pillars of ice, than to establish his fortunes upon an accursed ground.

"But the root of the righteous shall not be moved." The leaves of the trees of righteousness may wither, their branches may be tossed hither and thither by the tempests of tribulation and affliction — but they are rooted in Christ, and kept night and day by the Almighty, and therefore their root is safe from the rage of earth and Hell.

Proverbs 12:4. "A virtuous woman is her husband’s crown, but a disgraceful wife is like rottenness in his bones." A virtuous woman . . .

fears the Lord,

reverences her husband,

manages her house with prudence and care,

behaves charitably to the poor, and kindly to all. To what should we compare such a woman? Should we compare her to a bracelet, or say that she is a necklace of gold to her husband? Such comparisons would be quite below her worth. She makes him as happy as a king, and procures him such respect and honor, that she deserves to be compared to that royal ornament that encircles the head of Majesty. She is to her husband, a crown enriched with those lovely virtues, which shine with more radiant luster than diamonds! She is health to her husband's bones, for the sight of her amiable behavior, and the pleasure of her society, inspires him with that habitual cheerfulness which does good like a medicine. But the woman who lacks virtue disgraces her husband, and is as rottenness in his bones.

Her peevish temper or passionate behavior,

her extravagant expenses or her sordid avarice,

the levity of her speech or the scandal of her vices —

make him the object of pity or scorn when he is abroad, and fill him with anguish at home. She is not a help — but a torment to him. A man may get out of a fever in a few weeks — but the misery of this living disease is, that unless the almighty grace of God works an uncommon cure, it will prey upon a man's bones and spirits, until the death of one of the married parties brings relief.

Let such, then, as have wives to chose, consider that the man should be the glory of Christ, as the woman of the man; that a good wife is from the Lord — and that it is therefore their interest to live to the praise of Christ, to resolve to marry only in the Lord, and to seek this precious gift from Him, by humble prayer.

Let wives consider seriously, whether they wish for happiness and honor to their husbands — or disgrace and misery; and whether it be better for themselves to prove helpers to the joy, and crowns to the head of their husbands — or living plagues to them, and fires to consume their vitals!

Let husbands give honor to their wives, and encourage them in virtue, by their kindness and approbation. What tender love does Christ show to those whom he is pleased to betroth to himself in loving-kindness! So ought husbands to love their wives.

Proverbs 12:5. "The thoughts of the righteous are just." As far as we are warranted or concerned to judge of the character of our neighbors, we must draw our opinion of them from their words and behavior. But we are to form our judgment of ourselves, chiefly by our thoughts, which are the immediate product of our hearts — for as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

"The thoughts of the righteous are just." Evil and foolish thoughts often rise up in their minds — but they hate vain thoughts, and will not allow them a lodging place. Their love to God produces many delightful meditations concerning his excellency and grace, and constant desires to show forth his glory. Their love to men excludes ungrounded suspicion and evil surmises; and in their deliberations about their conduct, disposes them to consider not only how they may serve their own interests — but how they may contribute to the happiness of their neighbors. Should any plan be suggested to them that appears greatly conducive to their own advantage, it will be rejected with abhorrence, unless it consists with the happiness of those whom they are constrained, by the command of God and the love of Christ, to love as themselves.

"But the counsels of the wicked are deceit." But a wicked man’s pleasure lies in those thoughts that feed upon the earthly objects where his imagined happiness lies, and the schemes which he forms in his mind are crooked and artful. He must if possible, be gratified in his pursuits, though others should be rendered unhappy. And because the people at whose expense he means to serve himself, will naturally stand in his way — he contrives to cover his real designs with the false appearances of honesty and charity, that he may not be obstructed in their accomplishment.

Proverbs 12:6. "The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood." There is a ready communication between the heart and the tongue; when men’s hearts are evil, it may therefore be expected that their words will lie in wait for blood. There are passions in the hearts of wicked men, that are murder in the sight of God, and have a natural tendency to harm and kill — but through the good providence of the universal Ruler — they are checked by the terrors of conscience, or the fear of punishment from men, or some other means — and the world is prevented from becoming a scene of universal wickedness. But some wicked men are so degraded, that the life of their neighbors is of small account with them — if only they can accomplish their own cursed designs. Their tongues have the subtlety and poison of the serpent in them — and by their devilish arts, they draw men into dangers fatal to their reputation, their souls, and their bodies.

"But the speech of the upright rescues them." Their wise answers preserve themselves, and their wise counsels preserve others from ruin. Thus Mephibosheth preserved himself from the snares of Ziba. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ often preserved himself from the well-laid devices of his deceitful enemies.

God will severely punish the wicked for their deceitful counsels and their deceitful tongue; for,

Proverbs 12:7. "Wicked men are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous stands firm." There is a mighty difference between the evils that befall the righteous — and those who come upon the wicked.

Evil shall slay the wicked, so that they shall have no more existence in that world where their hopes and happiness lay — and their existence in the eternal world shall be an everlasting curse. But the righteous shall be established, and their seed with them.

Proverbs 12:8. "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom; but he who is of a perverse heart shall be despised." It is not here said, that a man is commended according to his wisdom. There are some commended for their wit, and others for their cunning; some for their genius, and others for their learning; nay, some are foolishly commended for what in Solomon’s estimation is nothing but folly! But praise built on a false foundation shall not continue — and wisdom will be found the only solid basis of a name. God approves of it, and men shall sooner or later join in its commendation.

It is a great evil to see true wisdom despised, and qualities which have no necessary connection with it applauded.

We should frequently think on the day of judgment — that day which will set the seal on all human characters. Then will the Lord himself commend the wise, in the face of the world, and the perverse in heart shall be a universal abhorring!

Proverbs 12:9. "He who is despised, and has a servant — is better than he who honors himself, and lacks bread." Some people are such slaves to the applause and respect of men, that they render themselves miserable — in order to make others think them happy. For the sake of making a figure in the eye of the world, they live in constant straits and anxieties. By the inspired moralist, this piece of folly is here censured — yet it is still very common, and very mischievous. When men, through the pride of birth or station, or some unaccountable vanity of mind, are determined to live in such splendor as their income cannot support — the ordinary consequence is that they run into debt, defraud their creditors, lose all trust from men, and expose themselves to the devil, who is too cunning to let the opportunity slip that thus presents itself — of tempting them to have recourse to the gambling-table. Starvation, or a jail, or a gibbet, or something incomparably worse than all these, closes the scene!

Oh! how much better and wiser were it to revere the providence of God, which fixes the lot of men — and to accommodate our minds to our circumstances, however narrow! In this way, we may hope to enjoy the comforts, or at least the necessities of life with composed minds, and be able to serve the Lord without distraction. If men should despise us because we cannot live as wealthy men do, it is not difficult to determine whether their opinion or our own peace of mind, is to be preferred. Whatever men may say at present — yet afterwards shall a man be commended according to his wisdom. To live above our income, that we may be admired in the world, is to rebel against divine providence, and to forget him who used to feed on barley bread and fish, while employed in accomplishing the work of human salvation. Paul traveling on foot, and living on the wages of a tent-maker, was more respectable than the pretended successor of his brother apostle (Peter) with a triple crown on his head.

Proverbs 12:10. "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal!" How presumptuous are those men who despise their inferiors, and look on their happiness and comfort as matters unworthy of their regard! Though kings and beggars share in the same common nature, they have less goodness towards their fellow-men, than the righteous have for their animals. A righteous man’s mercy diffuses itself not only over the most abject of his neighbors — but even to creatures without reason. He will not deprive his animal of its food and rest, nor oppress it with unreasonable toil, nor sport himself with the misery and pain of those creatures which God has subjected to his power. He considers them as servants to be employed for his advantage — but not to be tyrannized over. Are the animals good for food? Even in depriving them of life, he shows his humanity, by inflicting upon them no unnecessary degree of pain. But why should such a regard be paid to the lives end to the comforts of brutes? Because they are susceptible of pleasure and pain, and not so much our inferiors — as we are inferior to Him who made both them and us!

Heathen themselves were sensible of the mercy due to the animal creation. The Athenians excluded a man from a place in their government, if he killed a bird that fled to him for shelter. They justly reasoned that a man who could exercise cruelty to brutes, could not be safely trusted with the life or comfort of his fellow-men. That God, whose goodness the righteous imitate, is good to all. In goodness he made and preserves the beasts. He would not allow them to be all drowned in Noah’s flood, all he considered them in sparing Nineveh. There are many laws in the books of Moses guarding us against wanton oppression; and these laws, inconsiderable as they may appear to us, are fenced with promises and threatening. And what is equally worthy of our regard on this head, God on one occasion opened the month of one of the most contemptible beasts, to

plead the cause of the brute creation, and an angel took its part.

"But the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel!" Wicked men are so for from exercising their compassion to brutes — that they are unfeeling to men! And when they appear to themselves or to others the most merciful — their kindness is often cruelty in disguise. When people give to the poor, and join their gifts with insult and abuse — this is cruel mercy. When Pilate ordered Christ to be scourged, with a design to procure his release — was this mercy? and not rather injustice and oppression. Such was the mercy of the Jewish council to the apostles, and of the Philippian magistrates to Paul.

Ahab's mercy to Benhadad was cruelty in another sense. He was cruel to himself and to his people, that he might preserve the reputation of the kings of the house of Israel. Of the like nature are those foolish compassions which are sometimes exercised by parents, and magistrates, and ministers — to the great damage of those under their inspection, who are encouraged in vice by the connivance, or the too gentle reproofs and punishments administered to them. But this kind of cruel mercy has been too often practiced by the righteous themselves, of which Eli and David are striking instances.

Let us look to our virtues, and examine them attentively, that vice may not lurk under them undiscovered. We too often applaud ourselves for that which should rather cause us to mourn.

Proverbs 12:11. "He who works his land will be satisfied with bread." The business of the farmer is so honorable, that it is here used by Solomon to signify every useful profession. Kings themselves are served by the field, and the only two universal monarchs practiced farming. The Spirit of God here teaches us, that we ought to have a useful profession, and to follow it with diligence, minding our own business, and not meddling with affairs in which we have no concern. That we shall be satisfied with bread, is the encouragement held out to pursue such a course as this. Some people think that they cannot have enough, unless they have more than the necessities and decent comforts of life; but we are here instructed that bread should satisfy our desires, unless God is pleased to bestow more upon us. Having food and clothing, let us be content. There are few who lack these — and yet few are content. There are others who think that they will not be able to live by their business, without over-reaching their neighbors, by means of those underhand practices which custom has interwoven with many professions. But says the wise man, "He who works his land shall have enough;" and Paul tells us, that he may have something more to give to him who is needy. To be satisfied with bread, is a happy temper of mind, and is commonly the portion of the man of industry, which not only procures bread — but gives it a relish unknown to men that are above labor. A dinner of green herbs is commonly a sweeter meal to the laborer, and followed by more refreshing sleep — than all the luxuries of high life to a man of fortune.

"But he who chases vain (or idle) fantasies lacks judgment." The idle man deserves the name of a fool; nor can he clear himself of it by alleging, that the love of company, or the example of others, allures him to this course of life. It must be both sin and folly for a man, whatever reasons he pretends for it, to indulge himself in a vice by which he endeavors to elude the sentence passed upon fallen man, and breaks so many commandments of God. The idle person weakens the powers of his mind, and destroys the vigor of his constitution. He exposes himself as a prey to disgrace, and his soul to the temptations of the devil. He wastes his precious time, and lays himself open to all the miseries of a self-procured poverty. In short, all the creatures in Heaven,

earth, and Hell, proclaim the folly of the idle man. Let us, therefore, avoid it, as a nursery of vice and misery, and fill up our days with the useful labors of our calling, and the more important concerns of our souls.

Proverbs 12:12. "The wicked desire the plunder of evil men, but the root of the righteous flourishes." The original word, which in the 24th verse of this chapter is rendered slothful, signifies also deceitfulness, for slothfulness and deceit often accompany each ether. Wicked men have more enlarged desires after earthly things than the righteous, and their hands often refuse to labor for necessary things.

What, then, shall they do? Their lusts must be gratified at the expense of conscience and honesty, and so they desire the plunder of evil men. Then they ensnare others, and drag their property to themselves, that their portion may be fat, and their food plenteous. But a righteous man is above the temptations that lead men to over-reach their neighbors, for he has an inward principle of integrity and contentment, which tends to moderate his desires, and directs to praise-worthy means for the enjoyment of them. Thus, by the blessing of God, he obtains what is needful for himself, and something also to give to him who is in need. The life of a slothful man is full of the worst kind of toils, and is often a scene of guilt and wretchedness. While a godly man, besides his happy prospects, enjoys much pleasure in those earthly things, which to others are vanity and vexation of spirit.

Proverbs 12:13. "An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk, but a righteous man escapes trouble." As birds are suddenly seized in the trap, and cannot work their way out of it — so wicked men are often ruined unexpectedly and irretrievably, by means of their ungoverned tongues!

Adonijah was spared for his rebellion — but by one presumptuous petition, he showed himself a dangerous man, and brought vengeance upon his own head. Nabal, by his insolent language, almost destroyed his whole family. As the corrupt tongue is set on fire of Hell — so burning coals are its reward. A righteous man may be endangered by his own tongue — but through the mercy of God he shall be delivered, as David was, when he had engaged himself too far with the king of Gath; and Isaac and Abraham, when they had exposed the chastity of their wives, by their deceptions at the court of the Philistines. Nor will God ordinarily allow the just to perish by the tongues of the wicked. Sometimes he has done it, as in the case of Abimelech the priest — but just men are not ruined by death itself.

Proverbs 12:14. "From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things, as surely as the work of his hands rewards him." As a bad tongue is one of the worst things — so a good tongue is one of the best things in the world. By a well-ordered tongue, we may be useful in winning souls to Christ, and in teaching the ignorant, strengthening the weak, and making the mourners to rejoice. By our tongues we may glorify God, and spread the savor of that name which is so dear to every Christian. When men use their tongues in this manner, they shall be filled with good things by the fruit of them; for they obtain the friendship and respect of men, they enjoy acceptance with God through Christ Jesus, and the testimony of their conscience, that they have in some measure answered the end of their being. They are assured, that every word which proceeds from a pure heart, is marked down in God’s book of remembrance. At the last day, our Judge tells us, that we shall be either justified or condemned by our words. But our words will only prove us to be hypocrites, if they proceed not from sincere hearts, or are unattended with a suitable behavior.

Those trees will be cut down which produce no good fruit, though they should abound with the most beauteous blossoms.

Let our words, then, be ordered in the fear of God, and with a view to the account that will be taken of them, first by our own consciences, and then by our Judge, who now hearkens and hears every word which proceeds from our lips. And our actions must be under the same influence, that we may not condemn ourselves, and be judged out of our own mouths as sham hypocrites.

Proverbs 12:15. "The way of a fool is right is his own eyes; but he who hearkens unto counsel is wise." The greater fools are those who have the highest opinion of their own wisdom. Their self-esteem disposes them to neglect the advice of others, and to prosecute their own schemes, however foolish and dangerous, until they meet with fatal disappointments, which, after all, can hardly open their eyes, clean shut with pride and vanity. The wisest men are those who are most sensible of their need to avail themselves of the wisdom of others; and most qualified to make a proper use of counsel. This rule is to be observed, especially in the affairs of religion, for in none do men reveal more folly, and a greater degree of self-confidence. Multitudes walk under the influence of delusion and error, who, instead of allowing themselves to be set right, despise those who are able to give them good advice. Multitudes that make a sound profession of religion, are strangers to the narrow way that leads to life, and would yet exclaim against such as would give them, from scripture, the clearest proofs of the danger of the mistakes under which they labor, and the insufficiency of the evidences which they think they can, produce, of their being in the right way. We are not, however, to hearken to counsel without examination, because other men are liable to error as well as ourselves. Absalom was ruined by giving ear to treacherous counsel; and Rehoboam lost the greater part of his kingdom, by preferring the counsel of fools to that of wise men. In our spiritual concerns, the only infallible counselor is he who is made of God unto us wisdom, to whose word we are carefully to attend, and on whose Spirit and grace we must exercise a daily and humble dependence. It is our wisdom to value the instructions and counsels of ministers of parents and Christian friends, particularly of experienced and aged saints. But they must be able to prove the goodness of their advices by the Scriptures, which are the great and only rule to direct us to our chief end.

Proverbs 12:16. "A fool shows his annoyance at once." It is a shame for a man to allow his reason to be tyrannized over by an unruly passion, which spreads deformity over his countenance, and hurries him on to expressions and actions more like those of one confined in bedlam, than one who is supposed to have the use of his reason. A man would reckon himself debased, if the form of his body were changed into that of a wild beast; and is a man in a condition one whit more respectable, when reason is trampled under foot, and the government of his body and his tongue subjected to the spirit of a tiger? A fool disgraces himself by giving way to the impetuous sallies of passion. He reveals his temporary madness, by his reddened countenance, his quivering lips, and his flashing eyes. His tongue, having thrown out the reins of reason, pours forth torrents of rage, and perhaps of oaths and imprecations — thus announcing to every one that he meets, that he is a fool. It is with difficulty that his hands are restrained from doing that which in a short time would become the source of bitter and unceasing remorse.

"But a prudent man overlooks an insult." When he finds his passions beginning to ferment, he does not give them full scope — but considers whether he does well to be angry, and how far it is

lawful and safe for him to give way to this turbulent passion. He does not cover his wrath, that it may have time to work, and draw the powers of reason into its service, that it may break forth with more effect on some other occasion. But he overlooks an insult, that he may have time to suppress and destroy it, by considering its folly and wickedness, by meditating on the example and grace of Christ, and by fervent supplications for the support and assistance of the Spirit of meekness. By such means as these, the prudent man preserves own honor, and covers the shame of his neighbor, who is likely to be gained by gentleness and meekness. Thus the noblest of all victories is gained, while the Christian subdues, not only his own spirit, but the stubborn soul of his adversary, and covers, by his charity, a multitude of sins.

Proverbs 12:17. "A truthful witness gives honest testimony." Men, destitute of a principle of integrity, may be guilty of much iniquity in witness-bearing, while they flatter themselves that they are speaking nothing but the truth. A true and faithful witness will deliver his testimony fully, clearly, and impartially. He will not only tell the truth — but all the truth that he knows about the point in question, as far as it will open up the merits of the cause. He will use no language that may be misunderstood by the judges, nor dissemble matters so as to favor even that cause which he supposes to be the right one. He will give no unfair representation of matters, to gratify or serve a good man, or one who is his best friend. Nor will pity constrain him so to disguise facts as to serve the cause of the poor man, or him who is in danger of being condemned. If one should offer him a bribe, he will shake his hands from holding it, and shut his ears against every attempt made to bias his mind.

"But a false witness tells lies." He utters falsehood, or turns truth into a lie, by his manner of telling it. Doeg the Edomite, by a real fact misrepresented — was the death of eighty-five priests of the Lord. And those who bore testimony against our Lord, are called false witnesses, though they repeated our Lord’s words with but little if any variation, because the little difference in words made a complete change in the sense. It is necessary for us to consider exactly what we say, when the character or happiness of others is at stake, and to be cautious whom we trust, lest by artful misrepresentations we be persuaded to do injuries to our neighbors, which we cannot repair.

Proverbs 12:18. "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." The slanderer, backbiter, the railer, the flatterer, the false witness, and the unreasonable murmurer — have tongues which may justly be compared to sharp swords, by which they wound or destroy the peace and comfort, the reputation and prosperity, or the very lives of their neighbors! The seducer to sin or error, has a sword in his mouth to destroy the souls of men! But the tongue of the wise has a healing virtue to cure the wounds inflicted by the wicked tongue, and other diseases that affect the comfort or safety of men. It is not enough to refrain our tongues from evil — by them we should endeavor . . .

to defend the character of the injured,

to pacify those who are harmed by slanders and revilings,

to comfort the dejected,

to instruct the ignorant,

to reclaim those who err, and

to warn those who are in danger. For these purposes, we must not only consider what is fit to be spoken — but when also, and to whom it may be proper to speak.

Job's friends are an example of the bad consequences of misapplying most important truths. They were good men, and their words revealed much zeal for God, and concern for the welfare of Job — and yet to that godly man they were drawn swords!

Proverbs 12:19. "Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment." Let us always speak truth one to another — and if we lose anything by it, our gain shall counter-balance the damage. Our credit will be established, and we shall enjoy that confidence from men, on which our success and usefulness depend.

Truth is the ornament of the great — and to poor men, it is their stock and livelihood. Some small matter may be gained by lying, in the meantime — but a great deal more is lost when men lose their character by it. Our Lord tells those who had left all for him, that they would have a hundred-fold more in this world, and in the world to come, everlasting life. It may, on the other hand, be said of liars, that besides everlasting death, they shall lose an hundred-fold more in this life, than they can gain by such unhallowed means. The liar begins by making falsehood to be taken for truth — and ends in making truth to be taken for falsehood. Truth from his mouth is ever suspected, and will not in time of need serve that man who formerly made lies his refuge. Hypocrisy is lying to God — but the imagined advantages of it soon came to an end. The hypocrite's profession soon withers, or by his behavior is discredited. His character is lost, and his hopes perish.

Meanwhile, that profession of the mouth which proceeds from faith and soundness in the heart, shall always flourish and bear fruit. Its honors and advantages shall endure forever, and if it exposes men to present inconveniences, they shall be abundantly compensated at the judgment of the last day.

Proverbs 12:20. "There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil." The more of deception and contrivance there is in any sin — it is so much the more sinful, and exposes men to the more severe judgment.

God has given us the endowments of our minds, as talents with which we are to occupy until our Master come; but if men hide them in a napkin, they shall be punished as unprofitable servants. And if they use them for doing harm — their punishment shall be still more severe. If the servant is punished who is careless about his work — he shall be punished with much greater severity, who employs his thoughts in contriving, and his hands in executing, harm against his fellow-servants. Such people have hearts full of deceitfulness — but their crafty devices shall recoil upon themselves, and they shall have no solid joy — but disappointment and disgrace, as the reward of their work.

What did their father the devil gain, by employing his servants to bring our Savior to the dust of death? Ruin to his kingdom of darkness! What was the consequence of his shutting up Paul in a dungeon? The furtherance of the gospel. Haman was rewarded with a gibbet, for erecting one for Mordecai; for it is the glory of God to force a tribute of praise to himself, out of the wrath and cunning device of men.

"But there is joy for those who promote peace." Let us give praise to God for his everlasting purpose to save men by Christ Jesus, and for the counsel of peace between the Father and the Son. We should follow the pattern of the Prince of Peace, by promoting the peace and happiness of our fellow-creatures. When the wicked are so busy in sowing discord and harm — we must not be careless in seeking peace and pursuing it, for there is joy to promoters of peace. Their minds are serene, their consciences are full of peace. They are respected by men, and receive a blessing from Christ, who says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Proverbs 12:21. "No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble." Are not sickness, and persecution, and death, incident to the righteous? Or must we become Stoic philosophers, and imagine that there is no evil in pain? Solomon did not mean this. But the evils that befall the just are so inconsiderable, compared with their happiness; and have their nature so much changed by the grace of God — that it may well be said that no harm shall happen to them.

These are not the unmeaning flights of a philosopher who sits in his ivory tower, and when he feels no inconvenience of any kind, can declaim with great fluency on the inability of outward accidents to disturb the repose of a wise man. The primitive Christians were exposed to everything that men would call harmful — and yet they would scarcely admit that they considered them evil things; because they could not separate them from the love of God, and because they bore no proportion, in weight or duration, to the glory to be revealed, and for which they were the means of preparing their souls. But whatever may be the present situation of a wicked man, he shall be filled with misery and harm. The calamities of the wicked, even in this world, are very different from those of God’s people, for they are envenomed by the consciousness of guilt, and unalloyed by the comforts of faith and hope. Those things are killing to the wicked, which are trials to the righteous. The time is speedily approaching, when the ungodly shall be forever stripped of those objects which they looked upon as their portion, and filled with misery and horror, to the utmost extent of their capacity!

How foolish is it to be terrified from righteousness, by evils not worthy to be named — or allured to sin by those slight and momentary pleasures, which are not to be compared with the exceeding and eternal weight of misery!

Proverbs 12:22. "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." How terrible a thing is it to be abhorred by the Lord, whose loving-kindness is better than life, and his frowns worse than the most miserable death! What would it avail us to gain the highest advantages, or to insinuate ourselves into the favor of the mightiest prince — by a method that must provoke the indignation of Him from whom every man’s eternal judgment must come? Lying lips are the objects of the Lord’s abhorrence, though man designs no evil to others by them; nor will God excuse a person for lying, even when he intends to serve the best and most friendly purposes by it.

If God’s own favorites should be so unwise as to adopt this crooked method of serving the gracious providence of God, the Lord will often make them to feel how abominable their lies are to him, even when he shows his favor to their souls. Jacob would have gotten the blessing without cheating his father — but it may be questioned whether he would have been cheated by Laban, had he not by his sin deserved it at the hand of God.

God’s abhorrence of liars appears in the common course of providence, which generally deprives them of greater advantages, than their lies could ever produce. But His abhorrence of liars shall be manifested with awful severity in the eternal world, when none who love and practice lying shall enter into the celestial city — but all liars shall have their part with their great pattern, the father of lies, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!

"But those who deal truthfully are His delight." Why did not the inspired writer say, those who speak truly? Because truth in our words is not enough, without truth in our lives. There must be in the Christian, a uniformity of the heart, the tongue, and the life. This is that integrity which God requires, and which he beholds with a pleasant countenance.

How presumptuous are those who think it no great evil to tell a lie, unless some farther degree of evil is intended? Is it all one whether we provoke God or please him? Do liars imagine that God is a liar like themselves, and will allow his faithfulness to be dishonored, by exempting them from the punishment found written in his word?

Proverbs 12:23. "A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself." A prudent man will certainly publish his knowledge, when he finds a proper opportunity of making it useful to his fellow-creatures. But he will conceal it, when to publish it would only display his own vanity and folly. There is a time to be silent, and at that time it is a piece of prudence to keep our knowledge to ourselves.

Elihu was a better speaker than any of the other friends of Job — and yet had the good sense to observe a profound silence, until those who had a better title to speak had finished all that they had to say. Our Lord had in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge — and yet refused to speak before his enemies and judges, when speaking could be of no use. He did not even open up all the treasures of his wisdom to his disciples, when they were not duly prepared for the discovery of them. He gives us a very necessary caution against casting our pearls before swine, or giving our holy things to dogs. But a prudent man will not conceal his knowledge, as others often do — to feed their pride, or to gratify a malignant disposition. He lays it up as a good householder lays up provisions in his storehouse, to be produced for use as occasion requires.

"But the heart of fools blurts out folly." The fool’s mouth, under the direction of a foolish heart — is the herald of his own disgrace. He presumes to speak of those things of which he has a very imperfect knowledge, and to dictate to those who are much wiser than himself. He is confident, where wise men speak with caution, and publishes what he actually knows without a due regard to times, and people, and places. And while he flatters himself that he has gained a character for wisdom and downright honesty, he is generally looked upon as an impertinent fool! A word spoken in season, how good is it! But out of season, it is a sign of folly, and a cause of harm!

Proverbs 12:24. "Diligent hands will rule." We must not try to thrust ourselves into places of power, for an aspiring spirit is more likely to be humbled than exalted. But in the calling with which we are called, let us abide and walk with God — so shall we obtain that measure of wealth which is the fruit of industry. And if it so pleases God, we shall be advanced to stations of more eminent usefulness and dignity. The advancement of Joseph and of Mordecai, of Moses and of David, and of the apostles — are eminent illustrations of this truth.

Those who have the power of advancing others into public stations, should make choice of men approved for their industry, as well as other good qualities — for it is industry that gives life and motion to all the rest. Solomon advanced Jeroboam because he was an active man, and Pharaoh would have none but men of activity set over his cattle — although they had been the brethren of his favorite Joseph.

"But laziness ends in slave labor." By their laziness they expose themselves to poverty, and reduce themselves to a slavish dependence on those who, through the blessing of God on their own diligence, are in better circumstances.

Spiritual sloth weakens men, and exposes them to the power of their spiritual enemies. We must be strong, resolute, and active, if we would stand in the evil day, and escape the tyranny of the rulers of the darkness of this world.

Proverbs 12:25. "An anxious heart weighs a man down." There is a necessity that we should be in heaviness through manifold temptations. But we must be aware lest by giving free scope to anxious and worrisome thoughts, our hearts should sink in us like a stone, and our souls become altogether unfit to relish the comforts, or perform the services of life.

Sadness of the countenance makes the heart better — but despondency of heart disqualifies men . . .

for thanking and praising God,

for serving their generation,

and for bearing the burdens of life.

Life itself becomes burdensome, and is often shortened by excessive grief.

There is nothing that claims our grief so much as sin — and yet there may be an excess of sorrow for sin, which exposes men to the devil, and drives them into his arms.

"But a kind word cheers him up." Expressions of sympathy and friendship have a powerful virtue to soothe and allay the sorrows of the mind, and to prevent their dangerous effects. Job’s complaints would have been fewer, had his friends showed him that pity which he expected from them. But no words have such efficacy for this purpose, as the words of God. David would have perished in the day of his affliction, unless the law of God had been his delight. His afflictions were many, his griefs often great; but they never overwhelmed him, for the statutes of God were his song in the house of his pilgrimage. Would you comfort those who are cast down? Study the doctrines and promises of the Bible; make yourselves acquainted with the records of the experience of afflicted saints; and pray for the tongue of the learned, that you may be enabled to make seasonable applications from this spiritual dispensary, to the broken in heart. Are you grieved in your minds? Remember that it is sinful and harmful to brood perpetually over your sorrows. In order that you may have comfort restored — retire and read your Bibles, and see that you resist not, by the indulgence of unbelief, that Spirit who is promised as a comforter. In the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John’s Gospel, are contained those words of Christ, by which he conveyed strong consolation to his disciples, when sorrow had filled their hearts, because he was about to leave them. Can there be greater sorrows on any earthly account, or are there any griefs too desperate

to be relieved by such consolations?

Proverbs 12:26. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." The wise man does not say that the righteous is more excellent than the wicked — but gives the unrighteous man the best designation of which truth will admit, for after all possible allowances are made on the side of the unrighteous, the superior excellency of the righteous man is still unquestionable. The righteous man is possessed with the faith of Christ, and this faith works by love to God and man. He is not selfish in his disposition — but makes it his settled principle of conduct, to glorify God and to do good to man. He is under the government of inward principles, that render him steady in his good purposes, and dispose him, not only to seek for glory, honor, and immortality — but to perform conscientiously the duties of his station, and of every relation in which Providence shall be pleased to place him. His neighbor may exceed him in many of those possessions and qualifications which are valued in the world — but the righteous man is still more excellent in everything that is truly valuable. His neighbor may be able to perform more splendid acts of generosity — but he lacks that charity without which it profits a man nothing to part with all his goods. He may possess wit, and the wisdom of the world — but that is foolishness with God, and can bear no comparison with that wisdom which is unto salvation. He may be very rich — but he has no interest in the unsearchable riches of Christ. He may be a duke, or a prince — but he is not a child of God, nor an heir of Heaven. He may be clothed with purple, and fare sumptuously every day — but he is not clothed with the robe of righteousness, nor does he feed on the hidden manna. He may live in a magnificent palace — but he has no title to the house not made with hands, and to the mansions which Christ has gone to prepare for his followers. He may be admired by men — but the righteous man is an eternal excellency in the eyes of God, and the Lord Almighty is to him a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty.

"But the way of the wicked leads them astray." Why then do men despise the righteous, and toil themselves in the chase of those things that are not to be compared with the objects that make the righteous so excellent? Because their way seduces them. They are seduced by the devil and the world — otherwise they would not walk in such dangerous paths — and in their wicked progress, their seduction grows upon them. They are more and more infatuated with the deceitful charms of the world — and despising the genuine worth of righteousness, are bewildered and lost in the pursuit of vanities and lies!

Let us pray for the Spirit of wisdom, that our understandings may be enlightened to discern the true nature and the incomparable excellency of righteousness. For the light of the body is the eye, and the understanding is the light of the soul, and the whole course of our lives will be directed by it.

Proverbs 12:27. "The lazy man does not roast his game." It is a great happiness for a man to eat of the labor of his hands — and a great misery for a man to be deprived of the fruits of his industry. Disappointment of hope is a grievous thing, especially when that hope is the fruit of a man’s own labor, and the disappointment is mingled with bitter reflections on the toils sustained, with a view to the expected advantage. But no disappointment of this kind is more grievous than that of the sluggard, to whom labor is a burden which nothing but necessity can render supportable. If the slothful man took nothing in hunting, it would vex him; but to take, and not to roast it — this is altogether intolerable, and must make his heart sick; for his labor is vain, his hope makes him

ashamed, and Providence fights against him, depriving him of what he had gotten, at the very time that he thought himself sure of enjoying it.

"But the diligent man prizes his possessions." His toils sweeten his gains, and he enjoys them with pleasure and thankfulness. The blessing of the Lord infuses a sweetness into his substance, so that, (though little), it affords him more pleasure than the wicked and indolent can derive from great riches. The substance of a diligent Christian, though small, is very precious to him, because it is not the fruit of his labors only — but of his prayers also, and he discerns in it the love of his heavenly Father, who, while he gives him the pardon of his sins, gives him also daily bread.

Proverbs 12:28. "In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality." Solomon knew very well that Zion’s travelers must die — but it is a kind of happy impropriety to call the death of the righteous by its own name. Christ’s death was truly death — but the death of those who die in the Lord is only a sleep, for Christ has abolished death, and secured an uninterrupted life to those who believe in him.

There is nothing that can subject the righteous man to the curse of the first death, or to the power of the second death. Nothing can deprive him of that life which is hidden with Christ in God. What man is he who desires immortal life? Let him enter into the new and living way. There let him walk, and in it he shall find no death.

# 01.13. Proverbs 13

Chapter 13.

Proverbs 13:1-25

Proverbs 13:1. "A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke." The reason why so many will not regard instruction, and listen to rebuke with meekness, is, that they think it a disparagement to their good sense. But in what does man’s wisdom lie? Not in being infallible, or in needing no reproof — but in being sensible that he is liable to error and sin, and in a humble disposition to reverence instruction, even when administered in the form of reproof, and enforced by needful correction.

He is an unkind father who never checks the froward inclinations and behavior of his children. And he is a proud and haughty scorner, who receives the rebukes of a father, or of any other wise person, with contempt and aversion. Eli’s sons disregarded the mild admonitions of their father. Their father was punished in them for his excessive lenity — and they were destroyed for their stubborn contempt of advice.

If a wise son will regard the instructions and reproofs of a father, how much more should we be in subjection to the Father of spirits! How fatal is the stubbornness of those who disregard God’s Word!

Proverbs 13:2. "From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things, but the unfaithful have a craving for violence." Trees are often planted by one man and dressed by another, while the fruit of them is eaten by a third. But the tongue of the righteous is a tree of life, that yields its most precious fruits to themselves. They enjoy the comfort and honor, and gracious acceptance of their own holy and useful discourse; and these fruits are produced, not once a year — but every day. But the tongue of transgressors is like a poisonous tree, that bears fruit often hurtful to others — but deadly to themselves!

Proverbs 13:3. "He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin." We must not only avoid speaking evil — but prudently beware of speaking good when it would be unseasonable. A certain philosopher being silent in company, and asked the reason of it, answered, "I have often repented of speaking — but never of keeping silence."

Destruction from God, and sometimes from men — is the punishment of an ungoverned tongue, which in this respect resembles an untamable monster which often destroys its owner. Nabal had almost ruined his whole family by his intemperate railing at David. The harm was indeed prevented by the prudent tongue of Abigail — and yet the remorse of his own mind was one means of bringing him to his latter end.

Why does the wise man insist so much on this subject? Because the tongue is a most unruly member — and yet it is absolutely necessary to bridle it. Who is the man that desires ruin and misery? Let him give a loose rein to his tongue. Who is the man that desires peace and

happiness? Let him say nothing that he will repent of having said, ten or a hundred years hence.

Proverbs 13:4. "The sluggard craves and gets nothing." Laziness has a double tendency to make men miserable — for it affords to the mind abundant opportunity to form boundless desires — and at the same time it refuses the means of gratifying them. When men indulge an idle disposition, the desires of the mind are not idle — but enlarge themselves as Hell, and grow into exorbitant wishes, which even the most successful industry could not satisfy.

"But the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." He enjoys inward happiness, for his wishes are confined within the bounds of reason, and the success of his labors is sufficient to satisfy them.

Spiritual sloth is in like manner attended with spiritual poverty. There is no man that would not choose to be eternally happy — but the slothful man will not strive to enter in at the strait gate, or to walk in the narrow way. He has one mighty objection against Heaven, that he cannot make sure of it in a morning dream. But the soul of the diligent Christian prospers, for he adds one grace to another, and is neither barren nor unfruitful. His corruptions are subdued, his graces are lively, his comforts pleasant, his usefulness great — and he has an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom!

Proverbs 13:5. "The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace." It is not said that a righteous man never lies. David lied more than once — and yet he could say with truth, that he abhorred lying. Though he lied to Abimelech the priest, and to the king of the Philistines — yet his fixed hatred of sin was an evidence of piety, to which those can lay no claim who never spoke a lie in their lives, if their abstinence from this sin was caused by some other motive than hatred. A righteous man hates lying in all its forms, because it is contrary to the nature of God, and an abomination to him. God hates all liars — and therefore a godly man will not befriend such as tell lies. And if temptation has hurried him into this sin, he loathes himself, endeavors to repair every injury that his lie has occasioned, and prays to God to remove the wicked way of lies far from him.

Those who hate lying are valuable members of society, and are blessed with that good name which is better than precious ointment. But wicked men are loathsome to God, and come to shame. Whatever respectable qualities they may possess — they are destitute of a principle of truth and honesty. That falsehood which they sometimes use to serve a selfish purpose, is the same thing in their characters as a dead fly in a box of precious ointment, which causes it to send forth a stench. God and men agree in almost nothing but this, that a liar is detestable to both, and therefore he must sooner or later come to disgrace.

Proverbs 13:6. "Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner." No wonder that this truth is so often repeated. The righteous themselves retain not so lively an impression of it as they ought. In this case, Abraham should not have dissembled about his wife — nor should have Jacob lied in order to obtain the blessing.

Let us never, to avoid danger, shun the path of duty, or allow ourselves to be allured into that of sin, as though it were the way of rest and safety. What God has joined together — let no man put asunder. what God has put asunder — let no man attempt to join.

Proverbs 13:7. "One man pretends to be rich — yet has nothing. Another pretends to be poor — yet has great wealth." Some who have nothing affect a splendid way of living, in order that others may believe them to be very rich. This is to love a lie, and to impose upon society, by exacting that respect which is commonly given to the rich, without any just pretensions to it. Such people naturally run themselves into debts which they cannot pay, and thus ruin themselves and defraud their neighbors. They walk contrary to God’s providence, and reveal a worldly, proud, and unsatisfied disposition.

They have spiritual riches, sufficient to satisfy the most enlarged desires — freely offered to them in the gospel. If they desire to be rich, why do they not seek after these true riches, which would fill all their treasures, and make silver and gold to appear as mere dross?

There are others who are rich, and conceal their riches under an appearance of poverty. These are ungrateful to divine providence, which has bestowed on them this talent, not to be hidden in a napkin — but to be laid out in serving God, in the exercises of liberality. They defraud themselves, and the poor, and God also — while they sacrilegiously retain in their chests, what should be employed in his service.

Divine providence makes us either rich or poor, and it is our duty cheerfully to acquiesce in its disposal, and to suit our appearance and way of life to our circumstances, which are appointed for us by infinite wisdom.

If we are poor — let us remember Him who became poor for our sakes, and had nowhere to lay his head, while employed in procuring for us the true riches.

If we are rich — let us be rich in good works, and remember that we are stewards, and must give an account.

These opposite faults, which are in this proverb censured by the wise man, originate in the same cause — an excessive esteem of worldly riches. It is this which makes poor men pretend to have them — and rich men conceal them for the purpose of preserving them more safely.

All men are sensible of the conveniences that attend riches — and the inconveniences that attend poverty. But we should also remember that there are inconveniences that cleave to riches; and that poverty, as the wise man teaches, possesses advantages peculiar to itself.

Proverbs 13:8. "A man’s riches may ransom his life." Our Lord tells us that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. This saying, if we firmly believed it — would have a mighty influence in checking our immoderate desires after riches. Do we really desire to walk in that way which leads to life? Do we really desire to walk where there are fewest dangers, than to travel in places infected with robbers and murderers? But even in regard to the present life, there are great inconveniences that frequently attend riches. Rich men are the people whose houses are broken into by thieves, who are attacked by highwaymen, and whose lives are sometimes brought into danger by false accusations. They are often meeting with losses of their property, and sometimes they would be glad to lose it, if it might ransom their lives, like the ten men who willingly parted with their treasures to Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, that he might spare their lives.

"But a poor man hears no threat." Money is sometimes a defense — but the lack of it is a shadow under which poor men live unnoticed by the plunderers. A poor man can travel pleasantly in a road

beset by robbers — when he who carries a full purse trembles in every joint. In public calamities, the poor are often allowed to escape without a blow or a threatening — when the riches of others cannot ransom them. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans, the poor were put into more comfortable circumstances than they had before experienced since the days of the good Josiah.

Whatever are the disadvantages of our condition, let us bear them like Christians, still thankfully observing its advantages. Neither riches nor poverty have the power of rendering us either happy or miserable. We are taught that the righteous are truly happy — while misery is the sure portion of the wicked.

Proverbs 13:9. "The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out." The righteous have the light of comfort within their souls, the light of God's countenance shining upon them, and sometimes the light of prosperity in their outward affairs. Their light waxes clearer and brighter, and fills them with increasing joy. Clouds may sometimes obscure their light — but it cannot he extinguished; for the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and therefore their sun shall never go down. The wicked have something that may be veiled light — but it is not the light of the sun which shines more and more unto the perfect day — but the light of a lamp, which would soon expire if it were left to itself — but is more frequently extinguished before it has time to consume away. In the eternal world, the righteous shall have no need of the sun or the moon, because the Lord God and the Lamb are their light. While the wicked shall not have the benefit of a candle to mitigate the horrors of their darkness, or a drop of water to cool their scorched tongue!

Proverbs 13:10. "Pride only breeds quarrels." Contention is the fruit of anger and injuries, of drunkenness and covetousness — but it is more often the fruit of pride than of any of them. Quarrels seldom, if ever, happen without pride as one part of their cause — and they very often proceed from pride alone.

Pride and selfish ambition made the disciples to dispute among themselves who should be the greatest.

Pride raised the war in Jephtha's days, between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, in which so much Israelitish blood was spilt, that might have been more usefully shed in taking vengeance upon Israel's enemies.

Pride darkens the mind to one's own faults and the virtues of other — and on the contrary, represents one's own virtues and the faults of others in a very false and aggravated light. It produces contempt of others, and provoking speeches and insolent behavior, and by these means is an endless spring of contentions and harms.

We can never live in peace unless we subdue our own pride, and keep ourselves as free as we can from all connection with proud men.

"But wisdom is found in those who take advice." The proud and contentious are neither well-advised nor wise, for they despise the advice of others, and are enemies to their own peace. The humble will not easily allow themselves to be drawn into contention. If they are insolently treated by others, they consider whether and how far it is lawful and expedient for them to give place to anger. Injuries done to them are like sparks falling upon a rock; and they show

themselves to be truly wise when they will abate of their pretensions in point of honor or interest, to preserve peace, and to keep themselves and others from sin and trouble.

How wise was Abraham in consenting that Lot should have his choice of the pasture, though, for a variety of reasons, Abraham might have claimed the right of choosing to himself! But Lot was soon obliged to flee the pleasant fields he had chosen, and Abraham had the promise of all the land.

Proverbs 13:11. "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow." The blessing of God is not in that money which is gotten by stealing and cheating, or by their polite substitutes, cards and dice, or by the exercise of professions harmful to the interests and morals of society. And where the blessing of God does not accompany riches, they will be consumed like snow before the sun. But he who gathers by useful labor shall increase in substance, and therefore we must not only be industrious — but show a regard for the public interest in that calling in which we labor. It is not enough to work — but we must work that which is good; so shall we have enough for ourselves, and something for others.

Proverbs 13:12. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." If we would enjoy happiness, we must labor diligently to keep our passions and desires under restraint; for they produce, when not duly regulated, disappointment and misery. If we indulge ardent desires, and confident hopes of obtaining a thing — the hope produces a borrowed pleasure, for which, if our hopes are disappointed, we repay a high interest. When the object of hope is deferred, the heart languishes and pines. When hope is destroyed, the heart dies outright.

What stings did the hopes of Absalom and Adonijah leave in their minds, when they failed in their attempts to obtain the kingdom of their father!

It is cruel to disappoint the just hopes of others. If we make the eyes of the widow to fail, or keep the poor from their moderate desires — we break that commandment which forbids murder. We must not withhold the wages of the hireling, for this reason, among others — because his heart is set upon it, and be will be filled with uneasiness if he does not receive it. But when the desire comes, the heart is revived and gladdened as with the fruits of a tree of life. But this is not the case if the desire was irregular and unlawful. Amnon enjoyed no pleasure by the gratification of his desire after Tamar, which was followed by remorse and vexation. Desires of lawful things, when they are crowned by enjoyment, impart pleasure to the mind — but that pleasure is for the most part soon followed by weariness. This proverb is verified chiefly in the righteous, whose desire is only good, and whose enjoyments far exceed their most optimistic hopes. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the fruits of the tree of life, which grows in the midst of the paradise of God; and they shall hunger and thirst no more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat.

Proverbs 13:13. "He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded." In many things we all offend — but we are not all despisers of the Word of God. Godly men have reason to lament their manifold breaches of the commandment — and yet they have a sincere love and esteem for it, earnestly desiring that their ways might be directed to keep God’s statutes.

It was an evidence that Esau despised his birthright, when he sold it for a morsel of food. And men reveal a contempt for the Word, when they disregard its precepts, to gain some advantage, and

some indulgence for the flesh. A tree may be sound at the heart — and yet have its branches broken by a strong blast — but a tree must be rotten, which is broken with a gale of wind. In like manner, a strong temptation may prevail against a sound and lively Christian. But he is not sound in God's statutes, who falls before every temptation.

He who pours contempt upon a single word of God, however inconsiderable it may appear to him, shall be destroyed by the vengeance of God — for every jot and tittle of the law is enforced by the solemn authority of the Lawgiver. He that despises his authority despises not man but God, and shall have his place among those to whom it will be said, "Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish!" On the contrary, he who reverences the authority of the Lord, and earnestly endeavors, by the grace of God, to govern his steps, not by the fashion of the world, or with a view to serve himself — but according to the will of God, shall be rewarded with the gracious acceptance of God, and shall experience all that favor which God through Christ gives to such as fear his name.

Proverbs 13:14. "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death." Fountains of living waters are highly esteemed in a desert land; and the holy instructions of a wise man are equally to be valued in this world, which is a wilderness full of pits and snares! These instructions are agreeable to the word of life, because they are fetched from it, and may therefore be called a fountain of life, whereby the soul is refreshed and quickened. There is living virtue in the word of truth, even when earthen pipes are the channel of its conveyance. In this desert land through which we travel, there are innumerable snares spread for us by the great enemy of souls, who wishes to entrap us for our destruction, like a bird in the snare of the fowler. It is by the Word of God that we must keep ourselves from the snares of this destroyer. And the Word of God is seasonably applied to particular circumstances, by a wise teacher, by which we are enabled to perceive these snares, and animated to keep the straight way, and with resolution to guard against the temptations that beset us. By the advice of the prudent wife of Nabal, David was preserved from bloodshed; and by the instructions of Nathan, he was delivered from a dangerous snare in which he was already entangled.

We should value the friendship and counsels of a wise man, as a happy means of promoting our spiritual life and comfort, and of preserving us from the snares of death. We should endeavor to have our minds furnished from the scripture, with that wisdom which will enable us to perform such important services to others. The tongue of a righteous man talks of judgment, because the law of his God is in his heart.

Proverbs 13:15. "Good understanding gives favor." A good understanding lies not in dry apprehensions of spiritual things — but appears in that good way wherein it directs men to walk. For a good understanding have all they, and they only, who obey God's commandments. This good understanding gives favor in the sight of God and men. It is the grace of God that gives a good understanding to men, and grace is multiplied to them through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

God has the hearts of all men in his hand, and shows his favor to men of good understanding, by disposing others to favor them, as far as it seems proper to his infinite wisdom. He turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people; but when the set time was come, he gave them favor in the sight of these enemies, so that they enriched them at their own expense. God made Joseph and Daniel to be favored in the season of their captivity. Let us keep ourselves in the love of God,

and the respect of men will attend us, should it be necessary for us.

"But the way of transgressors is hard." Their practice is not only offensive to God and grievous to men — but hurtful to themselves. There are many present harmful things which attend sin, so that unrepentant sinners have a Hell here as well as hereafter. They have restless minds, and unsatisfied cravings, and uneasy consciences, to torment them. They draw upon themselves the frowns of providence and the hatred of men, and through manifold tribulations they make their way to everlasting fire. Let sinners be persuaded to enter into the way of life. It is a narrow but a pleasant way, and rest is found in it for the soul.

Proverbs 13:16. "Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly!" The wise man does not hide his talents in a napkin — but makes use of his knowledge to direct his choice and pursuits, and every part of his behavior in life. Knowledge buried in the head is like the miser's money, which he locks up in a chest, and which is of no use either to himself or others. But the knowledge that is joined with prudence, beautifies every discourse and every action.

Those, on the contrary, who live at random, are constantly rushing into dangers and harms, and are like an ignorant physician, who cannot distinguish between poisonous and medicinal herbs, and may therefore administer a poison instead of a cure.

Fools might be esteemed half wise, if they had sense enough to keep their folly to themselves; but they presume that they are wise, and talk of things of which they know as little as brute beasts, and meddle with things quite above their capacity! Thus they reveal their pride and ignorance, while they imagine that everyone must think them as wise as they think themselves.

Proverbs 13:17."A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing. People under authority, often think that they do no wrong while they execute the commands of their employer, however unlawful these commands are — but the doers of evil shall fall into harm, whoever they are that excite them to it.

Those servants of Nebuchadnezzar, who cast the three children into the fire by their master's command, were consumed to death, and none pities them. Unfaithful servants of princes, are to be reckoned among wicked messengers.

Such was Hazael, who indeed obtained his master's throne by his treachery; but his new dignity led him into crimes, which will cause his name to be abhorred forever. Such also was Haman, whose mischievous designs so signally recoiled upon himself.

Corrupt ministers are wicked messengers, who fall into the ditch, and draw others along with them, to add to their eternal disgrace and torment!

Even common servants who are unfaithful in a little, shall fall into harm, as Paul assures them: He who does wrong, shall be paid back for the wrong done. But a faithful ambassador is an instrument of procuring advantage and comfort to his master and to himself. Such was Mordecai in the king's court; Paul in the gospel ministry; and Joseph in the house of Potiphar and Pharaoh. Let us undertake no business — but what may be warrantably executed; and having undertaken it, let us perform it faithfully as to the Lord.

Proverbs 13:18. "He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored." A man who follows wicked courses, and will not be persuaded to abandon them, must be left to himself. Disgrace and ruin will soon make him feel that which he would not believe — and then every admonition formerly given him, will be like an envenomed dart in his soul, inflaming his conscience with tormenting remorse!

People think it incompatible with their honor, to receive reproof — but the dishonor lies in needing reproof, and not receiving it. He, on the contrary, who regards reproof, and profits by it, shall be honored as a man adorned with humility and meekness, and shall be turned from that course which disgraced him, into that way of life which is attended with true and solid honor.

Proverbs 13:19. "A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil." The deceitful pleasures which fools think they enjoy, or the gratification of their desires — is a means of hardening them in their sinful courses. Their eyes are shut to the wretchedness of their state. Their minds are under an infatuation, from the influence of the pleasures of sin, and the god of this world. In consequence of this, their hearts cleave with obstinacy to those sins that effectually exclude true happiness. No satisfaction of sinful desires can give solid and durable happiness to a wicked man. The pleasures of sense lie in imagination, rather than enjoyment — which rather extinguishes than bestows real pleasure, because it destroys the pleasing imaginations that were produced by hope. For this reason, a wicked man cannot possess real felicity, which cannot be separated from true holiness. His heart is filled with aversion to goodness, and he abhors the thought of forsaking his beloved lusts. His desires are so perverse, that the fulfillment of them cannot satisfy him — but must add to his misery. Sin poisons every enjoyment, and provokes divine justice to blast all his hopes, and what he desires shall utterly decay!

Proverbs 13:20. "He who walks with wise men shall be wise." Wisdom is so valuable, that those who know the worth of it, will take advantage of every opportunity of improving in it. And the society of wise men is a valuable means for attaining this. He who converses with the wise, will learn wisdom from their words and example — which will have a powerful tendency to produce in him a resemblance to their goodness. For this reason we ought to make the wise our companions and friends. David would not have a wicked servant in his house; and though he had learned much wisdom from God’s testimonies, he was yet sensible that, in order to preserve and increase his wisdom, it was necessary to avoid the fellowship of evil-doers, and to make those men his companions that feared the Lord. For the same reasons, we ought to attend the worshiping assemblies of God’s people.

Thomas would have been sooner cured of his unbelief, and recovered from his despondency, had he been present with the rest of the apostles when our Lord first appeared to them. David thought with deeper concern upon his exclusion from the place where the multitude kept the holy days, than his banishment from the royal palace.

"But a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Bad company has a still stronger influence than that which is good, because the corruption of human nature readily complies with it. A healthy man cannot communicate health to the sick — but a person infected with the pestilence may communicate the contagion to a thousand. Our Lord safely conversed with sinners, because he was free from all danger of being corrupted; and it may on some occasions be our duty also to mingle with the wicked, that we may use means for reclaiming them. But in ordinary cases, guilt or

grief is all that a godly man gets by the company of sinners. Lot chose the neighborhood of Sodom for his dwelling, because it afforded pleasant pasture. He forgot that the Sodomites were perverse sinners — but he soon found that daily griefs were the best things he could expect from such wicked neighbors. The grace of God kept him unstained by their profligacy; but he was obliged to flee for his life, and to leave his pleasant possessions and his plenteous flocks behind him, that he might escape their punishment.

Just so, a church that is become obstinate and incurable in apostasy must be left, for this reason, that we may avoid her sins and plagues.

Proverbs 13:21. "Misfortune pursues the sinner." Harm is allotted to such as obstinately persevere in sin. They perhaps do not feel their misery and danger — but enjoy the transient pleasures of sin and the world, and think themselves secure of a long continued term of prosperity. But Solomon here assures them, that misery is pursuing them, as the hound pursues his prey, and will not desist from the chase until it is destroyed!

Sinners may flee away as on eagles' wings — but vengeance follows them on the wings of the wind. They may look for safety and deliverance — but their eyes shall fail, and escape shall perish from them, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the spirit. If sinners desire to escape, let them flee to the Savior of sinners, and cut away their transgressions. Let them depart from evil, and do good, while their day of grace continues; for, if they resist the calls of wisdom, their desolation will come like a whirlwind.

"But prosperity is the reward of the righteous." Imperfect as their goodness is, not a single instance of it shall lose its reward. What can be less than giving a cup of water to a thirsty disciple of Christ? Yet even that shall be mentioned at the great day, to the praise of the followers of the Redeemer. God is so abundant in goodness, that he gave a reward to Nebuchadnezzar and to Jehu, for services done to him from a purely selfish principle. Much more will he reward those services that are done from love to his name. Even the children, and the more remote descendants of the godly, have often experienced the overflowing kindness of God to their pious progenitors; for,

Proverbs 13:22. "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous." A godly man is ever righteous and merciful. He is blessed, and his children and grand-children are blessed after him. He leaves to them the goodwill of men, and many precious promises. The influence of his example and instructions descends to his posterity, and they are enriched with substance for his sake.

David left an inheritance to his children for seventeen generations, and they were not dispossessed of it, until by intolerable provocations they had extorted punishment from God. But is this always true? It is to be remembered that the proverbs are often to be understood of what generally happens — though not always. But when this sentence is not verified, we may conclude that godly men, by the defects of their goodness, have forfeited this blessing to their children, which was the case with Eli; or that divine wisdom sees some better method, in these instances, of testifying that kindness which God has for them.

It is better to be the son of a poor saint, than of a great king, for every believer will acknowledge, that a single promise in the Bible is far better than a large estate. Parents that are anxious about the state of their families after their own death, if they believe the scriptures, will be more desirous

of leaving them an estate in promises, than in land and money. But many do not believe this truth. They fill their brains with projects, and their souls are vexed with anxious cares about obtaining earthly portions to leave to their children. In these labors they may be successful — but in the mean time the thoughts of eternity are banished from their own minds. And when they are inheriting the fruits of their earthly-mindedness, what pleasure can it give them, to think that their children are rioting in the enjoyment of wealth, and probably laying up to themselves treasures of divine vengeance! But their success in worldly pursuits is very doubtful. Their posterity may fail, or be reduced to poverty; for the wealth of the sinner is laid up, not for his posterity — but for the just. Riches are still changing masters, according to the direction of God, who made the wealth of the Egyptians and Canaanites to come into the possession of the Israelites, and who still distributes the gifts of his bounty to those who are godly in his sight.

Proverbs 13:23. "A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away." Better is the industrious poor man, than the rich man who lacks discretion and integrity. For though a man be poor — yet when he improves his little stock by honest labor, he shall not lack; nor in the greater part of cases shall he need to beg, or to be put into the poor-roll. There is plenty of food for himself and his family; and having food and clothing, he should be therewith content. But some are ruined by lack of integrity. They endeavor to increase their wealth by those dishonest and unhallowed means that bring the curse of God into their substance, and it melts like the Israelitish manna before the rising sun. Others are brought to poverty by indiscretion. Frugality and economy must be joined with industry. Our Lord could feed men by miracle — and yet he would not allow the fragments to be lost. The seven years of extraordinary plenty, could not have preserved Egypt from ruin, had not Joseph laid up the grain against the years of scarcity.

Proverbs 13:24. "Those who spare the rod hate their children — but those who love them are diligent to discipline them." Parents feel those lashes with which they are obliged sometimes to chastise their children. But parents love their children with no true affection, if they are not willing to endure the smart of them for the good of their children. There is not a groan of the believer — but is felt at the heart of Christ — but Christ does not for that reason spare his correcting rod: "Those who I love, (says he) I rebuke and chasten." The foolish fondness of too indulgent parents is accounted by them as parental love — but the Spirit of God calls it hatred. That affection which is harmful to the spiritual interests of its objects, is love in the language of men — but hatred in the language of the Holy Spirit. A parent would be accounted a hater of his young child, were he to allow him to play with a knife until he gave himself a mortal stab. And that parent deserves the same character, who by fond indulgence allows his son to bring himself to a gibbet, or to expose himself to the damnation of Hell. But he who loves his son, chastens him as soon as he begins to reveal that folly which is bound up in his heart. He will not, indeed, chastise him with blows — when words are sufficient to answer the end. But he will administer the rod — when words have small influence. He will imitate the skillful physician, who prescribes medicines, neither too weak — lest the disease should remain uncured; nor too strong — lest the body should prove two weak to bear them. A young bullock may be tamed — but if you allow it to grow old in idleness, you will sooner break its neck, than break it to the yoke!

Just so, the early days of childhood are a proper season for correction, because vice has not then obtained deep and firm root in the heart.

Proverbs 13:25. "The righteous eat to their hearts' content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry." God's blessing gives to a righteous man food and contentment — but the wicked man lacks one or both of them. The family of Jacob were well fed, when the Egyptians were almost starved. Elijah had food to his satisfaction, when Ahab and his courtiers were obliged, with anxious hearts, to traverse the country for a supply of pasture to their cattle. The righteous man must sometimes live on coarse fare, when the wicked riot in plenty. But Daniel was happier with his vegetables, than the others in the luxuries of the royal table. The family of Christ, too, enjoyed more pleasure in their barley-loaves and fish, than the rulers who despised them in their sumptuous entertainments.

If a righteous man has little, that little is better than the riches of many wicked. The wicked is often reduced to poverty by his own vices, and the judgment of God upon him. But if he has much, he still lacks the blessing of God, which alone can sweeten it, and therefore in the midst of sufficiency, he is in straits.

# 01.14. Proverbs 14

Chapter 14.

Proverbs 14:1-35

Proverbs 14:1. "The wise woman builds her house." Diligence in business is often recommended by Solomon, as a means of obtaining riches, or at least a competency. He here informs us, that the care of the wife is necessary, as well as the industry of the husband. A wise woman is frugal, and saves. She is industrious, and gains. She is pious and charitable, and brings down a blessing from Heaven upon her family. If the houses of Laban and Potiphar were blessed for the sake of pious servants, a house must be still more favored by Providence, for the sake of a pious wife.

"But with her own hands, the foolish one tears hers down!" As if it were a small thing in her eye to allow it to go to ruin, she uses her own hands to demolish it! The idle and careless woman uses one of her hands — but the extravagant woman makes use of both hands, in this ruinous work! How soon, in such a case, must a house become a heap of rubbish. This verse directs men in the choice of wives. A woman may be rich and beautiful — and yet prove a plague to her husband and his family, for nothing is more necessary to ruin a house than a bad wife. But a wise and virtuous woman is a rich portion to her husband, though she brings nothing with her. Her father would give her a portion if he were able — but let it be remembered, that she is a daughter of the Lord Almighty, who gives a better portion of graces and blessings with her, than the wealthiest of earthly parents can bestow!

Proverbs 14:2. "He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord — but he who is perverse in his ways despises him." Most men pretend to the fear of God — but pretensions go for nothing when they are confuted by facts. The scripture lays down plain marks, by which we may know whether we are really possessed of that truth of religion, which lies in an affectionate reverence to the Most High God. The truly godly man, is he who walks in his uprightness. That faith which is not attended with godly sincerity in the heart, nor endeavors after universal obedience in the life — is a dead faith, which gives no evidence of spiritual life. The godly man not only receives Christ — but walks in him. He not only enters in at the strait gate — but continues traveling in the narrow way, until he comes to the end of his faith and holiness in the heavenly world.

He walks in his uprightness, showing a constant regard, not only to the common duties of a man and a Christian — but to those also that are incumbent on him on account of the particular relations and circumstances in which he is placed.

Upright walking is a sure and true evidence of the fear of the Lord; for that fear consists in a deep impression of the divine excellency and authority, by which men are disposed to abstain from whatever God forbids, however pleasing to the flesh it may be — and to walk before him unto all well pleasing.

Men of corrupt minds and a perverse behavior, may speak much to the praise of God, and profess a high veneration for him — but they are so far from fearing the Lord, that they despise him. Every willful sin is a plain proof that they . . .

disregard his authority,

defy his vengeance,

insult his patience, and

turn the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ into a license for sin.

Let stubborn sinners learn from this observation, the exceeding sinfulness of their perverse conduct. It contains in it a downright contempt for God, which is a crime that can scarcely be charged upon devils! What punishment is sufficient for such as despise the authority of their Maker, and pour contempt on the grace of a Savior? To them it shall be said, "Behold, you despisers — and wonder, and perish!"

Proverbs 14:3. "A fool’s talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them." Pride is a root of bitterness, producing a rod of insolence and rudeness in the mouth of the foolish. By this rod they strike and wound their neighbors, who are better than they — but it proves also a rod to the backs of themselves. The wise man does not call the instrument of their punishment a sword — but a rod; meaning probably in this manner to intimate, that their pride shall be abased by punishment of an ignominious kind. They shall not die like heroes — but their punishment shall be that of slaves and fools, and shall yet prove destructive to them, for God can arm with vengeance the meanest instruments. Pharaoh was tormented by flies and frogs, and Herod was eaten up with despicable worms. But the lips of the wise will preserve them from the rod which is in the mouth of fools, and from that vengeance which overtakes the proud. The humility of their hearts instructs their mouths in the language of meekness and kindness — and their piety and prudence preserve their lips from speaking evil.

Proverbs 14:4. "Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest." As the wise man teaches us to be diligent in business, so the providence of God encourages us to practice this virtue. As he has done so in giving us other animals to assist us in our labors, so we ought thankfully to employ them. Where no oxen or other beasts of husbandry are, there is no food for man or beast — but there is much increase by their labor.

Oxen and donkeys testify, as Isaiah speaks, against the ingratitude of God’s people; and here Solomon insinuates that they bear witness against the laziness of the sluggard also. If oxen do not employ their strength for our benefit, the fault is not theirs — but ours. If oxen serve us so well — then we should not grudge those who food which they earn by their labor, and which is necessary for the preservation of their strength.

God would not have the mouth of the ox to be muzzled when he was treading out the corn. That law was in part, though not chiefly designed for the benefit of oxen; for the God who made all things, shows his regard and bounty to them in his laws, as well as in his providence. We should praise God for his bounty to the irrational creatures, since they not only reveal the riches of the Lord — but perform useful services to us. What is man, that God should give us the dominion over

so many useful animals, and keep them in subjection to us, even in our fallen state?

Proverbs 14:5. "A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies." In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established — but the witnesses ought to be men of veracity, otherwise twenty witnesses are no better than so many ciphers. A faithful witness is one who will not lie or deceive — but a man who has no principle of honesty, will, on the smallest temptation, utter lies without scruple.

Judges, and juries, and elders of the church, must be cautious what testimonies they receive. Justice requires that no man should suffer in his person or character, upon exceptionable grounds. What man can enjoy security — if liars are to receive credit? How wicked a character is that of a liar! His testimony cannot serve his neighbor, and ought not to hurt him. In his mouth, even truth is suspected for a lie.

It is unjust and uncharitable to indulge suspicions against our neighbors, on the report of a liar, or even of common fame, which is generally a common lie.

Proverbs 14:6. "The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none" A scorner may seek wisdom — but he never seeks it with right views, nor does he seek after that wisdom which best deserves the name. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way — but the scorner seeks wisdom to gratify a intricate imagination, to feed his pride; and to enable him, by the display of his wit, to make a show of wisdom. But he cannot find it, and the reason is plain — he has not a due value for the wisdom that comes from God, and he seeks it not with that earnestness and humility without which it cannot be found. He does not resign his understanding to the instructions of God, nor can his pride allow him to receive with meekness the instructions and reproofs which give wisdom. The Greeks sought after wisdom — but Christ crucified was foolishness to them. They were already too wise to admit of the preaching of the cross, and scorned a tent-maker who would inform them of new doctrines, which had never entered into their own minds, and who would prove them by other methods than their own favorite devices — eloquence and reasoning.

"But knowledge comes easily to the discerning." For he knows the inestimable worth of knowledge, and seeks for it as for choice silver. Conscious of his own ignorance, he thankfully improves the means of knowledge, and daily depends upon Jesus, the great Teacher, to open his heart for receiving it.

Reproof, as a means of wisdom, is precious to him, and the knowledge which he already possesses, fits him for making progress in it, for to him who has, shall be given more.

Proverbs 14:7. "Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips." We must not willingly enter into the company of fools — but if, through ignorance of their character, we happen to do so, we must not stay in it, lest we be corrupted by their foolish conduct. We are either like those whose company we frequent — or shall soon be like them. Evil companionships will efface our impressions of the evil of sin, and corrupt our own morals and character.

Lukewarm professors, who are perhaps the least dangerous of bad companions, will, if we take pleasure in their company, transfuse their lukewarmness into us. Ephraim mixed with the people, and he soon became a cake not turned. But when are we to leave the company of a foolish man? As soon as we perceive that he has not the lips of knowledge. As trees are known by their fruit, so

men are known by their words and works. But they are soonest known by their words, which are the most plentiful and the easiest products of the heart.

We are not to suppose men to be fools without evidence — but profane or foolish words come from folly in the heart; for a godly man out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good things — and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart, brings forth evil things.

Men may think themselves so holy, that they are in no danger of being corrupted by evil companionships — yet none are so ready to fall, as those who think they stand. Let Peter be a witness, who on this ground ventured into temptation, and fell before it. But though we were secure against all danger to ourselves, our rashness might embolden weaker Christians to mingle with dangerous society, and so our practice may prove a temptation to those for whom Christ died. This commandment should strike terror into the wicked. Since God will not allow His redeemed children to keep company with them on earth — it cannot be supposed that He will admit them to His own eternal home in Heaven. Either God or they must change — before they can be received into Heaven!

Proverbs 14:8. "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways." When men are acquainted with everything but what they ought to know — they are only educated fools. If we had hearts as large as the sand on the sea-shore, and filled with a world of information, while we remained ignorant of the way of attaining true happiness — we would resemble that philosopher who was busied gazing at the moon, until he fell into the ditch!

We are travelers to eternity — and our wisdom lies in knowing the way which leads to that world of unending bliss.

We must endeavor to be acquainted with the difficulties of our way — and how to surmount them; to know the enemies that may be expected to oppose our progress — and in what manner to conquer them; and what helps may be met with in the way, to animate our spirits in pursuing our journey.

It is a piece of necessary wisdom also, to acquaint ourselves with the business and duties of our own particular callings, that we may discharge them with honor and success.

They are fools who know other people’s business better than their own. Some people, if you will take their own word for it, could reign better than the king, and preach better than the minister. They know, in short, how to manage in every condition but their own! These are the busy-bodies and meddlers in other men’s matters, who in scripture are condemned, and by their neighbors held in derision.

"But the folly of fools is deception." That which they call wit, the scripture calls folly. They mean to deceive others — but they deceive themselves worse by it. They may trick their neighbors out of their money — but they cheat themselves out of their souls! All that wisdom of the serpent that is not reconcilable with the harmlessness of the dove, is folly; and every piece of deceit practiced on our fellow-men, is a dangerous infliction on our own souls.

Proverbs 14:9. "Fools mock at sin." Foolish men make a sport of their own sins, when they ought to be humbled to the dust on account of them. Because they are not presently punished — they think that punishment shall never come. Or, like brute beasts, they do not consider what shall be

hereafter. But if eternal burnings are a serious matter — then the sin that kindles them can be no just matter of indifference or sport.

Fools sport at the sins of others, which is far less human than to laugh at the fits of a man convulsed with agony, or the pains of one dying.

Sin is the sport of devils only, and those who make it a jest are devils clothed with flesh. Some of them are so like their father, that they will tempt men to sin that they may laugh at them. Such laughter will end in weeping and howling.

"But goodwill is found among the upright." They have too much good-will to one another, and to all men, to make a sport at sin. They are affected with the sins of others, as a man would be if he were brought into a leper-house. A man of spiritual discernment perceives sin to be the most loathsome and dangerous of all distempers — and his eye affects his heart with tender compassion for their misery. The righteous have a principle of charity, that disposes them to rejoice in the goodness and happiness of others as their own. Paul scarcely begins an epistle, without strong expressions of his joy in the prosperity of his fellow-Christians. This charity completed, will multiply the blessedness of the heavenly state.

Proverbs 14:10. "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy." The thoughts of a man knows no man — but the spirit of a man that is in him. And a man’s own tongue cannot express the bitterness of the griefs that he often feels, or the sweetness of the joy he experiences.

We must not be censorious of the griefs of others. There are some who do not express that grief which we think they ought to feel for their troubles, or the adversities with which they have met — but they perhaps grieve more than they appear to do. Sorrow may fill their hearts when they are alone, though company spreads cheerfulness over their countenances.

God is the true judge of the measure of our repentance for sin, or our humiliation of spirit under his afflicting hand. This observation should lead us to compassionate the sorrows of the afflicted. They have inward uneasiness that we cannot feel. Their griefs are frequently too strong for them to subdue, and when they would comfort themselves against sorrow, their hearts are faint within them. Job’s friends would not have vexed him so much with their severe censures on his complaints, had they thoroughly weighed his griefs and calamities.

It is a great comfort to Christians, that our Redeemer bore our griefs, and knows our sorrows, and is touched with the feeling of them. For this reason, the broken in spirit should pour forth all their sorrows at the throne of grace, and firmly expect from it all needful supports.

There are joys that equally exceed the knowledge of a stranger, especially the joys of religion, which an unrenewed man cannot relish or understand. These are sometimes unspeakable, and full of glory. Christians do not now enter into the joy of their Lord — but streams of joy enter into their souls from the overflowing fountain of pleasures, and refresh their hearts amidst the sorrows of this wilderness to such a degree, that they can rejoice greatly in the God of their salvation, at the very seasons when they are pitied by the world, as of all men the most miserable. The unsaved cannot understand how all the ways of wisdom should be pleasantness and peace — but they should consider that they lack those purified understandings and affections, without which spiritual

joys cannot be relished. Let them believe the Scripture, and the experience of all godly men. Let them taste and see that the Lord is good, and that there is no lack to those who fear him. Christians do indeed feel sorrows peculiar to themselves — but these are the seeds of inexpressible gladness.

Proverbs 14:11. "The house of the wicked will be destroyed — but the tent of the upright will flourish." The upright man is far happier in the poorest circumstances — than a wicked man in his greatest prosperity. Though a wicked man surmounts his neighbor as far as the cedars of the mountain overtop the creeping shrubs of the valley — yet he shall be filled with the strokes of divine vengeance. Though he dwells in a magnificent palace — the tempest of divine indignation shall beat it down! But the righteous man, though at present he appears, like the incarnate Savior, a tender plant — shall grow like the cedar in Lebanon. And though his dwelling place is but a tent, it shall flourish, and prosper, and grow into a heavenly mansion! It is far better to dwell in a poor cottage where the blessing of God rests, and in which is heard the melody of joy and praise — than in a palace which lies under the curse of the Lord!

Proverbs 14:12. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way. Happy is the man who understands it indeed, for many whose end shall be destruction, think that they are traveling in the ways of life. The Jews in Isaiah’s time thought their way right, when they endeavored to please God by multitudes of costly services, while they were mocking and insulting the Most High God, by attempting to bribe him into a connivance at their injustice and inhumanity. The Jews in our Lord’s time walked in the like paths of self-deceit, in setting the traditions of the elders on a level with the commands of God, and seeking righteousness, not by faith — but as it were by the works of the law.

Some professing Christians would join their own works to the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of their acceptance with God. They stand with one foot upon a rock, and the other in a quagmire, and must sink in the mire.

Others, on pretense of seeking justification by the faith of Christ, are careless about holiness, and do not consider that the faith which does not lead men to holiness, will never bring them to Heaven.

There are many others who expect to please God by serving him, not according to the rule of his word — but according to the inventions and commandments of men, and suppose that they are serving him when they are breaking the second commandment, and provoking the Lord to jealousy. Some are so perverse that they think they are doing God service, while they are doing harm to other men, and indulging those uncharitable tempers which God abhors.

We should always keep our eyes on the end of things, and learn with certainty what end we are to expect to our course of life. How terrible will it be for men to hear themselves condemned by the Judge of the world, for those actions for which they expected to hear these pleasant words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Let us give earnest heed unto the Word of God, and compare our expectations and practice with it. Let us daily pray that God may lead us in that way of holiness, in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err.

Proverbs 14:13. "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief." The joys of this world cannot make a man happy. They are often merely external and false, and they commonly end in heaviness. It is very common for men to put on a face of joy, while the heart pines away with grief.

Some put on the appearance of joy to prevent or remove suspicions about their behavior, and endeavor to cover a guilty conscience with smiles. It would surely be far better to own their sins, and to seek after the pleasures of pardon, and then they may rejoice in God for the forgiveness of their sins.

Others, from a pride of appearing happy, conceal their uncomfortable circumstances and dejected spirits under the appearances of mirth — when they ought to acquiesce in the providence of God, and to seek those pleasures which the world can neither give nor take away.

There are others still, who laugh when their hearts are sorrowful, from an ambition of appearing heroes — who cannot be subdued by misfortunes. They are like the Stoic philosopher, who, under a severe fit of the stone, revealed at once his weakness and his desire of concealing it by these words: "Pain, you may rack me — but you shall not make me confess that you are an evil thing!" An affected joy under tribulation, is as despicable as the triumphant joy of a believer is glorious. The end of this, and of all worldly mirth, is for the most part heaviness. In this valley of tears, our joys are few and weak, and pains tread upon their heels. Our greatest comforts are avenues to our bitterest calamities. Heaven alone is the land of real and lasting joys. The only joys on earth worth the naming, are derived from the hope of possessing them.

Proverbs 14:14. "The backslider in heart will be fully repaid for their ways." A true saint may slip with his feet — but his heart is ordinarily right with the Lord his God. The backslider in heart is the lover of sin, who departs, in the course of his life from God and his laws with full purpose of heart. Such a man is never so filled with sin as he desires to be — and takes much pleasure in it. He shall, however, be filled with sin, either in this world or the next, when, he feels its painful consequences, and finds that God has marked all his steps, and will not acquit him from any of his iniquities. This will be the end of all impenitent sinners — but chiefly of such as have not only forsaken the law of God — but also violated their own solemn vows, and after professing holiness, turned like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

Apostasy is a horrible affront to the ways of righteousness, and is commonly, though not always, the forerunner of final impenitence and despair.

"But the good man shall be satisfied with the fruit of his ways." The springs of his satisfaction are in God, and he abhors the thought of boasting, except in the Lord, and in his cross; and yet it is true that he shall be satisfied with the fruit of his ways. His pleasure does not lie in comparing himself with those who are worse than he — but he proves his own work, and rejoices with the fruit of his ways. His soul is fitted for relishing true satisfaction, and filled with that holiness which is the same thing to the inner man, that health is to the body. His good works are not the grounds of his confidence — but through Christ they are accepted of God, and graciously rewarded. "Say you to the righteous, It shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings."

Proverbs 14:15. "The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps." Readiness to believe what people say, being supposed to proceed from a good temper, is

commonly regarded a small fault. But none has ever proved more mischievous to the world. Daily experience shows that many have their fortunes ruined by giving too easy credit to those knaves who will say or swear anything that serves their own interests. History is full of examples of men who have lost their lives by means of their credulity, among whom were those great men Abner and Amass. Others have by this means been robbed of their comfort, as was Jacob for the space of twenty years, though he may well be excused for believing the mournful tidings of his son's death, especially when confirmed by so many plausible circumstances.

Some have been betrayed into the worst of sins, by believing groundless reports of others, as Saul in the case of David, and we might almost add, David himself in the case of Mephibosheth. The nation of the Jews was threatened with desolation by Ahasuerus, who believed the malicious suggestions of the wicked Haman without examination.

Multitudes have been seduced into the most dangerous errors and damning sins, by seducers whom they believed, either from an implicit faith, or from lack of care in searching the oracles of truth. The whole world was ruined by the simplicity of Eve, and the credit she gave to the serpent. A prudent man will therefore look well to his goings. He will not risk his fortune and happiness, his life and soul, by believing groundless reports, or receiving doctrines that are destitute of sufficient proof. He will not withdraw his love from men; or do them hurt, because they have the misfortune to become the butt of slander.

There is nothing in which we are so ready to be deceived as in points of religion, and no errors are so dangerous as these. A prudent man will therefore call no man on earth master — but will look upon Christ as his only Master. The Scriptures he considers as his only rule, and the Spirit who dictated them as their great interpreter. He searches the Scripture, and seeks wisdom from God by daily prayer. As Christ is the only way to the Father, the man that is spiritually wise enters into his religious course, and walks in it, depending on this Savior alone for acceptance. As there is great danger in stepping aside from the path of God's commandments, he pays a strict regard to the least of them. Many deceivers are gone out into the world, and the old deceiver is still walking about, seeking whom he may mislead and destroy. The prudent man is therefore sober and vigilant. He informs himself of the devices of these enemies of his salvation, and while he guards against them by taking heed to God's word, he commits himself to the guidance of him who led Joseph like a flock through the desert, and arrives safely at that paradise where there is no subtle serpent to betray.

Proverbs 14:16. "A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil." A wise man will foresee apparent or probable dangers, and will guard against them.

Nehemiah foresaw the danger he was in from the enemies of the Jews, and used every proper means to prevent their incursions, and this fear was very consistent with courage, for he scorned to use any base shift for his own safety. A wise man trusts in God's mercy — but this truth is consistent with fear, not with that tormenting fear which is cast out by faith and love — but with that reverence of God, and that necessary caution, which makes people depart from sin, and to flee from it as they would from the devil and Hell. Noah is an instance of this fear. Paul himself, that noble believer, who was always triumphing in Christ, lived under the influence of this holy temper, and kept his body in subjection, lest when he had preached the gospel to others, he himself should be a cast away. A wise man does not indulge anxious fears about the evils that may come at some

future period — for he trusts in the gracious providence of God. But he trembles at the word of God, reverencing its precepts, considering its threatenings with awe, and fearing lest he should seem to come short of the promised blessings. This fear is a bridle to the soul, to curb the workings of evil passions, and to restrain it from every appearance of evil.

"But a fool is hotheaded and reckless." Some are so foolish as to think it a sign of a brave spirit to live superior to all fear, as if it were men’s glory to be like the leviathan, who is made without fear.

Fools despise the threatenings of the Bible. They are filled with rage at those providences and reprovers which would check them in their course of sin — but their confidence is daring presumption, which hurries them on to those courses that end in despair. If you would set everlasting burnings before them — they will yet rush on in sin. But their haughty spirits will be tamed when they shall cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of the Lamb. The Assyrian monarch raged against God and his people, and was confident that God himself could not stop him in his victorious course — but he soon found a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws!

Proverbs 14:17. "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a man of wicked devices man is hated." Rash anger is a fruit and evidence of folly. Because another man has done me an injury — am I to do myself a greater, by allowing my passions to domineer over my reason, and expose me to the vengeance of God?

He who is soon angry, speaks and does many foolish things which may cost him many bitter thoughts through his whole life. But a man of wicked devices is far worse than a passionate man, for he harbors malice in his breast, and his soul is the habitation of him whom malice makes a devil. Woe unto the man of wicked devices, for he walks in the way of Cain, and is hated by God and men. Providence may keep him, by the restraints of fear, from imbruing his hands in his brother’s blood — but in his heart he daily commits murder, and cannot have eternal life abiding in him. Simeon and Levi procured reproaches from their father for this evil disposition, when the other tribes were receiving blessings.

Proverbs 14:18. "The simple inherit folly — but the prudent are crowned with knowledge." Folly is hereditary to those who spring from Adam, who lost to himself and to his posterity that excellent wisdom which beautified his soul in the state of innocence. Folly is like a field that produces nothing but weeds and poisons, and brings forth in great plenty, the grapes of bitterness. This is the inheritance of the simple who love simplicity, and will not hearken to the counsels of wisdom — with these fruits they shall be filled abundantly. The prudent have a royal heritage. They shall inherit glory, and their knowledge is not only a chain to adorn their necks — but a diadem of beauty to their heads. It makes them as honorable as kings, and prepares them for the possession of those celestial glories, compared with which crowns and scepters are but yellow dust. For the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament. The most prosperous sinners are objects of compassion to the wise, because they are fools, and the fruits of folly are their inheritance. But the saint in rags is one of the excellent of the earth — for he is possessed of those glories that confer inconceivable dignity on a beggar, while an emperor without them is base and despicable.

Proverbs 14:19. "Evil men will bow down in the presence of the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous." Wicked men follow courses which have a tendency in their own nature, and by

the appointment of God, to bring them to a state of slavery and dependence.

Godly men, through the blessing of God on their virtue and industry, are often placed in circumstances that enable them to relieve the wretched and unhappy, so that their favor is humbly courted by those who once despised them.

There have been instances in which this proverb was verified in a very remarkable manner. The Egyptians bowed down before Joseph, and Moses, and the Israelites. The proud king of Babylon almost worshiped the captive Daniel; and Elisha's favor was solicited by three kings, one or two of whom were wicked men. But it is certain, from experience, that the reverse sometimes takes place, and godly men are made to bow down before the wicked.

It is, however, certain, that goodness infallibly conducts to honor, and wickedness to disgrace in the end. It is because men believe not the scripture, that they make any compliances with the wicked of the world with a view to gain honor from men. God is the King of nations, and the great fountain of honor. Those who honor him, he will honor — but those who despise him, shall be lightly esteemed. If at any time God's people are under a cloud of disgrace, they have full assurance that it will be soon blown away. Christ himself was once a servant of rulers — but all things are now put under his feet; and it is a faithful saying: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.

Proverbs 14:20. "The poor is hated even of his own neighbor — but the rich has many friends." The poor man's neighbor, in this place, must signify one that lives in his neighborhood, or one that is obliged by the ties of relation to love him. All our neighbors of the human race have a title to our love — but those whom Providence has connected with us by the bonds of vicinity or relation, have a double title to our regard; and to despise or hate them, or to be indifferent to their happiness, is a very great sin. Our love to our neighbor deserves not the name, if it is founded only upon his riches. Poverty, or distress, instead of diminishing our love to them, ought to draw it forth into action. It is base to profess love to people in the time of their prosperity, and to be cold to them in the day of their distress. All men censure Job's friends for behaving harshly to him at a time when they could not show too much tenderness and compassion. The rich has many friends — but little reason to place much confidence in many of them. They are generally not friends to himself — but to his money and his table. Let him wear rags, and live on bread and water — and he will find who are his real friends.

Let us test our love to our neighbors, for there is much hypocrisy in men's regard to their fellow-creatures, as well as in that respect which they show to their Maker. Sincere love to Christ cleaves to him, whether religion is well or ill spoken of; and true love to our neighbors is the same, whether they are in adverse or prosperous circumstances — and love appears most when there is most need to reveal it. The poor need not be discouraged because their friends have forsaken them. It is not true that their friends have forsaken them, if they have given them no other reason for it than becoming poor. They were not real friends, but dissemblers — and it is no loss to know their insincerity.

They have reason to rejoice that Christ is the poor man's friend, and that he shows his friendship most in the season of greatest need. The rich man needs not boast of the multitude of his friends, for many of them are very probably dissemblers, who want to serve themselves at his expense. A

man need not call himself rich, although he has many guineas in his pocket, if he has reason to think that most of them are counterfeits. The friendship of Christ is necessary for him, as well as the poor man, and in that he may rejoice and triumph at all times. David was driven from his throne, and multitudes of his friends became his enemies — but his rejoicing was this, that he had one sure and all-sufficient Friend!

Proverbs 14:21. "He who despises his neighbor sins." However common it is for men to hate or despise the poor — it is a great sin, and exposes men to misery. A man's poverty divests him not of that relation to ourselves, and to our Maker and our Savior, which gives him a title to our love. Nor does his poverty weaken the obligation of that great commandment, which requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We show our contempt of the poor, not only by trampling upon them — but by overlooking them, or by withholding that help for which their distress loudly calls. The Levite and the Priest that declined the giving of assistance to the wounded traveler on the way to Jericho, were notorious breakers of the law of love, in the judgment of our Lord. The good Samaritan was the only man that performed the duty of a neighbor. He is an unhappy man, who is chargeable with this sin.

"But blessed is he who is kind to the needy." He needs, and he shall have, that mercy which he cannot merit. If those who do not show mercy are punished — then a heavy vengeance will fall upon the cruel and mischievous.

Proverbs 14:22. "Do not those who plot evil go astray?" The doers of evil are abhorred by the Lord, and the more of deliberation and contriving that is found with sinners — the more severely will they be punished. The plotters of evil promise to themselves success in their plans, and expect great advantage from them. But are they not grossly mistaken? Undoubtedly they are. They shall be baffled by the wisdom and power of the God whose kingdom rules over all. They may bring their devices to pass — but they shall not be able by the accomplishment of them, to gain their ends. Instead of doing hurt to the people of God, and disappointing the purposes of the Most High God, concerning his own glory, and the happiness of his chosen people — the wrath of man shall praise God, and promote the salvation of his people. And what remains of the wrath of God's enemies, beyond what would serve these glorious purposes, shall be restrained.

Whatever profit wicked men propose to themselves, they shall find to be loss; and if they should triumph in the accomplishment of their devices — a moment will put an end to their boasting. The builders of Babel expected to make themselves a glorious name — but they made themselves a by-word to every generation. The proud king of Babylon expected to set his throne above the stars, and to be like the Most High God, and with that view he ravaged the nations, and turned their countries into deserts. But how is he fallen from Heaven! And great Babylon which he built for the honor of his majesty — has become the dwelling place of every loathsome creature. Wicked men employ their thoughts to contrive harm, and show so much diligence in the service of sin, although they have such a miserable reward.

"But those who plan what is good, find love and faithfulness." Let God's people exercise the same diligence in the service of righteousness, by seeking out and seizing opportunities for doing good — and their labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. God's servants are oftentimes tempted to weary in well-doing, because they find they can do little good to others by their labors, which are

frequently attended with much toil, and many disquieting and anxious thoughts to themselves. But to Him who sows righteousness, shall be a sure reward at last, for his reward is not in the hands of men — but with the Lord, and his work is with his God. He cannot, indeed, pretend to merit anything from the Lord, for he stands in need of mercy. But mercy shall not be denied to Him; for he is savingly interested in the promises that are derived from the grace of God, and secured by the faithfulness of God. If God so exactly fulfills his threatenings against the devisers of evil — then the Father of mercies will not be slack to fulfill his words of grace to those whom he has beautified with his own likeness, and disposed to be faithful in his service.

Proverbs 14:23. "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." Some men, if they cannot obtain employment of an easy or genteel kind, would rather be idle than descend below their imagined rank, or expose themselves to the drudgeries of manual labor. And while they are busied in contriving plans for business more suitable to their taste and spirit, and talking of them — they waste their time in idleness. But no useful business is to be despised, for in all labor there is profit, and the lowest professions in life may be a means of procuring subsistence to him who is diligent in it, and to his family.

Men must not, however, expect success in their labor without the blessing of God; and therefore, to industry must be added a dependence on God’s providence, a due regard to the service of God, and a disposition to contribute a proper proportion of the fruit of their labors to pious and charitable uses. Otherwise God may blast their labors in righteous judgment, and then no diligence in business can be a security against poverty. As in religion it is not the man who merely speaks, but the man who does, that gives proof of his sincerity — so in earthly business, it is not the man who talks fluently, and lays down plausible schemes of business, but the man who labors, and does all his work — who has reason to expect the blessing of Providence.

Those that wear their working instruments in their tongues, are always the most useless, and sometimes the most hurtful members of society. They do not work at all, but are busy-bodies in other men’s matters. While they pretend to manage those affairs with which they have nothing to do, they bring themselves to poverty by neglecting their own. Like the sons of Jacob, when their father refused to send Joseph with them — they spend more time in deliberating about a thing, than they might have taken to perform it. If they are professors of religion, their slothfulness causes an offence against the good ways of the Lord — but with what justice, is plain from this text.

Proverbs 14:24. "The crown of the wise is their riches — but the foolishness of fools is folly." Riches are far from being useless in the hands of a wise man. They place him in an eminent situation, so that he is like a city set on an hill, and his wisdom shines and gives light to multitudes around him. Abraham and Lot could not have afforded us so illustrious proofs of their hospitality — had they been poor men. Solomon was wise enough to chose wisdom, rather than mines of gold and silver — but without riches, his wisdom could not have executed plans of such advantage to the church of God, nor built a temple so celebrated in every age. When men have riches, it will soon be known whether they have wisdom or not — for wisdom will avail itself of riches, to make itself evident by the noblest acts. But poor saints have no reason to be dissatisfied with their condition — it requires a greater degree of wisdom than perhaps they have, to overcome the temptations of wealth, and to make it a crown to them. And if their wisdom is despised among

foolish men — yet God is well acquainted and well pleased with every good disposition of their heart, although they have not the means of displaying it in acts of goodness. Many who could never give anything but a tear and a prayer to the distressed — shall be classed with Abraham and Lot in the kingdom of God. While others who exercised splendid acts of beneficence, shall be thrust down to the pit with the uncharitable.

If godly men are spoiled of their wealth, they need not lament, as if they had lost their crown. For riches are an ornament of grace to the head of wise men, even when they are lost. Job's patience in the loss of everything, did as much honor to him, as his extraordinary beneficence while he was the richest man in the East. We honor his memory still more, when he wore sackcloth upon his skin, and sat in the dust, than at the time when wealth was his robe and his diadem.

Riches are transitory possessions — but the crown of the wise is incorruptible, for the honors of charity and patience are eternal. But the foolishness of fools is still folly — when they are in their best and highest condition. Riches give a man fair opportunities to serve God and man by his wisdom — but instead of making a fool wise, they make him seven times more a fool, and render his folly visible to the world! If Rehoboam had been in a lower situation, his folly would have done less harm in his own time, and might have been forgotten when his eyes were closed in death.

Men are generally eager in the pursuit of riches for themselves and their children — but if Solomon may be trusted, it is far better to lack them, unless wisdom is first gotten to manage them; for they are instruments of good or evil — as men have, or lack wisdom. An Athenian philosopher used to cry out to his fellow-citizens, O you Athenians! Why do you toil yourselves to procure estates for your children — and yet take no pains to give them that education which will teach them to make a right use of their estates? When you see drunkards, and debauchees, and oppressors — you have reason to pity those who they ever had the command of a single shilling.

Pray earnestly for wisdom, and leave it to Providence to determine your outward condition. Wisdom will make every condition good and pleasant.

Proverbs 14:25. "A truthful witness saves lives." Some have an aversion to appear as witnesses in a court of justice, as if swearing were never lawful — but it is men's duty to bear witness when they have a call to it; and by bearing witness, God may be glorified, and the lives and properties of the innocent preserved. But we must never lie on any pretense. Neither the preservation of our own life, nor a regard to the life of our neighbors — is a sufficient motive to induce us to dishonor God, by violating the law of truth. Rahab was approved, not for her dissimulation — but for her faith and her good works. We may redeem the life of our brother, in some cases, with our own life — but a lie is too dear a price for it.

"But a false witness is deceitful" and his lies are often swords to destroy the innocent. The liar breaks not the ninth commandment alone — but frequently the sixth and the eighth also.

Ministers and professors of religion are God's witnesses, and it is of infinite importance to give faithful testimony for God. While they hold forth the word of life, souls may be edified and saved — but the profession and preaching of false doctrine, is pernicious to the everlasting interests of men!

Proverbs 14:26. "He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge." Riches are a crown to the wise — but the fear of the Lord is incomparably better. The

grace of the fear of God is so great a point in religion, and so inseparably connected with every holy disposition, that it is ordinarily used to denote piety in all its branches. In piety there is a secure fortress, for godly men are safe from every danger, and know, or may know, that they are safe. Neither earth nor Hell shall be able to destroy them, for the place of their defense is the munition of rocks. They are the children of Jehovah, and their almighty Father is their sun and shield. Death itself shall not destroy them — but convey them to those mansions that are made ready by Christ for their reception in their Father's house! By his children, we may understand the children of those who fear God. Our goodness can merit nothing from God for ourselves, far less for our children. But God is so abundant in goodness and truth, that he has spoken good, and has often brought it to pass, not only concerning his people — but also concerning their seed for many generations.

All men wish to do everything that lies in their power for their children — but death will soon remove us out of the world, and what will we then do for them or ourselves? The estates that are left them, often vanish like snow in the month of March. The best thing we can do for our children, is to fear God — and whether we live or die, the word of God lives, and his promise abides forever. Those who do not chose the fear of the Lord, chose death and ruin, but,

Proverbs 14:27. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death." The fear of the Lord includes in it faith in Christ — and those who believe on the Redeemer, have in them a well of water springing up unto life everlasting! They enjoy true life, and everything that can render life happy. They are preserved from those temptations and sins that are snares and nets to entangle and destroy those who have not the fear of God before their eyes. The fear of God is attended with every blessing — and is a preservative against all misery.

Happy is the man who the Lord. We may say to him as Abigail to David, "Your soul shall be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God — but your enemies shall be like stones bound in a sling." But of those who reject the fear of the Lord, we may speak in truth what Bildad says, in a very unjust allusion to Job, "He is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walks upon a snare!"

Proverbs 14:28. "In a multitude of people is a king's honor, but in the dearth of people is a prince's ruin." The wise king gives many good instructions, and is thereby doing good to us all. Kings without wisdom are public calamities — but well-instructed kings, with their long arms, are the ministers of God for good to millions. In this passage he directs kings to govern in such a manner as to make their subjects happy, that they may not be tempted to leave their country, and retire to a land of greater liberty — but encouraged to rear up an offspring for the service of their king and country. This instruction is conveyed in a powerful motive to enforce it, which is, that the honor and safety of a prince lies in the multitude of his loyal subjects — and his disgrace and ruin in the lack of men attached to his government, and prepared to venture their lives in his defense. In the happy days of Solomon, the people enjoyed peace and plenty, and the children of Israel and Judah were like the sand of the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. In the miserable reign of Jehoahas, the people of Israel were made like the dust by threshing, so that he and his kingdom were on the brink of destruction, when the God of mercy raised up saviors to prevent their extirpation.

It is the glory of the great and eternal King, that his subjects cannot be numbered for multitude; and the lovers of his name will contribute their zealous endeavors, by their holy lives and their

prayers, to increase the number of his subjects.

Proverbs 14:29. "A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly." Anger is a more ungovernable monster than the leviathan, and needs much more than a double bridle for curbing it! Solomon is constantly repeating his admonitions to us, to be on our guard against the incursions and ravages of this fury.

Many people are in a gross mistake on this point, and imagine that meekness is a sign of stupidity — and that a high and outrageous sense of honor an evidence of great spirit. But the inspired philosopher makes it his business to correct our false apprehensions of things, and assures us, that he is the truly wise man, who keeps his passions in subjection to sanctified reason; and that the man who gives way to anger, upon every provocation, is not only a fool — but so far gone in folly, that he lifts it up to public view, and proclaims by his behavior, that he has given to folly the throne of his heart!

Moses was the meekest man, and he was for that, as well as other reasons, the wisest man of his age. Solomon was in the zenith of his wisdom when he spared those rebels Abiathar and Adonijah — but he was in his decline when he sought to destroy the man to whom God had promised a part of his kingdom. A philosopher advised Augustus Caesar, when he felt himself angry, to say nothing until he had taken time to repeat all the letters of the Greek alphabet. When we find ourselves provoked, let us check our passions, until we are able, with greater coolness than Jonah, to answer that question, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Proverbs 14:30."A tranquil heart is life to the body." Most men will allow that religion is the best thing for the soul. But the body is generally regarded more than the soul, and they are prejudiced against religion, because it is considered as unfavorable to the interest and comfort of the outward man. This false apprehension, Solomon endeavors in many places of this book to remove.

According to his doctrine, holiness is the health of the soul, and diffuses its influence over the body — but sin, which is the disease and death of the soul, is a slow poison also to the body in its present state. A heart purified by the grace of God, and set at liberty from corroding and turbulent passions, enjoys the pleasures of a peaceful conscience, and a sweet joy, which gives a grace to the countenance, and communicates health and vigor to the bones. That cheerful heart which does good like a medicine, is chiefly the gift of sacred wisdom; and that benevolence which inclines us to do good to others — is sure to do good to ourselves, so that the fruits of charity always begin at home.

"But envy is rottenness to the bones." Envy is a torment and punishment, as well as a sin. The envious man is impoverished by another’s riches, and tormented by another man’s happiness. Every person who seeks his own happiness, is making the envious wretch miserable.

It was fabled that a woman was autopsied after her death, and a serpent found in her heart. But the envious man has a serpent in his heart while he lives, which is constantly tormenting him! He is not only disfigured by his evil eye — but pines away under a distemper that consumes his bones, and is a greater enemy to himself than to any other man. He has a Hell within himself, and is on the road to that Hell which is prepared for the devil and his angels, where a place is allotted to him among adulterers and murderers!

Envy in the devil, was the occasion of our ruin.

Envy in the Pharisees, brought our Lord to the cross.

Envy in ourselves, is rottenness to our bones, and damnation to our souls. May the God of love free us from this baneful passion!

Proverbs 14:31. "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." To oppress the poor by taking advantage of them, is a monstrous iniquity! To oppress them by the refusal of that mercy which they need, is a less degree of wickedness — but sufficient to procure eternal condemnation. He who oppresses the poor, either by insults and injuries, or by neglect — reproaches his Maker, who made man after his image, and by his providence allots to men their different stations in life, requiring the rich and the poor to be useful to one another. The former by kindness, the latter either by their labor, or if they are disabled from work, by their prayers for their benefactors.

Oppression and uncharitableness make it evident that men do not revere the works of creation and providence — but are atheists either in opinion, or at least in practice; and that the commandments, and promises, and threatenings of God, are despised by them as idle imaginings.

Every man that places more confidence in the promises of God than in the bonds of men, and trusts more to the living God than to his shining dust; every man that regards the authority of God in his precepts, and the providence of God in its administrations — will exercise mercy to the poor, and contribute to their relief. If we say that we love God and hate our brethren, or if we say that we love them — and yet act as if we hated them — then we are liars, and the truth is not in us.

Proverbs 14:32. All must die — but there is an immense difference between the death of the righteous, and that of the wicked. This difference is not always discernible to observers — but it is as real and wide as the distance between Heaven and Hell.

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." The wicked man is driven out of the world in which his portion lies, and all his hopes are then confined to a world of unmingled misery and unchanging despair. He lived in sin and dies in sin, and his sins lie down with him in the dust, and afford everlasting nourishment to the worm that shall never die, and fuel to the fire that shall never be quenched. If he should die as quietly as a lamb, that does not lessen his misery — but only suspends it a few moments. If he should feed his vain mind with the hopes of Heaven to the last — yet he dies into hopeless anguish!

"But the righteous has hope in his death." He believes in Christ, and his sins are all forgiven. His death is the destruction of sin, which gave him so much trouble in his life. He departs from this world, and from his own body — but it is to a better country, where he is absent from the body, and present with the Lord. His death is full of hope, for he will be with Christ, which is far better for him than the best things he could hope or wish for on earth. His hopes may be weak and languishing — but still he has so much hope in Christ, as to venture his soul in His hands. And if his sincere faith is mingled with fears, these fears shall vanish as a thin cloud. These anxieties will only add to the triumphant joy which he will feel, when angels come to convey his soul to the regions from whence fear and sorrow are forever banished!

Death is a grim sergeant to the wicked, sent to arrest them for their crimes.

Death to believers, is like Joseph’s wagons sent to convey his father to his best-loved son. The wicked are unhappy in their lives, for there is but a step between them and the king of terrors. The righteous are blessed in their lives, for their salvation is drawing nearer every day. They are most blessed in their deaths, for to them to die is Christ. Now they are saved by hope, then they die in hope, and through eternity they shall enjoy what they waited for in hope.

Proverbs 14:33. "Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning." Wisdom does not lie buried in the heart of the wise man — for his tongue brings it forth for the advantage of others on every proper occasion. But it is hidden in his heart, like a precious treasure that he wishes to preserve from those robbers that would deprive him of what he values above gold and silver. He does not make a vain and useless display of his wisdom to draw the applause of men — for he is not like those philosophers, falsely so called, who valued the reputation of wisdom above wisdom itself. He does not pretend to give instruction to those who are fitted to instruct himself, for he is readier to learn than to teach, except when he sees a proper call to instruct others. He will not make his wisdom cheap, by casting his pearls before swine, and prostituting his holy things to dogs. Nevertheless he is willing and ready to produce some of his precious stores, when he sees a probability of doing good to others by them. He is like a rich and generous man, who takes no pleasure in boasting of his wealth — but still keeps something in readiness to serve his friends.

"But what is in the heart of fools is made known." But that which fools may have is soon known, and found to be what it really is, and not what they imagine it to be. If they know anything, they think it useless until others know that they know it. This folly is wisdom in their own eyes, and therefore they publish it abroad, until all men know by their own testimony that they are fools. Some people are so weak as to think that much speaking is a sign of much sense, and silence a proof of ignorance. But a wise man is often known by his silence, and a fool by his multitude of words. Whereas, if he could have remained silent, he might have been taken for a wise man.

Proverbs 14:34. "Righteousness exalted a nation — but sin is a reproach to any people." This proverb is verified in the whole history of the nation of Israel, and in those promises and threatenings that received their fulfillment in the events which befell them.

Some allege that God dispenses no rewards and punishments to the nations — but such as are the native consequences of their behavior, without any particular direction of providence, from a regard to their good or bad conduct. But Providence has affixed prosperity or misery to virtue or vice, as their natural consequences — and we find God punishing many nations on account of their sins, by calamities that were not the native results of their sins. The histories of Genesis, and Exodus, and Joshua, and the predictions of all the prophets concerning the heathen nations, might be quoted in proof of this point; and even under the New Testament, we find prophecies of the miseries that would cane upon public bodies for their sins.

Great is the regard which a righteous God has for righteousness. The virtue even of heathen nations has been rewarded with prosperity, and their vices have brought reproach and ruin on them. Righteousness, such as heathens could practice, made Greece and Rome to flourish, and exalted them to glory. But the last of these nations, after it was advanced to the highest pitch of worldly grandeur, was soon brought to extreme misery, and debased to the most wretched servitude — when corruption and wickedness, in opposition to the dictates of natural light, was become common in it.

Let us all, therefore, if we love our country, oppose wickedness to the utmost of our power, for a remnant of righteous people may sometimes prove for a time the pillars of a land. It is in the interest of kings to promote righteousness, and to discourage iniquity among their subjects; and this they will do, if they deserve that noble title.

Proverbs 14:35. "The king’s favor is toward a servant who acts wisely, but his anger is toward him who acts shamefully." Many kings have indeed erred in this point — but they have frequently been made to see their error. Like Ahasuerus, who nourished in his bosom that serpent Haman, and overlooked the faithful services of Mordecai — but afterwards destroyed Haman to whom he had so shamefully given his confidence — and exalted Mordecai, the preserver of his life.

Solomon had told us that riches are a crown to the wise — but here he tells us that poverty and lowly circumstances will not hinder men from being crowned by wisdom. A servant who fears the Lord, and manages the affairs entrusted to him with prudence and faithfulness — obtains the favor of his master, although he is a king. A foolish servant is a shame to himself and to his master. Although for a while his folly and vices may be concealed — yet in the end they bring down that displeasure upon him which is often attended with vengeance. Some masters may be so ungrateful, as to despise the best servants, or through prejudice they may be led to treat them with great injustice — but time will convince them of their mistake, and cause them to alter their conduct, as we find in the case of David and Mephibosheth. But even if they prove so inhuman and wicked as to continue to be enemies to their best friends, let such servants remember how David was used by Saul, and consider whether he was a gainer or a loser by the persecutions he underwent. The great King who reigns over Heaven and earth, will reward faithful servants, who do honor to his gospel by the proper discharge of the duties of their stations; for he does not despise the lowest services of the lowest men — but he is a severe Avenger of the wrongs done by men, to those with whom his providence has connected them.

# 01.15. Proverbs 15

Chapter 15.

Proverbs 15:1-33

Proverbs 15:1. "A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Anger is a fire that burns unto destruction, and it is our duty to bring water to quench this fire. A soft answer to provoking words, is like water to a fire. By gentle language, joined to liberal presents — Jacob pacified the fierce resentments of his brother Esau. He prayed to God, and trusted in him for the preservation of his family — but he did not neglect the proper means of calming his brother's angry spirit.

There are some tempers so intractable that they cannot be pacified — but these are rare, and seem to be under some powerful influence of the devil, like that of Judas Iscariot, who was not reclaimed by the kind words of our Lord from executing his bloody purpose; or those miscreants that seized on our Savior, although to his ordinary gentleness, he added his miraculous power in healing the ear of Malchus. But there are some who cast oil upon the flame of anger, and make it to burn more fiercely by their grievous and provoking words. What can such people expect — but to be consumed by their own rashness? Anger is a temporary madness, and when two mad people are engaged, they both are in danger or receiving deadly wounds. Let us, therefore, endeavor to bridle our passions, and guard ourselves by the meekness of wisdom from the fierce passions of other men — lest, by biting and devouring one another, we be consumed one of another. The fierce words of the men of Judah and Israel, when they were bringing back David to his throne, kindled a new war, which, without active and prudent management in David and his generals, might have produced fatal consequences.

Proverbs 15:2. "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright — but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness." The wise man knows when he ought to be silent — and when he should speak. He will not cast his pearls before swine, and give his holy things to dogs. His words are good, for they are spoken in due season, and he knows how to address himself in a proper manner to different people, according to their tempers and circumstances. But our Lord is the most glorious instance of the right use of knowledge. The different answers be made to his friends and enemies, whether open or disguised, while they give proof of his admirable wisdom — afford us a pattern of prudence, joined with inflexible integrity. But fools turn the little wisdom and knowledge they have into folly — for their mouths pour out foolishness, as a fountain casts out her streams. They are not masters of their tongues — but their tongues are masters of them. While wise men have the fear of God set for a sentinel upon the door of their lips — the fool's lips have neither a door nor a guard — but everything that is within comes out. And as their hearts are little worth, their conversation is empty and vain.

Proverbs 15:3. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." The eyes of men can be but in one place, because themselves are limited to one place. But the eyes of

that God who fills Heaven and earth are everywhere. Angels are full of eyes before and behind — but God is all eye — and even the darkness cannot hide from him. He is in Heaven by his glorious presence; and that high and holy place is like a watch-tower, from whence He espies the evil and the good.

Evil men flatter themselves that none sees or knows their wickedness, as if God could not see through the dark clouds — but He is a witness of what they speak and do in their bed-chambers, nor does a single thought of their heart escape His notice! Shall we do that before the eye of God, which we dared not be guilty of in the presence of a child?

Alas! how is the God who sees all things despised and insulted by men! But He will not be mocked! He beholds and judges, and will punish every evil-doer. His eyes behold the godly also — and this is their great consolation when they are overlooked or poorly treated by men. God knows their integrity, and beholds with a pleasant countenance their humble and sincere endeavors to please Him, and to do good to men. Every thought of His name, and every good word that they speak — is written by Him in a book of remembrance. He beholds all their secret sorrows with an eye of pity, and puts their tears in his bottle! Not a moment does He withdraw His eye from the righteous.

Godly men need not fear that God will forget any of His gracious promises. They will be all accomplished in due season; for His eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, to show Himself strong in their behalf. And His providence is constantly employed to glorify His faithfulness, in fulfilling that word which He has magnified above or upon all his name.

Proverbs 15:4. "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit." The tongue that administers proper and seasonable counsels, comforts, and reproofs — is a healing tongue. Unmerited rebukes, reproaches, unkind words, and cruel mockings — are perverseness in that little member, which boasts and can really effect great things. The advantages derived from a healing tongue are like the fruits of the tree of life — the erring are reclaimed, the dejected are comforted, the weak are animated and invigorated by it. When Job weak in deep distress, he was very sensible how pleasant these fruits were, which he had no opportunity to taste, and tells his friends, that if they had been in his situation, he would have strengthened them by his words, and assuaged their grief by their speech. The words of God have a divine virtue for healing the diseases and the wounds of the spirit. This is the dispensary from which we are to derive healing words for the broken in spirit. But perverseness in the tongue crushes the spirit. It wounds and pierces, it breaks and bruises, the heart of him who is reproached by it.

Job would not have exposed himself so much to the censures of Elihu, if his more aged friends had behaved more kindly to him. His patient spirit felt the piercing edge of their unjust reproofs most sensibly.

David felt none of his afflictions more bitterly, than the keen reproaches and insults of his enemies. And our Lord Jesus Christ exemplified his unconquerable patience in bearing the contradictions of sinners, and enduring with all meekness, though not without afflicting sensibility — the indignities that were poured upon him. When we are exposed to the scourge of the tongue, let us remember that he was tempted like as we are, and imitate his patience, and trust in him for the supplies of

needful grace.

Proverbs 15:5. "A fool despises his father’s instruction — but he who regards reproof is prudent." A father’s instruction proceeds from love, and it is folly and ingratitude to despise it. Yet some children are such enemies to themselves, and so unnatural to their best friends, that they break the hearts of their affectionate parents, by spurning those admonitions that are needful for their own welfare. They are like froward patients, who are angry at the physician for giving them medicines which are beneficial — but taste bitter. In a father’s instructions there is authority. The authority of parents over their children has been acknowledged by the heathen nations — and is ratified in that law which was spoken by the mouth, and written by the finger of God. When they reprove their children, the authority of God is joined to the authority of parents, to enforce their admonitions. For they are expressly required to attempt the reformation of their children by rebukes and corrections.

He who despises his father’s reproofs; despises not only man — but God! This is folly in the extreme, and he who was a fool before he received instruction, becomes mad when be resists it! If a fool despises his father’s instruction, it is not to be supposed that he will pay much regard to the admonitions of other men — but a prudent man will receive correction, and be thankful for it, not only from a father — but from any person, though inferior to himself in station or wisdom.

David allowed himself to be reclaimed by the wife of Nabal, and Sarah received with meekness the reproofs of a heathen king.

People may receive instruction, when it does not touch their pride — and yet have no solid wisdom. But he who receives reproof with calmness, and makes use of it for the correction of his life — gives a sure proof of his prudence. There are many people who come to church, and sit as God’s people sit, and appear very attentive to the preaching of the word — but if there is any occasion to administer the censures of the church to them, they are like a horse or mule when their sores are touched; and the bit and bridle will scarcely hold them in from coming near unto their reprovers.

Proverbs 15:6. "The house of the righteous contains great treasure." That there is much treasure in the house of some righteous people, is certain — but it is equally certain that some of those who are rich in faith, have no silver and gold, and can scarcely find daily bread. Solomon was not ignorant of this, and explains this proverb in Proverbs 15:16-17.

There is incomparably more of solid treasure in the little that a righteous man has — than in the great wealth of many wicked. The blessing of the Lord is in the house of the righteous, and that is a more precious treasure than the gold and diamonds in a thousand mines! The riches of the wicked, in which they pride themselves, often consist of papers — and if bonds and charters make a man rich, the righteous cannot be poor, when they have bonds upon God himself for everything they need, and the charter which shows their sure title to the everlasting inheritance. The devil robbed Job — but he could not make him poor, for his chief treasure lay quite out of the reach of that enemy. Had he served God, as the devil said, for hire, he would have been poor indeed — but a good conscience, and faith in the living Redeemer, could not be torn from him as long as he lived.

"But the income of the wicked brings them trouble." When godly men have nothing — they possess all things. When wicked men have much — they are in straits, for their craving desires are still larger than their possessions. And whatever they have, they lack satisfaction, and are still crying, "Give, give!" They have, besides, a bad conscience — and a drop of that bitter ingredient is sufficient swallow up an ocean of earthly delights. Do we wish to be rich? Let us learn from the Bible what it is to be rich, that we may not spend our time and labor in the pursuit of feathers and vanities!

Proverbs 15:7. "The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools." The wise man does not boast of his wisdom, or make a vain parade of his knowledge — but he is far from grudging the benefit of it to others. He does not behave like that foolish miser who keeps his precious grain shut up in his storehouses, until it rots, or is destroyed by vermin. He scatters the good seed of knowledge, where there is any probability that it will do good. As the gardener, although he will not sow upon the rock — will nevertheless commit his seed to that ground where he is not certain of a good increase, and is not deterred by every cloud from his work. So the wise man will endeavor to do good, even to those who may possibly disappoint his kind intentions, and prove ungrateful for his offices of love. He who disperses knowledge wisely, shall not be disappointed of a harvest of gracious recompenses to himself. But the wicked man cannot disperse knowledge, for he has not a right heart. There is no good treasure in his soul to furnish useful instructions to others — but an evil treasure within, from which he brings forth evil things. He sows the seed of tares and hemlock, and shall reap destruction to himself! Our tongues are our glory, and should be used for the glory of God, and for the good of men. Therefore we ought diligently to store our hearts with that knowledge and wisdom which will be of infinite advantage to ourselves, and make us useful to others.

Proverbs 15:8. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord — but the prayer of the upright is his delight." Wicked men may abound in the external acts of religion, as if they intended to compensate the defects of the inward man, by a double measure of external religiosity. By this means they flatter themselves into dangerous and presumptuous hopes of the favor of God, and sometimes gain a name among the godly, who are neither qualified nor authorized to search the secrets of the heart. But God, who cannot be deceived, sees the insincerity of their hearts, and loathes their most splendid and costly services, as so many presumptuous attempts to bribe the great Judge into a connivance at their wickedness! No man would chose to put himself to a great deal of trouble to no purpose. But hypocrites not only lose the benefit of their services — but provoke God’s indignation by them! The wicked and their sacrifices are detestable to him! He counts them a trouble, and will not long bear with them.

How miserable are unrenewed sinners! Their righteousnesses are abominable and provoking iniquities to God. What need have they to disclaim their own goodness, and seek to win Christ and be found in him, clothed with his righteousness, and purified by his Spirit! But let not God’s true people be afraid of this text, although they are often obliged to confess that they are carnal, and sold under sin. They walk in the light, and have fellowship with God; and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanses them from all sin. Their prayers are unworthy of divine acceptance — but through the Beloved, they are well pleasing to him. While the costly services of the wicked are detested by him — he delights in the smallest services of the upright. This was a truth to be believed, while the Old Testament ordinances were yet in force — how much more are we

encouraged to believe this truth, who have clear revelations of that great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, and appears in the presence of God, making intercession for us, and recommending our weak and imperfect services to his Father!

Prayer is God's delight, and should it not be ours also — who stand in so much need of the benefit of it? When God requires from us the severest instances of self-denial, it is our duty and interest to please God rather than ourselves. But when he delights in prayer, and takes pleasure to have his richest favors asked by needy creatures — shall we not come often to his throne of grace? He who commands us to pray, and delights in the voice of prayer, and has appointed his Son to be or advocate — will not turn a deaf ear to the petitions of his redeemed suppliants.

Proverbs 15:9. "The way of the wicked is an abomination unto Lord — but He loves those who follows after righteousness." The hypocrites will say, "Why do we offer sacrifices — and God does not notice them? Why do we perform the most splendid services, and meet with contempt, instead of thanks? What does the Lord mean by requiring duties — and yet refusing to accept of them when they are performed?" The fault is in the sinner himself — for his heart is polluted with iniquity, and therefore he cannot reasonably expect acceptance to his most costly religious sacrifices. The whole course of the wicked man's life is detested by God, who is of purer eyes than to behold sin, or to look upon iniquity. The sinner's principles are corrupt; his thoughts are evil continually; his words are all vain, or vile, or hypocritical; his holy things are deeply stained with his pollutions — and he is abhorred by God, when he thinks he is praying. Not one of his innumerable iniquities are forgiven, for he is without Christ, and has no saving interest in the blood of atonement. If the very heavens are not clean in God's sight — then how abominable and filthy is the man that drinks iniquity like water! And how detestable is the course of his life — to him whose glorious holiness makes the angels to cover their faces!

Yet, as detestable as sinners are to God, their situation is not hopeless, unless they make it so by stubbornness in sin and unbelief. Though God hates all sin, even in his own people — yet rich is his grace, and so prevalent is the intercession of Christ, that he loves his people even in this world where their righteousness is imperfect, and their course of life stained with many sins. At the best, they are but followers of righteousness. Paul himself could not say that he had attained, or was already perfect. Their hungering and thirstings after righteousness, are sure evidences of the love of God to them, and presages of that perfection which they shall attain in due time. Like as a father pities his son, and takes pleasure to see his feeble efforts to please and serve him — so the Lord delights in every breathing of sincere desire, and every sincere aim to obey his will which he sees in his people. Their righteousness towards men, and faithful discharge of the duty of their stations, is accepted in his sight — as well as their praises addressed to himself.

Proverbs 15:10. "Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path; he who hates correction will die!" When a traveler loses the right way, he is glad for one who can set him right. When a man is on the edge of a concealed pit, he will thank the person that pulls him back with violence, and tells him of his danger. But many men are such enemies to their own souls, that they cannot endure necessary reproofs and corrections, and would rather be allowed to go to the place of torment at their ease — than be terrified with apprehensions of their danger, while there is time to make a retreat. Let such people consider, that however grievous correction is — yet Hell is much more grievous! Who pities Ahab for his fall at Ramoth-Gilead? He was forewarned of his danger by

Micaiah — but he hated the holy prophet for telling him the truth. Equally unpitied shall they be, who perish for refusing reproof. All the words of instruction which they heard in the day of grace, shall be like flaming thunderbolts in their consciences through endless ages!

Proverbs 15:11. "Hell and destruction are before the Lord — how much more the hearts of men!" Have you seen through the gates of death, or have the doors of the shadow of death been opened unto you? No! The eternal world is hidden from the eyes of all living. Many vain disputes have been carried on by men about the place and state of the departed. But this concealed region is open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The outer darkness of the place of the damned is light before him. He knows perfectly every thought of his grand adversary, and is entirely acquainted with every design and every feeling of all the fiends of darkness. Why then do wicked men flatter themselves with the hopes of secrecy in their wicked actions? The most secret principles of their conduct, the most clandestine thoughts of their hearts — are as bright as the day to his eyes! At the day of judgment there will be a revelation of the secrets of all hearts, and then it will appear, that not a single imagination of the thoughts of the heart was secret to him whose eyes are like a flame of fire. Woe to them who seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and whose work is in the dark. But happy are those who labor, that whether present or absent, they may be accepted of him. He knows their hearts, he knows all the purposes that their enemies form against them, and will disappoint the most crafty devices of those who hate them.

God has hidden from every creature that loathsome spectacle — the heart of man! But his eye beholds all the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of it. How astonishing is the patience that bears with such vile creatures! How wonderful that love which gave his Son to die for sinners, and gives his Spirit to sanctify them, and accepts of their services, though defiled with stains infinitely offensive to his holy eyes!

Proverbs 15:12. "A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, he will not consult the wise." Wisdom is necessary in a reprover, lest his reproofs meet with that cutting reply, "Physician, heal yourself!" Much skill is required in dispensing reproofs, that they may not irritate instead of reforming. Yet however wise the reprover is, a scoffer will hate him, at least he will not love him. As an evidence of his aversion, he will not go to him — but avoid his company as if he were an enemy, because he mortifies his pride. The scoffer is as impatient of rebuke, as if, like the Pope, he laid claim to infallibility.

Here is a trial of true wisdom. The seed that sprung up pleasantly for a time — but withered when the sun rose in its strength, was an emblem of those hearers, that cannot endure persecution for the gospel; and how could we endure persecution, if we cannot bear a friendly admonition, or a needful censure from the pastors of the church! The Apostle Peter received with meekness a sharp reproof from Paul, and we find him afterwards speaking of him in very friendly language. David was a king and a prophet — yet he could receive with thankfulness a reproof from those who were by many degrees his inferiors. Some think that he called one of his sons Nathan, in token of respect to the prophet of the same name, who reproved him for the blackest crimes. The rebukes of Christ in his word and providence are fruits of the tenderest love — and the wise will love him the more on their account, and thank him for the necessary discipline of the covenant.

Proverbs 15:13. "A joyful heart makes a cheerful face — but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken." There is so close a connection between the soul and body, that when the latter is pained,

the former feels its pains; and when the mind is oppressed with grief, the body cannot enjoy its health and vigor. On the other side, a healthy body is of great advantage to the operations of the mind, and the joy of the heart spreads itself over the countenance. It makes the eyes brisk and sparkling, and gives a pleasant grace to the face to every beholder. If one could paint his face as well as Jezebel, he could not make his face so lovely as it is rendered by the cheerfulness of the heart. Everything that tends to promote a well-regulated joy in the mind is valuable, for it serves both soul and body at once. Meekness and contentment with our lot, peace and love, afford a continual feast to the mind, and make us agreeable to others. These virtues are not to be acquired in their true excellency — but from God, for they are fruits of his Spirit, and are the property of the believer in Christ.

Christians should remember, that to rejoice is their duty, their privilege, and an ornament to their profession. The world has been too much tempted by Christians themselves, to think that there is little pleasure in religion. Why should we not constantly verify that saying of the wise preacher, "A man’s wisdom makes his face to shine!" The effect of sorrow is often dangerous, and sometimes destructive. It blunts the edge of the understanding, impairs the memory, destroys the vigor of the soul — and if too much indulged, may utterly destroy reason, and sink a man into despair.

There are indeed sorrows required by religion — but these have no danger in them, for they are mingled and attended with the sweetest pleasures. It is sin and not religion, which makes sorrow needful — and religion forbids sorrow, even for sin, to be carried to a dangerous height, lest Satan should thereby gain an advantage. For we are not ignorant of his devices, and know that some of his most dreadful temptations are founded on that constitution of body or mind that disposes men to the entertainment of melancholy thoughts. The kingdom of God is not a kingdom of darkness — but of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 15:14. "The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge." Here on earth, the most intelligent men know but in part. They are the wisest men, who are most sensible of the imperfection of their wisdom. The wisest of Christians compares his present attainments to those of a child. Desires for wisdom, revealed in the ardent pursuit of it — are the best evidences we can give of our wisdom.

There are many that use the ordinary means of knowledge — and yet have no true wisdom — but their fault lies more in the heart than in the head. They are formal and careless in their endeavors to obtain knowledge, because they have not a cordial love to the truth. They read and hear — but they do not meditate and pray. If knowledge would drop into their minds as the dew upon the earth, they would be very glad of it — but they will not incline their ear unto wisdom, nor apply their heart to understanding. The truly wise have a higher esteem of knowledge than of gold and rubies, and their hearts are deeply engaged in the search of it. They use the means of knowledge — but will not be satisfied with the use of them without obtaining the end, and therefore they depend upon Christ as the great teacher, and earnestly plead for the illuminations of his Spirit, to brighten their understandings with discoveries of the truth, and to furnish them with that practical wisdom, without which they cannot be happy. Such seekers of wisdom shall not be disappointed. They shall know God to their joy in this world, and in Heaven they shall know even as they are known.

"But the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness." They have no relish for wisdom; they can drink in vain and frothy discourse from morning until night, as if it were sweet wine. When godly men

meditate by day and night on the law of God — the vain imagination of fools supplies them with thoughts suited to their corrupt minds, in which they delight as much as in their necessary food. God has provided marrow and fatness for the entertainment of our minds — but these foolish creatures rather choose to feed on wind and chaff. Their mouth pours out foolishness, and they cannot do better, because they neither have, nor desire to have, anything better within their hearts. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speaks.

Proverbs 15:15. "All the days of the afflicted are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast." To him who is afflicted, pity should be showed from his friend, for none but those who have experience can tell what a gloom affliction spreads over the mind, and what unceasing sorrows it produces — when it is not soothed by the consolations of friendship, or alleviated by the vigor of the mind. The patientest of men tells us that his thoughts, disquieted by pain, and embittered by the unkindness of his friends — turned night into day. In distress, the night cannot put an end to the fatigue of the day by the refreshments of sleep — and the pleasant light of morning can convey no cheering influence to the anxious mind. But a good and cheerful heart is a continual feast. The pleasures of a peaceful conscience and a healthful soul, are sweeter than those which sensualists enjoy when they are reveling in all the pleasures that riches can give. The longest feast that we read of, lasted only six months — but it was impossible that the nobles of Ahasuerus could be merry all that time. Feasting continued too long, becomes an insupportable burden — but the feast of a soul that enjoys well-grounded mirth never ends, and needs not suffer interruption. The mirth of fools, Solomon tells us, is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, and therefore it cannot be the mirth that is meant by him in this place. The joy of the Lord is the strength and life of the heart. When affliction makes a man to abhor dainty foods, the joys of God’s salvation feed the soul as with marrow and with fatness. Paul was exposed to constant sufferings, and could safely protest that he died daily — yet every day he enjoyed those pleasures that were better than wine. The days of affliction could not suspend his happiness, for he was exceeding joyful in all his tribulations, and gloried in his infirmities, and sang praises in dungeons, and gave thanks to God, who always made him to triumph in Christ. This continual feast, which does not lose its relish in the days of evil, was not peculiar to apostles. The first believers in Christ were so lively in the exercise of faith and hope, that the days of affliction were in general good and happy days to them.

How valuable is religion! what fools are those who seek or expect happiness without it! And how much are religious people to be blamed, when they are sad from day to day, as if they were not the King’s children, or their Father were unkind to them! The question that Eliphaz puts to Job without sufficient reason, may pierce into their consciences, "Are the consolations of God small with you?" Saving religion is the soul of joy, it can cheer the afflicted, and will not allow the poor to be unhappy.

Proverbs 15:16. "Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble." It is the blessing of God that makes anything pleasant and satisfying. It is sufficient alone to make the beggar rich — and without it the man is poor who calls whole counties his own. And his blessing is upon his own people, and upon their basket and store — while the wicked and all they have are under his curse.

It is God who gives both food and gladness — and without gladness, what good can our food do to us? And this gladness is ordinarily given to him who is godly in his sight — but to the sinner he

gives travail; to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him who is godly.

If a Christian has but little, it is pleasant to him; because he considers it as the gift of his heavenly Father, and tastes in it the love of his Savior, through whose grace everything is pure and sanctified to him. The wicked have their food from the providence of God which rules over all — but the righteous have their bread by covenant and promise. If they have little in possession, they know that they shall have everything necessary and good for them, from the possessor of Heaven and earth. And when they are pinched with straits, it is not for lack of goodwill in their heavenly Father — but because his goodness to them is directed by his infallible wisdom. If they have scarcely any food at all, they have promises on which they can feed; with a pleasure never tasted by the men of the world when their grain and wine do most abound .

Trouble is the inseparable companion of great treasures, when they are not sanctified by prayer, and sweetened by the fear of the Lord. They are like water to a man in a dropsy, which does not quench — but only inflames his thirst. Anxiety and care, an ill conscience, and the uncertainty of present things — embitter the portion of the men of the world. Nothing can be really pleasant, which lacks the blessing of God. The little that a righteous man has, is better than the riches, not of one — but of many wicked. The love that religion promotes, tends greatly to sweeten their outward enjoyments.

Proverbs 15:17. "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love, than a fattened calf with hatred." Love is a pleasing affection of the soul, and diffuses cheerfulness all around it. It gives a relish to the scantiest and coarsest meal. Water is sweeter than wine, and dry bread more pleasant than fat things full of marrow — when this delightful affection gives a relish to them.

Ruth and Naomi were happy when they lived on the gleanings of the fields of Boaz, and in the fullness of their satisfaction poured their blessings on the head of him who allowed them the scanty pittance. But selfishness, and hatred, and disagreement, makes every pleasant dish insipid or bitter. The conversation of friends is far pleasanter than any dish at the table. Where hatred is, there is silence or sullenness, or at least hollow mirth, and tasteless ceremony. But where love and the fear of God is, the table conversation is delightful and useful.

How blessed were the disciples of our Lord, when they sat at table with him! Barley loaves and fish were probably ordinary fare with them — but they were entertained with divine discourse. Such pleasure as they enjoyed in their Master’s company, we cannot now expect — but his religion is admirably fitted to promote our present happiness, for love is his great commandment. He enforces love between husbands and wives, as well as among friends, by motives which no Christian can withstand.

If love is necessary to sweeten our ordinary meals — then we must never come to the Lord’s table without exercising supreme love to Christ, and fervent love to our fellow Christians. We must consider ourselves as one body, when we are all partaking of one bread.

Love is a pleasant passion — but let us beware of anger, which makes a man a torment to himself, and a plague to his neighbors!

Proverbs 15:18. "A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel." It will be our wisdom, if possible, to avoid the company of a hot-tempered man, for it is almost

impossible to live in peace with him. He is almost perpetually giving offence — and yet he cannot bear the least shadow of offence to be given to himself. You cannot act or speak so cautiously — but he will find or make some occasion for a quarrel, for gasoline is not more flammable than a mind in which passion rules over reason. But if you cannot avoid his company, be sure to keep a strict guard over your spirit, and by this means strife may be prevented or appeased.

It is one of the amiable glories of God, that he is slow to anger — and considering how much we are indebted to his patience, we are strongly obliged to copy after him, as dear children. A hot-tempered disposition makes a man the firebrand of society — but meekness makes him a blessing to his neighbors. He who appeases strife, does us as much service, as he who quenches the fire that is burning down a house. We must learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly of heart. So shall we find rest for ourselves, and pacify contentions, and enjoy a double blessing from the great Author of blessings. "Blessed are the meek, blessed are the peace-makers."

Proverbs 15:19. "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns." It is but little that a slothful man can be prevailed on to do — but that little gives him great trouble and fatigue. A diligent man finds himself easy and cheerful in the exercise of his profession. But the slothful man cannot be content, except when he is permitted to doze or sleep. When he is on the way of his duty, he cannot proceed far, for he sees a hedge of thorns before him, and no opening to give him passage. Whatever business he is employed about, he finds unconquerable difficulties, and inextricable perplexities in it, so that he either leaves it undone, or slubbers it over, and does nothing to purpose.

Such a man is fit neither for Heaven nor earth. His dispositions do not at all suit the present state of mankind, to whom God has appointed labor and sweat. Nor do they suit the law of Christ, which requires men to rejoice and work righteousness.

"But the path of the upright is a highway." The wise man mentions righteousness in this place rather than diligence, because the latter is included in the former, and is not sufficient without it, to make a man’s way plain. The man that joins to industry, the practice of justice towards men and piety towards God, may find difficulties in his way — but he is not diverted by them from his duty, nor discouraged from making progress. In worldly affairs, hard labor, with the blessing of God, conquers everything. In the course of the spiritual life, difficulties and discouragements vanish away before faith, and mountains are threshed down to valleys, by that power on which faith relies.

Proverbs 15:20. "A wise son brings joy to his father — but a foolish man despises his mother." Nothing can make a dutiful child happier, than to contribute to the happiness of his parents. This filial disposition must not be confined to childhood — but dwell in us while either father or mother dwell upon the earth. If our parents should require us to do some great and hard thing for them — both nature and gratitude would enforce our compliance. But all that they require, is that we should be wise and happy, for their felicity is bound up in our welfare. Surely he is an unnatural fool who will not gratify them in such kind desires.

Epaminondas, one of the best of the Greeks, having gained a glorious victory over the enemies of his country, said to those who complimented him on it, that his chief pleasure in it was the pleasure that the news would give to his father and mother.

Nature and Scripture condemn the folly of those who despise either father or mother. If our dependence is chiefly on our father — yet we have experienced more tenderness from our mother, and have cost her greater sorrows.

Religion, if it had free course, would turn this earth into a kind of paradise, by making all men a blessing to one another. The duties we owe to human society, and to our respective relations, are enforced in the Bible by motives, which nothing but folly and impiety can resist.

Proverbs 15:21. "Folly delights a man who is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walks uprightly." It is a sign of prodigious folly for a man to take pleasure in sin, which gives mortal wounds to the soul, provokes the displeasure of the Almighty God, and could not be expiated — but in the groans and blood of a Redeemer. And yet all wicked men take pleasure in sin. It is with the utmost propriety, that the wise man gives the name of fool to the sinner — and allows the character of wisdom to none but the godly.

We have in this verse a mark whereby we may know with certainty whether we are wise men or fools; and this mark is explained at great length by Paul, and illustrated by his own example.

Wise men are not wise in every instance of their conduct, for weakness and temptation too often betray them into sin — yet they hate sin, and long to be rid of their indwelling corruption. But sin is not only practiced by the wicked — but it is loved by them. Folly is their joy, and therefore they sin even without a temptation. It is their food and drink to sin, and they roll iniquity under their tongue as if it were a sweet morsel. They do not hate those sins that are condemned by God's Word — but the Word that condemns them. They dislike salvation itself — because it is a deliverance from sin. But the wise man's employment is to cleanse his way, and walk uprightly. He hates the sin that dwells in him, and loathes himself for his impurities. He takes pleasure in holiness, and loves the law of God, because it testifies against his iniquities. He joins earnestly with the Psalmist in that prayer, "O that my ways were directed to keep your statutes!" And instead of being satisfied with such a degree of holiness as may amount to the lowest evidence of true grace — he will not count himself completely happy, until his grace is completed in the glory of the heavenly state!

Proverbs 15:22. "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Wisdom is profitable to direct, and all our affairs must be conducted by it, and nothing done rashly and stubbornly; for what is done too hastily, is generally repented of at leisure. As we should endeavor to make our knowledge and wisdom useful to other men, so we should take the benefit of other men's wisdom — for we were designed by our common Creator to give and to receive, and by a commerce of wisdom to enrich one another. The proud and stubborn man, who thinks himself above advice, meets with disappointment and shame. But by a multitude of counselors, (that is, of wise counselors, for none else deserve the name), plans are established, and their success is generally ensured. This is so important a truth, that Solomon takes care we should not forget it, and therefore repeats it in this place, from a former passage of this book.

Solomon often speaks of the destruction of the proud, and the exaltation of the humble. This is chiefly owing to God's hatred of pride, and love of humility — but the natural tendencies of virtue and vice serve Providence in this, as in other cases. The proud man takes the course that leads to disgrace and ruin, while he trusts so much to his own wisdom, that he consults with neither God nor man. The humble man acknowledges God in all his ways, and employs the wisdom of other

men with his own, and his way is prosperous, because it is wise.

Proverbs 15:23. "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply — and how good is a timely word!" It is not a good objection against endeavoring to do good by our words — that we are often unsuccessful in our endeavors to serve our fellow-creatures in this way. For although, by the perverseness of men, our kindness may be rendered unprofitable to them — yet a man has joy by the apt answer of his mouth. It will be a pleasure to us to reflect, that we have discharged our duty, and used our tongues for the ends for which they were made. It can give us no true satisfaction, that we have gained the applause or good-will of men by sinful silence, or by flattering men's humours and prejudices. But if we have lost the favor of men by faithfulness to their best interests, the testimony of an approving conscience will abundantly counterbalance our damage. The joy that arises to a man from the apt answer of his tongue, will not be confined to this world — but at the day of judgment, those who have been converted by our words from the error of their ways, and edified in righteousness, will be a crown of rejoicing to us. Christ himself will take a gracious notice of every word that has been spoken in his cause. Our Judge assures us, that by our words we shall be justified or condemned; and when the works of charity are mentioned with honor, the words which proceeded from that noble principle shall not be forgotten. To make words really good, it is necessary that they be spoken in due season; for as the showers of rain in their proper season fertilize the ground, but at a wrong time drown the hopes of the year — so words have good or bad effects, as the time of speaking them is well or ill chosen.

Abigail would not tell Nabal of his danger until he was sober; and Job's friends wounded his spirit in a cruel manner, by speaking things excellent in themselves, and very suitable to Job — if he had been the man they believed him to be.

It is one of the properties of a wise man, that his heart knows both time and appropriateness. A single word spoken in due season, is inexpressibly good. It may revive the desponding soul, preserve from death, or save a soul — for death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Proverbs 15:24. "The path of life leads upward for the wise, to keep him from going down to Hell beneath." All men are travelers either to Heaven above — or Hell beneath. The writers of Scripture knew nothing of the middle place, which perverters of Christianity have taught, with the assistance of the ancient heathen. There is but one way of life, and Christ tells us that HE is that way, and no man comes unto the Father but by him. Those only are in the way of life, who receive him by faith, and walk in him by a holy and heavenly life, to which true faith in Christ always leads him who possesses it. This way is upward, and they are great deceivers of themselves, who imagine that Christ will save them from Hell — who persist in living in that sin which leads to Hell. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. The faith which does not make a man heavenly in his affections and life — will never conduct a man to the regions of blessedness. The Son of God came from Heaven to earth to purchase our salvation, and he has gone back to Heaven to plead for it, and the hearts of all who have the living hope of Heaven, will follow him thither. Our everlasting abode must be either in Heaven or Hell. Salvation from Hell, is half of the happiness of Heaven. The threatenings of Hell are a fence around the way to Heaven, and while we are traveling in it, they are of great use to make us serious and earnest in pursuing our course. For how is it possible that we can flee with too much speed from everlasting burnings, when our flight is directed, not, like that of the manslayer, to a place of banishment — but to the world of eternal

happiness and pleasure!

Let us try ourselves by this mark of true wisdom. Do we mind earthly things — or heavenly things? If earthly things are the chief object of our regard — then our way is below, and our names are written in the earth, because we forsake the fountain of living waters. If our affections are set on things above — then when Christ our life shall appear, he will receive us into the celestial mansions, that where he is, we may be also. David and Paul explain this character of the wise man, from their own example, compared with that of worldly men.

Proverbs 15:25. "The LORD tears down the proud man's house, but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact." We have already heard how detestable pride is to the Lord, and how it provokes his vengeance. Here we are told that God destroys the dwellings and families of the proud, as well as their persons. Proud men value themselves upon their magnificent palaces, their great riches, and their prosperous families, and provoke the Lord to destroy those things which are turned by them into idols, and used as the pillars of that creature confidence which He abhors.

Nebuchadnezzar prided himself in the splendor of his palace, and the magnificence of his royal city. But he was driven from it to dwell among the beasts! And some ages after his death, his family, which he had exalted by his ravages, was rooted out of the world, and great Babylon, which he had built for the honor of his majesty, became a monument of the triumphs of God's power over the haughtiness of worms!

Haman boasted of his riches and the number of his children — but Haman and his ten children were soon hanged, and his riches given to his hated enemy.

Let us never be proud and vain of anything — unless we wish to have it destroyed! God abhors pride even in those whom he dearly loves — and shows his resentment of it by sending humbling providences.

David was proud of the vast numbers of his subjects — but God soon showed him that great armies cannot save a king, and that three days may greatly lessen the numbers of a people.

Hezekiah's heart was lifted up in pride — but he was soon obliged to humble himself, being assured that the treasures which he had so ostentatiously showed to the Babylonish ambassadors, would be carried with his posterity to their own land.

God is dreadful to the proud — but he is gracious to the helpless and desolate.

Proud men often attempt to aggrandize their houses, by removing the landmark of the widow and fatherless — but the Lord keeps the widow's boundaries intact. Let dying husbands leave their fatherless children and widows in the hand of God — and let widows trust in him. If they are desolate and weak, and liable to oppression, that should not be a discouragement — but a strong motive to them to commit themselves unto the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.

There is often more meant, than expressed in the words of God. Widows in this place are to be understood of those who are in desolate circumstances, and exposed to injuries of any kind. Their distressed situations make them proper objects of compassion, and infinite compassion are with God. He has erected a throne of mercy, and the Redeemer sits upon it, and is exalted, that he may have mercy upon the poor and destitute. From the acts of terror and of grace here represented to

us, we may take occasion to join in the song of the mother of our Lord: "He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble."

Proverbs 15:26. "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord — but the words of the pure are pleasant to Him." Solomon already told us that the way of the wicked is detestable to God; and here he tells us that his thoughts, no less than his words and actions; are abominable to him. Men see not the hearts of one another, and are too ready to imagine that they shall never be called to an account of what passes in their minds. But we must remember that the difference between God and man is infinite. Man looks only on the outward appearance, and his rewards and punishments can reach no farther than his knowledge of the facts that deserve them. But it is the prerogative of the Omniscient God to search the hearts and to try the thoughts of men, and to render unto them according to their ways. The thoughts of the wicked are full of selfishness, impiety, pride, and impurity, and must be infinitely offensive unto the pure eyes of Jehovah. And whenever wicked men are, by the convincing operation of the Spirit, made to discern the secrets of their own hearts — they become loathsome to themselves. Wicked men must forsake their thoughts, as well as their outward practices of wickedness; for what is the profit of making clean the outside of the cup — while the inner part is full of impurity?

God requires us to give him our hearts for his residence. A heart which should be God’s habitation, if full of abominable thoughts — is like the royal chambers of Pharaoh filled with frogs.

If the thoughts of the wicked are abominable to God, their words cannot be pleasant to him — for how can those who are evil, speak good things? If the words should be good when the thoughts are vile, they are like potsherds covered over with silver dross. God desires truth in the inward parts, and abhors those who flatter him with their tongues, or seek the applause of men by making their tongues the instruments of hypocrisy. But the thoughts of the pure are well pleasing to the Lord, and their words are pleasant in his ears. God is of pure eyes, and delights in those who are made pure by the blood of his Son. Their heads are cleansed from iniquity, and produce those holy thoughts and words which are acceptable in the sight of the Lord their God and Redeemer. Their prayers and praises are a sweet fragrances in his nostrils. Their confessions are music to his ears. Their common discourse, when it is seasoned with salt, and ministers grace to the hearers — is heard by him with delight.

It is a solemn consideration, that God hears everything that we say, and is pleased or displeased with it. He hearkens and hears what the wicked say, and his judgment of them is that they speak wickedly. When those who fear him speak one to another, he hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before him for those who fear the Lord, and think upon his name. What have we to do on earth — but to labor that in our thoughts, and words, and ways — we may be accepted of him?

Proverbs 15:27. "A greedy man brings trouble to his family" The plans of the wicked shall cast him down, for he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walks upon a snare. Instead of gaining what he expects by his iniquity — he exposes himself to those miseries which he most dreads. That which he thought would be a shield to defend him, proves a killing sword. The covetous man is an instance of this truth. His heart is set upon gain, and he expects that it will render his life comfortable and happy. But he finds, by bitter experience, the truth of what he would not believe

from the mouth of Christ — that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

He who is greedy for gain shall not live — so the wise man insinuates in the last part of the verse. He either shortens his days by his anxieties about the world, and those sinful methods which he takes to obtain the things on which he has placed his heart — or he embitters his life by his distracting cares. He designs to secure his family against poverty and contempt, and to raise it to eminence and honor — but his covetousness brings evil and shame to his house, while he sins against his own soul. He kindles a fire in his dwelling, which shall consume the tabernacles of bribery.

If men could obtain what they seek by sin — it would be a pitiful compensation for eternal misery in Hell! "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" But the same Almighty God who punishes the wicked in Hell, reigns by his providence upon earth! His face is ever against the wicked, and if they prosper and flourish for a while, like the grass — it is that they shall be destroyed forever; and they are the wretched instruments of harm, not only to themselves — but to those whom they most love, and whom they mean to serve by their sins.

Money is a good thing when it is possessed by the wise — but the love of money is the root of every evil, and therefore covetousness is not to be named among the saints. If we love ourselves and our children, if we wish for quietness and peace on earth, if we cannot think without horror of dwelling in everlasting fire — we must take heed and beware of covetousness!

"But he who hates bribes will live" — and his house shall stand. It is not enough for us to refrain from dishonest gains — but we must shake our hands from holding of bribes. This is the difference between the disposition of good and wicked men, with relation to sin. Wicked men may for many reasons abstain from the outward commission of it — but godly men hate sin, and everything that leads to it. He who hates bribes is not a loser by his justice, unless a little money be more valuable than life, and the blessing of God to sweeten it. His family are great gainers, for the just men walks in his integrity, and his children are blessed after him. Jeremiah gives us several striking illustrations of this proverb.

Proverbs 15:28. "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil." The righteous man has a good treasure in his heart, out of which he brings good things — but he does not depend upon this good treasure, so as to speak anything upon a subject that occurs most readily and easily to him. He wishes to speak nothing that may do hurt to others, or lead them into mistakes — but on every occasion, and especially in affairs of importance, to say what is best and most seasonable. He therefore considers what is fit to be answered to any man with whom he converses, and his words as well as his affairs are ordered with discretion.

Without thought, the righteous would speak like fools, as David did when he was provoked by the churlish words of Nabal, and in his fury, vowed to destroy the house of Nabal, and cut of the innocent with the guilty. In matters of great consequence that require delicate management, it is needful, in answering men, to lift up our soul to God in secret prayer for the direction of our tongues. Nehemiah prayed to the Lord in the presence of the king of Persia, before he answered his question; and it is remarkable with what wise eloquence he was taught by God to address the king, in such a manner as to obtain great favor for himself and for Israel. But a wicked man has

little sense of the importance of the government of the tongue, and lacks the bridle of the fear of God to manage this unruly member, and therefore he pours forth evil things. But for all his vain and wicked words, he must one day account. "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned!"

Proverbs 15:29. "The Lord is far from the wicked — but he hears the prayer of the righteous." The Lord is not far from any man, for in him we all live, and move, and have our being. But as wicked men are far from God, through the alienation of their hearts, and the wickedness of their works — so the Lord is far from them, that is, he will have no fellowship with them. The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them — but he does not hear the cry of the wicked, and beholds them afar off. Wicked men think they may safely go on in sin, and if trouble comes upon them, then they will cry to the Lord, and all shall be well. Many have been ruined by such presumptuous expectations, and sad experience has at last convinced them that the Almighty was under no obligation to attend to their voice in adversity, when they would not hear his voice in the day of his forbearance. The prayers of the righteous are graciously heard. God does not always give a present answer to them — but they need not wonder at that, for he did not give a present answer to his own Son crying to him is the days of his flesh. He will hear at the time, and in the manner, which is best to himself. Even wise heathens could see that it is proper to leave it to the wisdom of God to determine what is best for us. If we do not obtain a speedy answer to our mind, we must wait on God, for he is a righteous God; blessed are all those who wait for him. Our Advocate who presents our petitions is always heard, and the worthy name in which we pray is ever prevalent with God. The blind man whom Christ healed, made a noble use of the truth contained in the beginning of this verse. He drew from it an irrefutable proof of the divine mission of Christ. But there are too many that draw a very bad conclusion from it. If our prayers cannot be heard, say they, we may give over praying. The prophet Isaiah draws a very apposite instruction from this truth, teaching sinners to leave their sins, and not their prayers. "When you make many prayers," says God, "I will not hear; your hands are full of blood."

What then must they do? Are they forever excluded from the favor of God? No, the Lord is far from the wicked — and yet brings near his salvation to them. He shows them a fountain of blood in which they must be washed and purged from their sin and filth — and then their prayers will come with acceptance before him.

Proverbs 15:30. "The light of the eyes brings joy to the heart." Truly the light is sweet, and we ought to give thanks every day to God, who makes the sun to shine, and formed that amazing piece of mechanism, the eye of man, and contrived it so as to fetch in a thousand pleasures, not only from the objects that surround us — but from those glorious luminaries that are millions of leagues distant from the place of our abode.

If Bartimeus was enraptured with gratitude to Christ when he restored to him his sight — then why should we be less grateful to our Maker, who gave us this noble organ of sense, and has constantly preserved it, and made it the instrument of so many pleasures and advantages?

It is very ungrateful to make our eyes the instrument of rebelling against our Maker, which is every day done by the adulterer and the covetous. On the contrary, when our eyes give joy to our hearts, it is highly roper to improve this pleasure into adoration and praise, by magnifying the work of God

which we behold.

"And good news gives health to the bones." The ear as well as the eye ministers delight and advantage to us. Pleasant views are cheering to the spirit — but glad tidings are no less reviving to the heart, and the pleasures received from them is marrow to the bones, and health to the whole man. No reports have this effect so much as the glad tidings of salvation to lost sinners. We must thank God that we receive so many intricate discoveries by means of the sense of hearing — but above all, that the gospel of his grace has reached our ears. Gratitude teaches us to turn away our ears from the instruction that causes to err from the words of knowledge, and from all corrupt and uncharitable conversation, and to attend with earnestness unto the voice of the Lord, addressing us from day to day in His holy Word. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Have any of us lost the sight of our eyes? That is a sore affliction — yet let us be thankful if the use of our ears remains to us, by which we enjoy the agreeable converse of our friends, and the opportunities of serving God, and waiting on him in his sanctuary.

Proverbs 15:31. "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise." There are great differences among reprovers. Some reproofs are not the reproofs of life, and these deserve little regard from us. There are people who will rebuke others for doing their duty, and curse them because they will not see with their unjust eyes. But in opposition to these gainsayers, and perverters of the right ways of the Lord, we must hold on our way, and never be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. But life-giving reproofs are valuable. Our Lord teaches us to account them pearls, and Solomon in this expression gives them an equal commendation, and frequently lays it down as a mark of wisdom, to pay a proper regard to just and needful reproofs. But how shall we know whether we have this character of wisdom? It is not by saying to that friend who reproves us, that we are obliged to him. Good manners will make almost any man to say that. But here is the trial of our submission to rebukes — if we have a just sense of the value of reproofs, we will count that faithful friend who reproves, rather than flatters — a treasure, and frequent his company on that account. We will not angrily leave that Christian society with which we are connected, because the word of God is faithfully applied in it to the correction of vice, and discipline impartially administered, although we ourselves should become the objects of it. The servant who loves a faithful reprover, and truly regards his own soul, will chose to live in a house where God is feared, and family religion enforced. And every man possessed of this humble disposition, will chose that company in which he is most likely to be told of his faults.

Those who reprove others, ought to dispense their beneficial admonitions with meekness and prudence, that they may not render this ordinance of God offensive by their manner of dispensing it, and render themselves accountable for the harm done by this means to precious souls.

Proverbs 15:32. "He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding." We are born like the wild donkey’s colt, and need not only instruction — but reproof, to make us wise. But some are such enemies to themselves, that they will not allow themselves to be taught wisdom. He is the greatest enemy to himself, if he spurns at the physician for giving him those prescriptions that are absolutely necessary for his health, though disagreeable to his vitiated palate. Just so, the scorner hates his reprover. He is more brutish than the horse or mule, for these animals, although they lack reason, and are stubborn at first — will rather be tamed than destroyed. But that man is happy who welcomes the word of exhortation and reproof,

for though he is at present chargeable with many faults and follies — yet he is in the way of reformation, and takes the sure method of getting understanding. He is meek and teachable, and God will bless to his soul that word which he receives with meekness.

Solomon gives us frequent advice on this point — but they are all needful, for no duty is harder to our proud spirits, than receiving reproofs with calmness, and applying them to the correction of our lives.

Proverbs 15:33. "The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it instructs men in every other branch of wisdom. For a right impression of the excellencies of God upon our minds — it will dispose us with due reverence to search the scriptures, and to acquiesce in the wise instructions which they contain. It will powerfully influence as to make a thankful use of Christ, as he is made of God wisdom to us, and to follow the conduct of the Holy Spirit. The fear of the Lord will be a preservative to us from sin and folly, and an incentive to all holy living and godliness. A good understanding have all those who keep the commandments of God.

"And humility comes before honor." For while we humbly renounce our own righteousness, and place all our dependence on the grace of God, we are exalted in Christ's imputed righteousness. And when we are pure in spirit, we are prepared for the kingdom of Heaven. He to whom all judgment is committed, has declared, and will make it good, "He who humbles himself shall be exalted." The honors of this world are so short-lived, that they are scarcely worth the naming. Sometimes the proud push themselves into high stations — and yet they cannot attain the summit of their ambitious aims, without the permission of that Providence from which promotion comes. It is certain that God hates the proud, and will not allow them to rise into eminence for their real advantage — but rather to signalize his vengeance, by spurning them, in due time, into eternal disgrace and misery.

Alexander and Julius Caesar blazed for a time — but how much more illustrious and durable were the honors of David, who thought himself quite unworthy to be the king's son-in-law, and compared himself to a partridge and a flea — but was exalted by God to the throne of his kingdom over Israel, and to the greater honor of being a prophet in the church, and the sweet singer of Israel!

# 01.16. Proverbs 16

Chapter 16.

Proverbs 16:1-33

Proverbs 16:1. "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD." A man cannot put his heart into a proper order, nor manage his thoughts so as to be ready for any good word or work, by his own abilities. We cannot expel sin from our hearts, nor furnish them with holy dispositions. Even when our hearts are purified by the grace of God, we cannot, without new supplies of grace, prepare them for praying, or speaking to the edification of our fellow Christians. One of the best of men, tells us that he was not sufficient of himself to think anything as he ought. It is our duty to prepare our hearts, and fix our thoughts for every religious service to which we are called — and it is our sin when we are careless about it. But we must not attempt this work in our own strength. In everything we must direct our eyes to God, the fountain of all goodness, praying to him, as David did for his people, that he may prepare our hearts unto himself. To encourage us to apply to God for his needful assistance, we are here told, that the preparation of the heart belongs to him; and in other passages of Scripture we are encouraged by his promises, to expect this favor at his hands. We must depend on God for everything. The answer of the tongue is from the Lord, as well as the preparation of the heart. He fashions the hearts of men, and makes their tongues to speak what he pleases.

He pressed Balsam’s tongue, against his desires, into the service of Israel, and would not allow Laban to speak to Jacob either good or bad, when he came to him with a full resolution to do him some harm. Caiaphas was made to speak a noble truth, when he designed only to suggest a political counsel; and Pilate had not power to pronounce the condemning sentence against our Lord, until it was given him from above.

However well our thoughts are arranged in our minds — yet we cannot utter them to the advantage of men, and the glory of God — unless the Lord enlarges our hearts and looses our tongues. Therefore David prays that his lips, which were closed, might be opened; and Paul begs the prayers of the Ephesians, that utterance might be given. We must beg from God the gifts of utterance for ministers, and the gift of prayer and Christian conference for ourselves — under a firm persuasion that we are altogether unable of ourselves to think or speak, or perform any good thing, and that every good and perfect gift is from above, even from the Father of lights, who bestows his gifts freely — but requires the praise of them to be rendered back to himself. The truth contained in this text must not slacken — but encourage our Christian diligence.

Proverbs 16:2. "All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD." How different is the judgment which men form of themselves, from that which God makes of them! He looks down from Heaven to see how men behave, and behold, be sees all men walking in sinful ways. They are filthy and abominable — and yet so blind, that they generally think their way is clean and pure. They will acknowledge that they are not free from sin — but they have no

impressions of the evil of sin. Their great transgressions, they account venial trespasses. Their lesser iniquities, which they daily commit, are accounted mere motes, not worth the minding. And every slight appearance of goodness, their vain imagination exalts into a shining virtue. The reason of men's good opinion of their ways is, that they are unacquainted with their own hearts, and take no pains to be acquainted with the secret principles and aims which animate and direct the course of their life. No kind of knowledge is more necessary, nor seldomer sought after and obtained — than the knowledge of a man's self. But it will profit us nothing to be pure in our own eyes, if we are abominable in the eyes of him with whom we have to do. It is not he who commends himself who is approved — but he whom the Lord commends. The better that a wicked man thinks of himself, he is the more abhorred by the Lord, who is the irreconcilable enemy of pride and self-conceit, and calls those men who boast of their goodness, a smoke in his nostrils — a fire that burns all the day. The Lord is our Judge, and our sentence must come from him. He weighs our hearts in a just and unerring balance — and if they are destitute of faith in Christ, and love to God and holiness, he will condemn our way. The most splendid actions, and shining appearances of virtue, without purity of heart, will make us, in his sight, only like white-washed sepulcher — beautiful on the outside, but inwardly full of rottenness and dead men's bones.

Let us examine our own hearts and ways under a deep impression of this truth — that God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things. The Word of God is the rule by which we must search and try ourselves — for God will judge us by it at last. We learn from God's Word, that none shall be able to stand in judgment before God, who have not been made to discern the impurity of their heart and lives, and compelled to build their confidence upon him who saves the lost. It is not impossible for men to attain a comfortable knowledge of their own salvation. Although a ragged beggar, when he dreams of crowns and scepters, thinks himself as sure of his imagined dignity, as if it were a reality — yet a king will not doubt of his royalty, nor imagine that it may be only a dream. But those who have obtained this precious blessing of knowing assuredly that they are purified in heart and life — have, at the same time, a humbling sense of remaining impurities. Their dependence is not upon themselves — but upon Christ; and they would dread the thoughts of being brought into judgment with God on the ground of their own righteousness, knowing that no flesh can be justified before him.

Proverbs 16:3. "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." The just God has appointed much toil to the sons of Adam, to be exercised therewith — and it often becomes a burden that makes us to groan and cry out for ease. And here God in his mercy directs us to a method of finding ease and comfort under the heaviest burdens — Commit to the Lord whatever you do. But how shall we cast them upon him? Shall we ascend into the heavens to find him for this purpose? No, David explains this point of instruction at great length in the thirty-seventh Psalm, and tells us that we are to commit our work unto the Lord, by trusting and resting in him, and waiting patiently for the outcome. Paul directs us to do it by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. And as Hannah, when she had prayed about her sorrows, went away, and was no more sorrowful. So when our burden is cast upon the Lord by fervent supplications, we ought to banish every anxious thought, believing that God is mighty and faithful, and will give a good account of that which is entrusted to him by his own direction.

We must not, however, neglect the use of proper and warrantable means for accomplishing our designs, for it is presumption, and not faith, to believe God's promise, and disregard his command.

Joshua was to depend upon God alone for victory over the Canaanites — and yet he was required to be strong and courageous, to fight with them, and observe all God's commandments. He seems to have erred when he sent only 3000 men against Ai, to save toil to the people. Our temporal affairs are to be committed to God, is well as our spiritual concerns. In everything we must depend upon God's help, ask his direction, and refer ourselves to his will. In the meantime, we must undertake nothing inconsistent with our duty to God and men, for it would be gross impiety to concern the most holy God in things opposite to his own will. Had David been employed in acknowledging God when he prepared his men for marching with the Philistines against Israel, the Amalekites would never have found an opportunity to destroy Ziklag. And yet David's encouraging himself in the Lord his God, after he had felt the bad consequences of his rashness, teaches us this comfortable lesson — that although we have been turned by our own rashness out of God's way, we are not excluded from the benefit of this gracious direction. David still committed his work to the Lord, and the harms occasioned by his unadvised conduct were soon retrieved. What a pleasure is it for a weary man to be allowed to cast his burden upon one who is well able to bear it! But it is our mercy, that we are allowed to cast our works and burdens upon the Almighty God. And we are assured that he will then establish our thoughts, and bring what concerns us to a comfortable end.

Perhaps the event will not suit our present views — but in that case it will appear that our views were not agreeable to the gracious intentions of God — and in that case it will be our happiness to have them disappointed. May the will of the Lord be done, and let our own will be done as far as it consists with his. It was a prayer of a famous divine, 'Let my will be done, O Lord — my will, because it is Yours.'

Proverbs 16:4. "The Lord has made all things for himself — yes, even the wicked for the day of disaster." Every rational being has some end of his work in view. And God, in all his works of creation and providence, has the noblest of possible ends in view — the glory of his name, and the manifestation of his divine excellencies. He is infinitely blessed, and needs no glory from us — but he is infinitely wise and holy, and he will be glorified by us, or upon us. Every creature should be used by us as a means of raising our thoughts to its Creator, for what being is there that lacks a tongue, to declare his glory to the rational mind? The silent fish will declare unto us that the hand of the Lord has made them. But does not God lose his glory in some of his creatures? Are not wicked men and devils dishonoring him every day to his face? Yet God shall never be disappointed of his great end. He will obtain a revenue of praise from those who will not give him the glory due unto his name, and will force the wrath and wickedness of his enemies to praise him.

Pharaoh was an insolent rebel against the Sovereign of the world — and yet in very deed God raised him up, to show his power in him, and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Tremble, you stubborn sinners! God must be glorified in you, and if you will not be persuaded to give him glory by accepting of his gracious salvation, and turning from your sins — then there remains nothing for you but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation. The Lord Almighty will be exalted in judgment, and God who is holy will be glorified in righteousness. The day of disaster is the day of the display of the glorious holiness of God. You cannot expect to escape, unless God could be persuaded to renounce his glory for you. You may with much more

reason, hope that the earth should be removed out of its place. Aaron was a highly-favored saint — and yet when his two sons affronted God by offering strange fire, they were immediately consumed by fire. The reason was, because God would be glorified in all who came near unto him. The flames of Hell will shine forever to the glory of God, and afford a subject for the songs of Heaven!

How admirable are the glories of the Lord! Every creature in every world, and everything that happens in any part of his dominions — concur to show forth his praise. Of him, and through him, and to him are all things! To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. The proud among those who do wickedly, shall be dreadful monuments of the vengeance of the Almighty God, and not one of them shall escape!

Proverbs 16:5. "The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished!" We have seen already, that a proud look is greatly offensive to God — but although there is no appearance of pride in the countenance or behavior to provoke the displeasure of the Almighty — yet he is the searcher of the heart, and if he finds it governed by pride, he will execute the vengeance written in his word upon the haughty sinner.

Man looks on the outward appearance, and frequently makes false judgments. The demure Pharisees were counted humble and pious men, when they were hunting after the praise of the people — but their inward pride was well known to our Lord, who tells them, that what was highly valued by men, was abhorred by God. The proud abound in the world. This abominable sin is natural to the posterity of him who fell by attempting to be like God. The forms of it are quite various, and the grounds of it cannot be reckoned up, for it is an insatiable monster that will find nourishment in anything. Some are proud of their dignity and power, and high birth. Others boast themselves because of their great riches. Some are proud, like Goliath, of their stature and the vigor of their limbs. Others boast of their beauty — and that pleasing form which shall soon be turned into corruption. Some are proud of their righteousness, and others (O the infatuation of the human race!) glory in the shame! But whatever shape pride may assume, and whatever is its ground, it is seen by the all-seeing eye of God, and makes the man in whom it dwells and reigns, an object of his abhorrence and avenging justice! None can imagine the terrors of that punishment which inflicted by the hand of the Lord, on those whom his heart abhors. But is there no possibility of avoiding it? None, unless the haughty spirit is humbled into a submission to the righteousness of faith. Though hand join in hand, those who walk on in pride shall be abased, and spurned into eternal Hell. Unknown myriads of angels fell by pride into the bottomless pit, and are groaning, and shall forever groan, under the power of God’s righteous wrath! Although all the proud on earth should enter into a confederacy with all the legions of devils and damned spirits in Hell, and exert their utmost combined force to oppose the execution of Almighty vengeance — they will only be like heaps of dried straw, reared up to oppose the progress of a raging flame!

Proverbs 16:6. "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil." It is plain from Scripture, that Christ has by himself purged our sins, and by one offering forever perfected all those who are sanctified. To pretend to substitute anything of our own in place of his perfect atonement, or to join our own works to his blood to procure our pardon, would be as foolish as an attempt to extinguish the sun, and supply its place with a candle; or to improve the brightness of that luminary, by lighting a torch at mid-day. We must not therefore imagine, that

Solomon meant in this place to recommend mercy and truth to us, as means of procuring the favor of God and the pardon of our sins, for Scripture cannot contradict itself.

Some, by mercy and truth, understand the mercy and truth of God, two attributes which shine with illustrious brightness in our salvation, and are frequently mentioned together by the sacred writers, when they celebrate the glories of it. Christ, our atonement, was the mercy promised unto the fathers, and when God bestows pardon through Christ, he reveals the riches of his mercy according to his Word; for he is faithful and merciful when he fulfills that promise of the covenant, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

None shall receive the benefit of pardoning mercy — but consistent with the truth of God in his Word; and therefore hopes of safety, not grounded on the Scripture, shall end in shame and disappointment. The Hebrew word which we render purged, is sometimes used to signify the cause or means of deliverance from temporal harms, or death. In this sense I think it may be said, that by mercy and truth in men, iniquity is removed; according to that exhortation of Daniel to the king of Babylon, "Break off your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, so be it may a lengthening of your tranquility."

It is mighty recommendation of mercy and fidelity towards men, that we are so infinitely indebted to the mercy and faithfulness of God, to whom we are to show our gratitude, by imitating those amiable attributes that appear with such lovely glories in our pardon and salvation. And while we thus show forth the virtues of our God and our Savior, in doing good to men, we are consulting and pursuing our own best interest and comfort. But mercy and truth to men, must have the fear of the Lord joined to them, to make them Christian graces. Morality is not solid without piety, and piety is not genuine without morality. The fear of the Lord is a soul-purifying grace, and we must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. When Joseph’s brethren were terrified that he would do them some injustice, he assures them that they might banish every anxious thought, for, says he, "I fear God!" The fear of God will not only dispose men to abstain from manifest acts of injustice — but it will keep them from every instance of harsh and ungenerous conduct.

Nehemiah would not oppress the people by exacting the ordinary benefits of his office, because he was under the constraining influence of this gracious principle. You may safely trust a man that has the fear of God in him, for herein he will exercise himself to have a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards man.

Proverbs 16:7. "When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." It is very natural for men to endeavor to please those whom they love, and on whom their interests depend; and often they despise and provoke God, by preferring the favor of men to the approbation of their divine Judge.

Every true Christian is disposed, by the grace of God, to endeavor to walk so as to please God; and if there were no other happiness but what this world affords, it would still be our wisdom to prefer the pleasing of God to the favor of men — because the hearts of all men are in his hand, and he disposes our neighbors to love or hate us, according to his will. When we have lost the favor of our friends or superiors, we are disposed to reflect on them for their unkindness or

ingratitude — but we should rather consider seriously, whether we have not provoked our great Benefactor to deprive us of the good-will of men, by our ingratitude to himself. Wolsey made this melancholy reflection, when he was turned out of his Master's favor: "Had I served God as faithfully as I served my prince, he would not have forsaken me thus at last." But if he had served God more faith fully, it is probable that his prince had not forsaken him at last; or if this calamity had in that case befallen him, it need not have produced such a bitter reflection. When we have lost the favor of our friends, or in fear of enemies, it is our wisdom to use proper means for softening their resentments — but that is not the first nor the chief thing we have to do. Our first work should be, to make our peace with God, if we have offended him — for he fashions the hearts of men according to his pleasure; and whether they act as friends or enemies, they are ministers of his providence.

Jacob did well in giving large presents to Esau, and addressing him in such submissive language but neither his complaisance nor his gifts turned his brother's alienated heart to him. These were, indeed, means which God blessed for that purpose — but the principal means which Jacob used for this purpose, was weeping and supplication, and by these he had power with God, and, by consequence, with men, and obtained the glorious name of Israel.

God has often given favor to his faithful people in the eyes of strangers and enemies, which appears in the instances of Joseph in Egypt, David at Gath, and Daniel in Babylon. These and the like examples of God's sovereignty over the hearts of men, and goodness to his people, may satisfy us that God will sooner or later reconcile the hearts of enemies to his servants, when he sees it for their real benefit. Job was long an object of indifference to some of his friends, and aversion to others of them — yet at last the hearts of all his acquaintances were disposed to love and serve him.

If one endeavors to prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God — and yet misses the favor of men, he may rest satisfied in this, that he is at peace with God, and that his providence will make the wrath of men to promote his noblest interests. The martyrs, when they lost their lives, were overcomers, and obtained brighter crowns than the mightiest of their adversaries ever wore.

Proverbs 16:8. "Better a little with righteousness, than much gain with injustice." The fruits of unrighteousness may be pleasant in the mouth — but they are bitter in the belly; and a man that consults his true interest, will rather live on bread and water, or starve, with a good conscience — than enjoy the revenue of kings, without the approbation of God and his own conscience. There are too many in the world who would rather be rich by unfair means — than enjoy the pleasures of a good conscience with poverty. Therefore the Spirit of God cries to us again and again, that a little with honesty and the fear of the Lord, is better than affluence without it.

Proverbs 16:9. "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." The first verse of this chapter is in many translations made to express the same truth. "To man belong the plans of the heart — but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue." The Lord has a sovereign influence over the hearts and thoughts of men. They can devise nothing without the concurrence of his providence, for in him we live, and move, and have our being. When men are even taking unhallowed means to determine their conduct, the holy providence of God, by undiscerned influence, overrules their minds, and decides in their councils. When the king of Babylon used

divination to direct him whether he should direct his march to Rabbah or Jerusalem, it was the Lord who determined him to come against his own people, to punish them for their iniquities. Yet Solomon affirms with truth, that a man's heart devises his way, because man exercises full freedom of will in forming his projects. The decree and providence of God do not interfere with the free-will of rational creatures, far less can man's free-will preclude the absolute dominion of the Most High over the hearts, as well as the fortunes of men. The sovereign dominion of God shines clearly in the disposal of men's ways. They either execute their counsels or not, as his wisdom has determined. They sometimes accomplish their own counsels — but whether they do or not, they never fail to accomplish the purpose of God.

Those that know not God, those who will not acknowledge his decrees and providence, and those who set themselves in the most avowed opposition to God — are all of them employed as instruments in the execution of his decrees. The devil himself was deeply concerned in the accomplishment of the glorious purpose of God about our salvation.

God not only determines the event of a man's devices — but every step in his progress. He not only directs every step of his people — but every step in the walk of every-man, and even of his greatest enemies, is ordered by him.

Accordingly, we find Isaiah and Micah, when they speak of the Assyrian invasion of Judea, naming the particulars of their march, as if they had been writing a history, rather than a prophecy; for they were inspired by him who works all things after the counsel of his own will, and makes use of all creatures as the ministers of his providence.

What comfort to God's people may be derived from this point! Our heavenly Father has all hearts, and tongues, and hands under his sovereign management! A dog cannot move its tongue against any one of us, unless he gives it commission. Whatever befalls us by the spite of men, should lead our thoughts to God; and when we consider it as a piece of his divine providence, we shall see that we have no reason to complain — but much reason to adore.

Let us never lay down any plan of conduct, without acknowledging God. If we will not take notice of his providence in proposing our measures, we shall find in the prosecution of them, that there is a divine providence which will have its course, in spite of all the wisdom and strength of men.

Proverbs 16:10. "The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth should not betray justice." It is too evident that this sentence contains not the character of all kings — but only of those who deserve this noble title by their wisdom and goodness. It would not be a perversion of the original text, in this and other passages which speak of the excellent qualities of kings, to translate them as advice, rather than descriptions of their behavior.

Let a divine sentence be in the lips of the king, and let not his mouth transgress in judgment. Great sagacity and insight is necessary for those who govern whole nations. The higher men are exalted, they need the more wisdom — because ignorance and folly are attended, in men of station and power, with very destructive consequences. Kings are not born wiser than other men — but they are under stronger obligations than their subjects, to use with unceasing diligence the means of attaining wisdom, and to pray for it to him who is the Fountain of wisdom and royalty. When God calls men to any station for which great degrees of wisdom are requisite, let them ask it of God, who gives liberally and upbraids not.

Justice is equally necessary in kings, for without this, great talents only render them terrible scourges for their subjects and neighboring nations. This text directs our sentiments about kings. We are not required to shut our eyes, and to believe manifest lies of the greatest men — but it is sinful and dangerous to entertain groundless prejudices against kings, and to weaken their government by speaking to their disadvantage.

How worthy is our Lord Jesus Christ to wear upon his head many crowns! He is the wisdom of God, and all administrations are judgment and righteousness!

Proverbs 16:11. "Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making." It was a custom among the nations who knew not God, to ascribe divinity to the inventors of useful arts — but the Scripture teaches us to ascribe all good inventions to the one living and true God. It was he who taught the merchant, as well as the gardener, discretion. The appointment of weights and measures, as instruments of justice in trade, is to be ascribed to him. A man who puts the royal stamp upon base metal, is accounted a traitor to his prince. Just so, it is a daring wickedness for men to use those weights and balances, which are God's appointments for the benefit of society, as means of injustice to their fellow-men. But a just weight and a just measure are approved by him, for he loves justice and establishes equity.

Proverbs 16:12. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness." Should not wickedness be abhorred by the poor on the dunghill, as well as the king on the throne? No doubt. But sin is greatly aggravated by the place that a man holds in society — and what is pernicious to one individual in a private man, is mischievous to a kingdom in a sovereign.

Jeroboam not only sinned — but made Israel to sin, and his iniquity spread itself from Dan to Beersheba, and continued to diffuse its poison many hundreds of years after he was laid in his grave. Kings must not only abstain from wickedness — but abhor it and punish it. It is their interest to do so, for great armies cannot save a king, nor is his throne secured by the largeness of his dominions, and the valor of his soldiers — but by righteousness, which brings down the blessing of God, and attaches to him the hearts of his subjects.

How greatly does God recommend righteousness to our love and practice! He makes it the instrument of safety and happiness to familial and nations, as well as private people. The histories of nations show us, that the number of years has been hidden to the oppressor, that long and happy reigns have seldom been enjoyed but by good princes, and that national convulsions and revolutions have been the ordinary consequences of of public injustice. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Why? The scepter of your kingdom is a righteous scepter. You love righteousness, and hate iniquity.

Proverbs 16:13. "Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth." There have been too many kings who loved flattery much better than honesty — but they have always found the smart of it. Jeroboam had almost lost an arm, and Ahab lost his life, because they could not bear plain dealing. David was a wise prince, who would not allow liars to abide in his sight, and loved Nathan for his sharp reproofs.

It is the duty of those who have the ear of kings, to give faithful and just counsels, and to tell them necessary though displeasing truths. By this they will at last gain favor — when flatterers are

become the objects of their just abhorrence.

Micaiah was honored as an honest prophet, when Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah was obliged to flee into an inner chamber to hide himself. Even the proud kings of Babylon bestowed the highest honors upon Daniel the captive, for his sagacity and honesty in foretelling the most dreadful calamities.

If God requires his viceregents upon earth to abhor liars and flatterers — then how detestable must lying and flattery be to himself! None of them are ranked by him among his own people, of whom he says, "Surely they are children that will not lie."

Proverbs 16:14-15. "A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it. When a king’s face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring." It is the duty of all men to govern their passions — but especially of kings, because their anger may prove deadly. On the other side, their favor misplaced is of such consequence, and attended with so much honor and advantage, that it may give encouragement to wickedness. The good emperor Theodosius the Great, made the latter part of his life unhappy to himself, by the effects of his rash anger, in causing many of the Thessalonians to be murdered. Just so, many princes have been ruined by means of unworthy favorites. A wise man will not rashly incur the hatred of his prince, or if he has provoked his anger, will endeavor by proper submissions to appease it. And it is a very justifiable piece of prudence in those who are admitted to the presence of monarchs, to make themselves agreeable, by every means that consists with a good conscience.

We have reason, however, to be thankful, that we are not plagued with arbitrary monarchs, as many nations were in ancient times, and still are in our own age. Let us do that which is good, and we need not much fear the frowns of princes.

If the wrath of kings, which reaches only the body, and is circumscribed within the limits of the present life, is as dreadful as a messenger of death — then who can stand before the wrath of him who can kill both soul and body, and torment them in an everlasting lake of fire! How infatuated are those who provoke his displeasure by willful rebellion, and will not accept the benefit of that reconciliation which his grace has provided! Is it all one to us whether we are crushed forever under the avenging arm of God — or blessed with the smiles of the King of Heaven, infinitely more refreshing than the dew upon the grass, or the clouds of the latter rain, which mature the precious fruits of the earth?

We are by nature children of wrath — but Christ is our peace, and through him we are called to the enjoyment of that favor which is the fountain of felicity. Shall the favor of God be less esteemed by us, than the smiles of a great man by his fellow-worms?

Proverbs 16:16. "How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!" If you ask a rich man who lacks prudence, whether gold or wisdom is best — he will answer, gold. But he is a fool, and his word deserves no regard.

If you ask the some question at a poor wise man, he will give the preference to wisdom. But you will say he is not a competent judge, because he lacks experience and impartiality. Here we have a clear and full answer to the question, by a man celebrated equally for his wisdom and riches; and he tells us that it is impossible to declare or imagine, how much wisdom is better than silver or

gold.

Most men prefer gold to wisdom, and thereby reveal their ignorance and folly. For as much as Heaven is higher than the earth, and eternity exceeds a moment in duration — so far does wisdom exceed riches in value. It is uncertain whether riches will do us any service — but it is certain they can do but little. It is uncertain how long they will continue with us — but it is well known, that they will in a few years at most be useless to us. Whereas the least degree of saving wisdom is of immense value, and has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Receive wisdom, therefore, rather than silver; and the instructions of wisdom, rather than choice gold.

Proverbs 16:17. "The path of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his life." To live in any known sin is utterly inconsistent with wisdom and uprightness. It is the property of a sincerely pious man to depart from sin of every kind, and in every degree. He will not allow himself in any sin, however profitable or pleasant — or however dangerous the opposite course of holiness may be. He will not indulge sin in his words, or in his most secret thoughts, more than in his actions — but keeps at a distance from every appearance of evil. He knows that there are many temptations surrounding his path, and that he has a corrupt nature within him, which is a constant and indwelling temptation. Therefore he walks circumspectly, not as a fool — but as a wise man, and daily prays that he may be led and kept in the way of uprightness by the Spirit of the Lord.

Happy is the man who guards his way — he walks in safe path wherein he shall not stumble, for it is the highway of the King of Heaven. He preserves his soul, for he is preserved from the paths of the destroyer. He walks in Christ, and is led by the Spirit of Christ, and no lion nor ravenous beast shall be let loose to destroy him — but he shall come at length to the Zion of blessedness with songs and everlasting joy upon his head. By this mark we ought to try our uprightness, and by this rule to guide our steps.

Proverbs 16:18. "Pride goes before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Pride is a common and dangerous iniquity, and our kind instructor multiplies his cautions against it. The danger of pride is plain from every history of the great transactions that have come to pass in Heaven and in earth. The prophets describe the destructive consequences of this sin with all the strength of their divine eloquence, and all the sublimity of the prophetic style. The history of the evangelists shows us what amazing humiliation was necessary to expiate the guilt contracted by the pride of man. The tendency of the preaching and writings of the apostles, was to cast down every high imagination of men, that no flesh might glory — but in the Lord. Might not this loathsome disease become a cure for itself? Can anything afford us greater cause of humiliation, than to find ourselves guilty of a sin so exceedingly unreasonable and presumptuous as pride? Shall a worm swell itself into an equality with the huge leviathan? What is man that he should be great in his own eyes? What is the son of man, who is a worm, that he should magnify himself as if he were some great being? Was the Son of God humbled for us, that we might not perish forever — and shall we allow pride to reign in our souls?

Proverbs 16:19. "Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." Although pride were not followed by destruction, and humility were attended by the most afflicting circumstances — yet humility is to be infinitely preferred to pride. The word here rendered humble might signify afflicted. Humility and affliction are often in Scripture expressed by the same

word, and described as parts of the same character. Low and afflicted circumstances are often useful, by promoting humiliation of spirit. The reverse sometimes takes place — but it is an evidence of a very intractable spirit — if we cry not when God chastens us, and continue unhumbled under humbling providences. The cottager who has his little tent of straw, is less excusable than the mighty Nebuchadnezzar walking in his pride through the splendid chambers of his stupendous palace.

However mean the circumstances of the humble man may be, he is incomparably happier than the most prosperous of proud sinners. Alexander and Severnus, after all their mighty conquests, are said to have lamented the emptiness of their acquisitions. "I have been all things," said the last of these mighty men, "and nothing is of any use." The joys and triumphs of the prosperous sinner are as unsubstantial and fleeting as the wind. But the humble and afflicted Christian is a happy man, for his poverty of spirit makes him content and thankful. The God who knows the proud afar off, looks on him with delight, and dwells with him, to revive his contrite spirit. The humble man believes that he is in the circumstances which his heavenly Father knows to be best for him. Christ declares him blessed, and he shall be blessed through eternity.

Proverbs 16:20. "Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD." He who handles a matter wisely shall find good; and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he. We ought not only to avoid everything sinful and foolish, and to exercise ourselves diligently in our necessary businesses and duties — but likewise to do everything that we undertake wisely and discreetly. The prudent management of affairs is attended with great comfort and advantage. It will give us reasonable hopes of success, command esteem from others, and prevent the evil consequences that usually result from indiscretion.

David’s name was much honored when he was in the house of Saul, because he behaved himself prudently on every occasion. Solomon’s prudent administration filled the Queen of Sheba with amazement, and made her almost to envy the servants that had the pleasure of attending him, and seeing and hearing his wisdom. In our religious course, we are required to do everything in a decent, orderly, and prudent manner. This will conduce to our own comfort and happiness, to the glory of the God of order, and to the edification of the body of Christ. It will prevent our good from being spoken evil of by those who desire to find occasion against us. But whether we are employed in the business of the world, or in that of God — we must not trust to our own skill and prudence. To God we must look, and on him we must depend for direction, and help, and success; for a man’s heart may devise his way — but the Lord directs his steps. Happy is the man who trusts all his concerns in the hands of God.

His heart is freed from anxious cares.

He receives all needful supplies of wisdom and strength.

He is led in the way of safety, and shall at last inherit the eternal kingdom of God.

Proverbs 16:21. "The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction." A good name is better than precious ointment, and this blessing is enjoyed by the wise in heart, and enables them to be serviceable to other men by the communication of their wisdom. Although the heart is the seat of wisdom, it must not be buried there — but wisdom must reveal itself in the speech and conduct, that many may be edified. We were not born for ourselves alone — but as

we are made of one blood, and joined together by endearing relations, so we are bound to be useful to one another. That our wisdom may be useful, we should endeavor to produce it to advantage, by a graceful and engaging manner of expression. It is not uncommon with wicked men to set off their corrupt sentiments by dressing them in all the beauties of language, and by this means multitudes are seduced into error and folly. Is not wisdom far better entitled to this recommendation than folly? The expression of our thoughts in proper language will increase our learning, by making them more clear and distinct to ourselves, and thus enabling us to pursue them into their native consequences. And learning will be diffused among others, while it is conveyed to them in a clear and engaging manner. What satisfaction must it give a man to improve his neighbors in the most useful knowledge? It makes him a public good, as we are told in the next verse.

Proverbs 16:22. "Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it, but the instruction of fools is folly." Our plenty of water makes us less sensible than the inhabitants of Palestine, of the propriety of that metaphor, whereby everything that is useful or pleasant is in Scripture compared to water. It was one of the recommendations that God himself gave to his people of the land of promise, that it was a land of fountains of water, as well as a land of milk and honey; and the blessings of Christ are compared to water in many passages of the Scriptures. As waters in a thirsty land — so is a wise man to his friends and neighbors. He has in him a well of living waters, and these issue forth in quickening and refreshing discourse. His wise and edifying converse is not confined to those times when he is professedly instructing or counseling his family or friends — but when he acts in character, his familiar converse ministers grace to the hearers. But when fools are giving their instructions and counsels, they cannot hide that folly which cleaves to them continually. They must still be themselves, and it is to be lamented that fools are for the most part more consistent than wise men.

Wise men have folly still remaining in them, and therefore are not wise in everything — but fools are entirely destitute of wisdom, and reveal their foolishness when they are most earnestly endeavoring to appear wise.

Every man, when he builds a house, seeks a situation where he may be furnished with plenty of wholesome water. If we believe the wise man when he commends the wise, we shall be desirous of their society and friendship, and account their counsel a blessing.

Proverbs 16:23. "A wise man’s heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction." The wise man commended a graceful manner of expression to us, but there is a false eloquence which he rather wishes to guard us against. Pompous words, and turns of wit, and fine thoughts which lack solidity, will not make a man truly eloquent. The true excellence of language consists in expressing just and important thoughts with clearness and force, that they may be understood and felt by the hearer. A man who understands a subject well, although he is but an ordinary speaker — will do more justice to it than the finest speaker in the world, who has not a clear view of it. We cannot expect to make others feel the importance of the things we speak — unless our own hearts are duly impressed with them. This text is a good rule for preachers, and directs them to a proper taste for pulpit eloquence. They ought to understand and feel the truths they explain and recommend, and this will greatly assist them to find out acceptable words, by which their hearers will be edified.

It likewise directs hearers in the choice of their pastors. A voluble tongue may enable a preacher to entertain them for a time — but they cannot expect to be fed with knowledge and understanding by one whose heart is not furnished with the truths of the Word and impressed with a deep sense of their importance. The tongue of every wise man is governed and taught by his heart. God is our great Teacher, and he has directed us to be teachers to ourselves. "My thoughts," says David, "instruct me in the night." The heart, by its wise deliberations, must instruct and guide the members of the body, the eyes, the hands, the feet, and particularly the tongue, which is hardest to be taught of them all. The tongue of the just is as choice silver — when that of the wicked is little worth; and it is the heart that makes this mighty difference.

Proverbs 16:24. "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb — sweet to the soul, and healing to the bones." Friendly converse is a very agreeable and useful thing. It . . .

relaxes and charms the mind,

dispels anxiety from the thoughts,

furnishes us with useful information,

promotes mutual kindness, and

makes us to return with renewed vigor to the businesses of life.

Words that convey proper counsels and consolations to people in perplexity and distress, are pleasant and medicinal like honey from the comb. They revive the drooping spirit, and strengthen the feeble knees.

"The words of the pure are pleasant words." The truths of God are unspeakably pleasant to every man that has not a most vitiated mind. They deserve to be expressed in the most pleasant language — but unless they are debased by a manner of expression quite below their dignity, they must be pleasant to the heart, and nourishment to the soul. The honey that drops of itself from the comb, is not so sweet to the mouth as the words of God to the spiritual relish. It is a feast to Christians to hear these truths delivered by the preachers of the gospel — but they are not entertainments merely for the Lord’s day. Christians should accustom themselves to useful and pious communications. Our Lord, in the days of his humiliation, set us an example of entertaining one another with them at ordinary meals and social meetings. How greatly would our comfort and spiritual strength be increased by such holy converse! Such discourse is pleasant in the ears of God himself, and why should it not be pleasant to those who profess to be followers of God as dear children?

Proverbs 16:25. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." It is no evidence that a man is in the right way, because he thinks himself to be in it. There are some who toil all their life in the practice of things which have not the stamp of divine institution — and yet are called by the name of religion. God, instead of saying to them as they expect, "Well done, good and faithful servant," will ask those who mortifying question, "Who has required these things at your hands?"

Some are treasuring up to themselves the fiercest indignation, when they are feeding their pride with ungrounded imaginations of doing acceptable service to God. Let us therefore give earnest

attention to the Word of God, as a light shining in a dark place. There are many of the human race who think they are in the high road to Heaven — and yet know nothing experimentally of Christ, without whom no man shall see the Lord. How terrible will it be for those who imagine themselves in the way to Heaven — to find themselves at last in the lake of fire and brimstone!

Alas! why should men indulge themselves in their own deceivings? Will it make a man well when he is dying, to think he is in a good way? It will only keep him from employing the physician until his case is beyond recovery.

Examine yourselves impartially by the Word of God, by which you must be judged at the last day. If you are then found in a state of condemnation, there is no relief. But, behold, now is the accepted time, and the day of salvation. Judge yourselves, and fly to the hope set before you, and you shall not be judged. So common and dangerous is self-deceit, that the wise man, directed by the Spirit, did not judge a single warning against it sufficient. Again and again he cries to us — to see that we are in the right way that leads unto life.

Proverbs 16:26. "The laborer’s appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on." A man’s industry in his calling is no sure sign of virtue, for although it is a duty commanded by God, and necessary to be practiced — yet profit and necessity constrain a man to labor, who has no regard either to God or man. But this proves that idleness is a most inexcusable sin. It is not only condemned in the Scripture — but it is a sign that a man lacks common reason, as well as piety, when he can neither be drawn by self interest; nor driven by necessity, to work.

Self-love is a damning sin where it reigns as the chief principle of action — but the lack of self-love where it is required, is no less criminal. They should be left to starve who have strength, and lack will to labor. But may those be idle who are exempted by their circumstances from the necessity of laboring for bread? By no means. Idleness wastes precious time, it enervates the body, and rusts the faculties of the mind. Idleness is an endeavor to elude the sentence pronounced upon fallen man — and an introduction to every vice!

Proverbs 16:27. "An ungodly man devises and digs up evil, and in his lips there is a scorching fire."

"If the bishops of England will not learn diligence," said the godly Latimer, "from Christ and his apostles — they may learn it from the devil, who is still busy in his diocese."

We may add, that slothful Christians, if they will not learn diligence from the example of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises, may be roused by considering the restless activity of ungodly men, who employ themselves in the service of sin, as busily as the slave who digs in a mine to supply the avarice of his unfeeling master. The service of sin is the worst of drudgeries, for that cruel master obliges the poor wretches who are enslaved by their own corrupt lusts, to fatigue their minds in contriving, and their bodies in executing their imperious commands.

Some of the ungodly dig up harm, by reviving stories that ought to have been forever buried in forgetfulness. Themistocles told one who offered to teach him the art of memory, that he rather wished to learn the art of forgetfulness. There are too many who remember what ought to have been forever forgotten, and thereby kindle up the flames of contention. In their lips there is a scorching fire; for their words are as dangerous as fire kindled in the thatch of a house, which threatens to burn it down, and set the neighboring houses in a flame. When men have such a fire

kindled in their tongues, it is easy to see by whose breath it is blown up. The devil was liar and a destroyer from the beginning, and endeavors to make men as like to himself as possible. For this end he fetches coals from the bottomless pit, and sets the tongues of wicked men on fire, that they may spread the infernal flame around them, destroying peace and love to the utmost of their power from the earth. What shall be given to these wicked tongues? Burning coals of juniper, and they shall not have a drop of water to quench them!

Proverbs 16:28. "A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends." He is a wretch, who spreads dissensions and enmities among men — who ought to live as brethren in unity. Such a person, Solomon has already told us, is abhorred by the Lord.

One of the most dangerous of these classes of men that sow strife, is that of the whisperers. These men do not think fit to slander their neighbors openly — but secretly defame one man to another. They report their idle or false stories by way of secrets, and generally endeavor to procure credit by pretending to lament these faults which they tell with pleasure, and which they even forge, or at least make them a great deal worse by their spiteful manner of relating them. This kind of evil-speakers is like venomous serpents in the way, or adders in the path, which hiss and sting men when they are dreading no evil. Men may oppose open enemies, and ward off blows which they see — but how can a man guard himself from the invisible arrows that is shot by the whisperer, while he keeps himself concealed from view. By these agents of the wicked one, irreparable breaches are often made in families and neighborhoods, and incurable jealousies excited among the dearest friends.

It is our duty never to lend an ear to the whisperer, nor to believe anything bad of our friend and neighbor — unless the cowardly backbiter will venture to become an open accuser.

If our own characters are in any danger from these arrows that fly about in darkness, let us commit them to God, "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

Proverbs 16:29. "A violent man entices his neighbor and leads him down a harmful path." The devil never did any good to any of his servants — and yet some of them seem to have more zeal for their master’s interest, than many of the servants of Christ. These violent men compass sea and land to make others as much the children of Hell as themselves.

Such tempters to wickedness are to be abhorred as the greatest plagues of mankind! Thieves deprive us of our money, and murderers deprive us only of a short life — but these emissaries of Hell who would seduce us to sin, attempt to rob us of heavenly treasures, and to destroy our immortal souls! The Spirit of God warns us at great length, in the first chapter of this book, to avoid their snares.

Whenever any man would seduce us into a way that is harmful, let us remember what the end of that way is, and hear his words with the same indignation as if he were persuading us to cast ourselves into a burning fiery furnace! The character of the seducer might be sufficient to set us on our guard —

Proverbs 16:30. "He shuts his eyes to devise perverse things; moving his lips, he brings evil to pass." The wicked takes so much delight in wickedness that he shuts his eyes, to meditate harm with an undisturbed mind, and vigorously employs the faculties which God has given him, in the

service of his grand enemy. His tongue is a fire, a whole world of iniquity — but it has not enough of wickedness in the compass of its power to gratify his infernal thirst for sin, and therefore he speaks with his feet, and teaches with his fingers, and winks with his eye, to express the malignity of his heart, and give the signal to his companions in wickedness.

Strange that the sons of Adam should thus abandon themselves to wickedness, and serve sin with so much toil, when the wages of it is death. Men complain that the way to Heaven is full of difficulty and danger. But as broad as the way to Hell is, there are many who undergo much more fatigue in it than the way to Heaven requires — and they have not the comforts and joyful hopes to entertain them under their toil and sweat, that the travelers to Zion enjoy. They pass through a Hell of labors and fears — to a Hell of fire and brimstone! Shall we join in a confederacy with these workers of iniquity? Let us rather abhor their company, unless we wish our souls to be hereafter gathered with lost sinners in the dungeon of Hell.

Proverbs 16:31. "Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life."

"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness.

Both Scripture and reason teach us to honor gray hair. But old men are not always wise, neither do the aged always understand judgment, and thus they forfeit that honor which they might otherwise expect.

Old age is an honor, and royalty is an honor — but better is a poor and wise child, than an old and foolish king who will no more be admonished. His self-conceit and intractable disposition, debase at once the luster of his crown, and the glory of his gray hair — but to be an aged saint, is an honor that entitles a man to the highest respect. None but fools will despise him for those infirmities, which are the inseparable attendants of gray hair.

How provoking to God such insolence is, may be learned from the story of the two she-bears that tore up forty-two children for saying to Elijah, "Go up, you bald head! Go up, you bald head!" The honor bestowed by God upon old Christians in lengthening their days, the experience they have gained, and the usefulness of their former life — should engage us to pay them great respect. We honor those whose heads have been encircled with crowns by the hands of men — and will we refuse honor to those whom God himself has crowned with silver hair. It is a comfort to aged Christians to find due respect paid to them, and they should endeavor to secure this respect, by avoiding peevishness and covetousness, which are vices incident to this period of life, by bearing with young people, although they have not learned so much wisdom as themselves — by submitting with cheerfulness to the unavoidable weaknesses of age, by trusting in God, by showing the faithfulness of God and the advantages of religion to the rising generation, and by bringing forth the various fruits proper to that time of life.

Young people should remember that old age is fast hastening to them — and show that regard to the aged, which they will then expect to meet with when old themselves. They ought to enter into the narrow way of righteousness, that they may be found in it by old age or death. If old age should find them in the broad way of sin — their situation is very dangerous, though not altogether desperate.

Proverbs 16:32. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty — a man who controls his temper, than one who takes a city." The meek obtain the noblest victories, and enjoy the happiest kind of authority. They have power over their passions, which are brought under the dominion of reason — and are not allowed to make such insurrections as those which disquiet the spirits of the proud and haughty. The conquerors of nations and cities have been celebrated by historians and poets, and their valor and success dazzle the eyes of the generality of men; and yet few of them deserve praise. Seneca observes, that such heroes as Alexander the Great deserve the same kind of honors with wild beasts, and earthquakes, and pestilences, or any other instrument of desolation to mankind.

Some conquerors are nevertheless truly honorable, who have exposed their lives in just and necessary wars, for the service of their country and the suppression of tyranny. Gallant exploits of such true heroes, are celebrated in the inspired writings. But he who is slow to anger and rules his passions deserves far higher praise, for he gains a nobler victory. Others conquer the bodies of men — but he conquers his own soul. The conquerors of nations fight with the arms of other men — but the meek have no soldier to deprive them of any part of their praise.

Most of the celebrated heroes conquered at the expense of their fellow-creatures, and spread horror and devastation around them like the tigers of the desert — but the meek of the earth are public blessings, and deserve the love of all men. Of earthly conquerors it may be said, that they have slain their thousands and ten thousands of men, by their swords and warlike artillery. But of the meek we may say, that they have put to flight armies of devils by the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith; for these malignant spirits fight against our souls, to support the dominion of our passions over our reason.

Other conquerors have their praise from men, and chiefly from men of foolish minds — for the wise look upon the generality of them as the plagues of the world. But those who are slow to anger have their praise from the unerring Judge, who exalts the meek to inherit the earth, while he looks upon the proud ravagers of nations with disdain, and spurns them into the dust. The conquerors of cities and nations are wretched slaves to their own imperious passions, which forced Alexander to kill some of his best friends, and made him so unhappy, that he almost killed himself. The meek enjoy the sweet and glorious liberty of the sons of God. The crowns of conquerors soon wither — but the honors of him who rules over his own spirit shall continue forever. Do we wish to enjoy honor and power? Let us fight against the corruptions of our own mind, with the armor of righteousness on our right hand and on our left. To be our own masters, will be more glorious for us than if we were masters of the world!

Proverbs 16:33. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." By lots men refer the determination of an event to that which in respect of men is purely chance, and comes not within the compass of men’s knowledge or power — but it is wholly determined by the Lord, who does all things, great and small, according to the counsel of his on will. A remarkable instance of this truth we have in the division of the promised land among the tribes of Israel, which was done by casting lots — but these lots were managed by divine providence in such a manner, that Jacob’s predictions in blessing his children were exactly accomplished. For this reason, lots are not to be used by way of amusement — but in matters of importance worthy to be referred to the arbitration of God, and incapable of being otherwise decided to advantage. This proverb teaches

us that the things that fall out to our view by pure chance, are within the compass of Providence, which so entirely regulates everything, however inconsiderable, that not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a hair from our head — without our heavenly Father.

Time and chance happen to all men, and the most important events of the life of men, and of kingdoms and nations, turn upon very small hinges, which do not come within the verge of our knowledge and care. The safety of the Jewish nation in the days of Esther, depended upon a very great number of accidents, which appear to us very unimportant, and very remote from the interests of God's people. But the Lord Almighty, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, was their Savior and hope in the day of evil.

Time and chance are His, and . . .

the feast of Ahasuerus,

the disobedience of Vashti,

the pride of the king and his ministers,

the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh, with the discovery of it by Mordecai,

the beauty of Esther,

the departure of sleep on a certain night from the king's eyes,

the thought that struck him to have the Chronicles of the kingdom read for his amusement,

the superstition of Haman,

the outcome of his lots, and

the good-humor which Ahasuerus happened to be in when Esther came into his presence to petition for the life of her countrymen

— all these things worked together, under the direction of the Lord, for the salvation of his chosen people. Do not think that your mountain stands immovably strong, for if God hides his face — you will be troubled. He can make the smallest trifle, the instrument of destroying all the strength of your confidence.

Trust in him at all times, and do not trouble yourselves with anxious thoughts about the things that shall come to pass in the future parts of life. We never reveal so much folly, as when we set up for prophets; for the things that are to come to pass, depend upon a very complicated chain of causes, consisting of innumerable links, which are quite out of the reach of our view and control. But every one of them is under the eye of God, and in his sovereign omnipotent hand.

Blessed are those who give up all their fortunes to the will of God, with a cheerful resignation. Nothing shall befall them — but according to the will of him who loves them better than themselves, and knows infinitely better what is good for them!

# 01.17. Proverbs 17

Chapter 17.

Proverbs 17:1-28

Proverbs 17:1. "Better is a dry morsel, with peace and quiet, than an house full of sacrifices with strife." Solomon expresses the most delicious entertainments by the word sacrifices, intimating his hope, that none would presume to offer unto God a sacrifice, but of the best of their cattle — for the best of beings is to be honored with the best that we can give him. The meat of the peace-offerings was a feast for the family and friends of the offerer — and there could not be a more delightful feast, when piety and friendship gave a relish to the entertainment. But the sumptuous provisions are turned into gall and wormwood by strife — while the bitterest things are made sweet by love and friendship. Solomon has already given us the instruction contained in this verse. But it is useful to have it still before our eyes, for peace and friendship are not only the balm of life — but of great importance in our pious course. Strife is productive of innumerable sins, and renders us unfit for the duties we owe to God, as well as those of our various relationships. Love and peace make every service to our families and friends pleasant, and prepare us to lift up holy hands to God, without malice or anger.

Proverbs 17:2. "A wise servant will rule over a disgraceful son, and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers." A poor situation does not disqualify men from obtaining and using wisdom, nor from enjoying the honors and benefits of it. Nor will an elevated rank support men in folly, or hinder them from feeling its mischievous effects. A poor wise man is too often despised — but it is only by the unwise; for those who have wisdom set a high value upon it, wherever it is found, and honor the poorest person who possesses it.

It is perhaps owing to the partiality, and not the wisdom of parents, that this proverb has not been more frequently verified in the letter. Children that are a shame to their parents, have sometimes brought disgrace upon themselves, from those who once loved them with a tender affection, and still love them.

Reuben was the beginning of Jacob’s strength — and yet he lost his dignity to his younger brother Joseph, who, according to the customs of those times, was to be in some degree under his government. But even when partiality prevails over reason in the behavior of parents — folly, by its native consequences, and the just providence of God, does often reduce men from honor and wealth — to poverty and disgrace, and place them below those over whom they once tyrannized.

Wisdom exalts servants from poverty to wealth, or even to power. Joseph was a slave in Potiphar’s house, and then a prisoner — but he was made lord over Potiphar himself.

Servants have often for their wisdom, shared in the inheritance. Solomon himself married his daughters to two of his own subjects. Jarha, an Egyptian servant, was taken into the family of his master, and became the head of a family in Israel. This verse gives parents a proper hint about the

distribution of their estates, and directs those who have the disposal of places of trust, to pay a greater regard to wisdom and integrity — than to high birth, or great estates, or the connections of friendship and kindred.

How excellent is wisdom, which raises the slave from grinding at the mill, and the beggar from the dunghill — to places of distinction, and to the truest honors, because they are the pure fruits of goodness! How miserable a thing is folly, which degrades the high, and brings misery upon the latter days of those who flourished like green bay-trees in the prime of their life!

Proverbs 17:3. "The refining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold — but the Lord tries the hearts!" As the fire tries metals, and separates the dross from them — so the Lord tries the hearts of men. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and he perfectly discerns all the secrets of the heart.

Men are too often strangers to themselves, and mistake the principles by which they are governed — but God is greater than our hearts, and every thought is naked and open to his eyes. He knows our words before they are pronounced by the mouth, and our imaginations before they are framed in our minds. This is God’s prerogative.

There is not a greater folly among those corrupters of Christianity, the Roman Catholics, than their practice of praying to saints and angels. You, Lord, even you alone, know the hearts of all men, and therefore ought to be feared, and to receive all religious homage.

It is vain for men to worship God with the lips, while the heart is removed from him; nor will our good deeds to our fellow-men be accepted by God, when they do not proceed from a principle of love. This proverb may likewise be understood of those solemn providences by which his people are tried, as gold and silver are tried by the fire. Afflictions and calamities are like a furnace which God has in Jerusalem, by which dross is revealed, and purged away. But herein God reveals his kindness — that he does not keep his gold in the fire until it is entirely free from the dross, for if such a furious heat were applied to it as is requisite to make metals entirely pure, it would be altogether destroyed. "I have refined you," says he, "but not with silver; I have chosen you (or made you a choice vessel) in the furnace of affliction."

Proverbs 17:4. "A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue." Solomon has often warned us against compliance with temptation; and every godly man will surely follow his advice. He is a wicked man who gives heed to evil lips. Wicked men have a great treasury of evil in their hearts — and yet have not enough to satisfy their own corrupt dispositions. They are like covetous men, in whom their large possessions only increase their lust of having, and therefore they carry on a trade with other wicked men, who are able to add to their store of iniquity, by flattering and counseling them in sin. Their heart gathers iniquity to itself, not merely by its own corrupt imaginations and contrivances — but by hearing the devilish lessons of those who have made a greater proficiency in that wisdom which comes from below. They are blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness — but cursed are those who add drunkenness to thirst in the service of sin, for they shall be filled with their own devices. By hearkening to the wicked instructions of Jezebel, Ahab destroyed himself and his house; and the political advices of Jonadab proved no less fatal to the apparent heir of David. A liar is a wicked man, and gives ear to an evil tongue, for by the lies of other men he increases his own stock, and is enabled to retail his abominable stories better. He can say that he gives the story as he heard it, (although he has no

scruple to make some additions), and thinks this a sufficient justification of himself; if the falsehood of what he has told is detected. A man shows himself to be a liar and slanderer, when he gives too easy belief to bad stories, that he may have the barbarous satisfaction of spreading them. An honest man will not wound his neighbor's character, by trusting the words of a talebearer, and divulging what may very possibly be false. And even when there is too much ground for believing the report, he will be backward to spread it any farther, without some good reason.

Proverbs 17:5. "He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished." It is our indispensable duty to compassionate the poor, and if Providence puts it in our power, to relieve them. Yet some are so destitute of affection, that they will trample them lower in the dust, by insult and oppression. The reason why poor men are more exposed than the rich to reproach, is, because they are supposed incapable of taking revenge. But it ought to be remembered, that they are showing contempt for their Maker. If God should appear in human shape, would we dare to insult him? Would not the fear of a just and dreadful vengeance deter us? And to mock the poor, amounts to the very same thing.

God did actually appear in our nature, and he was then poor for our sakes; and those who despise the poor, despise them for a reason that reflects upon our Savior himself when he dwelt among us. Poor Christians are members of his body, and every injury done to them, he considers as done to himself. The principle of this proverb extends to all people that are despised, or held up to ridicule, on account of any defect of body or mind, or misfortune in circumstances. When we are what God made us, and meet with calamities from the appointment of providence, every indignity or affront offered us reflects upon our Maker.

Let no man, therefore, be ashamed of any circumstance in his condition which is not the fruit of sin, unless he is ashamed to own his Creator. To rejoice in calamities, is a mark of a child of the devil. Christ wept for the miseries that were to befall his implacable enemies for their cruelty to himself. We find the people of God rejoicing and praising God at the destruction of their enemies — but their satisfaction was caused, not by any pleasure in the miseries of their enemies — but by the discoveries of God's mercy to themselves, and the vindication of his righteousness, by the infliction of deserved punishment on the irreconcilable enemies of God. A savage delight in the misery of enemies, is often represented in Scripture as the temper of the worst of men, who thereby expose themselves to signal divine vengeance!

Proverbs 17:6. "Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children." Children are the means of preserving the name of their parents when they are dead. And while they are alive, it is their delight and honor to be surrounded with descendants, except when they are so unnatural to the instruments of their being, as to disgrace them by their evil ways. When people are now on the verge of the grave, and everything else becomes insipid to them, their children's children are a great comfort, and procure them much respect, when they are trained up in the way wherein they should go.

Old men are therefore bound to give thanks to God for giving and sparing to them a posterity on the earth. "I had not thought," said Jacob to his beloved son, "to see your face again — and lo, God has showed me your children also."

Children are a heritage from the Lord, and ought to be instructed in his ways, that parents may have pleasure in them, and in their young families, when the days come wherein they would otherwise be obliged to say, "We have no pleasure in them."

It was a custom among the Romans, for men that wanted sons, to adopt young men, and give them the title and privileges of sons, that their name might not die with themselves. Christians to whom God has denied, or from whom he has taken away the blessing of children, may find a better method of having some to be their crown and glory. If, by their holy example and pious converse, they win souls to Christ, these shall be their crown of rejoicing in the day of Christ.

Some children are so destitute of natural affection, that they care not how soon their parents die — that they may enjoy their estates, and become masters of their own actions. These are profane people like Esau, who thought he would have it in his power to kill Jacob, when Isaac, who was now an old man, was dead.

Dutiful children will think it an ornament to them to have their aged parents still alive, even when their poverty and weakness make it the duty of their children to labor for their support. But are parents of every kind a glory to their children? The hoary head is not always a crown of glory to the man that wears it, or to his family — but only when it is found in the way of righteousness. The seed of the righteous are respected for the sake of their parents by godly men, and even God himself has a regard to them.

Truly there is a reward to the righteous, which extends to their families and posterity. Righteousness children are a crown to their parents, and parents are a glory to their children; and therefore we ought not only to practice — but to promote and maintain it among our families.

Proverbs 17:7. "Eloquent words are not fitting for a fool; even less are lies fitting for a ruler." Fools make themselves ridiculous, by affecting to speak of things beyond their reach, or to use language too high for their abilities. For a wicked man to talk like a Christian, is equally unseemly. When a covetous man talks in praise of liberality, or a hypocrite commends the integrity of David — they condemn themselves. For a beggar who wears rags to put upon his head the crown of a Duke, is ridiculous, because the agreement of things to one another is requisite to the beauty and propriety of anything. Professions of religion joined to wicked practices, are equally absurd. In nothing is consistency to be more studied than in ordering our words and conduct. When a wicked man has the tongue of a saint, he discredits religion, and brings suspicion upon truly pious men. The profane world will say, "Do you hear how finely that man talks? And yet he can take the advantage of his neighbor in a bargain! They are all alike, and their profession’s are but nets to catch the unthinking."

Good words will do no good to a bad man — but aggravate his condemnation; out of his own mouth shall he be judged. They are not acceptable to God. As Christ would not allow devils to make confessions of faith, even when their doctrine was sound — so God will not allow the hypocrite to take his covenant into his lips, because such a holy thing is polluted when it comes into the mouth of filthy dogs!

Lying lips are no less fitting in the mouth of a prince, who ought to honor the dignity of his station by the dignity of truth. A prince of our own is said to have frequently used this proverbial saying, "He who knows not how to dissemble, knows not how to reign." You may judge from the text

before us, whether he deserved to be called the Solomon of his age.

It was certainly a nobler saying of one of the kings of France — that if truth were banished from all the rest of the world, it ought to be found in the hearts of princes. When a young prince asked a certain philosopher to give him a directory for his conduct, all his instructions were comprised in one sentence, "Remember that you are a king’s son!"

All Christians are advanced to spiritual honors of the most exalted kind. They are the children of God, and heirs of the eternal kingdom — and ought to resemble their heavenly Father, who is the God of holiness. Their dignity obliges them to a behavior worthy of it, and of Him whose grace has conferred it.

Let Christians remember who they are, and how they came to be what they are — and act in befitting character.

Proverbs 17:8. "A gift is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds." Gifts have a very strong influence in gaining love. They are like precious stones in the eyes of those who receive them, charming their eyes, and powerfully turning their affections to the giver. The influence of gifts is almost universal, for they work upon the heart of the wise and the benevolent, as well as of the foolish and selfish.

It was a sign of Abigail’s prudence to meet David with generous presents, as well as a persuasive speech, when he was coming in fierce resentment to extirpate her husband’s family. And when Jacob met his incensed brother, he not only endeavored to pacify him by submissive words — but also loaded him with noble gifts, which were perhaps the most effectual means, (next to Jacob’s prayers), to regain his lost friendship.

Such is the efficacy of gifts, that God expressly forbids them to be received by judges from parties that have a cause to be decided by them — because these bribes blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

"The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!" What influence should the gifts of God have upon our hearts! They are more numerous than the hairs upon our head, and far more precious than pearls and diamonds! Surely they must have a constraining influence upon every heart that is not harder than the nether millstone. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Proverbs 17:9. "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." As we are required to love our neighbors as ourselves, so we ought to promote love in the world, and to seek the love of other men to ourselves. It is a duty that befits the followers of Christ, to be concerned whether we are loved by our neighbors or not. We should not be careless whether they obeyed God and performed their duty, or lived in the neglect of it. Whatever things are lovely, are to be minded and practiced by us; and nothing is more lovely than to cover transgressions — as nothing is more hateful than the repeating of them. To cover our own transgressions, like Adam, would be very dangerous — but we have the noblest examples to recommend to us the covering of other men’s faults. How lovely was the behavior of our Redeemer, when he excused the lazy behavior of his three disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, and when he bestowed such high commendations on their fidelity in his discourse with them, and his prayers to his Father, although he knew that they would soon forsake him in his

sufferings, and make the best shift they could for themselves! Nor was his goodness confined to his Apostles; he excused even his murderers, when he prayed to his Father for their forgiveness. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who covers our iniquities by his pardoning mercy, and removes them as far from us as the east is from the west! Surely his pardoning mercy to us — must mightily persuade us to cover the offences of our fellow sinners by the mantle of charity.

Love covers all sins. Paul teaches us how this is done, and our self-love may give us much light and direction on this point. Had we a love to our neighbors like that which we bear to ourselves — we would not be ready to observe their faults, unless they were very glaring. We would make much allowance for the temptations that seduced them, and consider how liable we ourselves are to fall before temptation. We would not keep our eyes fixed upon their faults — but consider likewise what there is in them to provoke us to love. We would not be harsh in reproving, nor backward in forgiving them. Nor would any consideration provoke us to cast in their teeth those old faults that seemed to be forgotten. By such a behavior as this, love is sought and gained. Was it possible that Joseph’s brethren, as cruel as they had been, could refuse their love to him, after the apologies that he so kindly made for their faults? But he who follows the contrary method of behavior seeks hatred, and alienates the affections of the most cordial friends from one another. The censorious man, the tale-bearer, the person that revives old quarrels — is a mortal enemy to love; a faithful servant of the accuser of the brethren; an enemy to him who is our peace with God and with one another. If such dreadful punishments are threatened to those who are destitute of love — then what shall be the portion of those who scatter the seed of enmity and discord through a whole town, by the stories they tell, and by the lies and misrepresentations which they mingle with their idle tales! The meaning of this proverb must not be stretched into a prohibition of punishments or censures necessary to be inflicted on offenders, or of friendly reproofs — all which are recommended in other places of this book.

Proverbs 17:10. "A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool." The wise man gives us many marks by which fools may be distinguished from wise men; and does not insist more on any of them, than the different uses they make of rebukes and correction. He not only tells us that the wise man hears rebuke, and the fool scorns it — but that one rebuke will have a better effect on a wise man, than an hundred lashes on a fool.

Fools have sometimes received correction, and made a good use of it — but they were fools no longer, for the rod and reproof gave them wisdom. But it is a sign that folly is deeply ingrained, when a hundred rods leave men as great fools as they found them. Wicked men have uncircumcised ears, and they cannot hear the word of the Lord. They also have hard hearts, and the works of God, in which he speaks louder than in words, leave no impression on them. On the contrary, we often find them walking contrary unto God, and making their faces harder by those means that should have wrought the very opposite effect.

Ahaz, in the time of his distress, trespassed yet more and more against the Lord.

David was of a very opposite spirit; and when Nathan said unto him, "You are the man!" he replied, "I have sinned against the Lord!" and immediately composed the fifty-first psalm, to testify his deep repentance to the church, and to every generation of mankind.

We must not be so strict in trying other men by this mark of wisdom, as ourselves, for wise men are not wise in every piece of their behavior. Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord his God all his days — and yet he was very angry with a prophet for giving him a just reproof in the name of the Lord. But such is not the ordinary temper of God's people, for God takes the heart of stone away from them, and gives them hearts of flesh, and they have the Spirit of God dwelling within them, who opens their ears to discipline, and seals their instruction.

It is good to have tender hearts susceptible of impressions from reproof, and from the providence of God. As a lively faith will enable the Christian to bear the greatest trials, so a tender conscience will enable him to derive spiritual improvement from the gentlest afflictions — which are not to be despised, because they come to us with a message from God. This text likewise teaches us to make a difference, according to the dispositions of men, in the reproofs or chastisements that we are called to dispense unto men. Eli reproved his children with words, when they deserved an hundred stripes, if the law had allowed it. On the other hand, some parents provoke their children to wrath, instead of reforming them, by their severities.

Proverbs 17:11. "An evil man is bent only on rebellion; a merciless official will be sent against him." Some of the wicked are very pestilent members of society, who, casting off all fear of God and the king, employ themselves in those wicked courses which expose them to the vengeance of the laws, so that the messengers of justice must be employed in their disagreeable task of punishment for the benefit and peace of society. But others of the wicked have some fear of the king, although they have no fear of God before their eyes. Their corrupt dispositions take another course, which exposes them to equal danger, though from a different quarter. Their employment is to carry weapons against the omnipotent King of the world, and they pursue their rebellious courses without intermission! There is much iniquity in their actions, there is a world of iniquity in their tongues, and the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts are only evil continually. They are blind, and know not what they are doing! While they think they are only gratifying their own dispositions, and making use of their liberty — they are provoking God, by a continued course of disobedience to his will. A merciless official shall be sent against these rebels; for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

God has innumerable messengers of justice, for every instrument of vengeance is at his command, and employed at his pleasure, to avenge his quarrel upon the breakers of his law. Beasts and men, diseases and death, angels and devils — are in arms at his call, to seize upon the criminals whom he means to punish. The weakest creature, considered as a messenger of the Almighty, is irresistible by transgressors! The proud spirit of Pharaoh was humbled to the dust by flies and frogs which were sent among the Egyptians. The hornets fought with success against the accursed Canaanites in the days of Joshua, as well as the destroying angel who fought for Hezekiah against the Assyrians.

God sometimes employs merciless messengers to chastise his own people. When David numbered his subjects, 70,000 of them were destroyed in three days by a visible merciless messenger, under the direction of an invisible minister of providence.

If God takes such vengeance of the rebellions of some whom he pardons — then what will the end be of those who seek only rebellion! Let the wicked cast down their weapons of iniquity, and acquaint themselves with God, and be at peace with him through Jesus Christ. Otherwise they

may expect that dreadful messenger of God, the king of terrors, to be sent against them, to plunge them into everlasting burnings!

Proverbs 17:12. "Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs, than a fool in his folly." What a mercy is it that a fool is not always in his folly, under the irresistible impulse of domineering passions, driving on in his career of harm, without fearing God or regarding men! If a gracious providence did not rein the wicked of the world by a strong bridle, the world would become more uninhabitable than those jungles, where lions and bears are constantly prowling and destroying. No creature is fiercer than a bear bereaved of her cubs.

Hushai thought he could not use a better argument to affright Absalom from following the dangerous counsels of Ahithophel, than by comparing the fierce valor of David and his mighty men to the rage of a bear bereaved of her cubs. And yet this animal in its greatest fury, is not so dangerous as a fool in the heat of passion. A bear in its rage makes no distinction between those who have robbed her and others — but falls upon anyone she sees, and tears him in pieces. Yet you may by escape from her, or secure yourself from her violence. But a fool in his folly will neither be reduced to reason by just reproofs, nor soothed by the mildest language — but behaves like the venomous adder, which will not be charmed by the wisest charmer. The most furious of beasts are men whose passions rule their reason, and make use of the understandings they have, to enable them to behave more brutishly than natural brute beasts can do. Alas! that rational creatures, made after the image of God, should debase themselves to such a degree, that the savage animals should not furnish sufficient emblems to represent their folly!

Why should any human creature chose to be a beast, or a devil, rather than a man! Let those who give up themselves to the government of passion, consider this text, and be ashamed, and show themselves at length rational creatures. Let us all beware of rousing the sleeping passions of such madmen, if we value our own safety and innocence.

God’s people ought to be on their guard lest they should, under provocation, be seduced into an imitation of such folly.

Proverbs 17:13. "If a man pays back evil for good — then evil will never leave his house." Ingratitude is one of the vilest sins, and gives a clear discovery of a disposition evil beyond expression; and the punishment of it shall be proportioned to the degree of its guilt. The ungrateful man brings evil, not only on himself — but likewise on his house. And this misery, which so great a sin procures, does not come like a stranger to the house, to tarry for a night — but takes up its residence, and abides in it forever.

Ingratitude to Gideon kindled a fire in Shechem, which consumed the inhabitants of that place and its environs, together with Abimelech their tempter. But the most striking illustration of this sentence, is the history of the Jewish nation. Never was such ingratitude showed to any benefactor, as they showed to the Son of God — and never was the punishment of any people so dreadful, and of so long continuance. That scattered people proclaim to every nation under Heaven how dangerous the sin of ingratitude is, especially when God our Savior is the object of it.

Although we are grateful to men for their favors, yet if we take no notice of God as the supreme Benefactor — we are as justly chargeable with this sin, as those who have a present sent them by a friend; and return all their thanks to the carrier who brings it. The worst ingratitude in the world is

a continuance in unbelief or disobedience — in opposition to the gracious declarations of the gospel. Those who despise the riches of gospel-grace, must burn forever in fiercer flames than those to whom the grace of God has never appeared, although they lived in constant disobedience to the will of God, as far as nature revealed it.

Proverbs 17:14. "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out." Nothing is more dangerous than fire or water, when they become masters instead of servants to us. The harms which arise from contention, are illustrated from the rage of both these elements. When a breach is made in the bank that confines a huge body of water, the water seizes the opportunity, widens the breach more and more, pours itself forth in mighty currents, and gathering new force continually, it soon becomes altogether irresistible, breaks through every obstacle in its way, and sweeps along everything that meets it, with a violence which cannot be controlled.

Such are the dismal effects of contention, which might have been checked at the beginning — but gathers fury in its progress, and will soon lay desolate a man’s peace, and credit, and comfort, and conscience, and hurry him on to speak and to act in such a manner as if he were altogether bereaved of his reason, and transformed into a raging bear! The effects of quarrels do not always stop at the people with whom it begun. This deluge often sweeps away houses, and countries, and nations, and leaves a scene of confusion and ruin in those places which formerly were the seat of prosperity and peace.

We must therefore endeavor to get out of contention, whenever we find ourselves engaged in it, with as much haste as a man who endeavors to make his escape from a deluge of waters, by which he is in danger of being overwhelmed. But it is still better to leave off contention before it is started. The banks of rivers are more easily preserved, than repaired after a breach is made. To keep ourselves out of this snare of the devil, it is our duty to mortify every selfish disposition, to keep every passion under the government of sanctified reason, to avoid everything that may give offence, to be hesitant in conceiving offences against others; and in our dispositions, words, and actions, to observe that great rule of doing to others as we wish that others should do to us.

There are some cases in which contending is a duty. The apostles write unto us, and exhort us to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. A zeal for truth and holiness is a necessary branch of Christian character. But in striving for the faith of the gospel, we must avoid the wrath of man, which works not the righteousness of God, and carefully preserve the holy fire of religious zeal, from mixture with that unhallowed fire of selfish passions which has so often usurped its name, and brought it into discredit with superficial observers.

Proverbs 17:15. "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just — they both are an abomination to the Lord." That condemning the just is a grievous crime, there is no doubt. But some will be startled at the wise man’s assertion, that justifying the wicked is a crime of the like nature and malignity. But we rebel against God by turning to the right hand, as well as by turning to the left — from that straight way in which we are commanded to walk.

Justifying the wicked has an appearance of mercy in it — but there is cruelty to millions in unreasonable acts of mercy to individuals.

Though it is bad to live in a state where everything was forbidden — it is worse to live in a state where everything was allowed. Historians tell us, that the provinces of the empire suffered more oppression under the administration of the mild prince — than in the bloody reign of Domitian.

Judges are guilty of this detestable sin, not only when they pronounce unrighteous sentences — but when they unnecessarily obstruct the judging of causes, whereby the righteous have their righteousness in part or for a time taken from them.

Lawyers, and witnesses, and jurymen, are guilty in various degrees of these crimes — when they willfully contribute their influence to the perversion of justice, or withhold their influence in their respective situations from the support of a righteous cause, where they are called to its defense.

Private people in common life are not frequently chargeable with justifying the wicked, because they are not called in most cases to condemn them. And yet they may incur this guilt on some occasions, by pleading the cause of the wicked in opposition to truth, or to that justice which they owe to the innocent and oppressed, or by taking the part of transgressors in such a manner as to countenance their sins. But the sin of condemning the righteous, or pronouncing too severe sentences upon those who have been overtaken in a fault — is very common in ordinary conversation, and the Scripture often warns us against it. Ministers are guilty of this sin when they preach doctrines unscripturally rigid, making those things to be sinful, which are not condemned in the Word of God; or carrying the marks necessary to saving faith to a pitch too high to suit the generality of true Christians, or applying to particular people those terrors that do not justly belong to them. Such was the fault of Job’s friends.

It is a mere dangerous error in preachers, to accommodate the characters of real Christians to many hypocrites by unsound representations of them, or to flatter the sinner into a false belief that he is a righteous man. By all these methods, righteousness is discouraged, and wickedness favored, in contradiction to the mind of God.

God never condemns the righteous — but it is his peculiar glory to justify the ungodly, through the execution of the curse upon his righteous Son. In each of these divine transactions, the injustice condemned in our text is revealed to be detestable to God, for righteousness shines with more solemn splendor in the infliction of punishment upon our Surety, and in our absolution from guilt — than in the flames of the lake of fire and brimstone! God would not justify his own elect to the disparagement of his inflexible justice — but condemned all their sins, and punished them in Christ — and so he is just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.

Proverbs 17:16. "Why is there in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, since he has no heart for it?" If fools had no means of obtaining wisdom put into their hand, their folly would be excusable — but when they have a price allowed them for procuring wisdom — and yet have no heart to it, what apology can be made for them? Everything that gives us an opportunity of becoming wise, is a talent for which we must give account to our great Lord. Bibles, and divine ordinances, and time, and leisure, and wealth, which enables us to furnish in greater abundance the means of knowledge — are a price put into our hands to get wisdom, and if we use them not to this valuable end, we despise the riches of God’s goodness, and act like unreasonable creatures. Nay, the basest animals reprove us, for the stork and the crane observe their seasons for flying to warmer climates; and the ants, though a feeble people, never neglect the gainful business of the

summer and harvest.

How is the fool so stupid as to neglect such important business as the gaining of wisdom, and trifle away his time and talents in vanity? Surely if he were informed of a rich inheritance to be gotten on easy terms, he would show a proper regard to his own interest. Does he not know that wisdom is infinitely more precious than land or gold? No, this is the reason of his carelessness. He has no heart or desire for wisdom — he knows not its value, and has no relish of its pleasures. That which is more precious than rubies — is to him more worthless than a pebble. That which is more sweet than honey — is as tasteless as the white of an egg to him. Is this price, then, put into his hand in vain? To himself it is worse than in vain. Every means of wisdom shall prove galling to his remembrance, when his eyes are opened — for opened they shall be at last, to discern the glory of that which he despised. The worm that is to prey upon him forever, will be continually fed by the recollection of sermons despised, and days wasted in idleness. But this price will not be lost to those who put it into the hands of the fool; for their generous endeavors to turn the foolish to the wisdom of the just, will be as graciously rewarded as the more successful attempts of others to serve their generation. Nor will God be a loser of glory by the self-ruining folly of sinners — but his justice will forever triumph in the revenges executed upon the despisers of his patience and grace.

Proverbs 17:17. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." There are many false friends who profess love for their own advantage — and reveal their insincerity when they have no more ground to hope that their selfish interests will be served by it. There are fickle friends who love for a time, and grow indifferent to our interests, without any reason but their own inconstancy. But a true friend is steady in his love, and times of prosperity and adversity, honor and dishonor, evil report and good report — make no more difference to him, than the changes of the air to a man of a healthy constitution.

Some false friends become cool in the day of prosperity, for they grudge to see their equals exalted above them. But a true friend rejoices in the prosperity of those whom he loves. Jonathan was one of the noblest instances of this truth, who loved David, and rejoiced in his prospects of advancement at his own expense.

Adversity is commonly reputed the touchstone of friendship. That is the season when our hollow friends forsake us — but a real friend then acts the part of a brother, and reveals his friendship more than ever.

Jonathan encountered the fury of a tyrant in a father, and risked his life for David, for whom he had formerly given up with cheerfulness his prospects of a crown.

We must not, however, be too rigorous in trying our friends by this mark, for perfection is not to be found anywhere among men — and the strength of harm or fear, may sometimes make real and worthy friends to act in a manner unworthy of themselves. The love of the disciples to Christ was approved by himself, "You are those who stood by me in my trials;" and yet through fear they forsook him, and fled in the day of his strongest trials.

Job’s friends, through an unhappy mistake, added greatly to his afflictions, and behaved like enemies. Yet that patient sufferer still calls them his friends, and solicits their sympathy.

We ought to show proper attention to our friends in their distresses, that we may approve the sincerity of our former professions. And in the day of our own distress, to make due allowances in others for the weakness of human nature. But no friend but Christ deserves our unlimited confidence. In him the text received, and still receives, its most glorious accomplishment. He remembered us in our low estate, and forgets us not in his own exaltation. Afflictions are the seasons when his kindness is most richly experienced — and our provocations do not alienate his affection from us. This is our beloved, and this is our friend. In him we will trust, and to him we will devote our hearts!

Proverbs 17:18. "A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor." Solomon warns us often against rash suretyship — and yet many professors of religion have opened the mouths of enemies by the temptations into which they have run themselves by forgetting this exhortation. Why should religion bear the blame of what it testifies so often against, that every man who reads this book must observe it, and have it in his mind — unless he willfully despises the instructions of the wise man? If we would hearken to Solomon, he would teach us to be richer and happier, as well as better Christians.

Proverbs 17:19. "He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction." Pride is a destructive sin, in whatever form it reveals itself; and the Spirit of God, by Solomon, gives us many warnings of the danger of it, and of those sins that are produced by it. Pride breeds contentions — and from the love of contention spring an innumerable multitude of iniquities! For as love is productive of every virtue — so that he who loves another has fulfilled the law, and will do no hurt to his neighbor. Just so, he who takes pleasure in strife has broken the whole law, and is ready to do every bad thing, for where there is envying and strife, there is confusion and every evil work. But who is the man that loves contention? Those who are engaged in it, allege that they love peace as much as any man — that they are forced into it by the perverseness of other men. However, when men are almost always engaged in strife, they afford too strong an evidence that they love it. If a man is always engaged in law-suits, or in angry contentions with his neighbors, or those things that concern his private interest — he is surely a lover of strife. It is an evidence no less clear of love to contention, when people seize every opportunity for beginning a quarrel, and cannot make the least sacrifice of self-will, or self interest, for the sake of peace.

Now, if strife is productive of so many sins, it must be attended with a proportionate train of miseries, and therefore our interest as well as duty requires us to avoid everything that may lead us into angry disputes. If we love God, we will love our brother also; and if we are reconciled to God, we will follow peace with all men.

Let us hate pride, for it makes a man miserable in this world as well as the next. It makes men unsatisfied with the condition allotted to them by God, and tempts them to waste their substance, and to cheat and oppress their neighbors, in order to gratify their own ambitious disposition, and leads on the person in whom it reigns, to the practice of many sins which bring down destruction from the Almighty.

Proverbs 17:20. "A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble." A man of a froward and perverse spirit, makes use of trickery and deceit to gain his ends. He thinks himself so wise, that he has no reason to fear a disappointment — but he indulges himself in an error which the whole Scripture condemns, and which no man of real honesty can fall

into, that some profit may be gained by sin. The perverse in heart is an abomination to the Lord. And as the Lord is the universal Ruler — he will never allow a man to enjoy any solid satisfaction in that which he detests. He will most certainly frustrate those expectations which are founded upon a contempt of his majesty, and a presumptuous notion that the power and wisdom of a creature can successfully oppose the Creator. The perverse in heart and in tongue will not only meet with a total disappointment of his hopes — but fall into extreme misery. And this is the most deplorable condition that we can imagine — when one is not only divested of everything comfortable and good, and loaded with the opposite miseries. This severe punishment is begun in this world, as experience teaches every day, and it is consummated in that punishment of loss and of sense, which the wicked suffer in the everlasting world.

How foolish are the men whose wisdom lies in a skill to do evil! Their own feet cast them into a snare, and their own tongues, by which they hope to execute their wicked contrivances, fall upon themselves, and grind them to powder. Honesty and integrity is our best wisdom. Upright men walk on firm ground — when the men who boast of their crooked arts fall into their own snares.

Proverbs 17:21. "To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool." How little are earthly objects to be trusted! Men’s children are the sources of their expected joys, and the birth of children is generally accounted a joyful occasion — but many children are the causes of grief, and not of joy, to their parents. By their folly they are a disgrace to those who might have expected better returns of their fondness — and fill their days of old age with additional pains, when it was expected that the sight of them would have relieved every pang.

He who has the unhappiness to be father to a fool, has no joy, either, in his son or in anything else, for every pleasure is deadened, and every distress embittered and poisoned — by the sight of a child despising the very instrument of his existence, and treasuring up endless miseries for himself. Unnatural are those children who make their parents miserable.

Unwise are those parents who look for comfort to their children, and do not look above them to the Father of lights, who alone makes anything a blessing to us.

It must, greatly increase the affliction of those who meet with this sore calamity, to have occasion of reflecting, that they have been careless in using these means that might have driven away foolishness from their children; or in praying for that blessing on which the success of all means depends.

Proverbs 17:22. "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." The intemperate mirth of sensualists is a slow poison to the body, and therefore cannot be here meant.

Innocent amusement is here allowed, as a means of promoting or preserving health. Yet amusement must not be turned into a business, to consume our days in vanity, and make our health useless to us. But the mirth principally recommended by the inspired, writer, is that cheerfulness which piety bestows; for he tells us, that the ways of wisdom are all pleasantness and peace, and that sorrow and wretchedness are inseparable attendants of sin. The things of this world are so incapable of affording permanent satisfaction, that Solomon wrote almost a whole book to show that they are vanity and vexation of spirit — but wisdom, he tells us, makes the face to shine, and inspires the heart with pleasure. A cheerful heart diffuses its influence through the body, and preserves its vigor and health, or tends to restore it where it is lost. But a broken spirit

crushes the frame of the body, enfeebles its powers, makes the flesh to wither and decay, and burns the bones, like a hearth. Christ himself, in his agony, felt the effect of strong sorrows in his flesh.

Everything that tends to spread a gloom over the mind, is to be avoided. There are cases, indeed where we are called to mourn and weep — but that grief which religion requires and infuses, is not dangerous to the physical frame, because it brings the sweetest joys in its train.

It is sin which brings the most dangerous sorrows along with it, and not repentance, which is a medicine to remove the cause of the worst distempers. When David was stubborn, and did not confess his sins, his bones waxed old, because of his roaring all the day long. But when he confessed his sin, the joys of pardon healed his bones, and renewed his vigor, so that he praised God, not only for pardoning all his iniquities — but likewise for renewing his age like the eagle's. The joys of God's salvation will be a mighty antidote against every grief, and strengthen the body and soul against those bad impressions which the multiplied calamities of life too often make.

Proverbs 17:23. "A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice." A wicked man takes a gift out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of judgment.

He is a wicked judge that accepts of bribes. An honest man would rather lose his cause, however just, than gain it by such a base thing as a bribe. It must have been a great bondage for Paul to be confined to a prison, when he loved the pulpit so well — had not his will been sunk in the will of God. Yet he would not offer the least bribe to his covetous judge, who detained him in prison, expecting that money would be offered for his freedom.

Wicked men take their bribes out of the bosom, that they may do it without public observation — but why should men thus affront the omniscient God? Can any man do a thing so secretly, that God shall not see it? Or will it be any profit to us to have our sins hidden from the eyes of men — when they are all before the great Avenger! That which is done in secret, shall one day be revealed to the view of an assembled world, and then the omniscience of God will be vindicated from all the insults put upon it in this world, by those foolish men who were not ashamed to do those things before the face of God himself, in which they would not have wished the lowest of their fellow creatures to detect them.

Proverbs 17:24. "A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth." Knowledge is often useless to the possessor of it, either because he is ignorant of those things which he ought to know, or because he lacks wisdom to make the proper use of his knowledge. But true wisdom is of constant use to him who possesses it, for he does not allow it to be buried in his mind — but applies it to the direction of his life. It guides him in the choice of his great end, and makes him steady in the pursuit of it. He keeps it still before his eyes to guide all his steps, and walks in his way safely, for wisdom preserves him, and discretion keeps him.

Thus we find David regulating his life. He hid the Word of God in his heart, and kept it before his eyes, and so he did not wickedly depart from his God.

We must not only learn wisdom — but keep it in view, that it may be a light to our feet; for a man who has wisdom in his mind, and forgets to use it, is like one that has money in his chest — but forgets to carry some of it with him when he is going a long journey, to bear his necessary

expenses. He will be at a great loss, on many occasions, who has money in his house, but none in his pocket. But a fool lacks wisdom in his heart, and there is no wisdom before his eyes; for instead of employing his understanding to fix upon the great end of life, as the mark at which he aims, his eyes are at the ends of the earth, roving up and down to look at everything that comes in his way, except that on which his view should be constantly and steadily fixed. He has a roving imagination that is perpetually misleading his mind, and never minds what he ought to mind in the first place.

He is either doing nothing, or nothing to purpose, or nothing of what he should do — but lives at random, and tosses to and fro like a ship in the sea, without a pilot and a helm. Such a man is perpetually in chase of shadows, and when he has overtaken one of them, and finds no substance in it as he expected — he begins to pursue another. And so his days are spent in vanity, and he enters into the eternal world without any serious thought of making provision for his long home. Our duty is, to fix our eyes upon the things that are not seen, and to live under the powerful influence of the eternal world. And whatever lesser objects we may be called to regard in our journey through life, to tread that path which leads to eternal life, without turning out of it to the right hand or left, upon any consideration whatever.

Proverbs 17:25. "A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him." This instruction would not be repeated so often, if it were not useful for many excellent purposes. It teaches parents to avoid that common fault of too fond indulgence to the faults of their children, for a child left to himself is for the most part a grief to his father, and bitterness (which is the greatest degree of grief,) to his mother — whose maternal tenderness was more likely to spoil him by its excess, than the fondness of a father.

It is a lesson to children, to beware of converting the kindness of their parents into a torment, by bad behavior.

It instructs those who have not the pleasure of a rising family, to acquiesce in the providence of God, when they recollect that children are but an uncertain comfort.

It instructs those who have not yet entered into family connections, to chose their partners in life with prudence, and to marry none who are likely to set a bad example before their children, or to neglect their religious education.

If parents have the misfortune to be plagued with foolish and wicked children; let them remember David, and the afflictions he suffered from his family, and the comforts that refreshed his soul under this distress. Let those who can look upon their children with pleasure, bless God, and ascribe the praise to his name.

Proverbs 17:26. "It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their integrity." It is a bad thing when children, who ought to be a joy to the hearts of their parents under every misfortune — prove their heaviest cross. But here is a worse evil censured; when magistrates, that are the ministers of God for good, prove the ministers of Satan in the administration of it, by punishing the just, and perverting an institution of our gracious Creator, into an instrument of unrighteousness! To punish the lowest of men without ground, is a very evil thing, for it is a discouragement to virtue, and a strong incentive to wickedness. But it is doubly wicked to strike princes for their integrity, by punishing inferior rulers for acting according to the eternal rules of

righteousness, and refusing to truckle to the humor and caprice of their sovereigns. It was the fear of this that determined Pilate to condemn the holy and the just One.

Subjects may be guilty of striking princes for their integrity, by smiting them with their tongues, or seditious practices against their authority — while they endeavor, in the administration of their office, to serve the true interests, rather than gratify the unreasonable wishes of those whom they govern.

Moses had a large experience of this rebellious disposition, in the people whom he led through the desert; and it is probable that Solomon himself saw reason to complain of it in his reign.

Parents and masters of families may be charged with the crime of punishing the just — by groundless severities to those who are under their charge. Rulers in the church are in like manner worthy of censure, when they administer the ordinance of discipline to the injury of those whom they rule, by rebuking them for things that are not criminal; or for real crimes which cannot be proved.

Proverbs 17:27. "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered." As we must not be hasty with our mouths to utter anything before God — so it is foolish to be swift to speak even before men. The empty vessel makes the greatest sound, and the man who has nothing to say which deserves hearing — is commonly most prodigal of his words.

Xenocrates the philosopher was upbraided because of his silence in a meeting of friends. He answered that, "He had often repented of speaking — but never of silence."

People should not be fond of hearing themselves speak at any time — but double caution is unsavory when we meet with provocations that put our minds into a ferment. The wise man’s knowledge teaches his mouth to speak the words of truth and soberness — but angry passions are the worst instructors to the tongue in the world. Floods of venom are poured from them when they have mastered reason, and obtained the command of the lips. A man of understanding having the government of his tongue, shows the excellency and coolness of his spirit, either by silence, or by the meekness of his words, as the occasion directs him.

David had such a command of his passions through the power of faith, that he said nothing amiss when he was tried with the most provoking usage in the time of distress, a season when the spirits of other men are discomposed by mere trifles. He was like a man that hears not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs, "For in you, O Lord," says he, "do I hope. You will hear, O Lord my God." But if a man spares his words, may he not lay himself open to the suspicion of being an ignorant man or a fool? No.

Proverbs 17:28. "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue." The silence of a fool is almost always a covering to folly, and a sign of some degree of wisdom — yet it is not always a sign that his folly is in any degree cured. Absalom held his peace when his sister was ravished by Amnon — but his silence proceeded from sullenness and cunning, and prepared the way for the execution of his furious revenge.

It is a good sign that a fool is not incurable, when he has learned to keep silent from a sense of his own ignorance, and a desire to learn from others. It is as difficult a thing to learn to be silent — as to learn to speak! And although unseasonable silence is not a good thing — yet unseasonable

speaking is far worse! It is often a point of real wisdom to be silent, for there is a time to be silent, and a time to speak — and the wise man's heart knows both the time and the manner. When men have no call to speak on a subject, or when they have not duly considered it; when they are discomposed by passion, or in the company of those whose passions render them incapable of hearing reason; and finally, when they are more likely to expose themselves to damage, than to do good to others by speaking — then to keep silent altogether will be their best method of behavior.

It is sometimes our duty to keep silent — but we must not run into one extreme to avoid another. Silence which is occasioned by cowardice, when we are manifestly called to bear testimony for truth, is a dangerous sin. Nor must we desert the defense of oppressed innocence, to prevent inconvenience to ourselves.

# 01.18. Proverbs 18

Chapter 18.

Proverbs 18:1-24 Proverbs 18:1. "Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeks and intermeddles with all wisdom."

Man’s wisdom in this world is imperfect, and appears much more in desires than attainments. But these desires are not feeble and ineffectual wishes, like those of Balaam, when he desired to die the death of the righteous — and yet had a prevailing love to the wages of unrighteousness.

Genuine desires for wisdom and holiness will dispose a man to separate himself from everything that would obstruct the attainment of it, and to use every proper means for obtaining it.

We are not called to give up every connection with the world — but in the calling with which we are called, we are directed to abide with God. But we must lay aside every unnecessary encumbrance, and avoid that load of worldly cares which would press us down to the earth, and keep us from traveling in that way of wisdom and life. Worldly cares, and the lusts of other things, are the thorns that choke the good seed of the Word, and hinder it from bringing forth good fruit.

David was called to the government of a kingdom — but he did not allow the weighty cares of government to alienate his soul from the Word of God; which was still his meditation day and night. How far it is a man’s duty to separate himself from worldly things to learn wisdom, depends upon his particular circumstances; for the same person, in different situations, is required to employ a greater or lesser part of his time for this purpose. The laborer, who must attend upon his own business with diligence in its proper season, should employ himself in beholding God’s work, when his hand is sealed up by stormy weather. The person who desires wisdom will seek it with earnestness, although he depends on God for this precious gift — yet he will not make the freeness of divine grace a pretense for laziness — but by reading and hearing, meditating and conversing, praying, and practicing what he knows already — he will follow on to know the Lord, and on such means the blessing of God may be expected.

It is not one branch of wisdom only that the lover of wisdom will seek after. It is his earnest wish and endeavor, that the word of Christ may dwell in him richly in all wisdom. He regards both knowledge and practice as necessary parts of wisdom — that his eye easy be clear, and his whole body full of light. He wishes and endeavors to be sound in the faith, and to attain a large measure of acquaintance with the law and the gospel. He is careful to understand his own way exactly, and to have every one of his steps ordered in the Word of God. Every branch of religion is valuable in his eyes, and the Spirit shall lead him into all truth.

Proverbs 18:2. "A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions." The disposition of fools is entirely opposite to that of the lovers of wisdom, for they have no pleasure in understanding. Novelty, or curiosity, or a desire to make a figure by their knowledge — may sometimes induce them to bestow some pains to procure knowledge; but their eyes were

never opened to discern the divine beauty of truth and holiness. They have no spiritual perception, to relish the sweetness of that which every Christian declares from experience to be sweeter than honey from the comb.

Herod heard John gladly, and did many things because of him — but his obstinate continuance in the sin of incest was an evidence that he had no true delight in wisdom — for that would have disposed him to abhor every false way. In Isaiah 58:1-14, we read of wicked men that delighted to know God's way — but we learn from the following part of that discourse, that their delight in wisdom was an empty pretense. Their delight was not placed on God or his ways — but on those advantages to themselves which they fondly hoped to obtain by their religious rituals. The hearers resembled by the stony ground received the Word with joy, and for a time seemed to profit by it — but they had no cordial relish of the gospel. Their delight was only a transient flash of affection, and it soon appeared that they loved their bodies more than their souls, and preferred their ease and safety to the gospel of salvation. The pleasure of a fool, is that his heart delights in airing his own opinions. Some of the wicked are decent in their outward conduct, and their pleasure lies in the inward indulgence of their corrupt disposition — but others of them are not ashamed of their folly, and take delight in making it visible to all men by its fruits. They reveal their pride and vanity, their sensual and impious dispositions, by their tongues and practices — so that you may easily see that they are corrupt trees, because they bear nothing but corrupt fruit. This proverb instructs us to distinguish between fools and wise men. A wise man seeks all wisdom, because be delights in it after the inward man. If we love not wisdom — but take pleasure in the thoughts of foolishness or in the outward expressions of folly, we must be ranked in that black catalogue of which so many bad things are said in this book, for as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

Foolish thoughts too often come into the minds of the wise — but we must suppress them as soon as they enter, lest by giving them license to pollute our hearts, and stain our lives — we should incur the reputation of a fool.

Proverbs 18:3. "When wickedness comes, so does contempt; and with shame comes disgrace."

Pride is one ingredient of the wicked man's character, and this disposes him to treat those who are better men than himself with contempt. When he makes his appearance, you need not wonder if you find contempt, and ignominy, and reproach in his company — for he wishes to exalt himself upon the ruins of the honor and good name of his neighbors. The proud man has sagacity to find materials in great abundance to furnish him with those titles of scorn and reproach which he heaps on other men. Poverty and calamity, natural infirmities, or ungracefulness in behavior, foibles and failings — are all employed by him for exposing his neighbors to contempt and laughter. But godly men are the chief objects of his spleen, and if he can find nothing else to afford him a handle for holding them up to scorn or reproach, he can make a dexterous use of their very virtues to serve his pride and malice. To expose our innocent neighbors as the objects of contempt or ignominy, is a very wicked thing, especially when they are saints who are treated in this disrespectful manner. He who mocks the poor, reproaches his Maker. He who casts dirt in those faces which shine with the beauties of holiness — is an enemy to Christ, and to his beauteous image.

What a pity is it, that even the saints themselves should reproach or insult one another! And yet it cannot be denied, that church disputes have sometimes afforded instances of this melancholy fact. When we meet with contempt and reproach, let us remember that our Lord Jesus Christ met

with it in a much larger degree for our sake, and has left us an example of bearing it with patience. He hid not his face from shame and spitting — but gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. But wicked men shall be paid in their own contempt. Michal despised David for his piety, and lived all her days under the reproach of barrenness. The text may admit of another meaning besides that we have given, that dishonor and disgrace follows wickedness at the heels. The wickedness and pride of men shall be recompensed with shame and everlasting contempt!

Proverbs 18:4. "The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters, but the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook." The words of a crafty man may be compared to deep waters — but this is not owing so much to his wit as his lack of conscience, for he does not scruple to speak in direct contradiction to his real sentiments — but God knows, and will reveal and punish his iniquity. The wise man seems here to speak of the words of a man that is furnished with a rich treasure of true wisdom. His words are like deep waters, not because he delights to express himself in riddles, and to conceal his treasures of wisdom from the eyes of others. He uses great plainness of speech — but there is more of solid sense and useful instruction in his words, than another man can apprehend at hearing them.

While men of shallow understandings pour forth a flood of words, in which there is scarcely a drop of matter — the truly wise man spares his words, but what he says contains much in its narrow compass.

Such were the words of Solomon himself, which filled the queen of Sheba with amazement, for the sagacity of that wise princess could not penetrate the depths of that wisdom which he conveyed in his discourses.

How valuable is the conversation of the wise! Their words are like oracles which deserve to be remembered, and to be the subject of our thoughts. They supply us with refreshment and pleasure, like a flowing brook which never runs dry — but is ever ready to afford drink to the thirsty traveler.

It is the Word of God which furnishes the heart of a wise man with all those treasures of knowledge which are so justly compared to a spring of living waters. And the faithful sayings of God deserve this high character above all the words of the wisest men — that they are like deep waters. Our ears can receive but a little of them, and therefore they ought to be our study day and night. We cannot expect much benefit by a cursory view of the Scriptures — but when we search into any part of them, with a dependence on the Father of light, we shall find not only treasures — but rich mines of what is more valuable than the purest gold.

Proverbs 18:5. "It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the innocent of justice."

It is a very bad thing to justify the wicked, and a worse thing to condemn the righteous — but both these iniquities meet in the sin condemned in the text. Peter exhorts oppressed Christians to commit their souls in well-doing to God as to a faithful Creator. God hates partial dealings so much, that he will certainly reprove it.

Job’s friends condemned that godly man out of zeal for the glory of God, for they could not conceive how God could be righteous, unless Job were wicked. And yet God did not approve of

their conduct — but sharply censured them for endeavoring to vindicate his glory at Job's expense. This sin of partiality in judging is no less detestable in ecclesiastical, than in civil administrations. When men of riches and power are allowed to trample upon the liberties of the poor and lowly, and when those who ought not to have a place and a name in the church, are permitted to usurp those powers that evidently belong, by Christ's appointment, to the body of the faithful — is it not plain that church-rulers have become partial in themselves, and judges of evil thoughts?

There are other instances of partiality in church managements equally condemned in this place. When we take it on us to judge other men, without any call, against the command of Christ — we too often run into this iniquity of partial judgment, by censuring the same faults in different people, with different degrees of severity — as our affections lead us.

Proverbs 18:6. "A fool's lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating."

Solomon has already represented very clearly the folly and danger of contention, and observation abundantly verifies his words — and yet there are many people so foolish that nothing will warn them. Their lips enter into strife, and their mouth calls for a beating. While they pour forth the venom of ill-nature in a torrent of spiteful reflections against their neighbors — they do not consider that they are calling for a stroke to themselves, by kindling up those passions which may provoke their antagonists to return their rage with good measure. That profane apostate, the emperor Julian, used to banter the Christians with that precept of our Lord, "When your adversary smites you on the one cheek — turn to him the other also." But Christians consult their ease as well as their consciences when they obey this precept in the spirit of it. Whereas proud and passionate fools, when they give vent to their rancorous spirits, because they cannot bear the shadow of an indignity, not only turn the other cheek to their adversary — but smite, and urge, and almost force him to strike and destroy them. It may be justly said, that, Proverbs 18:7. "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul." For men to be destroyed on account of the transgression of their lips, is a grievous though just punishment — but the text represents the calamity which they bring upon themselves, in a still stronger light. They are not only the causes — but the agents of their own destruction! By their lips they are caught in a snare — and by their lips they are destroyed.

It was a severe, though unjust censure, which Eliphaz passed on Job, when he said, "Your own mouth condemns you, and not I, and your own lips testify against you." But here Solomon tells us that fools, who have not the command of their tongues, are not only condemned — but punished by their own mouths. Their own tongues, as David expresses it, shall fall upon them; and when men's tongues fall upon themselves — they are crushed under the weight. The tongues of other men may pierce into our vitals — but the sharpest and most envenomed words of other men can never wound a man so incurably as his own.

It was a more mortifying punishment for Haman to be hanged on a gibbet erected by himself, than if he had been hanged in the most disgraceful manner on any other gallows. The contentious fool is like Haman — he erects a gallows for himself, and twists those cords by which he is strangled. But Haman could not know that he was working for his own destruction; whereas the lover of strife has fair warning of his danger from the Word of God, and therefore must fall unpitied if he will not be reformed.

Proverbs 18:8. "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts."

It is just that a fool’s mouth should become the instrument of his own destruction — for his words are arrows that make deep, and sometimes fatal wounds in other men.

Men may in some cases report the faults of others, without exposing themselves to the censure of this text. Joseph reported the faults of his brethren to his father, that his father’s authority might reclaim them. Just so, we are authorized by our Lord to complain to the church of an offending brother, when he will not allow himself to be gained by a private admonition. But when men publish bad things of their neighbors through spite or levity, or to have the pleasure of hearing themselves talk — then they deserve the name of tale-bearers, and incur the reproofs given to such pestilent members of society in this book. The tales which this kind of men tell, are sometimes entirely false, and at other times have some truth in them — although they seldom lack some dash of slander, to heighten their relish to those who love to feed on the faults and misfortunes of their fellow-creatures. The words of tale-bearers are as wounds, and these wounds are of a very dangerous kind, for they pierce into the inmost parts. They wound the character, and often destroy the usefulness of those who have the misfortune to be the mark of these sharp arrows of the tongue. Those who give these deadly wounds do not always mean all the harm they bring, being instigated, not by downright spite — but by a pleasure they have in speaking, while they are destitute of good materials for conversation. But why can they not remain silent? If you kill your neighbor in sport, or for lack of better employment — will it be a sufficient excuse for you to allege that you had no intention to do it, or that you did it for lack of better employment? Don’t you know that a man’s name is as dear to him as his life, and his usefulness perhaps dearer to him than either of them? By wanton cruelty to others, men often bring serious misery upon themselves.

Proverbs 18:9. "One who is slothful in his work, is brother to one who destroys."

Slothfulness in work is commonly a companion of tale-bearing; and both of them are more dangerous iniquities than men generally apprehend, and need to be seriously and frequently remonstrated against. A man with half an eye may see that the squanderer will soon reduce himself to feeding on husks. With a little attention, we may know that a slothful man is only a younger brother to him, and will come to poverty as certainly, though not with so much speed. The man that runs will speedily arrive at the end of his journey — but he who follows him with a slower pace, will arrive at it in good time.

He who spends his days in debauchery, takes his estate and casts it into a devouring gulf! But he who is slothful in his work, suffers a moth to devour his substance. Both these sins are breaches of the eighth commandment, though in different degrees.

There is the like difference between the careless Christian and the profane sinner. Sloth in religion is a consumption which preys upon the vitals — but open profaneness is a burning fever, which will more rapidly destroy the constitution.

Let us not be slothful, otherwise we are followers, though, at a distance, of those who have already plunged themselves into perdition by their wickedness! But let us follow those who by faith and patience inherit the promises.

Proverbs 18:10. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

Nations provide fortifications and arms for their defense, even in time of peace. If they are so imprudent as to neglect these precautions, they are in imminent danger of destruction when an enemy makes an attack. In like manner, when we know that life is exposed to the incursions of calamity, and that we are surrounded with legions of invisible enemies — it is our wisdom to be provided with a sure defense, that we may be safe in the day of battle and war. No creature in Heaven or earth can defend us against the assaults of misfortune, or the more dangerous attacks of invisible adversaries. Nor have we any power or wisdom of our own to afford us security. Our safety is only in the name of the Lord, that God with whom is everlasting strength and sufficiency, and who reveals himself through his blessed Son our Savior, as the refuge of fallen men. In this great name, protection is to be found . . .

from the distresses of the present life,

from the tyranny of sin,

from every evil,

and from every fear,

from the temptations of the devil,

from the terrors of death,

from everlasting wrath!

David in the day or his distress resorted to the caves of Engedi, and the mountains of the wild goats — but we find in his history, and in many of his psalms, that these were insufficient for his protection, and that his confidence was ever placed on God himself as his tower of salvation. In him he trusted, and was helped. Therefore his heart greatly rejoiced, and with his tongue he praised God. But God was not only David’s confidence — he has ever been the dwelling-place of the generation of the righteous. They run by faith and prayer, into this high tower in the day of their calamity and danger — and they are not at a loss when unexpected dangers are ready to overwhelm them, for no enemy can be so near to distress them, as God is to preserve them. He is ever a present — a very present help in the time of trouble. But are poor sinners excluded from this refuge? Will they be expelled from it, if they come to shelter themselves under the protection of the merciful God? Never! The righteous runs into it, and none that run into it continue unrighteous. But it is accessible to lost sinners also, for the name of the Lord is "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness, and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity." And sinners are invited into this tower of salvation by God himself.

Eternal safety is enjoyed by all who run into this tower, for it can never be undermined, or scaled, or destroyed, by all the devils in Hell! No enemy can break into it by force, or find a way by fraud to enter. None can so much as climb up to this refuge, to endanger the safety of those happy people who have made it their habitation. Nor is there any lack of necessities ever felt in it, for he who is the defense of his people is their all-sufficient portion, and heavenly Father. The place of their defense is the munition of rocks — bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure.

Surely if we have any wisdom, we will endeavor diligently to learn the way of running into this tower. We cannot learn it better than by taking David for our pattern, whom we see, in many of his psalms, fleeing unto God for refuge. Let us read these divine compositions, and pray for the same spirit of faith which animated that holy man, and endeavor to follow the steps of his faith.

Proverbs 18:11. "The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall."

Few of the rich are righteous. God is the hope and strength of his people — but the rich are generally dazzled with the luster of their gold and jewels, and mistake those precious metals for gods; and so they say unto the gold, 'You are our hope,' and to the fine gold, 'You are our confidence.' They do not trust to the Rock of ages — but lean upon a broken reed which will soon break, and leave them to fall into perdition, after they have been pierced through with many sorrows.

Riches are good things when they are well used — but confidence in riches is a grievous sin, because it is an alienation of the heart from God, who requires the homage of the heart more than the bowing of the knee.

Wealth is a source of many iniquities, because it prompts men . . .

to injustice and oppression,

to despise God, and

to forget death and judgment.

It shuts up men's compassion to the indigent, and makes it as difficult for men to get into the kingdom of God, as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. This second warning the wise man here gives against this vain confidence. Examine yourselves, you rich men, and see whether you have not the symptoms of this vain confidence. Do not trust in uncertain riches — but in the living God, and show that your confidence is in God by a readiness to lend unto the Lord. Do not murmur, you who are poor, because you are not under the same temptation with some others, to make a God of gold to yourselves. Trust in the Lord, and you shall lack no good thing.

Proverbs 18:12. "Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor." The ruin of all mankind, and of millions of angels, is a tremendous proof of the first part of this text. The abasement and exaltation of our Redeemer, is a glorious illustration of the other clause.

Solomon gives us repeated warnings of the danger of pride, and the necessity of a humble spirit — and we need them all, for as vile and worthless as we are — humility is a very great stranger in our world, and pride is a sin so insinuating, that most men's hearts, and even their religion, is quite corrupted by it!

Proud men stand on the edge of a fearful precipice, from whence they will soon tumble into destruction! But blessed are the poor in spirit; they may be at present in the valley of abasement — but they shall dwell forever with God in His holy hill, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Proverbs 18:13. "He who answers before listening — that is his folly and his shame."

Men charm themselves upon their penetration and quickness of discernment. And to display this talent, are often too hasty to give their judgment upon a point, before they are well informed of it. But this rash manner of judging, especially in matters of consequence, is their folly and shame — they reveal their ignorance and pride, when they expect to have their sagacity applauded.

Instead of pronouncing peremptorily upon a half hearing of a thing, it is often needful to hear it over and over again, and to hear different people concerning it — that we may not be drawn into false conclusions by the prejudices and partiality of those whom we first heard on the subject. This is a necessary instruction to magistrates, who may be guilty of crying injustice, by pronouncing a hasty sentence in a cause that comes before them.

Philip king of Macedonia, having given sentence against a widow in a cause she had before him, was so sensible of his injustice upon second thoughts, that he sentenced himself to pay her damages. But kings are seldom so honest as to acknowledge their mistakes, and therefore they ought to be very careful that they do not fall into them. The pride of sovereigns established that law in Persia, that the royal decrees should not be reversed; and other princes, although they do not make sigh pretenses to royal infallibility, have nevertheless too high a sense of dignity to be easily brought to an acknowledgment of errors.

Ministers of the Word of God are instructed by this rule, not to be rash with their mouths to utter anything as the Word of God in the pulpit — but to consider well what they are to say in the name of the Lord; and to use due deliberation and inquiry before they give their judgment in cases of conscience — lest they should make sins and duties, that which God never made, by a wrong application of the Word of God to particular cases; or distress the minds of God’s people, and encourage sinners, by giving a rash opinion on the state of their souls. This rule is to be observed by all men in giving advice, or in judging of men’s characters or actions, when they have any call to judge on them. The Jews condemned our Lord as a Sabbath-breaker, because he made a man whole on it — but he tells them that they sinned by judging too rashly: "You judge according to outward appearance — but judge righteous judgment."

We ought to be the more cautious in forming and pronouncing opinions, because we are so little disposed to admit our wrongs if we fall into mistakes, or to retract them upon conviction.

It is commonly supposed that ministers do not repent of their mistakes, although they do not claim, like the Pope, the gift of infallibility. There is too much reason for the supposition, provided it is not restricted to that order of men; for the same pride that makes one set of men stubborn in their wrong opinions, is to be found in other men, although it is not perhaps so much strengthened by particular circumstances, nor so visible in their conduct, because they do not meet with the same temptations to reveal it.

How many do we find who will not change their sentiments about religion, or about people and things, upon the clearest evidence — and give way to anger upon the least contradiction to their favorite notions, as if their dearest interests were attacked! The saints themselves are not entirely delivered from this unjust disposition, as we see in the behavior of David to Mephibosheth, after he had pronounced a rash sentence in his case.

Proverbs 18:14. "A man’s spirit sustains him in sickness — but a crushed spirit, who can bear?" When a man’s spirit is free of wounds, it will enable a man to bear an incredible load of distress.

That courage which is derived from natural constitution, or moral principles, enabled some of the pagan heroes to behave with astonishing firmness under the greatest pressure of calamity. But the true Christian is the true hero. Thousands, through faith in Christ, have encountered with resignation and joy, the rage of beasts, and flames, and tyrants!

Cato and Brutus were cowards compared with the apostle Paul. They killed themselves, and deserted their country — that they might escape from the miseries of life. But Paul was content to die every day for the service of the church — and yet still live absent from the Lord, the life of all his joys. But a crushed spirit is absolutely intolerable. It is a very Hell upon earth, and has often made the most courageous of men, and the best of saints, to roar through the disquiet of their hearts. When the conscience is pierced with a deep sense of guilt, and the heart alarmed with the dreadful apprehensions of eternal misery — then the affrighted eye seems to behold upon the walls the hand-writing that amazed the mighty king of Babylon, and unsinewed all his joints. Every earthly comfort is to a man in this situation, like the white of an egg; mirth appears to be madness, and nothing has any relish — but what gives some prospect of deliverance from this intolerable anguish.

Blessed be Jesus, whose soul was crushed, and environed with sorrows not his own. He never knew sin — and yet he felt the tremendous impressions of wrath upon his blessed soul, for he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that by his stripes we might be healed.

If the presages of Hell are so astonishingly dreadful, what must Hell itself be? May we have grace to flee to Jesus, who has delivered us from the wrath to come.

It is sin which causes this terrible anguish which none can endure, and sin unpardoned will cause it sooner or later in every transgressor. Why then should we thus wound and mangle our own souls, by fighting against God? If we shoot these arrows against the Almighty, they cannot wound his honor — but he can soon dip them in the venom of his wrath and curse, and shoot them back into our own souls!

Proverbs 18:15. "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out." The prudent man has a due apprehension of the value of knowledge, and seeks it with all his heart, and finds it. The Spirit of God writes the Word of truth upon his heart, and inscribes it in his inward part. While others have it only in their memories or tongues — he has it in his heart, which is filled with the love of knowledge, and enriched with this precious treasure. But he is not satisfied with that measure of knowledge he has already got. He would not part with it for mines of gold, or mountains of jewels — but he wishes still to add to his stock, and therefore his ear is employed in seeking knowledge. The ear is the learning sense, and the wise man will hearken attentively to any man who can give him useful information — but he attends chiefly upon the ministry of the Word, because this is the appointed means of increasing his knowledge and animating his soul. Although he meditates daily on the testimonies of God — yet he does not satisfy himself with the suggestions of his own mind — but feeds his meditating faculty with the Word read and heard.

Those who wish for no more knowledge or grace than they think absolutely necessary for getting to Heaven, all who think their stock of knowledge sufficient, and all those who neglect the means of grace, are excluded from the class of prudent men by this sentence of Solomon.

Proverbs 18:16. "A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great."

It is a shame for great men to love gifts. They should remember what our Lord says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Great men have received their great power to do good to others; and poor men should not find the way so strait to their presence, as to have occasion for gifts to widen it. The King of glory admits the poorest of men freely into his presence, and will do justice to the poor and needy, and send them every needful supply.

It appears from this proverb, that riches cannot satisfy the heart of man; the great and rich of the world are as eager to receive, and as much under the influence of money, as the poor. Silver and gold may dazzle the eyes — but they cannot fill the heart, even while they encumber it.

Yet it is not in every case unlawful for great men to receive gifts, nor for men of inferior station to bestow them. Great men may cheerfully receive them as expressions of gratitude, for favors of a higher kind conferred, or to be conferred on their inferiors. And poor men may lawfully give them to procure favors, though not to obtain justice in a court of law.

Blessed be the Lord, who makes us welcome to come to his throne without money and without price — to receive the richest gifts. May his gifts make room for him in our souls!

Proverbs 18:17. "The first to present his case seems right, until another comes forward and questions him." When God came down to take vengeance on the men of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, he said, "I will see whether the wickedness is as great as the cry that has come unto me; and if not, I will know." God is not ignorant of anything that men do — but he speaks in our language, and intends, by this manner of expression, not only to represent his own justice — but to teach righteousness to earthly judges. By judging in a cause without searching it out, David injured the son of his generous friend Jonathan. Ahasuerus, by the like conduct, exposed his queen to destruction, and signed a warrant for her own death, and was forced to see that the Persian laws could not make their kings infallible. An eloquent speaker will make his own cause appear a great deal better than it really is — and that of his adversary a great deal worse than it really is. Therefore a just judge will not decide, nor even form a judgment within his own mind, until the parties are both heard.

Claudius the emperor has rendered his name forever infamous by judging causes after hearing only one of the parties, and sometimes neither of them.

Rome, in its pagan state, would never have allowed of a court so manifestly contrived by the father of wickedness, as that of the Inquisition — but made it a rule that no man should be reputed guilty until he had seen his accuser face to face, and enjoyed the liberty of answering for himself. In private life, it is proper that we should know what a man can say for himself and his behavior, before we punish him in his character. If we will judge our neighbors, we should certainly act the part of impartial judges, and not believe bad things of men, upon the report of tale-bearers, or those who are too plainly under the influence of prejudice against the people whom they accuse. In religious disputes, it is a great injustice to regard the character of a sect, or an impartial representation of their doctrines — upon one whom partiality has blinded, and rendered unfit, however honest he may be, to do them justice. Party-spirit has as much influence as gifts, to blind the eyes of the wise, and to pervert the words of the righteous.

It may, however, be a great satisfaction to us, that we may judge, as far as we have any occasion to do so, for ourselves, in the most important religious contentions, without hearing either of the

parties. A man may easily know from the Bible, whether Christ is the supreme God, without the help of others. The Bereans could readily judge whether Paul’s doctrine was true or not, by searching the Scriptures, without putting themselves to the trouble of hearing what the Jewish doctors could say against it.

Causes between private people are thus to be decided by an impartial judgment, founded upon good evidence. But how shall those contentions be decided, that arise between princes, who are too high to have any magistrate above them, and too proud to refer their differences to an arbitrator?

Proverbs 18:18. "Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart." The contentions of princes are very dangerous, because pride will not allow either party to yield, and their power enables them to interest millions in their cause. How often have oceans of blood been spilt, and nations been loaded with the most oppressive taxes, and great kingdoms utterly subverted and laid desolate, in the prosecution of the the quarrels of their leaders! The disputes of kings, are like dangerous wounds in the head, which are felt to the sole of the foot.

Why may not the lot determine their quarrels? They are too great to refer their causes to an earthly judge — but the whole disposing of the lot is of the Lord.

It is a mercy to men that God has provided a method so safe and easy for determining controversies, which must otherwise be decided by the sword. But it is the sin of men, that they will rather have matters settled their own way, whatever it may cost — than by means of an ordinance of God. As the whole disposing of the lot is of the Lord, those who agree to have their businesses determined by it, must reverence the providence of God in it, and rest cheerfully satisfied with the determination, and thus it will make contentions to cease. Let us never prostitute the lot to trifling uses. It is an ordinance designed for such great and merciful ends.

Proverbs 18:19. "An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel." A brother offended it harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle. That law which binds us to love our relations, obliges us, if we have unhappily differed with them, to be easily pacified, and even to seek peace with them, although we have been the wronged party.

Abraham would not live in a state of contention with Lot, because they were brethren. To put an end to the strife of their servants, he yielded to him, though only his nephew, the power of choosing what part of the land he would take to himself. But such is the perverseness of human nature, that contentions between brethren are generally more irremediable than any others. When we meet with provocation where we thought we had all the reason in the world to expect a contrary behavior — we can scarcely find in our hearts to bestow forgiveness. Thus it is easier to win a strong city, or to break in pieces the barred gates of a castle — than to heal breeches in families and among near friends.

It is therefore our duty to guard against those harms which are so much easier prevented than removed. With this view, we must not wantonly provoke our friends, nor be ready to take offence at their conduct. But if we are involved in contention with them, the authority of God should constrain us to mortify that unforgiving disposition which would prevent a cordial reconciliation. The love of Christ has broken in pieces for us the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the iron bars of

our infernal prison — so why should not our most stubborn enmities be dissolved by the apprehensions of it?

Jacob used all possible means obtain the good graces of his brother Esau after their unhappy difference — and yet it is a question whether their reconciliation was cordial and lasting. Their posterity kept up the strife, and Edom did tear perpetually, and kept his wrath forever, as Obadiah tells us. This example teaches us what means we should use for healing such breaches — but at the same time admonishes us to prevent, if possible, the need of using them.

Proverbs 18:20. "From the fruit of his mouth a man's stomach is filled; with the harvest from his lips he is satisfied."

Wicked men are never satisfied with their vain or wicked discourse — and a godly man never thinks he has served God or his generation sufficiently by the good use of his tongue. But both good and wicked men shall be filled with the product of their tongues — in happiness or misery!

If a man were possessed of a field exceedingly productive, either of good fruits, or of noisome and poisonous herbs, according to the cultivation bestowed on it — what pains would he use to clear it of every weed, and to have it sown with good grain! And yet when the harvest has come, he may take his choice whether he will eat of the produce or not.

Such a field is the tongue of man, with this difference, that a man is obliged to eat the fruit of it, although it should be worse than hemlock! What care, then, should we use to pluck from our hearts every root of bitterness, and to have them furnished with knowledge and prudence — that our discourse may be good, to the use of edifying! The fruits of the tongue are either very bitter, or very pleasant.

Proverbs 18:21. "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Our tongues, as we have been frequently told in this book, are often the instruments of life or death, to others. But it is the fruit of our own tongues, with which we must chiefly be filled. A fool's mouth is his destruction — and a wise man's mouth is oftentimes his safety. He who would live a long and a happy life — let him take care how he uses his tongue. And at the last day, when evil-speakers are cast into a fiery furnace — the fruits of the sanctified tongue will be produced as evidences of a man's title to everlasting life. It is not the use of the tongue on some particular occasion that will determine a man's happiness or misery — but the love of a good or bad tongue. Saints may, through the influence of provocation and passion, speak unadvisedly with their lips — and the wicked may speak many good words, when their hearts are not right with God. But he who loves to speak as befits a saint, shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth. And he who that takes pleasure in vain or ungodly discourse, shall meet with a just and dreadful recompense.

If, after all that the wise man has said, we do not bridle our tongue — with what eyes will we look to Solomon at the last day! Or rather, how shall we look our omniscient Judge in the face, who speaks to us in this book, and who taught the same lessons by his own blessed mouth in the days of his flesh!

Proverbs 18:22. "He who finds a wife finds what is good, and receives favor from the LORD."

It was not good for man in the days of innocence to be alone — and an helpmeet for us is still more needful, amidst those calamities that embitter the life of fallen men. Two are better than one,

because when one of them meets with a misfortune, the other is ready to afford some relief. A wife that is rottenness in her husband's bones, is no doubt a bad thing, for sin and folly will turn the choicest blessings of life into oppressive burdens! Such a woman does not deserve this endearing title. A good wife is an excellent thing, and is to be sought from the Lord. When Abraham wanted to have a wife for his son, he prayed to God. His servant prayed, and Isaac went out into the fields to meditate, probably to pray likewise. The man that has found a wife, has obtained favor from the Lord, and ought to acknowledge him with thanksgiving. It is God who made the woman for the man, and has preserved an equality between the sexes by his providence, and appointed marriage, and directs every man to his own wife, and disposes her heart to this tender union. If we are to thank God for the pleasures of friendship — then what thanks are due to him, for the pleasures of the most delightful union, whereby of twain are made one flesh!

Proverbs 18:23. "A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly."

It cannot be denied that the rich have many particular advantages — but the poor have no reason to repine, for poverty has also its gains, one of which is that it teaches us one of the best lessons — that of humility. The poor have a daily experience of their dependent condition, which instructs them in the language of submission and lowliness; and when the Spirit of God sanctifies this condition of life to a man, it leads him to great improvements in that grace on which Christ pronounces the first of his blessings, poverty of spirit. A little of this holy and humble temper is worth all the gold and silver in the world!

Some, indeed, are poor and proud, and they are the most inexcusable of all the proud people that can be round on the earth, for they not only sin without a temptation — but in opposition to a providential remedy. However, their poverty still preserves them from many bad fruits of pride that are to be found with the rich. The rich answer roughly, for their riches produce self-confidence, and that makes them insolent towards God himself. And it need not surprise poor men, that those who can say, "Who is the Lord?" can give rough and uncivil words to them.

We should all consider the advantages of our different situations, that we may be thankful, and make a good use of them, and the temptations that are incident to our respective situations — that we may be on our guard. Let poor men take heed that the necessity they lie under of using entreaties, may not degenerate into a slavish baseness of spirit, disposing them to sell their consciences for bread. Let the rich remember, that they are infinitely more dependent on the great Patron of the poor and needy, than the poor on them.

Those who give nothing but words to the poor in their distress, are declared to be destitute of charity. In what class, then, must they be placed, who cannot afford even this hapless favor? The poor and the rich are alike poor before God, and without his rich bounty they both must be eternally wretched. If poor men supplicate the rich for their favors, with what words shall we express our baseness and absolute dependence, before him who regards not the rich more than the poor! But he never gives a rough answer to his suppliants. Let us therefore come boldly to his throne of grace, that we may obtain every needful supply.

Proverbs 18:24. "A man who has friends, must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother."

Every person must endeavor to fill up the offices of the various relations in which he stands. A man who has found a wife must show himself affectionate and tender. A father must reveal kindness to his children. A neighbor must show himself a social man. He who has a bosom friend, must reveal in his behavior, all that union of souls which is the very essence of friendship.

Religion requires us to perform all those kind services to one another, which, if they were duly discharged and returned, would make our world in some measure a picture of paradise. We must not allow unreasonable offenses to alienate our affections from our friends — but cleave to them while we live. We must often gladden their hearts by our company, and share in all their joys and sorrows. We must not renounce their friendship for their imperfections, nor even for those temporary coldnesses which they may reveal in the day of our distress — unless their behavior is such as to show that their professions of regard were not sincere. Above all, we must show our tender sympathy in the time of their calamity, otherwise our alienation will greatly embitter their distress. To excite us to this duty, we are told that friends sometimes stick closer than the nearest relations. The greatest acts of generous heroism have perhaps been performed by those who were not connected by the bonds of relation or affinity. None of David's brothers ever gave him such proof of their attachment as Jonathan; and even his wife Michal, though she loved him, did not love him so well as that gallant friend did. She lied to his harm, to screen herself from the resentment of her father — but Jonathan bravely incurred the resentments of his father, and cheerfully gave up his prospects of a crown, for David. When our Lord was crucified, his disciples forsook him and fled, and James and Jude, who had the honor of being our Lord's brethren, among the rest — but the beloved disciple looked on his sorrows with the eye of a friend, and received his charge about his mother with thankfulness and obedience.

If this is a reason for our friendly behavior to our friends, what regard ought we to show to our Lord Jesus Christ, who sticks to us infinitely closer than any friend! Having loved his own who were in the world — he loved them unto the end. Neither death, nor sin itself, can separate us from his love. What shall we render to him for his marvelous loving-kindness? Love and obedience — for we are his friends, if we do whatever he commands us.

# 01.19. Proverbs 19

Chapter 19.

Proverbs 19:1-29

Proverbs 19:1. "Better is a poor man who walks in integrity, than he who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool." So depraved are the understandings of men, that the rich are generally honored for their wealth — although their conduct shows them to be destitute of any noble virtue. While the poor are despised — though they are adorned with the beauties of religion. To give an outward respect to the rich, according to the innocent fashions of the place where we live, is not a sin; for if providence makes a distinction, we may do it likewise, between the rich and the poor. But it is a sign of great corruption in our minds, to value the rich as if they were worthier men, and more deserving of our esteem and affection than the poor — when grace has made a plain difference in favor of the poor, of a kind infinitely more important than the outward gifts of providence ever made. The bad effects of this unjust preference are censured by the apostle James, in the second chapter of his epistle. We ought undoubtedly to follow God, in the judgment which he gives of things and people, as far as that judgment is revealed — and we find that he sets no value upon riches. He oftentimes bestows riches on those whom he abhors — and denies them to his favorites. But the upright, however poor, are his delight.

God esteems Job as a perfect and upright man, and he still bestows higher commendations on him, after he was stripped of all his substance, because he had given additional proof of his steadfast integrity. When Christ was on earth, he was a poor man who walked in his integrity. Surely the lovers of Christ will never value a man the less, because he is as Christ also was in the world. In short, the upright man, however poor and lowly, is not only a man of better dispositions and behavior than the rich worldling — but he is also incomparably happier and richer, and shall be rich as long as God himself is rich! Be satisfied and thankful, you who are taught by the Spirit of God, to walk in integrity. You are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom — and in this world you have and shall have everything that infinite wisdom and divine love sees fit for you!

Here the poor may see a certain method of being rich, or of obtaining what is far better than riches. Do not labor to be rich in gold and silver — but seek after that which Christ calls the true riches, and which he will dispense unto those who seek them in his appointed way.

Let not the rich man glory in his wealth — if he is perverse in his lips, he is poor and miserable, and blind, and naked; and the esteem of men will not counterbalance the abhorrence of God. Go to Christ under deep impressions of your poverty, and buy from him gold tried in the fire, and you shall be truly rich!

Proverbs 19:2. "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way." To lack that knowledge which we need for our direction through life, is very pernicious. For we are in a dangerous world, full of pits and snares; and the man who has not eyes in his head, must fall, sooner or later, into destruction! When the blind are led by the blind, they cannot well avoid falling

into the ditch. But blind sinners are led by a quick-sighted and crafty devil, who will certainly land them in eternal perdition.

Although we have knowledge in our heads, it will not profit us, unless we have it also in our hearts. Knowledge, when it is not loved and reduced into practice — will only serve to bear testimony for God against the abuser of light, and to heighten his condemnation. A man of much knowledge, and a bad practice, carries about him, like Uriah, that which will prove his own death. To lack knowledge, is not good. To have knowledge, and not to use it as the directory of our life, cannot be one jot better! He who hastens with his feet, and takes no heed to his way, sins!

It is no sin — but a duty, to run in the way of God's commandments. It was an evidence of David's wisdom, that he made haste, and delayed not to run out of the paths of sin, when he considered where they would lead him. To run on, without consideration, wherever our imagination or our passions lead us, exposes us to much sin and danger. Therefore we are commanded to walk circumspectly, keeping our eye upon the ground we tread, that we may not slip; and observing the rule of duty, that we may not transgress it.

Even in those businesses that are lawful, we will be drawn into sin, without circumspection. For the devil has snares spread for us everywhere in this evil world, and he who makes haste to be rich, shall not be innocent.

Although we ought to run in the ways of the Lord, and not faint — yet rashness in our religious course will be attended with much sin. We must carry the lamp of truth with us, otherwise, by running in the dark, we will certainly stumble. As rashness and inconsideration are sinful — so they are also the causes of a great deal of the sin that is in the world. Men would not choose, or at least they would not so resolutely keep the ways of iniquity — were it not that they lack knowledge and thought, as Isaiah clearly shows in the case of idolaters.

Proverbs 19:3. "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD."

Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God." God tempts no man — but every man is tempted when he is seduced into evil by the blindness of his own mind, and the perverseness of his own heart. The world and the devil may indeed persuade us to sin — but none of them can force us. When a man sins, he does more harm to himself than all the legions of Hell can do to him. Therefore, whenever our way is sinful, we must chiefly blame ourselves. It would be blasphemy to charge the most holy God with our sins — and it is folly to transfer the fault unto our seducers. For if our enemy should persuade us to stab ourselves to the heart, it is our own madness to comply. When our way is sinful, we soon feel the miserable consequences of our folly. For wretchedness, in one form or other, follows sin, as the shadow follows the body. But we are so reluctant to blame ourselves for the consequences of our own folly, that our hearts will rather fret against the Lord, as if he were the cause of our ruin! Adam laid the blame of his sin upon the woman, whom God gave to be with him, indirectly transferring his own folly to his Maker — and it is natural and common for men to follow the example of their common parent. This corrupt disposition is not entirely rooted out of the saints themselves. It was David's fault that he did not cause the ark to be carried in the proper manner from the house of Obed Edom. Yet when God made a breach upon the people on that account, David was displeased. Men are oftener guilty of this sin than they imagine. Our hearts fret against the Lord, by fretting at the instruments of his

providence. Therefore, when the people murmured against Moses in the wilderness, he tells those who their murmuring was not against him and his brother Aaron — but against the Lord!

David would not fret against Shimei, because he looked upon him as an instrument employed by God for his correction.

Instead of fretting, it is our duty to accept of the punishment of our iniquity, and to bless God that matters are not as bad with us as we deserve. For why should a living man complain, when the damned have no just reason to do it? If our troubles come upon us without any particular reason from our own conduct — yet bad reflections upon God would be very unjust. Job's troubles were extremely grievous, and they came upon him without cause in himself, as God testifies in Job 2:1-13. Yet he was made humbly to acknowledge his great folly in reflecting upon God for his distresses, before his captivity was turned back.

Proverbs 19:4. "Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him."

God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, whether rich or poor, and to show a peculiar tenderness to the poor on account of their destitute circumstances. But such is the depraved disposition of men, that the rich have many friends — but the poor man is not known by him who lives at the next door. The rich have many temptations to high-mindedness, and this is one of them — that they meet with a great deal of respect, and every person professes friendship to them, and they naturally think that they are possessed of many good qualities, which draw to them the esteem of mankind. But they ought to consider that money is the answer for all things, and is one of the chief attractives of esteem in the world. Let them throw away their money, and those who once made their court to them will leave them, as quickly as the eagles leave a field of battle when the carcasses are all devoured.

Job was the most respected man in the east, when he was the richest — but when he was spoiled of his wealth, he who had been venerated by the people, became their byword.

Jerusalem, in her prosperity, was the princess among the provinces — but in the day of her calamity, all her friends dealt treacherously with her, and became her enemies. A very ordinary virtue in an ordinary man, is a shining virtue in a man of fortune. But if he should become poor, all the luster of his virtues is entirely gone! When the poor man is separated from his neighbor, let him remember and imitate the apostle of the Gentiles, who was often reduced to poverty and hunger. Paul laid very little stress on good report or had report, for he knew that none of these things, nor anything else, could separate him from the love of Christ!

Proverbs 19:5. "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free." A false witness does one of the greatest injuries to his neighbor, and one of the greatest possible dishonors to God. He breaks at once the two great commandments, of loving God, and loving his brother — and therefore deserves more severe punishment. But if he escapes punishment from the magistrate, he shall be punished by God with the loss of credit, and other miseries, in this life — or at the least, with an eternal punishment hereafter. For those who bear false witness against their neighbors are an abomination to the Lord, and how is it possible for them to escape?

Liars are here classed with those who bear false witness, for they are so much alike, that the ninth commandment, which directly forbids the bearing of false witness, does also, by good

interpretation, forbid whatever is harmful to truth. Those who can allow themselves to tell lies in common conversation, will, in all probability, bear false witness, and confirm it by an appeal to Heaven, when they have a sufficient temptation.

Some liars may expect to be safe, because their lies are not of a mischievous kind — but when they do evil that good may come, they expose themselves to just condemnation. "All liars," says our great judge, "shall have their part in the infernal lake!"

Proverbs 19:6. "Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts."

It is, no doubt, a right thing to honor princes, and to seek their favor when we need it — if God is not neglected, from whom every man's judgment comes. The Lord is the king of kings, and it is a plain evidence that we forget God, when we are less anxious about his favor, than men are about the favor of our fellow worms.

Princes need not pride themselves in the homage that is paid to them, for their favor is sought by men, not so much out of regard to their persons, as from a regard to their power.

Kindness and liberality have a greater influence for gaining the hearts of men, than dignity of station. There are many who seek the ruler's favor — but every man loves him who is generous. When power and generosity meet in the same person — he becomes an object of universal esteem, like Marcus Antoninus, who was lamented by every man when he was dead, as if the glory of the Roman empire had died with him.

How inexcusable are we, if we do not love God with all our hearts. His gifts to us are past number, and all the gifts of men to us are the fruits of his bounty, conveyed by the ministry of those whose hearts are disposed by his providence to kindness.

"I have seen your face," said Jacob to Esau, "as the face of God." His brother's favor he knew to be a fruit of the mercy of him with whom he spoke and prevailed at Bethel. In our love to the rich and liberal, we exceed the bounds of duty, if we reserve not a proper share of out regard for the poor, who cannot give us anything — but have a title to receive from us. But the greatest part of men are of a different mind from Christ Jesus, and think it more blessed to receive than to give.

Proverbs 19:7. "A poor man is hated by all his relatives — how much more do his friends avoid him! Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found." The brethren of the poor shun him — this is very hard. He might have expected that though all men had forsaken him — yet his brethren would have shown him compassion in the time of distress. A brother is born for adversity, and he ought chiefly at such a season to show that he is a brother — and if he does not, he greatly aggravates the distress of such a near friend by his unkindness, and gives a fair pretense to those who are not connected with the poor by such endearing ties, to forsake them altogether. We make ourselves guilty of other men's sins, when we tempt them to sin by our example, especially when our obligations to the opposite duty are much stronger. This sin is very general, and almost universal among men — although nature, as well as Scripture, testifies against it. The best of men have often complained in the time of their afflictions, that they were forsaken and abhorred by those whom they most loved, and those from whom they had reason to expect the greatest kindness. But how do they reveal their hatred? By behaving like strangers, and turning a deaf ear to their entreaties for help. This is a sufficient evidence of hatred in the wise

man’s view, and therefore we may justly conclude, that there is more of this abominable sin in the world than those who are chargeable with it will be willing to acknowledge. The lack of love is hatred, though in a lesser degree than malice or spite — and therefore the apostle John distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, by this mark of loving or hating their brethren. By extending this observation into its native consequences, we might convict all wicked men of enmity against God himself, for they do not love him — but despise his laws, and have a reigning aversion to every means of fellowship with him. When poor men are real Christians, it is a double iniquity to despise them for their poverty, for they have a double claim to our regard, and their Redeemer is a severe avenger of their wrongs. To disregard the importunity of the poor when we are able to help them, is a sign of a very hard heart, and provokes God to disregard the prayers of such unmerciful creatures in the day of their own distress, and to punish them without mercy! When the poor are overlooked, let them remember this text to their comfort. When God testifies against this conduct of their friends, it is a clear evidence that his ways are not as men’s ways, nor his thoughts as their thoughts. When Job’s friends scorned him, his eyes poured out tears unto God. Christ was left in his distress by all his disciples — but he was not alone, for the Father was with him. It is an encouragement to our faith, that he had, in the days of his flesh, so large experience of the sorrows of poverty, for in that he himself has suffered, being tempted — he is able also to support those who are tempted.

Proverbs 19:8. "He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers."

Spiritual wisdom is not natural to men, and the best scholars, and greatest philosophers, live and die fools, unless they get into their possession that wisdom which comes from above, and is taught in the holy Scriptures. The way of getting this wisdom is to be sensible of our need of it, to trust in him to whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge belong for the communication of it, and to be diligent in the use of the means which he has appointed, and will bless, for conveying it to us.

We must not only get — but keep this precious treasure, retaining it in our hearts, showing it forth in all our behavior, and refusing to part with it on any account. Many think that those men who are so careful to seek and retain wisdom, are great losers — buying it at too high a price, and refusing to part with it at the risk of everything that is valuable in the eyes of men. But the Spirit of God assures us in this place, that they are great gainers, and never can be losers. They may despise their wealth and ease, their friends and life, for the sake of wisdom — but when they do so, they are lovers of their souls, for the wealth of the whole world is not to be put in competition with an immortal soul. They may meet with loss and disgrace, with persecution and death — but still they will prosper, for they not only find those eternal advantages which infinitely outweigh every temporal loss — but even these losses themselves are good to those who find wisdom, which, like the pretended philosopher’s stone, turns everything into gold. That is truly good to us, which does us good — and that does us good which makes us good, or brings us nearer to the possession of the chief good. The keeper of wisdom does not always find that which appears good to a carnal eye — but he always finds that which appears good in the eyes of God, and consequently in his own eyes. Paul found much good in the things that appear to be the most frightful objects in nature, to the greatest part of men.

Proverbs 19:9. "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish."

These sins are very pernicious — and yet Solomon knew and found them so common, that he publishes a double warning against them, almost in the same breath, Proverbs 19:5.

Proverbs 19:10. "Delight is not fitting for a fool, how much less for servants to have rule over princes."

Wisdom turns everything to a man's advantage and honor — but folly turns gain into loss, and makes a man ridiculous and contemptible, when he is surrounded with everything that might make him happy, and procure him respect.

Happiness is a thing that all men wish to enjoy — but when a fool is furnished with every mean of pleasure, his folly is heightened into madness, and he is found to be seven times more a fool than he appeared to be when he was in other circumstances. A whip is proper for an donkey, and a rod for the fool's back — but delight and the means of procuring it are the same thing to a fool, as a golden bridle to that lazy animal.

It is still more unfitting for servants to have rule over princes, for although servants have as good blood in their veins as princes, and are born with the same rational powers — yet their education and habits of life make them quite unfit for the arts of government. And pride, that universal vice, has never a greater opportunity of gaining full dominion in a man, than when he is unexpectedly raised from the lowest to the highest stations. But this proverb, like many others, is true only in general, and not in every particular instance. For Joseph was very justly raised, from slavery and imprisonment, to reign over princes. Solomon himself assures us, that a wise and poor youth, is worthy of much more respect than an old and foolish king.

Besides the instruction contained in this sentence, to those who have the disposal of high offices in their hands — it teaches us all to value wisdom above pleasure, and all the means of pleasure. Wisdom can make a man happy without pleasures, and wisdom alone can make pleasures the means of happiness to us, and enable us to use them without abusing them into means of our own dishonor.

Wisdom also teaches us also to be pleased with our own condition. How ridiculous would an illiterate rustic appear, were he to be placed in a pulpit — or a man of low birth if he were seated on a throne! It is God's office to choose our stations, and ours to discharge the duties of them with cheerfulness. When God raised Joseph, and Saul, and David, to power, and when he called fishermen to be apostles — this proverb could not be applied to them, because God gave them a spirit suited to their offices. In like manner, when he raises the lowest of men to spiritual honors, he bestows upon them a suitable disposition of mind and soul. Those who are made kings and priests unto God, have the spirit of sons, working in them those heavenly tempers which befit those who are exalted so highly by the grace of God.

Proverbs 19:11. "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Have you been offended by any person? Now is the time for knowing whether you are a wise man, or a fool. If you are a fool, you will follow that maxim of fools, that a man behaves honorably when he will not allow any man to give him the least shadow of affront, without forcing him to repent of it, if possible; or at least showing that it is rather the lack of power than will, which hinders him from taking revenge.

If you are wise, then you will not allow anger to domineer in your heart — but when you find it raising insurrections, you will force it to yield to the dominion of reason and piety. Before you display anger in your words and behavior, you will consider calmly whether you have reason to be angry, or so much reason as passion would make you believe. And if you have reason — yet another question still remains: Do you well to be angry? Do you well to be angry to such a degree? A wise man will not only defer his anger — but pass over offences.

Joab could suppress his anger at Abner for killing Asahel — but he was not a wise man, for his resentment broke forth at a fit opportunity, and instigated him to shed the blood of war in the time of peace.

David was a man of a very different spirit. He not only restrained Abishai from killing Shimei, when he was fleeing from Jerusalem — but he pardoned that offender when he was returning in triumph to his palace. It was not revenge — but the love of peace, and a desire of the public welfare, which made David charge Solomon, on his death-bed, to keep his eye on that dangerous traitor.

It is our duty and wisdom to pass by, not only slight offences — but injuries of a deeper dye, such as may be called transgressions. For we need sometimes the forgiveness of such from men, and every day we are obliged to supplicate the forgiveness of transgressions from God. We are bound to forgive men, even as God, for Christ's sake — has forgiven us.

It is the wisdom of a man to be slow to anger and ready to forgive. For as it is not the water that surrounds a ship — but the water which soaks into it, that sinks it — so it is not the injury done by another man who endangers us, so much as the impression it makes upon ourselves. Our fretful and revengeful thoughts are the torment of our hearts, and deprive us of the government of our own souls! It is a piece of folly, when our neighbor does us an injury, to do a much greater to ourselves, when we mean to be revenged on him. It is a greater glory for a man to govern himself, than to take strong cities, and rule over mighty nations.

It is the wisdom and honor of sinning creatures, to behave to offenders as men who need pardon for themselves. It is the glory of Christians to learn meekness and lowliness from Christ. It is the glory of pardoned sinners, to show forth the virtues of him who called them — to whom they owe so much, not only in their praises but in all their holy conduct.

Proverbs 19:12. "A king's rage is like the roar of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass."

We must be loyal to the king because of his power, if we will not are loyal for conscience sake. For here the Bible requires it, and represents the great danger of disobedience, to affright those who will not be governed by a sense of duty. As the lion among the beasts of the forest — so is a king among men; and as the roaring of the lion is terrible to the beasts — so is the displeasure of the king to those who offend him. But his favor is pleasant and refreshing like the dew upon the grass.

We must not wantonly provoke the displeasure, and forfeit the favor, of one who can do us so much good or evil. Yet if conscience interferes with the king's commands, we must obey God rather than man, for what is the roaring of a lion, or the rage of a tyrant — compared to the torments of a mind enraged with a sense of guilt. Or what is the dew on the grass, or the smiles of a monarch — compared to that peace of God which surpasses all understanding, and made the martyrs happier in their dungeons, and at stakes, than their tyrants were upon their thrones.

Proverbs 19:13. "A foolish son is his father’s ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping." When children behave badly, they are a great cross to their parents. But a peevish and contentious wife is a much greater cross, for children may be turned out of doors when they cannot be reclaimed — but death only, in ordinary cases, can separate those who are joined in marriage. As the rain that drops through an old house rots the timber, and will, in time, wear away the very stones, so the everlasting reflections and complaints of a peevish woman prey upon the vitals of a man, and consume his heart with unceasing anguish. Women were made to assist and comfort their husbands, and therefore they ought to behave with a meek and quiet spirit, for it will never be of advantage to a woman to cross the end of her creation. Those who make such a near friend unhappy, must bring a double share of unhappiness on themselves. But husbands must not impute peevishness to their wives, without good ground. We are all the sons of Adam, and all women are the daughters of Eve, and it would be very unjust to call a woman contentious, for every instance of contention to which vexations may provoke her. If a man has a froward wife, let him consider his own behavior. Few women have so little of the heart of a woman, or a human creature, as to make those men unhappy who treat them with discretion and tenderness. Or if women really deserve this character, gentle admonitions, and kind usage are the best means of reclaiming them.

If a wife has so much of the spirit of a tiger, as still to vex a good husband, his duty is to acknowledge God in this providence, and to consider it as a just correction, or a necessary trial. This will dispose him to perform his duty to a wife who does not perform her duty to him, and to become better himself by her means — if he cannot make her better by all his endeavors and prayers. When men who have good wives consider this text, and the too frequent illustrations of it which the observation of the world gives us — it will teach them what reason they have of thankfulness to God, for appointing them a happier lot. It is not chance, nor our own discretion — but the providence of God that gives any of us a prudent wife!

Proverbs 19:14. "Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD."

Houses and lands are given us by God — but he gives them to us by means of our parents, whose industry acquired them. The providence of God shines more remarkably in bestowing good wives on men, for they cannot come by inheritance — and no man can guess beforehand what wife shall fall to any man’s lot.

Prudence in a wife, includes not only skill in the management of domestic affairs — but likewise that good sense that makes her an agreeable partner, and directs her to that kind of behavior which makes her husband happy in this connection. To these qualities, if piety is added, it renders her a far greater blessing than any possessions that parents can transmit.

We are to thank God for every outward enjoyment — but chiefly for those in which his favorable providence appears most plainly. Houses and lands may tend, in a great degree, to render life comfortable — but a virtuous woman is an uncommon blessing, for her price is far above rubies! He who finds a wife has reason to thank God. He who finds a good wife has many reasons to be thankful. It was God who gave her prudence. It was God who brought him into acquaintance with her. It was God who disposed him to choose her for a wife, and determined her mind to comply with his desires. When we receive a rich present from a friend, gratitude obliges us to use it

according to his wishes.

If a wife is a rich present from God — then her husband is bound to show her all that respect and kindness which God requires.

Whatever treatment a wife deserves, God commands her husband to love her — but when a wife is prudent, the husband would be inexcusable who did not love her with the tenderest affection.

If a man desires to have a wife, he must acknowledge God by earnest supplications. For he alone knows the hearts of men and women, and exercises a sovereign influence over their affections. But let him not presume to affront God by pretending to seek a wife from him, without seeking prudence in her — preferably to houses or land. For God declares, that a prudent wife is a far richer gift than those things which are so much valued by the generality of men. When children wish to enter into marriage, they cannot expect the favor of their parents, if they make a choice directly opposite to the judgment of their parents. Just so, how can we expect that our heavenly Father should give us his favor, in pursuits opposite to his declared will?

Proverbs 19:15. "Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle soul shall suffer hunger." A man would make himself universally despised, if he kept his bed all the time that other people are at work. Yet a slothful man might as well lay in his bed all day, for while he is awake, he is sleeping, and when he is at work, he is idle. Slothfulness is to the body like rust to iron — it is a consumption to all the powers of the mind, and by its stealing influence and stupefying nature, it casts a man into a sleep, not of an ordinary kind — but a deep sleep like that of death. When a man does nothing as it ought to be done, he is like one buried alive, and may as well be numbered with the inhabitants of the land of silence and rest. Would you avoid hunger and poverty, things so much dreaded by mankind? Then avoid idleness, which brings these miseries upon men, and deprives them of that pity which waits upon virtue in distress. Idleness brings hunger, and along with it temptations to fraud and theft, by which means it has led many to a gibbet.

Proverbs 19:16. "He who keeps the commandment, keeps his own soul — but he who despises his ways, shall die." As the Word of God is called the Scripture, (or the writing,) as if there were no other writings in the world, because there are none which can bear a comparison with it — so the precepts of the Bible may be called the commandment, because, although there are men who have a right to command — yet the precepts of God lay an obligation upon us, of force infinitely superior to anything else in the world. The authority of parents and kings is derived from God, and we are bound to obey them, because God requires it, and when their commandments interfere with the will of God, we are bound to obey God, and not man. The commandment of God is to be observed and obeyed by us in all things, and through the whole course of our lives. We must keep it, not only as the apple of our eye — but as our life and soul. He who keeps the commandment keeps his own soul from those sins that would bring death and ruin upon him, and from the temptations of the adversary who watches our halting, and seizes every opportunity he can find to do us harm. But how can a man keep his own soul? Is not the Lord our keeper? Certainly — but in converting and keeping men, he deals with them as rational creatures. We greatly abuse the doctrine of free grace, if we imagine that it supersedes the necessity and advantage of obedience. Although the glory of salvation belongs entirely to Jesus — yet he condescends to give to faithful ministers the honor of being workers under him. And although the glory of the strength of Christians stands in him — yet when he communicates the influences of his grace, he makes

themselves instrumental, under his agency, in their own preservation from the snares of the destroyer. He who is born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one touches him not.

Care and thought are absolutely necessary in those who resolve to keep the commandment. The saint must not only endeavor to understand and remember the rule of the law — but likewise to observe his own way, that he may direct his steps, and form his course of behavior in an agreeableness to it. The travelers who have their faces towards the better country, must have their eyes in their head, for there is no going to Heaven by chance, and those who live at random must die. This truth is clearly taught by the apostle Paul in language sufficient to alarm the stoutest sinner, if anything could alarm him. "If you live after the flesh, you shall surely die!"

Proverbs 19:17. "He who gives to the poor, lends to the LORD — and he will reward him for what he has done."

Without the pity of the heart, the bounty of the hand is unacceptable to the Searcher of hearts. Professions of pity are mere hypocrisy, without the fruit of bounty — if it is in the power of our hands to show it.

How great is the mercy of the Lord to the poor! He has appointed them to be the receivers of a part of his revenue, and what is given to them, he accounts to be lent to himself. This mercy is not confined to the poor of his own people; although he interests those especially in our bounty — yet he would not have us to restrict the fruits of our compassion to believers alone. Our Lord dispensed his cures to the ungrateful, although he knew what was in man. God causes his sun to rise, and his rain to descend, upon the evil and the good. He requires us to give a portion to seven, and also to eight, dispersing the fruits of our liberality, as the gardener scatters his grain, although he does not certainly know whether it shall prosper.

"He who gives to the poor, lends to the Lord." This is an argument of wonderful force for charity. No Pagan moralist could ever produce a motive for any social duty, equal to this. It is sufficient to open the closest fist, and to enlarge the most selfish heart. Does God show so much regard to the poor — and shall we be indifferent to their happiness? Can we lose anything by lending it to the Lord? Men refuse to give when they do not expect to receive — and they expect no return from the poor. If the rich were desirous to borrow from us, we would think our money safe in their hands, and esteem their bonds as good as money in our purses. But all the earth belongs unto the Lord, and shall we not trust our money in his hands, by giving to the poor? Here is his bond, and it must be a good one, if the Scripture is the Word of God. The richest man in the world may, for anything we know, be poor tomorrow, or he may prove unfaithful to his word. But the Lord is the everlasting possessor of Heaven and earth, and he cannot lie, nor deceive anyone who trusts in him. Had we lived in the days of Christ’s humiliation, when he lived on the contributions of pious women, it is natural for us to think that we would have cheerfully given to him all our living, and thought ourselves greatly indebted to him for accepting it. We no longer have Jesus with us — but the poor we always have with us; and when we have them to receive the fruits of our bounty — it is the same thing as if we had Christ himself. God will be sure to repay what is given to the poor at his command, with great increase. The greatest usurer on earth cannot make so much of his money, as the man who gives to the poor. "You shall be recompensed," says Christ, "at the resurrection of the just!" Is that a long time to wait for it? Then you are assured, by the same faithful witness, that you shall have an hundred-fold, even in this life, for everything you part with on his account! Luke

14, Matthew 19.

Men who may be safely trusted with our money, are not always ready with their payments. A poor man cannot have his money from them when he needs it — but God repays what is given to the poor at the best time; and if he does not return it in money, he pays it in what is incomparably better.

Proverbs 19:18. "Discipline your son while there is hope, and let not your soul spare for his crying."

If you mean to do good to your children by discipline, begin early! For if he is left to grow up under the government of self-will, it is to be feared that he will become like a horse or mule which were never taught to obey the rider. When these animals come to a full age, without being forced to obey the rein — you may sooner break their necks, than break them to obedience! But you say that your heart melts, and you cannot bear to hear the cries of your poor child under discipline, and you cannot give him another harsh word. You then let your child alone, and leave him to the government of his own sinful passions. But remember that it will be still more grievous to have your gray hair brought down with sorrow to the grave, and to hear him curse you at the left hand of your Judge, for allowing him to destroy himself — than to hear his groans for a few moments!

Parents ought neither to inflict unnecessary chastisement on their children, nor allow their angry passions to mingle themselves with the duty here recommended. Those parents who make an angry use of the rod — need a rod given to their own backs! An offending child must not be spared for his crying — and far less must he be spared for his anger. If his anger procures his deliverance — he will soon learn the way of escaping all chastisement. If you deliver him once from discipline, you must deliver him again and again, until he is past all hope of amendment. This seems to be at least a part of the meaning of the next verse.

Proverbs 19:19. "A man of great anger shall suffer punishment. For if you deliver him — yet you must do it again." When Peter asked our Lord how often he should forgive his offending brother, he received a very surprising answer: "Not seven times — but until seventy times seven." But will not this give great encouragement to men to offend their brethren, and to give every indulgence to their angry passions? No, for it does not imply that an angry person shall escape from punishment.

It was once said to a man who was killing his adversary, "let him alone, and he will die of his own accord." So may it be said to a man who thirsts for revenge upon his passionate antagonist, "let him alone, and he will take revenge upon himself." Although you spare him at this time, he will soon expose himself again to punishment, and it cannot be supposed that he will always escape.

You ought rather to pity him, than rage like him — for he is his own irreconcilable enemy, and will be sure to plunge himself into harm.

Anger is said to be a temporary madness — but the passionate man is always mad until he gains the victory over the tyrants who domineer in his soul. He has sober fits — but he so frequently relapses, that you cannot say he ever possesses the use of reason. Any man who wishes evil to him, may deprive him of the use of his understanding, by a single word, or even by a look. Are your souls subject to those storms of angry passion? Turn your anger upon itself. You are displeased with other men, because you take them for enemies — but your worst enemies are the passions of your own heart! Do you not hate that monster, Vitellius, who said that the carcass of a

slain enemy was a pleasant sight? Why then don't you hate the violent tyrants of your own breast, that would wreak their fury upon the names and bodies of your neighbors — but reveal it most of all in tearing your own souls? You are every day torturing yourselves, and exposing yourselves to a severe retaliation from those whom you insult, and to a more severe vengeance still, from your Judge, who will call you to account for every angry thought and every passionate word!

Proverbs 19:20. "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise." A friend who can give us good counsel is a precious treasure, and nothing but folly and self-conceit can keep us from valuing his good advice as more than fine gold. If the counsels of our friends deserve respect — then the counsels of the Word of God are infinitely more useful. The testimonies of the Lord were David's counselors in all his difficulties, and they made him wiser than the ancients.

Every name of our Redeemer is dear to the true Christian, and one of them is Wonderful Counselor. He gives us counsel by his word and Spirit. Our ears and souls are his, and shall we not employ them in hearing and treasuring up his counsels, that we may direct all our actions by their light?

Instruction is very much needed by us, for we are naturally ignorant and foolish. When God gives us instruction, either by his word and ordinances, or by the rebukes of his providence — we must receive it with submission and meekness. Instruction, either by words or blows, would be welcome to us, if we had a due sense of our own stupidity, and of the value of our souls. But what will we gain by hearing counsel, and receiving instruction? It will make us wise; "for the entrance of God's Word gives light, it gives understanding unto the simple." The rod and reproof give wisdom, and wisdom is far more precious than gold and rubies.

Without counsel and instruction, we must be fools forever. If we refuse wisdom, when it is presented to us in those means of God's appointment — then our folly is desperate and stubborn, and admits of no excuse. But we have used these means, you will say, and have acquired but very little wisdom from them. But a little wisdom is a very great attainment, and if you think that you have got none at all — yet you must still continue to use the means, and so you shall be wise at your latter end. A man will spend several years in learning a business which will enable him to live comfortably through the remainder of life. Just so, we have no reason to grudge a whole lifetime employed in receiving instruction, if it makes us wise at our latter end. At our latter end it will be seen whether we have been fools or wise men. If our days are spent in the pursuit of perishing things, to the neglect of our eternal interests — then we shall be forced to leave these vanities to which we sacrificed our souls, and at our end we shall be fools. When the men who choose the world for their portion come to the close of life, and their former conduct presents itself to their eyes — how will they curse and tear themselves in their rage, at their own blindness and madness! Even while they are eager in the pursuit of vanity, and flattering themselves with the delusive hopes of many days of pleasure before them — they cannot forbear from wishing, like the covetous soothsayer, that they may die the death of the righteous, and that their last end may be like his. But mark the follower of wisdom, and behold him who hearkens to the counsels of the Almighty. His latter end is peace and happiness. Those who hated his holiness, and despised his condition — are now obliged to acknowledge that his life was spent in wisdom, and that his last hour is blessed. Do you think that you have already gained enough of wisdom? You are quite mistaken. He is yet a child, and speaks as a child, who thinks himself a scholar if he can repeat the

letters of the alphabet. A Christian must live and die learning.

Proverbs 19:21. "There are many plans in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord shall stand."

Men’s hearts are perpetually filled with plans, and they seldom consider whether these plans are agreeable to the mind of God or not. But the counsel of the Lord revealed in his word, shall stand good after all the plans they can form. It is the way of happiness to hear his counsel and receive his instruction. For the world passes away, and the lusts thereof — but he who does the will of God abides forever, and must prosper while he acts by the direction of these unerring counselors, the testimonies of the Lord. But the counsel of God is generally used in Scripture to signify the purpose of God concerning the events that shall come to pass. This counsel comprehends everything that has come or shall come to pass in the world, either by the immediate agency of God, or by means of any creature. For the worst of men, and devils themselves, are employed by the providence of God in executing his decrees. Men and devils act in an agreeableness to their own wills as far as their power reaches — but they are still under the absolute dominion of the Lord; and whether they are able or not able to execute their own devices, they are executing his decrees.

How inscrutable is the wisdom of divine Providence! Millions of creatures know nothing of the true God, millions of them are his constant enemies, and are incessantly employed in devising and executing those purposes which have for their objects, the gratification of selfish and corrupt affections; and are filled with enmity against God — and yet they all concur in fulfilling his secret will. His counsels leave them to their own will — and their will, however corrupt, is managed by his holy providence to serve his own glorious designs — and where it would lead men beyond the line of his decrees, he powerfully and invisibly controls it.

It is vain for men to form any purpose, and to think of carrying it into execution, without acknowledging the providence of God. The Apostle James warns us in strong language against this piece of practical atheism. When we meet with hardships from the cruelty of men, let us consider this truth, and behave meekly and humbly. They can do nothing without the observation and permission of God. Christ submitted quietly to those sufferings which he underwent from the hands of barbarous men, because it was necessary that the Scriptures should be fulfilled, and the determinations of God’s hand and counsel performed. What David did, pleased all the people — and shall not we be pleased with what the King of Heaven does?

Let the people of God rejoice. The counsels of God concerning them are glorious in wisdom and grace, and though hand joins in hand, they shall not be unaccomplished. The counsels of their enemies are dangerous — but no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper. All the counsels of the wicked shall be executed or frustrated according to the good pleasure of God, whose eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him.

Let sinners tremble, for their counsels and works are in the hand of God. He may allow them to prosper for a time in evil, and to bring some of their wicked devices to pass — but their evils shall rebound upon themselves, and their nets shall entangle their own feet. God may use them for a time to accomplish his gracious though solemn designs upon his people — but he will in a short

time call them to account, and punish them for all the evils they have done, and for the greater evils they have imagined.

Proverbs 19:22. "The desire of a man is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar." A man's benevolence is not in proportion to the good deeds he performs — but to the real desires he has to do good, if it were in his power. A man may perform many acts of kindness — and yet not perform all that he ought. When a rich man bestows a few of his superfluities, they may amount to a considerable sum — and yet in the balance of the sanctuary they will not equal in weight the little pittance that a poor man gives, when he stretches himself to the utmost of his ability, or even beyond it. A rich man may even give more than a man could reasonably desire him to give, for the purposes of charity or public service — and yet be entirely destitute of charity and public spirit, seeking only the praise of men, while he professes, like the old Pharisees, much better things. On the other side, a man may give only two mites, or nothing at all — and yet possess a generous soul, like that of Job, who never ate his morsel without sharing it with the poor. As God alone knows the heart, the day of judgment will be the grand revealer of the real characters of men. In the meantime, we must not love those only who bestow much kindness on us, nor confine our esteem to those who signalize themselves by their extensive liberalities. For the virtues, as well as the vices of men, are often concealed under rags, and pinched by poverty, so that they cannot display their blossoms, or produce their proper fruits. The poor man who cannot give, and is obliged to receive, is a much better man than the liar who professes kindness — and yet does nothing to verify his professions by works. Good words are good things in their proper place, and do well befit the mouth of the Christian — but good words instead of good deeds are mere hypocrisy; of so gross a kind, that even men often discern it, and despise the pitiful wretch who endeavors to shelter the baseness and selfishness of his spirit, under empty professions. Do you say to your poor brother, be warmed and clothed, while you give him nothing to shelter him from the pinching cold, or to fill his craving appetite, although you are well able to do it? You only join hypocrisy and lies to the lack of charity — and a poor man who lives upon the bounty of the parish is a more respectable man than you.

Let us learn to value men by their hearts, as far as they lie open to the judgment of candor and charity — rather than their professions and appearances, which are so frequently delusive.

Thus shall we be enabled to choose our friends, and to put a proper value on their kindness. By this means we shall be preserved from that injustice so frequently condemned by the wise man, of despising the poor, and paying an undue respect to the rich. This proverb also teaches us to examine our own hearts, that we may know how far we are under the influence of a kind and charitable spirit. God will not accept of all the substance of our houses — instead of the charity of the heart. At the same time, desires are not real, nor are they genuine marks of godliness — if they are not followed by suitable performances, when the providence of God puts it in our power.

Proverbs 19:23. "The fear of the Lord tends to life, and he who has it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."

Religion is the soul of happiness. It makes the present life long and happy, as far as a long and happy life is really for our advantage — and it is the beginning of eternal life in the soul. He who is governed by the fear of the Lord enjoys heart-felt satisfaction; and the joys that spring from it are not like the short-lived joys of the world, which die away into sadness and misery; they last through

life, they are vigorous in old age, when the pleasures of sense have lost their relish, and they triumph over death and all its terrors.

Christians are indeed exposed to heaviness through manifold temptations — but the fear of the Lord, and faith in Christ, has often produced joy unspeakable and full of glory in such seasons. The disquiets which the people of God often feel, are owing for the most part, to the imperfections of their religious dispositions, and are blessed by God as means of improving their grace, and introducing sweeter joys into their souls.

Christians have unfailing grounds of satisfaction, for they have health in their souls, they know that all their affairs are managed by a wise and gracious Providence, and they have the sure promises of the life to come. If God himself can give satisfaction to the souls which he has made — then they have it, or shall have it in due time — for he manages all things for their good, and his eternal excellencies are their portion. The saint of God is entirely delivered from the miseries of fallen state, as far as it can consist with the plan of his recovery which divine wisdom has contrived. The calamities which he suffers are unstinged to him through the Redeemer's cross, which, like the tree that Moses cast into the waters of Marah, makes bitter things sweet. He is not visited with any unnecessary evil, and those evils that visit him are made good on the whole by the tendency which they have to do him good, and make him good. Reproaches and tribulations, sicknesses and deaths, are the common lot of men, and they are very evil things to those who are strangers to God — but they are good to those who love God, for they are appointed and useful means to make them partakers of God's holiness, and prepare them for that blessed world where sins and sorrows are no more.

Proverbs 19:24. "The sluggard hides his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again."

Solomon was a mortal enemy to sloth, as every wise man will be. He has often told us of the mischievous effects of this vice, and here he holds up the sluggard as an object of contempt and laughter, to make him ashamed, if possible, of his laziness, and to awaken us to diligence in the duties of our calling and religion.

It is a mark of a sluggard to make a great business of a little affair, and to make much ado about nothing at all. It is a business to the sluggard to take his hand out of his bosom, and it is a grievous affair for him to put it to his mouth to feed himself. Were it not for shame, he would desire to be fed like an infant, and he will at length be tempted to grudge that men cannot live like trees, on which their proper nourishment falls down from the clouds. A man who employs his hands with diligence, is able not only to support himself and his family — but to give something likewise to him who is in need. He finds less trouble in his work, and enjoys more contentment than a sluggard would do, if you should bring everything to him that is needful for his support, without any labor of his own hands — because the things that no man can do for him are oppressions to his sluggish soul. It is a greater burden to a sleepy man to strip himself and go to bed, than for another man to perform some laborious service.

Awake, you sluggard, out of your deep sleep, unless you desire to be miserable through life. For life itself is an intolerable slavery when every piece of work is a burden.

Beware of spiritual sloth, which makes every duty of religion a toil. God loves a cheerful servant who rejoices and works righteousness — but he will accept of no drowsy and spiritless services, which are a dishonor to him and to his ways. To the slothful Christian, it seems a burden to pray, and to read God's Word, although by these duties we only ask, and receive, and eat our spiritual food. The lively Christian admires the grace of God, which has made these holy exercises our duty — but the sluggard grudges that he cannot have Heaven in a morning dream.

Proverbs 19:25. "Flog a mocker — and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke a discerning man, and he will gain knowledge."

Solomon has already told us that it is needless to reprove a scorner, because his pride will make reproofs useless to him. What, then, is to be done with him? Shall he be allowed to proceed in his wicked courses, and to corrupt others by his example? No, he ought to be smitten — at least when he lays himself open to the vengeance of the laws. And although there is little hope of reclaiming one who is so much hardened in wickedness — yet his punishment will be useful to other men, who will hear, find fear, and no more do wickedly. The simple and thoughtless will be made to see how dangerous it is to follow the example of one who has suffered imprisonment, or whipping, or death, for his vices — and those who would not be restrained from evil by the fear of God, and the thoughts of an eternal world, will be checked by the fear of men, and the terror of present punishment.

It is a necessary thing in a land to punish criminal offences. For without the execution of justice on the wicked, iniquity would overflow all its banks, and men would not live with safety among their fellow-creatures. We have, therefore, reason to bless God for the institution of magistracy, and should concur in our stations to assist in the execution of the just laws against vice. But a wise man needs not be smitten for his faults, which are generally of a much less atrocious nature than those of the scorner. He is not, however, to be connived at, or left to his own wisdom, to inform him of his miscarriages. Men are commonly too dim-sighted to discern their own miscarriages in a proper light — and reproofs are means appointed and blessed by God for bringing wise men themselves to the exercise of a lively sorrow and repentance. Are you afraid to reprove a wise man, lest he should take it amiss? You need not fear this, if he is really a wise man. He will love you for reproving him, and will understand knowledge. A fool is displeased when he is supposed capable of falling into a fault — but a wise man is meek and lowly, sensible of his imperfection and frailty, and when he goes out of the road of duty, is glad and thankful to be set right. This proverb teaches us, how vain it is for men, through the pride of character, to cavil at admonitions, and endeavor to justify themselves in opposition to plain fact. Instead of serving our character by this behavior, we greatly hurt it. When we receive reproof with gratitude, we show ourselves wise men. When we are displeased with reproof, we show that we are fools, or at least that our wisdom is mingled with much folly. To affect the character of perfect men, is a plain evidence that we know not ourselves, and do not remember the present state of human nature.

Proverbs 19:26. "He who robs his father and drives out his mother, is a son who brings shame and disgrace."

Some children are so wicked, as to think it no sin to steal from their parents, and to take at their own hands that portion of the goods which they think belongs to them. Others abuse the fondness of their parents, and ungratefully make use of it as a means of robbing them by their own consent.

Both these kinds of wicked children may be said to rob their parents.

There is another kind of children who have some reverence for their father, because their self-interest depends on his will — but they have so little regard for their mothers, that they chase them away from their houses, by rendering their life uncomfortable, or by wasting that portion of goods which pertains to them.

Esau, as profane as he was, had some regard for his father, and sought his blessing with many tears — but he valued not his mother, and resolved to kill her dearest son, as soon as her husband's head was laid in the dust. On the other side, dutiful children will at all times endeavor to make their mothers happy, especially when they are reduced to the affliction of a widowed condition.

Those sons that behave so undutifully to their parents bring a reproach on themselves, which spreads to the whole family. They are monsters of mankind, who are entirely destitute of natural affection, and feel no gratitude for the highest obligations which one human person can receive from another. They barbarously disappoint the most reasonable hopes that can be formed by men, and prove the torment and disgrace of those who had the best reason to expect comfort at their hand. They violate the strongest obligations to duty, and make themselves unworthy of the least confidence from men. They greatly provoke the author of their being, by their base conduct towards their parents.

God has placed in his law the duties we owe to our parents, next to those we owe to himself — and he will severely avenge the neglect of them. How, then, can they escape punishment, who do not only neglect — but scandalously subvert these duties! If the injuries done to strangers, or inferiors, expose men to the displeasure of the Most High God — then what punishments hang over those who wound, in the tenderest part, the parents to whom under God they owe their being? Is God so careful to enforce the rights of parents upon their children — then how careful should parents be to inculcate on their children their duty to God, the sense of which, in the minds of their children, is their own best security for that regard which is due to themselves.

If God be the father of the human race, and of Christians in particular — then what fear is due to him? What monsters of undutifulness are those who provoke him to anger continually!

Proverbs 19:27. "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causes to err from the words of knowledge."

There are many deceivers in the world, who make it their business to clothe error with the appearance of truth, and to weaken the motives to holiness which are set before us in the Word of God. And the exhortation in this verse speaks to us as children, warning us to beware of their artifices and insinuations. Error may be rendered very plausible, for the Devil himself came to men with Scripture in his mouth; and no wonder if his ministers can presume to plead both Scripture and reason in behalf of their pernicious doctrines.

Yet a quagmire is not the less dangerous, because it is covered with beautiful verdure, and has the appearance of solid ground. Nor is poison the less pernicious, because it is covered with honey. Error is error after all that can be said for it — and all the shapes which it can be made to assume. It is, no doubt, our duty to prove all things, and to take nothing upon the mere testimony

of men which concerns our precious souls. Yet it is the property of a sincere soul, like Nathaniel's, to be open to conviction, where there is danger of a mistake. But this does not imply that we are to be ever learning, without coming to the knowledge and assurance of the truth. The truth may be known, because it is plainly revealed in the Bible. And when we have found that which is good, we ought to hold it fast, that no man take our crown. We are to contend earnestly for it against all opposition, and to shut our ears against those instructions that would shake our regard to those things which are most surely believed among us.

It is dangerous for men to lend a ready ear to those who would exalt the dignity of human nature, to the dishonor of the righteousness and grace of Christ; or loosen the obligations of men to obey every law of God, because the corruption of our natures gives countenance to everything that favors pride or carelessness. When we think we are well fortified against the delusions of seducing spirits and false teachers, and rashly venture to hear what they can say for themselves — then we are in great danger of being perverted, and filling from our imagined steadfastness. The apostle John tells us, that it is a great and dangerous sin, when a man comes to teach false doctrine, to receive him into our houses, or to give him any kind of encouragement.

Christ tells us, that his true sheep hear and know his voice, and follow him — but will not follow a stranger. Perhaps you have already given too much ear to the teachers of corrupt doctrine. The exhortation is chiefly addressed to you, by him who knows your danger. Cease to hear such instruction. The time past is sufficient to have listened to it. Examine carefully how far your judgment or practice have been perverted, by comparing them with the Scriptures. Adjust your profession and practice to that unerring standard. Endeavor to know the present truth, and to be established in it. Learn by the Word of God, and prayer, to distinguish between truth and error. Hear those teachers that are of God, and preach sound doctrine. Beware of itching ears, which would tempt you to drink poison into your ears and hearts, instead of the sincere milk of the word.

Proverbs 19:28. "A corrupt witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down evil." This is not the first nor second time that Solomon has informed us about the wickedness of false witnesses. It would be a great injustice to admit the testimony of a profligate wretch, against the life or fortune of his neighbor. For he neither regards man, nor fears God. He scorns justice, and has no reverence for the most sacred and venerable objects. He bids defiance to eternal justice, and swallows down the most enormous iniquities as if they were sweet wine. For his conscience has become hardened in iniquity, until a trifle will be a sufficient temptation to him to swear against innocent blood.

It is greatly the interest of a nation to take care that a sense of religion is preserved among its members. When men generally lose their reverence for an oath, the bonds of society are broken — then honesty becomes a prey, and ruin advances with hasty steps.

Let all men beware of those sins that are counted little, for they are like little thieves that get in at the window, and then open the door for bigger villains to get in! When men learn to lie without scruple, because they hurt none but themselves — they will next learn to bear false witness, when they are tempted by gain or fear, and from thence they will proceed to greater degrees of wickedness — until at length they will scarcely put the devil to the trouble of tempting them to any sin — but will drink iniquity down like water.

Every sin tends to harden the conscience, and a conscience long hardened in sin, will in time be seared as with a hot iron. However stupid the consciences of ungodly men are, and whatever flatteries they use for deceiving themselves — their iniquity will in the end be found hateful to God.

Proverbs 19:29. "Penalties are prepared for mockers, and beatings for the backs of fools."

Scorners and mockers, in the pride of their hearts, think themselves secure from the vengeance of the law, and are sometimes so profane as to laugh at the threatenings of the Almighty. But the day is coming when their laughter shall be turned into heaviness. The God whom they despise, is the Judge of all the earth — and it is his glory to exercise his high office in righteousness. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked — but if they will not turn and live, they must die, and their blood shall be on their own head, and the Lord shall be known by the judgment which he executes. The judgments that shall be inflicted on scorners, are already prepared, and determined for them.

It is the triumph of lively Christians that they can look to the days of eternity, and rejoice in the contemplation of a kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world. But the wicked have great reason to tremble with astonishment, when they reflect upon the immutable decrees of God — for an everlasting Hell was designed in them for every unrepenting transgressor. As kings have their officers of justice, and instruments of vengeance ready to terrify profligate subjects into obedience to the laws — so the Everlasting King has every instrument of vengeance reserved among his treasures, to terrify men from sin, or to destroy them if they go on in their trespasses. Their punishment shall be disgraceful to the last degree, for stripes are prepared for the backs of fools. They shall suffer ignominious wounds as the basest of criminals, and their reproach shall never be wiped away.

Because the wicked feel not the strokes of judgment, they foolishly think that they shall forever escape. But did the old world of the ungodly escape, although they were spared a hundred and twenty years? Christ himself, the beloved Son of God, when he was bearing iniquity of his people, was not spared. Justice and judgment took hold of our blessed Surety, and he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. If God spared not his own Son — will he then spare stubborn transgressors?

Perhaps you imagine, sinners, that vengeance will be long delayed, and that your sufferings are reserved to the eternal world. Perhaps it may be so — and for anything you know, it may not be so. But, allowing that you should enjoy all the prosperity that your hearts can wish until you die — are you sure that you shall live another year, or another day? Your life depends absolutely on him whom you treat as an enemy; and when his much abused patience is at an end — then where, O where are you! "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say: Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons!"

# 01.20. Proverbs 20

Chapter 20.

Proverbs 20:1-30 Proverbs 20:1. "Wine is a mocker and strong drink is a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."

Wine and strong drink are creatures of God, which are very useful to men when they are seasonably and moderately used — but by abusing them, we sin against the goodness and law of God, and against our own souls and bodies.

Wine deceives and mocks those who use it to excess, and punishes those who abuse it as an instrument of dishonor to him who gave it to men to cheer their hearts. It promises refreshment — but it steals away men's senses, until it makes them the objects of scorn to the sober. It made the venerable patriarch Noah a laughing-stock to his own son. It deprives men of their reason, and gives the government of the mind to the passions; and then those who were men of good behavior in their sober moments — become insolent and brawling. When the king of Israel was made drunk with bottles of wine, he forgot his dignity, and stretched out his hand with scorners.

Wine has been the beginning of many quarrels which have ended in wounds and blood. For it rouses the passions, it turns suspicions into certainties in the eye of the drunkard, and thus inflames resentments into irreconcilable animosities. It gives full range to all the hidden vices of the soul, and produces new vices of a dangerous kind. It destroys the power of reason, and infuses into the soul all the fury of a wild beast!

He who allows himself to be led astray by it is not wise, for he wastes his memory and his mind, as well as his money. He wounds his conscience, he enslaves himself to a tyrant, and enters upon a course which, when it becomes habitual, will render him useless and miserable upon earth, and exclude him from the kingdom of Heaven! When wine and strong drink are greedily swallowed down — they swallow the drunkard, and turn him into an raging beast.

Wine had the honor of being used in the service of God under the law, and is still used in it under the gospel — so why should we use it in the service of Satan? It is not allowed by God but with moderation, to the greatest men on the greatest occasions. Neither birth days of kings, nor happy meetings of friends, nor the transacting of the most important businesses, will justify men in excess of wine.

We should remember, that the day of Christ is approaching, and take care that our hearts be not overcharged with excess and drunkenness. We must remember from whom we receive the refreshments of life, and endeavor to glorify him in the use of them. We are called to the hope of drinking of the rivers of God's pleasures — and shall we fill ourselves with wine, wherein there is excess?

Proverbs 20:2. "A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life."

Solomon had probably seen too much evidence of a seditious disposition in that people over which he reigned, and therefore warns them again and again of the sin and danger of provoking kings to anger. Men have such a degree of self-will and pride, that they can scarcely be prevailed upon to submit to the necessary restraints of their liberty. Liberty is a valuable thing — but licentiousness is the ruin of nations.

If the fear occasioned by the displeasure of a king is so intolerable — then what must it be to encounter the wrath of him whose voice is not only like the roaring of a lion — but like the sound of many thunders. His voice shakes the Heaven and the earth, and neither men nor devils shall be able to endure the terrors of it. To sin against Christ is to sin not only against our lives — but against our immortal souls!

Proverbs 20:3. " It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel."

It is an honor for a man to avoid strife, and to overlook those things that might stir up anger. But when a man is engaged in contention — is it an honor for him to give it up? Will not the world say that we have a bad cause, or weak arguments, or a cowardly spirit, if we have not the last word? It does not matter what the world says — if the Spirit of God says other things. It is here declared to be honorable for a man to give up a debate for the sake of peace and quietness. By so doing, we testify our humility and meekness, our obedience to God, and our aversion to sin.

Christ did not strive, nor cry out, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street — and surely it is a man’s honor to imitate, as far as our weakness will allow, the meekness and gentleness of Christ. It was wise in Paul to make an acknowledgment of his error in speaking disrespectfully of the high priest, although that partial judge well deserved the sharpest reproof for his partiality and tyranny. It would have been wise in Job’s friends to have yielded to the force of his convincing arguments, rather than, by endeavoring to maintain their errors, to expose themselves to the displeasure of God, and to the just mortification of being obliged to have recourse to the intercessions of that godly man whom they had so deeply injured. But every fool is quick to quarrel. For a fool is so self-conceited, that he can bear no contradiction. He is so insolent, that he will have a hand in every other man’s business. He is so proud, that he cannot bear to be found in the wrong. He is so stubborn, that he will have the last word, although his lips should prove his destruction.

Amaziah was fairly warned of the danger of meddling with the king of Israel — but he would not hear reason, nor cease from strife, until he was brought with his kingdom to the verge of ruin.

Zedekiah entered into contention with the good prophet Micaiah, and had the insolence to strike that faithful servant of the Lord — but was soon after compelled to flee to an inner chamber to hide himself. This is one difference between wise men and fools. The former are for peace — the latter are ordinarily keen for battle. This may be illustrated from the difference between the behavior of Nabal and David; Nabal had a very bad tongue, for as Nabal was his name, so folly was with him. He gave a very provoking answer to a very civil message from David, and thereby exposed himself and his family to ruin. David had human nature, and his passions were too fierce — but it was his honor that he was easily pacified, and although he did not leave off contention, as he should have done — yet he left it off before it came to a fatal extremity.

Proverbs 20:4. "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold, therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing."

It is one plain evidence of sloth for a man to be dexterous in finding excuses to shift of necessary work. If a small inconvenience is allowed as an excuse for idleness — then excuses will never be lacking. The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; and he will not sow because the ground is not in good order; and he will not weed his field because of the heat of summer; and he will not reap in harvest because he cannot endure to bend his back, and is afraid of an headache. But is there any other useful business that can suit him, since farming is so disagreeable? No, one business would oblige him to a sedentary life; another is attended with too much fatigue; a third is too lowly for a gentleman; a fourth requires a man to rise early in the morning. He will sleep or lean on his elbow — or he will divert himself with any kind of sport — or he will talk until you are tired with him — or he will play at cards, for although he abhors business, he loves busy idleness. He will either do nothing — or what is worse than nothing. But he who will not work, must beg — and this is surely a base employment for a man who is able to work — but although he can conquer shame sufficiently to betake himself to it, his misery is, that nobody will give him anything, for why should drones eat the labor of the bees? Even in harvest, when plenty smiles all around, and when the hearts of men are enlarged with joy, and bestow liberal quantities of food upon their beasts — the wretched sluggard finds that every man's affections are shut against him. The industrious and disabled poor are then blessed, for the law of God requires the gleanings and leavings of the fields to be allowed them — but the same law requires that he who will not work, should not eat.

Spiritual sloth is revealed by this mark, and attended with the like misery. The careless Christian will not attend the house of God, by reason of the cold of winter, or the heat of summer. He will not keep up the worship of God in his family, because he is encumbered with worldly business; or if shame and love of character obliges him to perform those services which the eyes of men behold — then there is so much attention of spirit necessary for the duties of the closet, that he cannot find in his heart to perform them at all, or to perform them to any good purpose. What will become of such sluggards at the end of the world? Our Lord tells us, they will beg and have nothing!

Proverbs 20:5. "The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out." The heart of man is a great deep — and there are thoughts and devices in it as much past numbering, as the creeping things and fish in the sea. God alone searches the heart, and tries the thoughts of men. By one glance of his eye, he pierces into the bottom of our souls, and knows our thoughts infinitely better than we ourselves. But although a man cannot go to the bottom of a deep well, he may draw out some of its water for use by means of a bucket. And although a man cannot penetrate into the bottom of another man's heart, he may find out some of his thoughts and plans, his purposes and designs, or form such conjectures about them as are necessary to regulate his own motions. A man of understanding, without the gift of prophecy may know many things that are useful to be known about the counsels of those who are most desirous to conceal them. David revealed, and represented before his God the secret projects of his enemies against him, when both the inward thought and the heart of every one of them was deep. And Job saw clearly what his friends aimed at by all their flaming discourses about the misery of the wicked, before they named himself as the object of that vengeance which they described. A man of sagacity has a knowledge of human nature, which assists him in finding out the plans and designs of particular men. He can avail himself of their gestures, their general course of behavior, their behavior in particular instances; and on sudden emergencies, their silence, their words, even when they are disguising their thoughts; their connections and company, their interests and

humors, to form our judgment of their thoughts and designs. And by this means, he is often enabled to guard himself and his good name from the snares of the wicked. Wisdom is profitable, you see, not only for the life to come — but likewise for the present life — but hypocrisy and deceit profits little. It is often detected by men — it is always known to God; and the day is coming in which he will make manifest the secrets of all hearts.

Proverbs 20:6. "Many a man will proclaim his own goodness — but a faithful man who can find?"

It is very natural for men to have a high opinion of themselves. Many men who have a better opinion of their own worth, than any other man has — but a man of consideration will discern the folly of self conceit, and will be cautious of publishing his own imagined virtues to the world. There are few who have the good sense to consider these facts, and therefore it is very common in conversation to hear men proclaiming their own praises either directly, or by plain insinuations.

If they are ashamed to talk of their own generosity and charity in an avowed manner, they catch at the good opinion, and applause of other men, by a variety of methods, sometimes commending virtue and goodness with a design of showing their own love to it — at other times running down their neighbors, for the lack of these virtues, imagining that the depression of other men will be their own exaltation.

Sometimes they insist upon particular instances of goodness, which they think, from some known pieces of their behavior, will be a means of leading people to think of themselves. And on other occasions, they will take occasion, from what others in the company are saying, to hale into the conversation some of their own good deeds, as if they had been led to mention them without any previous design. But a man is not a proper witness in his own cause, for he is ready to form, from the influence of self love, too good an opinion of himself. If the love of our wives or children covers their faults, and magnifies their virtues — then self love must have a still greater influence in bribing our judgments, so that an honest man’s testimony of his own goodness can scarcely be taken. But among boasters, you will scarcely find a man so honest as not to exceed, in his own praise, the bounds of what he himself knows to be fact. The Scripture declares, that a truly faithful and godly man is rarely to be found — and yet if men’s own word could be taken, there is scarcely a bad man to be found. We have therefore great need to be cautious in forming our judgment of ourselves, lest we deceive our own souls, and pass a sentence upon ourselves, opposite to that which our great judge will pass upon us at the last day. Nor must we be rash in trusting men, and choosing friends. He is one among a thousand, who possesses such kindness and integrity, as will entitle him to the character of a faithful friend.

We learn, in the last place, from this proverb, to let strangers praise us, rather than our own lips, except when evident necessity obliges us. For self praise will make a hundred people to conceive a bad opinion of us, sooner than one wise man to entertain a good opinion of us.

Proverbs 20:7. "The just man walks in integrity; his children are blessed after him." The just man lives by faith in the Son of God, for, like his father Abraham, he believes in the Redeemer, and his faith is counted to him for righteousness. But although he is pronounced by God a righteous person, for the sake of a righteousness not wrought by himself — yet he is not the less earnest in endeavoring to be holy in all manner of living, for he knows that those men deceive themselves who turn the grace of God into a license for sin — and that he who does righteousness is

righteous, even as God is righteous. The just man is a man of integrity, for he follows after perfection, although he knows that he cannot reach it. He does not think that a good and kind behavior towards men, will compensate for the neglect of his duty to God, any more than a social behavior will atone for disloyalty to his prince — and therefore he makes it his daily practice to walk in all good conscience before God, and to testify the utmost gratitude to him who loved us and died for us. At the same time, he feels the force of that saying of Scripture, which is sufficient to strike an alarm into the most hardened consciences of those who neglect morality while they profess religion, "If a man says I love God, and hates his brother — he is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The integrity of the just man, is not like the pretended integrity of the moralist, for it includes piety, justice, sobriety, and a conscientious regard to every precept of God, without excluding those who appear to vain men to be of small importance, or those who most directly oppose the prevailing disposition of the mind. The just man walks in his integrity, for his righteousness is not like the morning cloud — but like the light of the sun, which shines more and more unto the perfect day. God tries him — the devil and the world, and the flesh, solicit him to sin — but he will not turn aside into the ways of iniquity. Or if he should, he will not continue to walk in them — but returns with bitter regret to that good and straight way, which leads unto life, and continues in that path until the end of his life, for his heart is set upon it, and upon that heavenly city to which it leads. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, it is plain from Scripture that they never really knew the way of life.

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord. He is blessed in the day of prosperity — and in the day of adversity. He is blessed in life — and in death. He is blessed after death, for he rests in his bed, and enters into peace. His soul is blessed in Heaven, and he leaves blessings to his children upon earth.

If the children of Jehu, who never took heed to walk in the law of the Lord, were blessed with outward prosperity, to the fourth generation — then how much more may the truly godly expect a blessing to their children? It is said of the wicked man, that God lays up iniquity for his children. And will the God who delights in mercy, exercise less kindness to his own people, than severity to the wicked? Far from it. While the rich man rejoices that he has much treasure laid up in his house, to be enjoyed by his family after him — the godly man has much more reason to believe that God has a treasure of blessings laid up for his children. Are you children of the godly? Know the God of your fathers, and plead this promise at his throne of mercy.

Proverbs 20:8. "When a king sits on his throne to judge, he winnows out all evil with his eyes."

Kings have majesty in their countenances, and when they preserve their dignity of character, their eyes are dreadful to the breakers of the law. This awe of royalty is impressed by God upon the minds of men, for the peace and benefit of human society. Kings are obliged to use that authority with which the Most High God has dignified them as his ministers — for the encouragement of virtue, and the suppression of vice.

How tremendous is that Eternal King, whose eyes are like a flame of fire! How shall the wicked be able to stand before him, at whose presence the Heaven and the earth flee away, and no place is found for them! How can men presume that the Judge of all the earth will allow sin to go unpunished — when he will not permit his viceregents on earth, to leave open wickedness to go unpunished.

Earthly kings can punish only the outward enormities of men's lives. The universal Judge brings every work into judgment, with every secret thing. Earthly kings reach only the body — but the King of Heaven can destroy both soul and body in Hell fire! "I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!" Luke 12:5 Proverbs 20:9. "Who can say: I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?"

"Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"

It we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, for we were conceived and shaped in iniquity, and unless our hearts are made pure, we must remain forever abominable in the sight of the most holy God. The depravity of the human race is not here expressly asserted — but it is taken for granted, as an incontestable truth. The call of God to sinners is, "Wash and be clean. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts." But neither our righteousness nor our strength lies in ourselves. Except Christ washes us, we have no part in him, and remain under the reigning power of sin. But even those who are washed by his blood and Spirit, cannot say that they have made their hearts so clean, that they are entirely pure from their sin. They are daily employed in cleansing themselves from all pollutions — and yet the leprosy of sin will cleave to their earthly tabernacles, until they are pulled down by death.

If sin dwells in the best of us — then our dependence must be on the grace of the Redeemer, by whose blood our sins are expiated, and by whose powerful agency we crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. Purity of heart ought to be our constant study — for so far as our hearts are cleansed, we are pure from our sin. Under all the imperfections of our holiness, we have reason to join thanksgiving with our sorrows, for although no man on earth can lay claim to perfect purity — yet every believer in Jesus has abundant encouragement to hope that he shall be presented in due time, without spot or blemish, before the throne of God!

Proverbs 20:10. "Differing weights and differing measures — the LORD detests them both."

Once has God spoken, yes twice have we heard this, that unjust weights are detested by God. It is plain that unjust measures come under the same condemnation. But here they are expressly mentioned, so that no man can pretend to observe the letter of the law, while he transgresses the spirit of it. If a man keeps one measure or weight for selling, and another for buying; or if he keeps one for selling to people that have too much skill to be cheated, and another for selling to the ignorant and unwary — then he exposes himself to the hot anger and severe vengeance of God, who hates all unrighteousness, especially that which lies in perverting the means of justice.

If the perversion of the instruments of just trade is detestable to God — then how much does he abhor the perversion of law and justice, and every kind of partiality in those whom he entrusts with the administration of government, in church or state. Injustice in merchants is very bad — but unrighteousness in those who rule by the authority of Christ, is a great deal more dishonorable to God, and offensive to the righteous eyes.

Proverbs 20:11. "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right."

"Except you be converted," says our Lord, "and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Sincerity is one of those qualities wherein we ought to resemble children, for

they cannot disguise their inclinations — but a little attention to their childish talk and behavior will enable a person to reveal their present dispositions, and to form a probable conjecture concerning their future behavior.

One thing appears in the behavior of children with too much evidence — that they are the descendants of Adam. The selfishness, vanity, and revengeful spirit, that appears in all of them, are lineaments of the image of the first transgressor. But there is a very great difference among them in their temper, which may be justly considered as an indication of a greater difference in the manner of their conduct, when they arrive at manly years. Some are kind and obliging, and easily managed. Others are intractable, sullen, and spiteful. It is the duty of parents to improve and nourish the good dispositions which their children reveal, and to check every appearance of vice — before it is matured by time into settled habits. Parents generally consider the mental status and inclinations of their children, to direct them in the choice of a profession — but they ought to be no less careful to consider their turn of mind in their earliest years, to direct themselves in their religious education. Herein several parents reveal their partial fondness for their children, regarding with applause every appearance of goodness as a happy presage — but considering every instance of perverse behavior as an instance of childish ignorance, which time will reform of course. But Solomon tells us that their bad, as well as their good behavior, when they shall become men — may be conjectured from their childish doings.

Children of a pleasant disposition may disappoint the expectations that have been formed of them — but in that case parents may generally blame themselves for neglecting to avail themselves of their good dispositions, to graft on them religious instructions, or for permitting them to fall into the dangerous society of those who not only live in sin, but, like Jeroboam, make Israel to sin. When bad dispositions appear in children, it is necessary for parents to early use those means which God has appointed for reclaiming them. The rod and reproof give wisdom — and when these, and the like means, are neglected, or not accompanied with fervent prayer — then parents have great reason to reflect on themselves with shame, if their children prove thorns in their eyes, when their vices have attained the vigor of riper years, and confirmed habit.

There is an old proverb that says, a young saint often makes an old devil — but Solomon was not the author of it.

Proverbs 20:12. "Ears that hear and eyes that see — the LORD has made them both." And did he not make every other part of our bodies, as well as the eye and the ear? No doubt — but we ought not to rest in general truths, when we contemplate the wonderful works of God. It is highly proper for us, to survey with attention, the particulars of what the Lord has done for us — and we shall find abundant materials for gratitude and praise in every member of our body, in every faculty of our soul, and in every event of our life!

It is said that the famous physician Galen learned the absurdity of atheism from the consideration of the human eye. The structure of it clearly displays the amazing wisdom of God, and his goodness shines with no less brightness in the pleasures and advantages derived from the ministry of this admirable organ. The ear is that sense by which we enjoy the pleasures of society and friendship, by which we learn the most interesting and entertaining truths, and by which we receive the instructions of life.

It is by the kind agency of our Maker that our eyes see, and our ears hear — for in him we live and move and have our being. When he pleases to withhold his influence, we see, but do not perceive, like Hagar at Beer-lahai-roi. We hear a voice, and know not what it says, like the companions of Saul in his journey to Damascus. To use these instruments of sense as inlets to temptation and sin — is as unnatural as for infants to rend that breast which gives them suck! How shocking is it to deserve the reproof that the prophet gave to Belshazzar, "The God in whose hand your breath is, and all your ways — you have not glorified."

We are God's creatures. Our senses are his; our souls are his; all our enjoyments are from his bounty, and our activity depends upon his all-governing providence. Whether, therefore, we see, or hear, or think on those objects which we are acquainted with, by means of our bodily senses, or the exercise of our rational powers — let us mind above everything, the glory of God.

Proverbs 20:13. "Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare."

Sleep must be taken — but not loved. Sleep, as well as food, is necessary for refreshing our frail bodies — but neither food nor sleep must be used for their own sakes, nor must we be intemperate in either of them. Sleep taken in a moderate degree, is the nurse of nature, it recruits our physical and mental powers, and prepares us for the labors of life. But excess of sleep enervates the body, and stupefies our souls, and is loved only by sluggards.

We have received time and talents from God, to be used according to his direction — and to waste the one, and bury the other, is a very great sin. And yet by immoderate sleep, we do both in some degree, for all the time that we sleep beyond what is needful for us, our talents are unemployed, and our time is running out in vain.

Long life is universally desired, and death is set at as great a distance as possible — but the lover of sleep voluntarily gives up a considerable part of his life. And during all the time that he wastes in needless sleep, he might as well be in the state of death, for anything he does, or enjoys.

I remember Dr. Doddridge gives this reason for his being able to write so many books, notwithstanding all the weighty employments which were constantly lying on him — that he found a great difference between rising at five, and rising at eight in the morning — the one making several years more in the course of a life than the other.

Poverty and hunger, in the course of things, according to the righteous appointment of providence — are the ordinary consequences of too much sleep. Plenty and satisfaction, are the consequences of early rising.

Open your eyes, rise and go to work — for he who gets out of bed, and sits idle at the fire-side, is still sleeping, even when he is awake. But he who rises to his employment, shall have bread for himself and his family.

It is not said that he shall have everything that an unbridled appetite might crave — but he shall have, by the blessing of God, bread to eat, and clothing to put on. These things will generally satisfy a man diligent in his business, for his work makes both sleep and food pleasant to him. If people who love their work, should prove unsuccessful in business, or be disabled from working — they will meet with pity and relief; while starving sluggards are hated and despised.

Proverbs 20:14. "It’s no good, it’s no good!" says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase."

Solomon was a teacher to men of all ranks, for he was acquainted with the life and manners of men in every profession, and writes instructive proverbs for merchants as well as kings. There is one piece of fraud censured in this verse, which is very common with the lower sort of dealers, and is scarcely reckoned a piece of unrighteousness. It is the art of buyers to get a good bargain, by depreciating the commodity which they mean to purchase. The inspired moralist, that he might come home to men’s bosoms, gives us their very words, "It’s no good, it’s no good!" What is the evil of saying this? Why, if it is not true — then it must certainly be a lie; and no lie is of the truth, nor is any lying habit consistent with the character of an honest man. Men may, if they please, form to themselves rules of morality from the general practice of the world — but these are not the rules by which they must be judged at the last day. If we were heathen, we could not be excused in using little deceitful tricks which do not come within the compass of the criminal law — but we are Christians, and our bibles testify against them, and threaten punishment to those who go beyond and defraud their brother. Indeed, very little is to be made by such poor artifices but guilt — for they are so common that almost every man sees through them. The people that use these pitiful tricks in making a bargain, don’t think there is much evil in them, for they boast of their trickery and good fortune. But men’s shutting their eyes will not alter the nature of things.

Men applaud themselves in their dexterity to impose small deceits upon their neighbors — but what does the Spirit of God say about them? "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil." While they boast of the goodness of the commodities which they formerly depreciated — they denounce this woe against themselves. The spirit of this proverb includes in it, a condemnation of the like methods that sellers use to get bad commodities disposed of. When a man commends his wares above their value, or gives a false account of the price which they cost him, or of the price that he was offered for them, or when he uses deceitful means to conceal their bad properties — then he is dealing unrighteously, and seeking the gain by fraud — by which he is not so likely to fill his purse as to wound his character, and bring the curse of God upon his substance.

Proverbs 20:15. "Gold there is, and rubies in abundance — but lips which speak knowledge are a rare jewel."

It is a great deal easier to spread riches, than wisdom, through a nation. In the days of the wisest of kings, silver was plenteous as the stones — but wisdom was still a rare commodity. Yet Solomon never ceased to inculcate the superior value of wisdom. But such is the depravity of man’s understanding, that the gifts of fortune are generally preferred to those of the mind — and you will find many who learn the art of being rich, for one who acquires the lips of knowledge. The wisest and richest of kings, inspired by the Author of wisdom and riches, frequently reminds us, that the lips directed by true knowledge, are a more precious jewel than any that can be found in the mines of the east! A deep impression of this truth, would be of very great advantage to our souls. When a man values gold and rubies above wisdom, he lies exposed to a thousand temptations of a very dangerous kind. For he is like a blind man who knows not where he goes, and will leap into a pit, if he imagines that money is at the bottom of it, because he sees not how deep it is, and how impossible it will be to get out. But he who prefers the lips of knowledge to riches, has his eyes in his head, and steadily observes the ways of religion and happiness. Did we

really believe this truth we would not grudge time, and expense, and labor, in obtaining wisdom for our own benefit and the use of others — and would account a wise and faithful friend, one of the most precious treasures. The Word of God would be valued as it deserves, and the world would lose its tempting influence.

Proverbs 20:16. "Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger; hold it in pledge if he does it for an immoral woman."

We lately heard that the love of sleep will soon reduce a man to poverty and hunger. It is not, however, the speediest method of becoming poor, for nothing will so soon ruin a man's estate and credit, as rash suretyship. If you see a man who engages in putting up security for one who is a stranger to him, and especially for a immoral woman, trust him not if he should swear, and offer you the surest bonds for payment. He will in a very short time become a bankrupt, and therefore lend him nothing. And if you sell him anything without ready money, be sure to have a sufficient pledge. You may even take his garment without any breach of charity, for the law about restoring the garment taken by way of pledge, was made for the benefit of the poor and unfortunate, and not for those who are running to ruin by their own willful folly.

If a man, by an excess of generosity, hurts himself by engaging in suretyship for his friends, he plays the fool — and yet he may be pitied — but how can that man expect pity, who squanders away his substance for the sake of people with whom he has no connection, or of wicked women with whom it is infamous to have any dealings?

Proverbs 20:17. "Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel."

There is some kind of pleasure in sin, by which the devil draws men into his snares, and keeps them entangled. There are indeed some sins in which we cannot discover any pleasure — but those who practice them appear to love the devil's service so well, that they will do his work without any wages — such are profane swearers, and the agents for infidelity. But sinners in general must have some present enjoyment from their sins, to compensate for the guilt and danger of them. A man would not do a piece of injustice without the prospect of some gain and satisfaction from it — and when he has gained what he expected, he feels some pleasure from it, and applauds himself for his wit and success. For his present advantage drowns for a time, the thoughts of what shall come to pass hereafter. But men should always remember, that the time now present, was some years ago far distant — and yet is now come, and our feelings of pain and anguish are as lively as ever; and the time to come will one day be present, and bring its sensations of happiness and misery along with it.

He is rather a brute than a rational creature, who would rather be happy for a day, and miserable for the rest of his life — than deny himself the present pleasures which are sure to bring lasting misery in their train!

Such are the gains of dishonesty; they are like pleasant bread in the mouth of the covetous man — but his teeth are afterwards tormented with gravel, and his belly is racked with pains more grievous than those of the fiercest diseases that ever preyed on the human constitution. Providence usually crosses and disappoints unrighteous men, and makes them to vomit up the riches which they have swallowed down. Dishonest gains produce a worm in the conscience,

which gnaws the soul with teeth more poisonous than those of the viper!

Zophar uses every terrible image to illustrate the miseries of the unjust man — and yet all are insufficient to describe the terrors of that vengeance, which the wrath of God inflicts on those who have the presumption to think, that any advantage can be gained by sinning against God, and wronging their fellow creatures.

Proverbs 20:18. " Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance."

Wisdom lies, in the first place, in forming right purposes; and secondly, in devising, and executing proper plans for bringing these good purposes to pass. However good our designs are — yet rashness and inconsideration will be sure to render them abortive. And, besides our own wisdom, it is necessary for us, in all matters of importance, to take the advice of the wise and upright. If we have such a high opinion of our own wisdom, that we think we have no need of counsel from other men — then we prove ourselves fools of the worst kind, for there is more hope of any other kind of fools, than for those who are wise in their own conceit. Do we limit wisdom to ourselves? Are we wiser than Solomon, who had too much sense to think himself above the need of a privy council of the wisest men in the nation?

Above all things, war is to be made with good advice, for the lack of which, many nations have been brought to desolation. It is one of the greatest judgments to a land, when it’s wise counselors are removed, or when the sovereigns of it are so unwise as not to make use of their counsels.

Rehoboam, as foolish as he was, had the sense to make use of his father’s instruction in this point, although he had neglected it a little before, in another affair of no less consequence. By his neglect of it, he lost ten tribes — but his observing it afterwards, was the means of preserving his authority in the other two.

We have need of good advice in our spiritual warfare, for our enemies are incomparably superior to us in strength and skill. We may receive great benefit from the counsels of some of our fellow soldiers — but the Word and Spirit of God are infinitely the best counselors in this, and in every other point. They alone shall overcome, who are strong in the Lord, and use those divine weapons that God has prepared for our defense, and cry for God’s help against the enemy. These are the counsels given us by the Spirit of God, and as our success entirely depends upon his help, we must comply with his instructions.

Proverbs 20:19. "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who flatters with his lips!"

Flatterers are generally gossips. They sooth and caress a man to fish his secrets out of him, and they tell the secrets which they have got by these base means, to the next companion they meet, and perhaps make very considerable additions to them, for they take the liberty to add conjectures of their own to what they have heard. By spreading their stories, they sow the seeds of contention among neighbors, and their words are as dainties which go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Beware, then, of those flatterers, who cajole you with good words and fair speeches!

Self love makes us flatterers of ourselves, and disposes us to be well pleased with those who comply with all our humours, assent to all our opinions, and approve of all our actions. But those who flatter us are not our friends — but for the most part the most dangerous enemies we have. If we give them our company — we are very likely to hear stories that will vex us. If we tell them any

of our secrets — we may be sure of having them divulged, and represented to our disadvantage. When they tell us stories about other people, we may judge how they will behave to us — for when they were in the company of these people, they flattered them as much as they now flatter us — and by their pretenses of friendship, they made a shift to pick up these tales with which we are now entertained.

It is an excess of self love, which makes the company of a flatterer tolerable. It is the lack of love to our neighbors, that makes us bear with tale bearers. But if we will not discountenance them for the sake of our neighbors, let us do it for our own — for they will mete out the same measure to us, that they have already meted out to other men.

Proverbs 20:20. "If a man curses his father or mother — his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness." For a man not to honor his father and his mother, is a violation of one of the ten commandments in the letter of it. A curse was pronounced from mount Ebal upon him who sets light by his father or his mother. The miserable condition of the Africans, and the negroes in America, is a monument to this day of God's judgements upon a man who lived 4000 years ago, for revealing his father's shame. But is it possible that any man can rise to such a pitch of impiety, as to curse his father or his mother? It seems so. But woe to those who are chargeable with it. Had they lived under the Mosaic law, they would have died without mercy. But if they live in our times, their sin is not the less; and although they should escape punishment from men, they shall not escape the vengeance of the Father and King of the universe. When those crimes that deserve death are unpunished by men, the perpetrators of them are not always so safe as they expect. God often permits them to fall into other crimes, that bring them to the gallows, as we may learn from the confessions and last speeches of many malefactors who have lamented their disobedience to their parents, as the first step to their ruin, or acknowledged other crimes worthy of death, besides these for which they suffer. But if those who treat the instruments of their being with insult and outrage, should escape every visible testimony of vengeance in this life, their lamp shall be extinguished in the blackness of darkness. The punishment prepared for all impenitent sinners, is described in Scripture by this gloomy image — but surely there are regions of thicker darkness in Hell itself, for those who are guilty of crimes that would shock the ordinary run of sinners.

Proverbs 20:21. "An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning, will not be blessed at the end."

We have been often told, that no profit can be made by the wages of unrighteousness — but experience seems to contradict this truth, for we have seen or heard of several that have amassed great treasures by fraud and extortion. This does not, however, militate against anything which the inspired moralist has said, for he never meant to deny that treasures may be obtained by wickedness. Those who will be rich may get riches by cheating and lying, by fraud and oppression, by grinding the faces of the poor, and by toiling their poor servants until they groan under their hard bondage. These and a thousand other ways of unjust getting, may put money in their pockets — but the fact is that it is of no use to them, when they have got it.

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, for a very plain reason, because they are not attended with the blessing of God, and it is only this blessing which preserves riches and makes them a comfort to men. It is far better to have nothing — than to have the riches of kingdoms without the blessing of God; for those who lack it, will find everything they have a curse. But you will say: Then

why do they succeed in getting an estate without the blessing of God? Wait a little, and it will be seen that there is no blessing in what they have got. If they have been heaping up mountains of gold, they will be found only mountains of snow, which the curse of God will soon melt! He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall he prolong the perfection thereof upon the earth. What he gets unjustly, shall not only be blasted — but it shall blast everything that he had got by fair means. Ahab lost not only the garden of Naboth — but his life, and kingdom, and family, by his wickedness.

Beware of love for wealth, for covetousness disappoints itself. It leads men to poverty, by pushing them on to unfair methods of gaining money. Stronger arguments might be advanced, and will be found in this book, against this sin — but this argument will have a deeper impression upon the minds of some people, than any other. It is addressed to the only ear by which the covetous man can hear, for he is deaf to everything but what concerns the mammon of unrighteousness. If he believes anything that God says, he must see that he is taking a very foolish course, when he endeavors to enrich himself by those very means that are declared in Scripture to be the surest methods of bringing poverty and ruin!

Proverbs 20:22. "Do not say: 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you."

If private revenge were allowed, it would soon fill the land with confusion and blood! For while men's passions are kindled by the smart of a fresh injury, they cloud the judgment, and hurry on those who are under their power, to the most dangerous irregularities. By indulging them, we would be driven on to make very disproportional returns for the wrongs done to us. We might wreck our vengeance on the blameless, as David would have done, if Abigail had not disarmed his fury. We might bring upon ourselves the guilt of the bloodiest crimes, and make ourselves miserable through all the remainder of our days. Most wisely, therefore, and graciously we are forbidden to avenge ourselves, or so much as to say that we will do it.

It is a bad thing to have any thought of revenge — but if we say, or swear, that we will take revenge on him who has offended us — we are entangled in a dangerous snare by the devil, who will endeavor to persuade us that our honor is doubly enraged by the provocation received. To say that we will recompense evil, is the same thing with saying, that we will step into the throne of God, and wrest his thunderbolts out of his hand, to hurl them against all whom we judge to be our enemies. "For vengeance is Mine, says the Lord, and I will repay it!" But our corrupt hearts are dexterous in mustering up objections against our duty, and the inspired writers are equally dexterous in answering them. "If I allow the wrongs done to my credit and estate to pass unrevenged," says one, "I expose myself to every shaft of malice, and may expect still greater injuries than those I have already received." There is no fear of that, says Solomon, wait on the Lord, and he shall save you. Are you defrauded in your interests? Wait on the Lord who gives and takes away at his pleasure, and he will make up, if he sees it good for you, all your loss. Are you wronged in your credit? Trust in the Lord, and he shall bring forth your righteousness to the light, as you find he did in the cases of Job, and David, and Mephibosheth. Whatever injury you have felt, or fear — commit yourself to God with a calm and forgiving spirit, and he will either prevent your fears, or make a rich amends for the malice of your enemies. Only you must wait his own time for doing it, for he who believes does not make haste — but waits God's leisure, as it well

becomes us to do when it is God whom we trust.

We must not wait on the Lord for destruction to our enemies. David was blessed with divine inspiration, and had directions for praying against some of his spiteful enemies — but herein we are not to consider him as a pattern for us. We have the noble example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who did not repay evil with evil — but prayed for his persecutors, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. Wait on the Lord, and whatever way he deals with your enemies, he shall save you, and that is all you can reasonably desire. Will you will insist that it is better to secure yourself against new injuries, by revenging the old? The question is clearly this: Is your safety and protection best lodged in God's hand — or your own? By indulging your revengeful spirit, you do yourself a greater hurt than your greatest enemy can do you — for you gratify his ill-nature, when you allow it to make a deep impression on your spirit, without which it could do you little or no hurt. But by committing your cause to God, you turn his ill will to your great advantage, making it an occasion for the exercise of the noblest graces, which are attended with the sweetest fruits, and with the rich blessing of God.

Proverbs 20:23. "The LORD detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him."

Injustice is a poisonous weed which springs up very plenteously in the heart of men. It needs great pains to pluck it up, and the inspired writer does not grudge his pains for this purpose. When he might have been dazzling us with new discoveries of surprising truths in every sentence — he repeats the same warnings over and over, to reclaim men from every instance of dishonesty. How inexcusable will the unjust trader be, if he continues unreformed, after all that the Spirit of God has inculcated so frequently for his conviction and amendment.

Proverbs 20:24. "A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?" The steps of all men are ordered by the Lord. Wicked men are under the dominion of his providence — as well as godly men who rejoice in his sovereignty. God has a righteous hand in the most unrighteous actions of men. They sit deliberating and contriving — but they are under the eye of God, who laughs at their impious imaginations, and without suspending the freedom of their wills, determines them to concur in the execution of his holy and immutable purposes.

They know not, when they are consulting — how they will determine; and when they have determined — whether they shall succeed in their purpose; and when they are fixed in their minds — whether they shall be able to perform what they intend; and if they perform it — whether it shall answer their intention, or some purpose entirely opposite to what they designed. But known unto God are all the thoughts that come or shall come into the minds of men — and how far their plans shall prosper, and what shall be the outcome and consequences of them. All the affairs of particular people, and all the weighty businesses of states and kingdoms — are in God's hand like the potter's clay, to be molded into any shape he pleases. And he will manage everything wisely for his own glory, justly towards men, and graciously towards his own people.

Go now, you who say we will do this or the other thing — without any impression of God's sovereignty, or dependence on his providence. It is presumption in you to dream that your motions are under your own sovereign direction. Are you sure that you will be in the same mind an hour hence, that you are in at present?

Alexander the Great went to Jerusalem with an intention to wreak the fury of his revenge upon the Jews — and when he arrived, he showed them greater favor than he ever did to another conquered nation. But if your resolutions should continue the same, do you live and move in yourselves, that you can be sure of the continuance of your life, and ability for doing what you propose? The kings and princes of the world sought to destroy our holy religion in its infancy — but the emperors who ruled the world were driven from their thrones, or chased out of the world; and of the kingdom of our Redeemer there shall be no end. For he who sits in Heaven saw from his dwelling place all their foolish contrivances, and baffled all their efforts, and said, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion!"

If you should be able to accomplish your designs — are you sure that they will have the effects you propose. The rulers of the Jews crucified Christ to gratify their spite, and to secure their place and nation from the Romans — but Christ conquered every enemy by his cross, and the Almighty executed the most tremendous vengeance by the hands of the Romans on the murderers of his beloved Son. A conviction of this truth would make us to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, and to endeavor to walk before him unto all pleasing. It would raise us above those strong temptations which have all their force from the fear of men's displeasure, or the hope of their favor. It would make the believer in Christ cheerful under every cross, while he could say: "My heavenly Father rules all, and my enemies can do nothing without his providence."

It would raise us above all earthly confidences, being persuaded that the kindest and most powerful friends can do nothing for us — but as God pleases to incline and enable them. This truth has also a mighty influence to destroy our confidence in our own strength and wisdom. The children of Israel made great promises to God at mount Sinai — but they soon broke them, for the Lord had not given them eyes to see, nor ears to hear, nor hearts to understand. Peter was very sincere in promising to cleave to Christ, although all men should forsake him — but by his self-confidence, provoked God to withhold the supports of his grace, and was left to behave, not like a rock — but like the slender twig which bends before the gentlest blast.

Proverbs 20:25. "It is a snare to the man who devours that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry."

Stealing and robbery are crimes so detestable and pernicious to men, that they are everywhere severely punished. But God is greater than men, and to rob God is a greater and more dangerous crime than those by which our fellow men are wronged in their substance. But will a man rob God? Can any man be so foolish as to try it, or so mighty as to accomplish it? Malachi complains that this crime was very common in his time, and there are too many instances of it, even in these latter days. He who gives to the poor, lends unto the Lord; and that which is appropriated to the service of the Gospel and the support of the ministry, belongs unto God, and should be given to his servants as the receivers of his revenues. Therefore, when the poor are cheated of their dues, or those who labor in the gospel are deprived of their hire, or anything alienated that was justly devoted to the service of God — a robbery is attempted, and, in some sense, executed, upon God himself, who cannot be pleased with so base and ungrateful conduct towards him, from whom we receive everything that we possess. The man who applies to his own use, and devours that which is holy, is greatly mistaken if he thinks himself a gainer. He is just in the same degree a gainer by his dishonest conduct, as the silly bird, when it snatches at the bait which the fowler has placed for

it to draw it into his snare! The people of Judah in Haggai's time, were crossed and disappointed in all the labors of their hands, because they bestowed their money upon building houses for themselves, rather than in building the temple of the Lord. And in Malachi's time, the whole nation was cursed with a curse for robbing God in tithes and in offerings.

It is no less a snare for a man, after vows, to make inquiry, in order to evade the obligation of his solemn engagements. Some men are much more forward in making, than in paying vows. Their religion lies in transient flows of affection — not in solid piety. When their affections are roused by some remarkable providence, or allured by some pleasant blessing; or roused by some alarming sermon — then they are ready with their vows to the Most High God. But when their affections return to their usual temper, they endeavor to find out some shift, to free their consciences from their obligations, which they voluntarily took up on themselves. Their conduct draws them into the snares of the devil, who will suggest an hundred pretenses to excuse the breach of them.

We must therefore be cautious and considerate in making vows — and speedy in performing them. If we are Christians, we have engaged ourselves to be the Lord's. Justice and truth and gratitude require us to pay our vows, and every transgression derives the great aggravation of treachery from our sacred promises. If our promises to men must be kept inviolate — then how much more our promise to God! If it is sinful to make inquiry after vows — then who can express the guilt that arises out of downright violations of them!

Proverbs 20:26. "A wise king winnows out the wicked; he drives the threshing wheel over them."

Such a king was David and his son Solomon — and above all others, is the king who sits upon the throne of David forever, who breaks in pieces the wicked like a potter's vessel. The wicked in the nation are like the chaff among the wheat, and in those ancient times, the gardener used to bring the threshing wheel over the grain to separate from it the chaff. In like manner, the king who does not loll in his palace to indulge his pride and leisure — but sits upon the throne of judgment, will treat the wicked of the nation, breaking and dispersing them, that they may not prove a nuisance to society, an infectious plague to the country, and provocations of the wrath of God against the whole nation. Kings have but a limited power for this purpose, and must confine their punishments within the bounds of law. But the king of Zion will thoroughly purge his floor by the fan in his hand, and will scatter all the impenitent sinners in his dominions, like the chaff before the wind!

Proverbs 20:27. "The lamp of the LORD searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being." The Father of our spirits, has bestowed on us a glorious distinction from the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field. Our bodies were framed by his powerful agency — but our spirits were created by him within us. In our animal bodies we have some resemblance of the brutes — but our intellectual faculty raises us to some degrees of likeness to the angels of God, for they are candles lighted within us, by him who breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and made him a living soul. By the light of reason, especially when it is brightened by divine revelation, we are enabled to survey many of the wonderful works of God, and to discern the evidences of his eternal power and Godhead. By this candle, we can take a view of the wonderful structure of our own bodies, which are fearfully and wonderfully made. But the most necessary kind of knowledge which it gives us, next to the knowledge of God, is that of our own spirits. As deep as the hearts of men are — yet this lamp of the Lord searches all his inmost being. A king who was perfectly acquainted with the constitution, laws, and history of every country but his own — would be only an intelligent fool. Just

so, the man is equally void of true judgment, who is thoroughly versed in every art and science, in all histories, and every branch of commerce and law — and yet is unacquainted with his own heart, where his main business lies.

Heathen themselves were so deeply impressed with the importance of self knowledge, that it was a general opinion among some wise nations that the celebrated maxim "Know yourself!" came down from Heaven.

Reason rightly employed, will make us acquainted with the excellent nature and uses of our faculties, with our personal dispositions and talents, with our defects and constitutional faults, with our prejudices, and the temptations by which we are most ready to be overcome, with our state and frame in relation to God. The mention of these different branches of self knowledge, is enough to show the value and necessity of it. We are commanded to keep our own hearts with all diligence — and how can we keep them without some knowledge of their most important concerns? But we cannot know ourselves unto perfection; and therefore we ought to search deeper and deeper into our own hearts, to keep an eye upon the movements of our own minds, and the frame of our hearts under prosperous and adverse providences, and under injuries from men, or while we are employed in the performance of our duty to God — that we may improve in self-acquaintance.

Above all, we ought to compare our hearts with the Word of God, and to pray earnestly that God may reveal us to ourselves, and preserve us from those self flatteries by which multitudes are deceived into eternal ruin!

It is God alone who searches and knows infallibly the heart of man, and without the help of his Spirit, the candle within us will mislead us like wild fire, until we fall into the ditch of perdition.

Proverbs 20:28. "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by mercy." A king must scatter and crush the wicked — but he will prove a tyrant unless he tempers his severity with mercy and goodness. Severity to criminals is exercised by a wise king, from a principle of mercy to the community at large — and he will spare where he can spare without betraying his trust. Such behavior secures the affections of his subjects; and is attended with the blessing of providence, by which thrones are established. But unmerciful severity has often overturned the mighty from their seat. The Emperor Aurelian was called an excellent physician to the state, except in taking too much blood. His rigor drew upon him the hatred and fear of some of his own servants, who deprived him of his life after he had performed many signal services to the empire.

Truth must be joined with mercy in the administration of a good prince. Faithfulness and uprightness, in conjunction with mercy, are the sure and lasting pillars of the throne. If truth and mercy were banished from all the world beside — it should be found in the hearts of kings.

How glorious is the Prince of the kings of the earth! Mercy and truth go before his face, his throne is a throne of grace and faithfulness.

Proverbs 20:29. "The glory of young men is their strength — and gray hair is the splendor of the old."

Equality of age and dispositions naturally produces affection and friendship — but difference of age and talents tends too much to produce mutual alienation. To remedy this, the wise man puts the old and the young in mind that each of them have their different endowments, which should

endear them to one another.

Old men should not despise the young for their lack of experience and gravity, for God has honored them with vigor of body, which qualifies them for active service to God and their generation. How could old men defend their lives and properties, or how could they exist, if they were not assisted by the strength of the young?

Far less should the young despise the old for their infirmities, or for that fretfulness of temper which old age too often produces. For God has favored them with length of days, and crowned them with gray hair, the badge of their experience, and, it is to be hoped, of their wisdom. If the hoary head is the splendor of old men, it should draw respect from the young, who are commanded by God to rise up before the hoary head, and to honor the face of the old man.

It was a saying of Lewis IX of France, when he was old, that if he had possessed in his youth that wisdom he had now acquired, or if he were still in possession of the vigor of youth — he could conquer all the world. It was better, it seems, for mankind that he did not possess both these qualities at once!

God is wise and good in distributing his gifts among men of all ranks and ages, that none, by having every good quality — might become an idol to himself and others; and none, by lacking everything valuable — might become an object of contempt.

Let young men beware of debasing their glory, by abusing their strength to the service of sin.

Let old men endeavor to make their gray hair venerable by wisdom and piety, by cheerfulness, and the command of their temper.

Finally, let old men remember that they were once young — and young men remember that they will soon be old.

Proverbs 20:30. "Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being." The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil, so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.

We are naturally very averse to chastisement and pain, and Solomon often represents a due regard to chastisement as a sign of wisdom — and here he tells us the great advantage of chastisement to overcome our aversion. Correction and affliction for the present, seem to be not joyous — but grievous. There is a far worse evil from which they are a means of reclaiming us. Sin is infinitely worse than affliction, and affliction is really turned into a blessing to those who rightly improve it, for those wounds cleanse away evil, and stripes are instrumental, not only in reforming the life but in cleansing the heart.

Parents ought not, therefore, to spare the rod through foolish pity. At the same time they ought to join instruction and prayer with chastisement — for still it must be remembered that the blessing of God alone can make it useful for cleansing the inmost being.

Children ought to welcome the rod of chastisement, as a necessary means for their spiritual advantage. The chastisements inflicted by magistrates upon malefactors who do not deserve death, may have the same happy effect — and therefore mercy ought to mingle itself with the punishments inflicted upon them. According to the law, when a man deserved stripes, he was not

to receive more than forty, and the reason given was, "lest your brother should seem vile unto you." He was to be considered as a brother that might be reclaimed, and was not to be treated contemptuously, lest, by despair of recovering his character, he should be hardened in sin. The like tenderness is to be used in the administration of church discipline, that offending brethren may be gained.

Corrections from God are gracious and merciful, even when they are most severe — for his design in them is to make us partakers of his holiness, and to purge away sin. They are a tried medicine which God has often blessed for curing that vanity, that earthliness of mind, that lukewarmness in prayer, that pride and thoughtlessness about eternal things — which are so common and dangerous distempers among men.

Many who once groaned and cried out bitterly because of their afflictions, are now praising God for them among the choirs of angels! And many have seen great cause to be thankful on their account, before they left the valley of tears.

"You have dealt well with your servant," said the much afflicted king when he reviewed the providences of God towards him.

# 01.21. Proverbs 21

Chapter 21.

Proverbs 21:1-31

Proverbs 21:1. "The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases."

It is men’s ordinary way to court the favor of princes and great men, as if their happiness depended on the smiles of kings — while they make little scruple of forfeiting the favor of God, by bending their consciences into a compliance with the humors of those for whom they entertain such undue respect. The like compliances are too often made, to avoid the displeasure of those who have power to hurt or kill the body.

Solomon directs us not to forfeit the favor of princes, or incur their displeasure, by any needless or wanton instances of disrespect. At the same time, he instructs us in the first, place, to seek the favor of God, which is infinitely more necessary for us, than the friendship of the greatest men — and to avoid everything that may displease him, even if we should offend the mightiest tyrant in the world. For the favor of God is all in all to us, and his wrath is tremendous beyond all conception. While kings are entirely dependent on the King of kings, and have their hearts governed by him, in such a powerful, though invisible manner, that they must, whether they design it or not, execute his unchangeable counsels. The currents of water may be directed into any channel that is cut out for them by the hands of men — even the mighty river Euphrates had its course changed by Cyrus, at the siege of Babylon. The waters still retained their nature and properties — and yet the power of that great prince managed their natural tendency to descend, in such a manner as to gain his purpose, and to take that great city, whereof they were reckoned the sure defense. The like influence has God upon the hearts of kings. He does not destroy their natural faculties, nor take from them the freedom of their wills; and, what is still more astonishing — he leaves them for the most part under the power of those natural corruptions which dispose them to exalt themselves above God, and to oppose his will. Yet still he makes them the instruments of his pleasure, and the ministers of his providence.

Nebuchadnezzar thought himself almost a God, and laid waste the Lord’s land, and burnt his temple — and yet God calls him his servant, and used him to accomplish his work upon his people, as really as that noble king of Persia, Cyrus, whom he called his shepherd and his anointed, and employed in doing his pleasure upon Babylon, and delivering his captives.

Those that walk humbly before God, may behold the stern countenances of tyrants without trembling — for God can easily turn their hearts to favor those whom they hated. The history of the three heroes in Babylon is a noble encouragement to all who are called to the like encounter for conscience sake. The fury of the king was raised to madness, his countenance was like a flame, and his fiery furnace burnt with a fierce rage — but when the king commanded them out of the furnace, and he almost adored those whom, a few moments before, he could have torn like a wild

beast with his own teeth.

It is certain that God has often allowed kings to wade in the blood of his people. This is a strange providence — but we can understand the consistency of it, with the truth delivered in the text. If the heart of kings is in the hand of the Lord — then why does he allow them to use their power so frequently in opposition to the interests of his kingdom? This is a piece of the mystery of providence, which will be cleared up in due time — but appears dark to us at present.

Meanwhile, we must believe that God is righteous and holy in all that he does, and allows men to do. He has brought a rich revenue of praise to himself, out of the dark administrations of providence in former ages, and will in the end pour such light upon his ways, that he shall appear in all things to be wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

Proverbs 21:2. "All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart." This is the same useful instruction which the wise man already gave us, and no admonition is more necessary to be inculcated than this: that men are too often flatterers of themselves, and ought to remember that they have an omniscient judge who will not be mocked nor imposed on — but searches their hearts, to give to every man according to his ways, and the inward disposition of his heart. The inspired writers of both testaments insist greatly on this point, and our Lord in his sermons frequently warned men against the dangerous influence of self-deceit.

Proverbs 21:3. "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice."

It was a very common fault among the Jews, to lay too great a stress upon the performance of sacrifice, as if that could atone for their sins, and give them a title to transgress the moral law. The wise man warns them against that piece of self-deceit, in this verse. Solomon was far from under-valuing sacrifice as an institution of God, and a means of faith. No man ever offered a greater number of beasts to God, or did so much to encourage men in the observation of the ceremonial law — unless we may except the lawgiver himself. And perhaps the glory of the temple which he built, and the splendor of the temple service, might dazzle the eyes of men in his days, and occasion them to entertain too high an esteem of the ordinances that belonged to it. If any man had reason to say, "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" — Solomon had much more — but he learned otherwise from the Spirit who instructed him.

Sacrifices were appointed by God, they typified Christ, they were acceptable to God, as expressions of faith and obedience — but they were detestable to him when they were valued on their own account, as if they had been instituted for their own sake, or to give men opportunity of pleasing God so much as to procure an allowance for the neglect of more important service.

Sacrifices were appointed for a single nation — judgment and justice are required from every nation, and from every man under Heaven. Sacrifices were required by a positive law, which depended on the sovereign will of God, not on the nature of God — and the observation of them was dispensed with on many occasions. But the justice is founded in the nature of God, obliges all men at all times, and can never be dispensed with. The law of sacrifices is long ago abolished — but the law of righteousness is an eternal statute. Sacrifices had no goodness in their own nature; and when men rested on them, they were abominable to God. Righteousness and justice are a part of the image of God in man, and have an everlasting excellency in their nature. Sacrifices typified Christ, and were set aside in consequence of his great atoning sacrifice — but justice is

not abolished by faith in Christ. Nay, it is established, and shall continue when Heaven and earth are no more.

If we would show ourselves to be Abraham's seed, we must keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice. It is a gross hypocrisy, it is a grievous dishonor to Christianity, and a ruin to the souls of men — to pretend religion, and observe the forms of divine service — and yet live in the neglect of those duties which we owe to our fellow men.

Proverbs 21:4. "Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the plowing of the wicked is sin." The state of wicked men is miserable beyond expression, for they are every day and every hour adding to their treasury of guilt which is already more than sufficient to sink them into the bottomless pit. They are impure before God in all the labors of their hand — and those works which are accepted at the hands of others, as instances of obedience to God, are reckoned to the wicked in the number of their sins. That a haughty look is abominable to God, is no surprise to us — for it is abominable even to men, and must be infinitely more abhorred by God. We do not wonder to hear that the proud heart is hateful to him, for he is the Searcher of hearts, and is jealous of his own honor, and cannot bear that men should exalt themselves into a rivalship with him. But how the plowing of the wicked should be sin is not so plain, because they are commanded to plow, and severely reproved for the neglect of that work by which they ought to support themselves and their families. If they are plowing when they should be praying, or on Sabbath days, every man will see that they are sinning — but how can their ordinary plowing be sin, when we are told that plowing is a duty?

Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we are required to do all to the glory of God. But the wicked man neither eats nor drinks, nor plows, nor sows, to the glory of God — and therefore he lives in a course of sin, even when he is employed in those actions that are most innocent or necessary. His soul is infected deeply with the venom of sin, which spreads itself over all his life. For to the unbelieving and impure, there is nothing holy. They are corrupt trees, and no fruit that grows upon them can be good. Their hands are defiled with sin, and their fingers with iniquity — and, therefore, everything they touch must be defiled by their impurity.

What then must the wicked do? Must they leave off all work lest they should sin in doing it? By no means. Idleness would bring upon them far more guilt than the labor of their callings — for that is sinful in itself. Whereas plowing is sinful, only by means of their own impurity communicated to it. Their business is to get free of that plague of sin that spreads infection to everything they meddle with. Let them have recourse, like the leper, to Christ — that he may make them clean, and then being pure, everything will become pure to them.

Some render these words thus: "The lamp or prosperity of the wicked is sin." Their prosperity is turned into a snare, and an occasion of sin to them by their wicked dispositions — which use it as an incentive to pride and impiety. Because their candle shines with brightness, they think it will never be put out, and think they stand in no need of the Sun of Righteousness to illuminate their souls. Wickedness is a most unhappy thing, for it perverts the objects that are most desirable in themselves — into means of sin and ruin.

Proverbs 21:5. "The plans of the diligent lead to profit, as surely as haste leads to poverty." Is not the hasty man a diligent man? He is often busier than those who think before they act — and one would think that he must carry the prize of industry. Yet Solomon will not allow him a share of the

praise that he bestows upon the diligent, because his activity is not under proper direction, and therefore cannot serve any good purpose.

True diligence lies between laziness and hastiness — and is directed to its proper end by prudence and consideration. We must remember that we are rational creatures, and act as such both in our religious and civil affairs — and not allow ourselves to be hurried hither and thither, by the impulse of humor and passion — or to be pushed on in any enterprise, however commendable, without thinking of the means proper for obtaining success.

Saul was in too great haste to make an end of the Philistines, and, therefore, he put the people that were fighting with him under a curse, if they should eat any meat until the sun went down — by which step the victory was hindered from being complete. In common life, we see multitudes of people who make too much haste to be rich — and so make themselves poor, by plunging into a multiplicity of business, and bringing confusion and financial embarrassment into their affairs. A man, by running himself out of breath, weakens his strength, and is later in arriving at the end of his journey — than another man, who walks at leisure, and puts himself under no necessity of stopping. And a man who minds his business, and carries it on with a prudent activity, is in a fair way of being rich — when another man, who drives on post haste to get an estate, becomes a bankrupt.

Although lukewarmness in religion is a very detestable disposition — yet rashness is no less dangerous. No business of life requires so much thought and prudence. Many, under the impulse of a rash zeal, have run briskly, and soon stopped and turned aside. Young converts, when their passions were more deeply tinctured with religion than their judgments, have too often hurt their own comfort, and the cause of religion itself, by their indiscreet forwardness in displaying their attachment to it. Christ would not have any person to embrace his cause, without considering the cost of it.

Proverbs 21:6. "A fortune made by a lying tongue, is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare." A lying tongue is an abomination to the Lord — and yet some will venture upon his displeasure, if they can make any profit by it. It must be confessed that some present gain may be made by lying — but then it answers no good purpose. Who would part with his sincerity, and the pleasure of a good conscience — for a little smoke, or for a handful of chaff? And all the treasures that can be made by a lying tongue, however great, are no better. They are vanities and lies that deceive the possessor, making him to believe that he is rich — when he is miserably poor. They are a vanity tossed to and fro, like chaff or smoke in the wind, which will soon be out of sight. For riches gotten by vanity are soon consumed into nothing. But this is not the worst of the matter. For the people that use such methods of obtaining riches, seek death. Although they abhor the thoughts of death — yet in the judgment of God they love and seek it, for they take a sure method of bringing eternal death upon themselves, if not a miserable death in this world. While others are walking towards the region of destruction, they are running to it post haste! They make haste to be rich — but greater haste to be damned, for neither their dishonesty nor their lies, will allow them to be admitted into the kingdom of God!

Proverbs 21:7. "The violence of the wicked will destroy them, for they refuse to do what is right." The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.

It is impossible that the unrighteous should escape punishment, for they bring it upon themselves by the work of their own hands. Although there should be no magistrates to pass sentence upon them, or executioners to execute the sentence — yet their own violence will destroy them. Their sin, is the seed of misery — and it cannot fail of producing its proper fruit. They have none but themselves to blame for the vengeance to be poured out upon them. Their punishment comes forth from the Lord Almighty — but the cause is in themselves. Is their sin then unpardonable? No. The blood of Jesus can cleanse from all sin. Zaccheus the publican was probably an extortioner — but salvation came to his house. His sin was pardoned, and he was made to abhor it as much as ever he had loved it; and if he had taken anything from any man by iniquitous means — he resolved to restore fourfold — but this was a rare miracle of grace. When men have entered upon a course of violence or injustice, they are seldom brought to repentance — for they are entangled in the snare of the devil, in such a manner that they seldom get out. Repentance brings with it restitution of what is gained by unrighteousness; and when men restore, they are obliged to confess to their shame, their former acts of unrighteousness, and sometimes to impoverish themselves and their families. These are terrible inconveniences, to which men, in general, will not submit — but the very thought of them is often sufficient to stifle all motions of their hearts towards anything that is good.

They will rather run the risk of God’s wrath — than think of exposing themselves to disgrace and poverty in this world! Thus they go on in sin, and violently suppress the remonstrances of conscience while they live. And when they die, they envy those grosser offenders who were condemned to the gallows, because the shame and punishment to which they were doomed, were effectual means of removing those peculiar obstacles which hinder the reformation of the unjust.

Beware of entering into this snare of the devil, if your hands are yet untainted by the pollution of filthy lucre — for they are mighty impediments to repentance for this sin. If you are entangled in these snares, remember that shame and poverty at present, are but painted misery in comparison of Hell fire. Fly to Christ’s atoning blood — which purged away the sins of the great transgressors at Corinth. Repent, restore, shake your hands free of unrighteous gains. For while you hold them fast, you are exposed to the destruction threatened in the Word of God, because your hands refuse to do what is right.

Proverbs 21:8. "The way of man is strange and devious — but the conduct of the pure is upright." The way of man is devious. Is the way of every man devious? Or may we contrast the way of man in general — with the conduct of the upright? Are not men justly distinguished into the deceitful and the upright? Why then does Solomon speak as if all men were deceitful?

There is certainly truth in the division of men into the pure and impure — but this distinction is the work of grace and not of nature — for men are all sprung from the first transgressor, and have derived a corrupt disposition from him, and until they are renewed by the grace of God, their way is deceitful. They are all together become corrupt, and have done abominable things — if we may believe the testimony of the omniscient God himself. In our state of innocence, our way was straight and even, while the glory of God was our great end, and the will of God was the rule of our practice. But in our fallen state, we all walk in a crooked and perverse way, following the bent of our own evil inclinations, and seeking after happiness in creatures, which are like broken cisterns that can hold no water. Our course of life is directly the reverse of what it ought to be, for instead of

making the will of our Creator the rule of our behavior — we make it our business to provoke him to anger continually, by trampling upon his authority and despising his laws. Our way is a strange way, being a course of estrangement from the God who made us for his glory, and framed our natures to a capacity of enjoying him, and receiving happiness only in him.

Until we are restored to communion with God through the mediation of Christ — we are aliens to God, and our conduct is a continued proof of alienation from the life of God. But as for the pure, he is raised above other men, and his work is very different. He is purified by the Spirit of Christ, and created in him unto good works. His work is regulated by an unerring rule, and directed to the noblest end — for his constant endeavor is to cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to the Word of God, and to walk in the world as Christ walked. He lives not to himself — but unto the Lord.

It is too natural for us to think that, if we are no worse than the generality of our neighbors — then we are safe. But Solomon and Paul teach us, that, to walk as men, is not to walk like saints. While we are following the course of this world, we are walking in the broad road that leads to destruction — and not in the narrow way that leads unto life. Let every man prove his own work — but it must not be tried by the maxims or example of the world — but by the Word of God, by which God will judge us at the last day.

Proverbs 21:9. "It is better to live in a corner of the house-top, than share a house with a quarrelsome wife." A man might live on a roof, if it were flat like the houses of the ancient Israelites — but it would be a very uncomfortable place of dwelling, because it is exposed to rain and wind, to frost, and snow, and lightning. But as the least of two evils is to be chosen — a wise man would rather choose to dwell on a house-top, and be confined to a single corner of it — than to have his ears tormented, and his spirits crushed, with the endless brawls of a peevish and quarrelsome wife. A man on a house-top would have at least some intervals of comfortable weather — but a quarrelsome woman will never lack something to make her uneasy to herself, and a torment to those who have the misfortune to be connected with her. She is perpetually vexing her children and servants — but her husband is most to be pitied, because she is of one flesh with him. She may be a scourge in the side of others in the family — but she is rottenness in her husband’s bones. She is the greatest plague to him to whom she is bound by every obligation to be the greatest pleasure. She is one flesh with him — and yet she is a constant grief to his heart. She torments herself most of all, and, next to herself, all others in proportion to the obligation she lies under to behave in the very opposite manner.

God said that it is not good for man to be alone, and therefore made woman to be a help-meet for him — and yet the contentious wife is such a perverse creature, that she perverts the design of our Creator, and proves a scourge instead of an help. She makes it better for a man to be in the most solitary circumstances imaginable, than with her.

Those who choose a wife for her wealth, rather than the sweetness of her temper — are not Solomon’s disciples. He declares that the married life is better than the single. But he likewise tells us in this place, that it is much better to live alone in the deepest poverty — than to enjoy affluence with a quarrelsome and peevish woman.

Proverbs 21:10. "The wicked man craves evil; his neighbor gets no mercy from him." The difference between evil and godly men, does not lie in complete freedom from what is evil on the side of godly men. Paul was one of the best men that ever lived — and yet he confesses that he had not obtained perfection in goodness — but found evil present with him, when he was most inclined to do good. But herein lies that goodness which the saints attain in this life — that they love what is good with an ardent affection, and hate that which is evil with their whole soul, although they cannot do all that good they wish to do, and too often do that evil which they hate. On the contrary, wicked men are not only doers of iniquity — but their souls are fully inclined to it. With their souls they crave evil; and although their consciences frequently remonstrate against sin, and are a strong bridle upon the lusts of most unregenerate people — yet sin dwells as a king in their inner man, and is not resisted with hatred like a tyrant — but is allowed to possess the throne of the heart. This is a miserable disposition, for sin is the worst of all evils. No man expressly and directly desires misery — and yet all who love sin desire the worst of misery in reality — for sin is the sickness, the death, the ruin of the soul. The desire of all unrenewed men is towards evil, and not one of them would think himself happy, if he were not allowed to enjoy the pleasures of some sin. Yet their relishes for these cursed pleasures are very different, and the desires of evil in some are stronger than in others. There are many who have some regard to the voice of conscience, and the great principles of morality — and many others that push on in their pursuit of the pleasures that suit their vitiated taste, in spite of their own consciences.

Saul persecuted David, although he had been the champion of Israel, and was his son-in-law. For his corruptions had gained the victory over his conscience and feelings, and he pursued the gratification of his malice with unrelenting fury. This is the tendency of sin — to sink a man deep in the abominable gulf of self-love, and to harden his spirit against those whom he ought to love most tenderly.

Let us therefore choose our friends from the number of those who love God. For their hearts are enlarged with charity, and in their eyes their neighbors find favor.

Those are wicked people, who are so entirely swallowed up by a selfish spirit, that they will scarcely perform an office of charity, or a good neighbor, without the expectation of a return. If we are godly men, let us show it by doing good. Our neighbors and friends have a special title to expect good at our hands.

Proverbs 21:11. "When a mocker is punished, the simple gain wisdom; when a wise man is instructed, he gets knowledge."

It is a bad thing in a family, or church, or nation, when mockers are not duly corrected or punished. It was a sign that the inhabitants of Laish were a ready prey for any invader — when there was no magistrate in the land to punish them.

Those who are too unwise to see the evil of sin, have sense enough to see the evil of shame and pain; and when they behold these disagreeable consequences following sin, their dispositions to wickedness receive a check, to their own great advantage, as well as the good of the society to which they belong. If the fear of censure or punishment does not make men holy — it will make them sober; and this is a good thing in itself, and puts men in a fair way to become still better, by leading men to the means whereby holiness is ordinarily produced. The wise who do not expose

themselves to punishment, are not beyond the need of instruction, and sometimes of admonition and rebuke. David was one of the best of men — but he was not faultless in his behavior, and we find what happy effect instruction and rebuke had upon his soul. He improved in knowledge and grace, by the ministrations of the sanctuary, and the rebukes of the prophets. A rebuke enters more into a wise man, than an hundred stripes into a fool. Even the simple man receives knowledge from the instructions and rebukes which are given to the wise. He is so foolish, that an attempt to instruct himself awakens his jealousy and anger. He thinks you know him, or take him for a fool, when you begin to instruct or admonish him. But when he sees that the wise are instructed, and are thankful for it — then he is forced to see his own stupidity, and his conscience tells him, "If the men that are so much wiser and better than I can pretend to be, are so thankful for instruction — then surely I have much greater need of it! The rebukes that are administered to them, ought to enter ten times deeper into my heart, who deserve them so much better." The simple begins to learn wisdom, when he applies to his own case that which is said or done to other men.

Proverbs 21:12. "The righteous man wisely considers the house of the wicked — but God overthrows the wicked for their wickedness."

We have a clear illustration of this truth in the conversations between Job and his three friends, all of whom had considered the house of the wicked, and God's providence in overthrowing it — but with very different degrees of wisdom. Eliphaz had considered the sudden overthrow of the wicked man, and the unhappy end of his prosperity — and from thence inferred the justice of God, the danger of sin, and the necessity of repentance to sinners. His two friends joined with him in opinion; and we have no reason to doubt that they had received great benefit from the observations which they made upon the providence of God, to the wicked in their own days, as well as in ancient times. For they had taken advantage of the wisdom of the ancients, and of the histories which had been handed down to them, to increase their own stock of knowledge.

Job had considered the house of the wicked with more wisdom, and learned much instruction from the providence of God concerning it. He had observed so many instances of the downfall of prosperous transgressors, that he saw wickedness to be a very dangerous thing, however prosperous it might be for a time — and therefore he abhorred the counsel of the wicked. At the same time he observed, and understood from the reports of travelers, that some wicked men lived and died in affluence, and were buried with great pomp, and had stately monuments erected for them. From thence he justly inferred that the wicked were reserved to a future day of wrath, and defended his own character against his friends, with solid arguments drawn from the unequal distributions of providence in this world.

It is a great point of wisdom to learn instruction from the calamities that befall the wicked, or have befallen them in former times. By this means we may render all the histories of past ages very beneficial to ourselves. We find that the destruction of the old world by the flood, and the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah — were means of impressing the mind of Eliphaz with an abhorrence of sin. And the prophet Ezekiel severely censures the Jews in his time, because they had not taken warning by the fate of Sodom and Israel.

It is not safe for us to pronounce men wicked merely because they are overthrown — but when God makes his judgments upon sinners manifest, it is our duty to observe it, and to glorify and fear

God. And although we have no reason to think that those who meet with signal calamities are worse than other men, unless we have good evidence of it — yet their calamities are loud warnings, and calls to repentance.

Proverbs 21:13. "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."

There may be a very good excuse for not giving to the poor — but insensibility to their extreme distress is an unnatural and a crying iniquity. Our eyes and ears are organs fitted by nature for working upon the heart, and exciting affections of compassion in us. And if we do not regard the cry of the poor with sympathy, we put a force upon nature by stopping our ears. When Eliphaz meant to convince Job that his transgression was great, he charges this among other horrid crimes upon him, that he had not given water to the weary to drink, and had withheld bread from the hungry. But Job was innocent, and could with a good conscience declare that he never withheld the poor from their desire, nor caused the eye of the widow to fail.

Those who are hard-hearted to the distressed, should remember that they cannot make a covenant with death, nor hinder the scourge of distress from reaching themselves. They also shall cry — for the days of distress will come upon them; and while they show no pity to the poor, they harden the spirits of men against pity to themselves, and provoke God to leave them to fall without support.

If we should never fall into distress that needs relief at the hand of our fellow creatures — then it is certain that we need help from God to our souls, and although we feel not our need of his pity at present, the day is coming when we shall feel it at our hearts, and cry out for mercy. Our poor fellow creatures need a few pence from us — but we need great mercy at the hand of God. And when we disobey his voice, and refuse to show mercy unto men — we have just reason to fear that we shall have judgment without mercy to ourselves.

God is a most gracious God. He delights in the voice of prayer, and continually answers those requests that believers present unto him in the name of his Son — but he has not bound himself to hear those cries which necessity extorts from the wicked. This is a part of the extreme misery of those who refuse to hear the cries of wisdom — that they shall cry out in their time of calamity, and he will not hear them. The same punishment is here threatened to those who will not hear the cries of the poor.

What extreme wretchedness is this — to cry and not be heard by a most merciful God! How provoking is the sin which is so severely threatened! When David’s enemies cried unto the Lord, and were not heard — it was plain that they were doomed to irremediable misery. This is the height of the misery of the damned — that their cries are not regarded with pity by God. This truth need not however discourage us from presenting the prayers of faith to the throne of grace. For the prayers here spoken of, are only the cries of strong distress extorted from men that have not the love of God, or the love of Christ in them. It is rather an encouragement to pray. For it shows us that the refusing of prayer is God’s strange work, and a piece of his severity to great sinners who are destitute of compassion to their fellow men. When we have reason to complain that we cry and shout — but God shuts out our prayer — let us consider our ways. Perhaps we have shut our ears on some occasions against the cries of the poor. This was one reason why God accepted

not the prayers and fasts of those people whom Isaiah speaks of in the 50th chapter of his book. The poor may see in this threatening, great encouragement to themselves to apply to his throne of mercy. He who condemns uncharitableness so much in others — is full of love and pity, and listens with a gracious ear to the sighs and groans of the poor and destitute.

Proverbs 21:14. "A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath."

Anger is a very outrageous passion, and strong wrath makes a man like a savage beast, which attacks in its fury, any creature that comes in its way. Yet such is the power of money and gifts, that the fiercest rage is assuaged by them. And therefore when a good conscience allows, it is often a piece of prudence to disarm an enemy by gifts, rather than to fight with him. By such means did Jacob and Abigail secure themselves from those enemies that threatened them with destruction. But to give, or to receive bribes, is a very sinful thing, because it is a perversion of justice. For ministers to receive gifts to soften their severity in censuring offenders (if such unfaithful ministers can be found) — is one of the worst instances of corruption.

Although men are generally fond of receiving — yet they are as generally unwilling to be reckoned fond of gifts. Therefore those who have the art of giving will do it in secret, and avoid every appearance of ostentation in themselves, and everything that might cause a blush in the receivers of their gifts.

If the love of gifts is so universal and so powerful in the hearts of men, we ought to try our own hearts, how far we are influenced by it, or whether we believe our Savior’s words, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Take heed, says our Lord, and beware of covetousness. We must keep a double guard against this sin, because it is so natural to us — and yet so dangerous. Those who receive gifts should take heed to themselves lest they receive a bribe under the gloss of a gratuity. What is given in such a manner as to shun the light, deserves to be suspected. Have gifts such a powerful influence to disarm resentment? Then let no man plead, in apology for the fury of his passions, that he is not able to conquer them. If money can conquer them — then shall reason, and the fear of God, and the command of Christ, be too weak to bridle them? Surely the commandments of our God and Savior have too little authority with us, if they have less influence upon our spirits than gold and jewels have upon the spirits of almost all men.

Proverbs 21:15. "When justice is done — it brings joy to the righteous, but terror to evildoers."

Men that are utterly unacquainted with the spirit of religion, and view it only at a distance, form very false and harmful notions, and are affrighted from it with much the same reason that children are afraid to walk in the dark. They imagination that religion is a dull and melancholy thing, and that it affords and allows no pleasure to saints, at least while their present life continues — but the wise man here tells us, that the very doing of what is right is a part of its own reward, bringing with it an heart-felt satisfaction.

Love is the soul of our obedience; and a well-regulated love is a delightful passion, communicating pleasure to all the toils and dangers that are endured for its sake. Jacob endured the sultry heats, and chilling frosts, for seven years, with great pleasure, for the love he had to Rachel. And the holy

love of Christians will dispose them with greater joy to encounter the assaults of the tempter, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, to strive against sin, and to continue resolute in piety — notwithstanding of all the discouragements which often attend it. The joy of the saints in doing justice is not complete in this world, because the flesh which remains in them lusts against the spirit — yet it vastly exceeds in purity and vigor the highest joys of the wicked. The Christian is unspeakably more happy in resisting and vanquishing the lusts of the flesh — than the worldly man is in gratifying them. This sentence is a mark by which we ought to try ourselves. Many do justice without taking pleasure in it; their consciences will not allow them to do otherwise — but their hearts are on the side of sin. Or they will do many good things with pleasure, because their constitutional and beloved sins are not affected by them. But there are other things at which, like King Herod, they stop short, because they will rather risk damnation, than part unreservedly with the pleasures of sin. But the just man takes pleasure in the way of God's testimonies, without any exception to particular steps of it, as far as it is known to him. He cheerfully obeys the commandments of God which he loves, and in his measure he resembles Christ, whose food and drink it was to do his Father's will. Nor is his love of the commandments confined to the first table of the law. It is as much his joy to pay his debtor, as to receive payment of what is owing to himself; and to bestow charity on the poor, as to receive a present from some rich friend. The wicked have an aversion to justice. Perhaps they are not immoral in their conduct — but it is no pleasure to them to render unto God his due; and they say of his service, "Oh! what a weariness it is!" Their religion is but a dull lifeless form. But there is some iniquity which is relished as honey by them, and drunk greedily as water. But that sin which is sweet in their mouth is bitter in their belly, and shall be found more deadly than poison! For destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

Proverbs 21:16. "A man who strays from the path of understanding, comes to rest in the company of the dead." The way of holiness is the way of understanding. All those who do God's commandments have a good understanding — and all besides are fools. While men wander in the forbidden paths of sin, they are dead while they live, and are sinking themselves deeper and deeper into the dungeon of misery! But of all the wanderers in the ways of sin, those are in the most dangerous condition who were once to appearance walking in the ways of understanding, and have now turned aside into the ways of darkness. It had been better for them never to have known the ways of righteousness, for they bring great reproach upon the ways of God, and behave as if they had found iniquity in the Holy One. They sin against convictions and vows; they prejudice multitudes against the way of truth; and bring the blood of many souls upon their own heads. They harden their hearts against God, and if their consciences are ever again awakened, they are in danger of sinking into the hideous gulf of despair!

Although apostasy is not in itself an unpardonable sin — yet it is sometimes an introduction to it, and never fails to render repentance extremely difficult, and almost impossible. These unhappy wanderers once ranked themselves, and were ranked by their neighbors, among the living in Jerusalem — but they were no better than stalking ghosts — they belong to the congregation of the dead. Without astonishing exertions of omnipotent grace — they must forever remain among that wretched crew.

Those who walk in the light must die — but their death is an entrance into a better life — or it cannot dissolve their blessed connection with the Lord of life. But those who wander out of the way of understanding, are twice dead, they are like trees plucked up by the roots. Death will be the king

of terrors to them, because it opens their passage into the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Consider, you straying sinners, the greatness of your guilt and danger; be thankful that your situation is not yet altogether desperate. There is hope even for you, in the all-sufficient Savior — but fly to him without delay, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, until there is no remedy!

Proverbs 21:17. "He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich."

Love not the world, nor the things of the world — for if any man loves the world, or the lusts of the flesh, or other things in it — the love of the Father is not in him.

Must pleasure then be renounced, and every earthly satisfaction given up? Who will enter into the ways of wisdom, if she insists on this?

Pleasure is not to be absolutely renounced. The truly pious man finds more pleasure, even in his earthly enjoyments, than the happiest sensualist — but pleasure must not be loved as our chief happiness. Our hearts must be given to God, and nothing earthly must be allowed to usurp his throne in our souls.

It is no hardship imposed on us, to be forbidden the love of pleasure, for the sensualist by his love to the delights of the flesh, undoes everything that is dear to him. He not only wounds his soul — but harms his health, and wastes his estate. If he is rich, he makes himself poor. If he is poor, he reduces himself to beggary, and perhaps to a prison.

We see every day instances of the truth of this proverb, in men who have reduced themselves to hunger and poverty, by gratifying the love of pleasure. Gluttons, and drunkards, and revelers, are fools for this world, as well as the world to come. They exhaust, by their intemperance, the very source of their pleasures — and after contracting by habit an unconquerable desire after wine, and other objects of a sensual taste, they are reduced to a lack, not only of the luxuries — but even of the necessities of life.

Let us therefore, if we wish to be happy, follow the Apostle’s rule: The time is short — let those who use this world, be as if it were not theirs to keep.

Feasting is not unlawful — but when men feast without restraint, their joviality leads them to rebelling, which is expressly condemned in Scripture. Let us make no provision for the lusts of the flesh — but put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 21:18. "The wicked become a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright."

"I gave Egypt for your ransom," says God to his people, "Ethiopia and Seba for you." When Jerusalem appeared to be on the point of ruin, God gave a diversion to the Assyrian forces, by means of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia. In like manner, Achan was a ransom for the people of Israel in the days of Joshua, and the seven men of Saul’s sons in the days of David. In these, and in many other instances, the righteous were delivered out of trouble, and the wicked came in their stead.

When the wicked flourish, and the righteous meet with humbling providences — we must not take offence at the providence of God, or the way of holiness. God tries the faith and patience of his people, and will in due time make it to appear that they are gold and jewels in his eyes, and that he puts away the wicked of the earth like dross. God's people need not despair when they are in trouble and see no likely way of getting out of it. God can see methods of relief — when they cannot see them, and he can perform wonders for their relief.

Israel in Egypt was brought very low, and their oppressors were too mighty for them. It seemed impossible for them to escape out of the land of bondage, or if they could get out of it, to be safe from the pursuit of their enemies. But their Redeemer was wise and mighty, and gave Egypt for them. By the plagues of Egypt, their release was accomplished — and by the drowning of Pharaoh and his army, they were preserved from their pursuers. But God's people must walk uprightly, if they wish to enjoy the benefit of this special favor. If they step out of the path of integrity, God may show that he is no respecter of person, to their cost. Jonah for his flight from the presence of the Lord, was made a ransom for the heathen sailors that were with him in the ship. Those that shall not be condemned with the world, may expect to be chastened, although others should escape.

Proverbs 21:19. "Better to live in a wilderness, than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife."

Contention and anger commonly go together, and they kindle a flame that can scarcely be extinguished. The wise man has already told us, that it is better to dwell in an ill-thatched house, or even on a corner of the house-top, without any covering from the storm — than with a contentious woman. But here he goes further, and says that it is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman. The wilderness would make a very bad habitation, because there are the lion's dens, and the habitation of jackels — so that a dweller in the desert would be not only destitute of every convenience — but exposed to constant perils of his life.

Yet it would be a more desirable habitation, than a costly house with the company of a woman who was tormenting her husband with everlasting contentions. The contentious woman is a greater monster than the tiger of the desert, and her tongue is more noisome than the tongue of the viper! A contentious woman is not worse than a tyrannizing husband. A man may more easily make his escape from the presence of a scold — than a woman from the face of a brutal tyrant. The delicacy of her mind makes her more susceptible of melancholy impressions from bad usage, than men ordinarily are. When a husband and wife find the marriage yoke sweetened by love and peace, they should bless God for the happiness they find in each other's society. Their pleasures are the most delightful which this world can afford, and they are indebted for them to that kind providence which has made them one flesh and one soul.

Proverbs 21:20. "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has."

Works of charity are requisite — but don't imagine that they will make you poor. Christ commands us not to lay up treasures on earth — but to lay up treasures that never decay, nor become a prey to thieves. But he does not require us to give everything away to the poor — on the contrary, he insinuates that a prudent householder has in his treasure, things new and old. We must give alms of all that we possess — but we are not called to give all that we possess in alms. That would be at once to drain up the fountain of beneficence, and preclude ourselves from doing good, as we see

occasion, through the remaining part of our lives. Solomon directs us to be liberal in charitable distributions — and yet he tells us in this place, that the wise have a desirable treasure, not only of the necessities — but likewise of the comforts and conveniences of life.

Charity dispensed with wisdom, will not hurt but improve a man's estate. Was there ever a more liberal man than Job — and yet he was the richest of all the men in the east. Abraham abounded in hospitality, and he abounded no less in flocks and herds. It seems a riddle — and yet it is a certain truth, that expenses and losses on God's account are real gains.

Poverty is often the lot of the wise and pious — but it is not the native consequence of piety. Industry, and temperance, and frugality, are recommended by religion — and these are natural means of plenty.

Above all, godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and therefore it must be a great error to imagine that worldly prosperity is inconsistent with the grace of God. For God delights in the prosperity of his servants — and if he does not smile upon their outward estate, it is because his love is directed by infinite knowledge, which sees a different condition to be, for the present, more conducive to their best interests. But if the godly man has not a treasure of the good things of this world in his house, he possesses a large treasure for himself and his family in the promises of God. A man is not poor, although he has no money in his pocket — if he has plenty in the bank. The Christian may lack everything that glitters in the eye of flesh — but he has rich treasures laid up in Heaven, and the written Word of God is his security. But a foolish man spends and devours the substance of his family. His wealth is consumed by idleness or extravagance, or by the blasting curse of God. Or if he is still rich in possession, he does not hold it by a sure tenure. Sin is often the destruction of men's estates, as well as their souls — and brings present misery as well as eternal ruin.

But, however the wicked may flourish, or the righteous decline in the world, (for this world is not the place of full recompenses,) the righteous man when he is poorest, is immensely rich — and the richest of sinners is miserably poor!

Proverbs 21:21. "He who follows after righteousness and mercy — finds life, righteousness, and honor." This world is not the place of perfection. The best Christians must confess their daily failings — but their desires for holiness are sincere, and accompanied with vigorous endeavors.

Slothful professors have some cold desires after holiness, and sometimes their desires are accompanied with endeavors — but these are weak and ineffectual. Or however ardent they may appear to be — yet they soon spend their force, and all their goodness is like the morning cloud and the early dew.

Christians that deserve the name, are like Caleb and Joshua — of another spirit — for their endeavor is to follow the Lord fully. They are followers of the Lamb wherever he goes — and whatever it may cost them. The grace of the gospel teaches us, not only to live godly — but to follow righteousness and mercy, and these two virtues cannot be separated in practice. To be righteous, is to render unto every man his due. Now love is a debt we owe to every man, and mercy is due to the miserable. The great rule of righteousness is to do to others, as we would wish to be dealt with, if we were in their circumstances. And certainly we all wish to enjoy kindness and pity from our neighbors, as circumstances require. The righteous, says David, shows mercy, and

gives. And in another place he says that the righteousness of the merciful man endures forever.

It is in the strength of Christ, that we must follow after righteousness and mercy. As his righteousness is the ground of our hopes — his grace is the fountain of our supplies. He is the vine, and unless we are branches engrafted into this vine — our fruits will be bad.

Love and faithfulness are mentioned among the fruits of his Spirit, and those who have not his Spirit are sensual and selfish, and bring forth fruit only to themselves.

Men think they will be losers, by following righteousness and mercy with too much eagerness — but the Scripture assures us that they shall be great gainers. They may suffer present loss — but their eternal gains will be infinitely greater. They shall find life, and life is the foundation of every enjoyment. What is sweeter than life? And yet the life of most men is but a vain shadow and an empty dream — but that life which comes from the special favor of God, and is secured by divine promise, must be a pleasant and happy life.

Some have lost their life for the sake of righteousness — but Christ assures us that their loss was unspeakable gain. They shall find righteousness. For as those who love cursing — they shall have cursing poured into them like water, and like oil into their bones. Just so, those who love righteousness shall meet with righteous dealing from men, and the righteous God will take care of their interests, and fulfill his faithful promises to them. The justice of God is engaged on their side, through the mediation of Christ, and he cannot be unrighteous, to forget their works and labors of love.

They shall find honor, for their upright and generous behavior is very likely to procure to them honor from men. If fools should despise them, they will be respected by the wise and godly. If all men should despise them and cast out their names as evil — they are precious and honorable in the eyes of the Lord. They shall at last be dignified with a place at Christ’s right hand, with approbation from their judge, and with an eternal crown!

Proverbs 21:22. "A wise man attacks the city of the mighty and pulls down the stronghold in which they trust."

Men are generally so deeply sunk in flesh, that they value the endowments of the body, and the outward bounties of providence — above the noble qualities of the mind. This error is corrected by Solomon in this verse. He tells us that in every point of view, the qualities of the mind are preferable to those of the outward man.

Counsel is better than strength for war, for one wise man will take a city defended by many strong men — although they have the advantage of high walls, and strong fortifications on their side. By the wisdom of Cyrus in turning the current of the Euphrates, was Babylon taken, notwithstanding of its stupendous walls and numerous defenders. By the discipline of the Romans were the brave and strong nations of France and Germany subdued, and in almost every battle, it has been found that wisdom is better than weapons of war.

If military wisdom is so much preferable to strength — then how excellent is that pious wisdom so much commended in this book! This divine wisdom even in war has a vast superiority over the wisdom of generals and ministers of state, for it leads men to victory, because it teaches them to trust in the Lord Almighty. By this wisdom, Abraham conquered four kings when they were flushed

with victory. By this wisdom, David the stripling, overcame lions, and bears, and giants. By this wisdom, many of the old believers waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens — for they knew their God, and were strong, and did exploits. By this wisdom the weakest believer is victorious through the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony — over the dragon and his demons.

Proverbs 21:23. "He who guards his mouth and his tongue, keeps himself from calamity." A furious horse needs a double bridle to restrain its fierceness. Just so, it seems the tongue of man needs more than a double bridle to keep it in from doing hurt. The wise man never ceases to admonish us about this point, and in this place he mentions particularly two of the instruments of speech, and puts a bridle on each of them. As a high-spirited horse, if its fury is not curbed with a strong hand, will hurry its rider along, without regarding pits, or precipices, or deep waters, and expose him to extreme jeopardy of his life — so an unbridled tongue will make a man hateful to God and men, plunge him into contentions and debates, and expose his estate, and life, and credit, to extreme danger. Who is the man who wishes to enjoy a quiet and peaceable life? Let him set a guard over his mouth, and refrain his tongue from profaneness and corrupt communication, from railing and reviling, and all evil speaking, from foolish talking, and from inconvenient jesting. Let prudence and the fear of God stand continually like sentinels at the door of his lips. Let him follow the instructions of David, and Solomon, and James. Let him pray to God to guard the door of his mouth, and remember that an ungoverned tongue is inconsistent with true religion and happiness, and exposes a man to the same danger as a ship when it lacks a pilot and an helm, and is ready to clash against every rock that comes in its way.

Proverbs 21:24. "The proud and arrogant man — 'scorner' is his name, who deals in proud wrath. The anger of a proud man is very fierce." When he meets with the smallest shadow of an affront or provocation, his passions are on fire, and his vengeance must be satiated — be the consequence what it will. He would have every man to do him homage — and when his opinion is contradicted, or his humor not complied with, he rages like a tempest, which threatens to spread desolation and ruin.

Such was the proud wrath of Haman, which could not be glutted with the blood of Mordecai alone — but thirsted after the blood of a whole nation! What does the proud worm design by all this fury? It is his honor that set him in a flame. He thinks highly of himself, and cannot bear the thought that another man has not the same deference for him which he has for himself. To repair the imagined attacks upon his honor, he gives way to revenge, and seeks the reputation of a man of true honor — but he disappoints his own views, and meets disgrace, when he is hunting for praise.

He shall be called a proud man, and that is a character so base, that a proud man cannot bear it — for pride seeks to hide itself under any covert rather than be seen. He shall be called a haughty scorner, for he puffs at his enemies, and pours contempt upon his reprovers.

Now a haughty scorner is a very hateful character, for the scorner is an abomination among men. Haman the Agagite, and Uzziah king of Judah, have brought great dishonor upon their memories by their proud wrath.

Moses and Job, are men of glorious memory, for their humility and meekness. The godly man is not ambitious of praise — but he receives honor from God. The proud man cannot live without

honor and applause — and his ambition and pride load his name and memory with contempt.

Proverbs 21:25-26. "The sluggard’s craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more — but the righteous give without sparing."

Solomon has already said enough to banish sloth out of the world — if those who are under the power of this vice were not besotted with it. But here he tells us a worse thing about it than in any of his former proverbs, for he represents it as a degree of self-murder. The slothful man brings diseases upon himself, by reducing himself to lack of the necessities of life — for he will not labor for his food, nor take that exercise which prepares the body for quiet rest. But besides this, his very desires are hurtful to his constitution, for his mind must be employed, when his hands are idle. His needs, and the time that lies heavy upon him, are strong incitements to those insatiable cravings of desire which rack the heart and have a sickening influence upon the body. If the desire accomplished is a tree of life — then those desires that cannot be accomplished, must have the quite opposite effect. If hope deferred make the heart sick — then how cruelly must it be tortured by those insatiable desires that are not sweetened by any mixture of hope.

What is the reason that the slothful man’s desires have such a pernicious influence upon him? His hands refuse to labor. If you bid him go and work, he will perhaps promise to do it, like that son who said to his father, "I will go, sir," to work in the vineyard. He is sensible of the necessity of it, he wishes earnestly to enjoy the fruits of labor, he has even some faint wishes that his hands would submit to the toil of labor — but the loss is that his hands will not comply, because they must be taken out of his bosom if they work. If he could work with his tongue, without his hands, he would be a very industrious man — but he hates work because it does not consist in talking or sauntering about.

Slothfulness is very harmful to the soul, as well as the body. The deep sleep into which slothfulness casts a man, is the nurse of the body of sin. The sluggard covets — he covets greedily; greedy covetings are his constant employment. Although he will not work for necessities, he could not be happy without the luxuries of life. Those greedy workings of covetous desire, are a strong temptation to him to pilfer and steal, and sometimes they push him on to those crimes that procure the gallows.

Wicked men disappoint themselves by their sins, of that wished-for enjoyment, which they seek and hope to obtain by their iniquities. The sensualist deprives himself not only of pleasures — but of necessities, by casting away that money that should procure them. The vain and proud bring infamy upon their name, by the very means they take to support their honor. And slothful men, while they seek rest and ease, endure much more fatigue than the diligent man, because they make themselves a prey to the restless workings of their own unbridled desires. But the righteous give without sparing. He does not say the diligent man gives. For all wicked and selfish men are not slothful. Some men toil hard, not from any regard to God’s authority — but entirely for their own interest. They do not glorify God in their labors, for they do not work that they may have something to give to him who needs. The righteous man is of a nobler spirit, for he is ever merciful, and his mercy is one motive to his industry. He labors in his calling, and the blessing of God gives him success, and he shows his thankfulness to God, by giving with an unsparing hand. The slothful man covets the fruit of other people’s labors — but the godly man does not wish to eat that morsel alone, which is procured by his own sweat and toil. God is well pleased with his bounties,

for he is a cheerful and liberal giver.

Proverbs 21:27. "The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable — how much more so when brought with evil intent!"

We have already heard that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. We are here told, that it is an abomination, although it is presented with the very best dispositions that a wicked man is capable of. Some unregenerate men are anxious for eternal life — because they cannot always live on earth. Some of them have a great deal of seriousness in their devotions, and will even worship God in the exercise of tempers of mind that have some resemblance of love to God, and faith in Christ. Will not such service be accepted of God? By no means! Our great teacher tells us to make first the tree good, and then the fruit will be good. For a corrupt tree, at the best, produces corrupt fruit. It must, therefore, be a very foolish thing, for men to dream of preparing themselves for Heaven by a course of serious devotions — before they will venture to commit the salvation of their souls into Christ's hands. Without his grace, we can have no good dispositions, nor do anything which is acceptable to God — for it is only in the Beloved, that we are accepted.

What then must wicked men do? Must they be driven to despair? or must they give up performing duty? No. It is certain that without faith it is impossible to please God — but it is equally certain, that they are fully warranted to believe in Jesus. Let them make a thankful use of this privilege, and from henceforth do all that they do, in word or in deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the sacrifice of the wicked at the very best is detestable to God — then how abominable must it be at the very worst? It is more than abominable, if he brings it with a wicked intention!

Balaam presented many rich sacrifices — but they were designed to bribe the Holy One of Israel to be unfaithful to his people, and changeable in his purpose. It is a detestable thing for men to think they can prevail on God by the multitude of their holy services, to dispense with sin, and allow them to escape unpunished — although they still live in the practice of injustice towards men, and in the neglect of several necessary duties which they owe to God.

It is no less presumptuous for men to be diligent in the practice of religion, to obtain the applause of men. This was the vice which our Lord so frequently reproved in the Pharisees, and this fault is still too common among the professors of religion. It will be a comfortable evidence that we are not under the reigning power of it, if we are as conscientious in the secret performances of religion, as in those who come under the view of men.

Nothing can be more detestable, than to cover vice with professions of religion. Some have the daring presumption to walk on in the ways of sin, and to practice the forms of duty — that their character may be shrouded under the mask of piety. These are followers of the Scribes and Pharisees, against whom our Lord pronounced so many dreadful woes. They walk in the cursed way of Jezebel, who caused a feast to be proclaimed, that she might destroy an innocent man — and yet keep up the forms of religion and law; and they are likely to perish in the gain-saying of Korah.

Proverbs 21:28. "A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever."

He is a false witness that speaks what he has not been assured of, by the testimony of his ears or eyes, or some other way that secures him from the danger of lying. He may possibly speak what is

true, without having sufficient evidence of it — but it is evident, that he is a man of a loose conscience, who speaks things with a greater air of certainty than his ground of belief will warrant. "We testify," says the faithful witness, "the things that we have seen and heard," and his followers must imitate his example. The false witness was to be punished by the magistrate, according to the law of Moses — but if he should escape the punishment which his crime deserves from men — then God says he shall perish, and his threatenings are not wind and vanity. For lying lips are but for a moment — but the lip of truth shall be established forever. Therefore, putting away lying, let us speak truth every man to his neighbor, especially in witness-bearing. If the commandment of God, and the mighty motives of his gospel, will not induce us to do so — then let us regard our own honor and interest, which suffer irreparable injury by every deviation from truth.

Proverbs 21:29. "A wicked man puts up a bold front, but an upright man gives thought to his ways." The wicked man walks in a crooked path, where peace and happiness never were, nor shall ever be found. God calls upon him to leave this cursed way, and to turn into the straight way of life. He thunders in the curses of his law, and orders his ministers to lift up their voices like trumpets, to proclaim in his ears the dangers of his course. He deals with him by his providence, and makes him to feel some of the first fruits of that vengeance which is the fruit of sin. He sets before him the peace and pleasure to be found in the way of holiness, that he may be encouraged to leave the way of destruction — but the perverse sinner disregards the voice and providence of the Lord. The ways of sin are so pleasant to him, that he will venture the consequences, rather than be turned out of them for the present. The wicked man has many devices to harden his face in his sinful course. He thinks that he only walks in the same paths as other men do, and many are much worse than himself. He thinks that he has time enough before him, to repent and serve God. He does many good things to overbalance his evil deeds, or he will make amends for all at once, by fleeing to the mercy of God at last. By such corrupt reasonings as these, he hardens himself in iniquity, and sets God at defiance, disregarding the terrors of his wrath, and trampling upon the grace and blood of the Redeemer, who came to turn ungodliness from Jacob. By degrees he contracts so powerful habits of sin, that his conversion is almost impossible; he casts off shame and fear, and sins without restraint, until he finds that there is justice and vengeance, as well as forbearance with God. But the upright man directs and establishes his way. He may slip with his feet — but he recovers himself by the aids of divine grace. If he turns aside, as a godly man may occasionally do — he will not persist in sin, but, like Job, he confesses with self-abhorrence his vileness, and will proceed no farther in it. He endeavors, in the general course of his life, to keep at a distance from sin and temptation, and to order his conduct with such prudence, that he may not by surprise be ensnared in to sin, nor meet with any occasion of stumbling.

Thus did David direct his way, when he had the Word of God in his heart to keep him from sin, and fortified himself with firm resolutions, and fervent prayers, when he knew that he was to meet with snares in his path. Thus did Abraham direct his way, when he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac. He never told Sarah, nor even his servants that attended him on his journey, that he had received so strange a command from God, for he was fully resolved to obey the voice of the Lord, and wished to obviate every advice in opposition to his duty.

Let us follow the example of these holy men, making straight paths for our feet, that what is lame may not be turned out of the way; and to him who orders his conduct aright, will God show his salvation.

Proverbs 21:30. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord."

Wisdom excels folly, as much as light excels darkness — and Solomon often directs us to manage all our affairs with discretion and counsel, by means of which purposes are established. But he warns us in this place, not to trust to our own wisdom or prudence, nor to dream that they can accomplish anything without the permission and pleasure of God. Wisdom and counsel can do much with the blessing of God — but all the wisdom of men and angels could do nothing in opposition to his counsels, which are all executed by the arm of omnipotence.

There is, no doubt, wisdom and strength in human counsel — but with God is wisdom and strength in an infinitely superior degree. One wise man excels another wise man, so much that he can manage him as if he were a child. But the only wise God turns the wisdom of all the philosophers in the world into foolishness — and the foolishness of God is infinitely wiser than the best wisdom of creatures.

Herod formed a project as deep as Hell to destroy our infant Savior — but Jesus lives and reigns. Herod and his family were soon extinct. The like success has attended all the contrivances of men to destroy the church of our Redeemer, and God has glorified himself upon the mightiest and wisest enemies of his people, by making their infernal devices the means of ruining themselves, and of advancing the interests of Zion.

Let Zion rejoice because of God’s judgments, and let all the daughters of Judah be glad, for the Lord of hosts has purposed good concerning her — and who shall disannul his purpose? The enemies of Zion may associate and combine, and form their plans for her destruction — but they shall not stand, for the Lord has founded.

There are men who aspire to honors, and in their pride would exalt themselves in opposition to the will of God, who has annexed honor to piety — and disgrace, to pride and ambition. But shall they succeed? The Lord has purposed to stain the pride of all glory, and they shall be scattered in the imagination of their hearts. There are some that try to carry on their plans for enriching themselves and their families, in spite of God. But poverty and ruin is the fruit of their presumption. In short, all who seek for profit or pleasure in transgressing the law of God, shall find loss and misery. Trust in God at all times, acknowledge him in all your ways, and be not afraid that any of his gracious counsels shall be frustrated. But those who harden themselves against God shall be ruined without remedy.

Proverbs 21:31. "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but safety rests with the Lord."

Solomon here teaches better than he practiced, for we need from God not only light to guide us in the way — but grace to walk in it. He provided 40,000 horses even though God had expressly forbidden the kings of Israel to multiply horses, lest their hearts should be drawn away from the hope of Israel. But this proverb was abundantly verified by the consequences of the change that Solomon introduced into the management of public affairs, for from his days the people never made such a figure in war, as they had done in former days, when the judges of Israel went on foot against those who fought from chariots of iron.

Horses and warlike preparations of every kind are nevertheless necessary to be used in war, when they are not expressly forbidden by God. Yet if you trust in horses, you will find that they cannot

afford safety to those whose hearts are turned from the Lord. When the people of Judah went down to Egypt for help, and trusted in the Egyptian horses for safety against the king of Assyria — the prophet Isaiah, with a loud voice, remonstrated against their conduct, and cried that their strength was to sit still, and wrote it in a book, that it might continue forever and ever as a testimony on record against those who trust in chariots and horses, rather than the name of the Lord. Are we obliged to fight for our liberty and religion? Then let us set up our banners in the name of the Lord, believe in him as the Lord of armies, who musters the hosts of the battle, and decides the fate of war — and beware of everything that might provoke him to sell us into the hands of our enemies.

Prudence obliges a nation to avoid dangerous wars. Religion teaches us, if possible, as far as lies in us, to live peaceably with all men. But necessity is sometimes laid upon Christians to expose themselves to jeopardy in war for their country. In such cases the firm belief of this proverb will encourage us to venture into the field against a superior force, persuaded that every bullet has its direction from God, and that he is able to give us the victory, or to make defeats and deaths our advantage.

Salvations of every kind belong to him. The means of safety must not be neglected — but God alone must be trusted, and when the means are attended with success, the glory is to be ascribed to him.

Joshua employed the whole force of the armies of Israel against the nations of Canaan, and he praised those tribes that generously and faithfully assisted their brethren to subdue the country — but he was fully sensible that it was not their sword and bow that had gotten the land — but God’s right arm and favor, and the light of his countenance.

Just so in our spiritual warfare, we must arm ourselves with the whole armor of God — but our strength must be in the Lord, and in the power of his might. If we must trust him for safety in fighting with flesh and blood, how can we wrestle successfully against the powers of Hell without his divine support?

# 01.22. Proverbs 22

Chapter 22.

Proverbs 22:1-29

Proverbs 22:1. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold."

Great fame is none of the most desirable objects — but a good character and the love of others are frequently represented by Solomon as valuable blessings. Riches are greatly esteemed in the world, and, under the management of wisdom, serve very valuable purposes — but they don't contribute so much to the quiet and happiness of life, as the esteem and love of our neighbors; nor do they qualify us so much to honor God and do good to men. Paul does not require it as a qualification in church rulers to be rich — but he requires that, along with knowledge and good behavior, they should have a good report among Christians, and even heathen. He was sensible that the most useful instructions from a suspected person would have no better relish than wholesome food presented in an unclean dish. Our Lord requires all Christians to do those good works that are esteemed by men, not indeed that they may receive praise from men — but that God may be glorified on their behalf. The like exhortations are frequently given us by the apostles of Christ. But we must still remember that a good name and the favor of men are not to be compared with the pleasures of a good conscience, and the favor of God. For if the friendship of men is so pleasant and useful — God is greater than men, and his favor is infinitely more valuable. And we have no reason to be vexed if we lose the esteem of men in our endeavors to please God. The esteem and good will of men are to be valued chiefly because they will enable us more effectually to serve the interests of God's kingdom, and to do good to the souls of men. When they are valued for their own sakes, they become a snare to us, as they were to some of the ancient Jews, who would not confess Christ, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. When our names are cast out as evil, for a godly cause, we have reason to rejoice and triumph, because we are made partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that when his glory shall be revealed we may be glad also with exceeding joy. If we seek chiefly to please men, we are not the servants of Christ — but if we are the servants of Christ, we must endeavor for his sake, to please men, for their good to edification, and for the honor of his gospel.

We must value our character above money, and avoid everything that is base, although it might promote our outward estate. We must not only attend to the secret duties of religion — but those also that recommend it to the world, and take all care that our good be not evil spoken of, and that the gospel meets with no reproach by our misconduct. We should be thankful to God, if we enjoy the benefit of a good name, and employ our influence for the advancement of his glory — but we must abhor the thoughts of making any sinful compliances with the course of the world for the sake of our credit, remembering that instructive saying of God, "Those who honor me, I will honor — but those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Proverbs 22:2. " Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all."

Such is the vanity which generally attends riches and power — that great men often treat people of lowly station, as if they were some lower rank of animals. The poor and rich are made of the same blood, and the same glorious power is displayed in the formation of their bodies, and the creation of their souls. They breath the same vital air, and enjoy the light of the same sun. They owe their support equally to the earth — and shall return to the same dust. Their souls are equally precious, and shall dwell in the same eternal habitations — unless there is a distinction between them of a very different kind from that which makes the rich too often to trample upon the poor, and the poor to return their contempt with the no less criminal passion of envy. They are alike lost in Adam, and have the same right to salvation, through Christ revealed in the gospel. They meet together in the same family, and church, and nation, and they are useful to each other, if they comply with the designs of providence. The rich man's wealth would be of little use to him without the labor of the poor; and the rich man ought to return protection and wages to the poor. Like members of the same body, they ought neither to despise nor to grudge at one another — but to contribute their joint endeavors to the good of the whole. The Lord is their common creator and father, and by his providence he has made this man rich and the other man poor — and can invert their conditions when he pleases, as the experience of every day declares.

Why should the rich man despise his poor fellow creature? Did not he who made you, make him? Did not one God fashion you both in the womb? Did God frame you of finer clay, or form you of better blood, than that of Adam? Or do your riches make you better, or wiser, or even happier than the poor man? The horse is not so much worse than brutish, as to reckon itself a nobler animal than another of its own species, because it has got a finer saddle on its back. Let not the poor grudge at their poverty, and repine at him who has given a larger portion of land and money to their fellow men, for he is the Lord. He has given you more than you can claim by the rights of justice — and if he has given more to some others than to you, he has given them what was his own and not yours, and has commanded them to be kind and useful to such as you, in the spending of it.

Proverbs 22:3. "A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it."

Common prudence will teach men to provide for their security against plain and evident dangers. Drunkards, and whoremongers are destitute of common sense as well as religion, otherwise they would not rush upon certain destruction for a momentary gratification. This mark of prudence appears chiefly in those who partake of the wisdom that is from above. As Noah, when he foresaw the deluge, prepared an ark to the saving of his house — so the prospect of the deluge of wrath alarms them, and instigates their flight to that blessed refuge which God has provided for our souls. When Moses foretold the tremendous storm that was to destroy the fields and cattle of Egypt, it was seen who of Pharaoh's servants were fools, and who were wise. The foolish left their cattle in the fields to perish, the wise among them put their cattle under a shelter.

Now God threatens punishment to sinners in his word — but he is pleased in his great mercy to show us where we may find refuge. Christ is a hiding place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest; and those who are made truly wise, will give no rest to their eyes, nor slumber to their eye-lids, until they are hidden under the covert of his righteousness.

Besides that terrible wrath which shall seize upon all sinners at last, God oftentimes gives commission to particular judgments, to avenge his quarrel upon a land or church. Now prudence will enable us in some measure, to discern the signs of the times, and to judge of effects from their causes. There are some men so stupid, that they will not see God's hand when it is lifted up — but the wise man, by the threatenings of the Word and the appearances of providence, can see God's hand when it is about to be lifted up, and enters into those chambers of safety which are provided for his safety in the evil day.

It is only sensual and earthly wisdom that teaches men to shelter themselves from danger, by venturing on sin, or neglecting duty. This is just as wise, as it would be for a man to run upon a drawn sword to avoid the scratch of a pin. But the simple walk in dark. They do not see the evil coming — or if they see it, they are so senseless that they pass on in their dangerous course, until they meet with deserved punishment. They are more stupid than many of the brute creation, who foresee the storms and run to their shelters.

Many of the feathered tribes, before the cold sets in, fly away to warmer climates. How then do you say that we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us, if you are more senseless than the beasts of the earth, and less wise than the birds of Heaven? Will you call yourselves reasonable creatures, when neither reason nor revelation can make you so prudent about your best interests, as instinct alone renders animals that cannot boast of these precious gifts.

Proverbs 22:4. "Humility and the fear of the Lord, bring wealth and honor and life."

Many great things are said of humility in Scripture, and many precious promises are made to it. But the humility meant, is not that false humility that is often found among the proudest of men — nor that constitutional modesty — nor that condescension of temper and behavior, which is the mere effect of good sense, and is a very amiable quality — but not a Christian grace.

Christian humility is that which has the promises belonging to it, and it is always joined with the fear of the Lord. It arises from an apprehension of the glorious excellencies of God. For when our eyes are open to his awesome majesty — we cannot but perceive our own baseness. When we behold his spotless purity — we must be ashamed of our own loathsomeness. When we contemplate his solemn authority — we feel our obligations to deny our own perverse wills. When his sovereignty is felt — we cannot but yield the management of all our concerns into his hand. When we have the knowledge of his righteousness — we are obliged to renounce our own works, and submit to the righteousness of God.

Thus Job and Isaiah were humbled. They saw God with the seeing of the eye, and humbled themselves in the dust before him. Humility, arising from an impression of the glories of God, is attended with other Christian graces, and a holy life. The humble man will walk humbly with his God, and bend all his endeavors to please the Most High. By this humility, come riches, and honor, and life. These things are greatly valued by men, especially when they attend one another. Riches are universally coveted — and yet many who possess them are discontented — because they covet the addition of titles and dignities to their wealth. And some who have riches and honors in abundance, are more unhappy than those who lack them — because they must die, and leave their beloved dignities and riches to others. But here Solomon instructs us, in few words, in a short and sure way of attaining those blessings, which men so ardently covet, and in securing

them against every contingency, and even against death itself. But if we follow his direction, we must renounce the wisdom of the world, which teaches the opposite doctrine.

It is generally believed, that if men would obtain riches and greatness, they must push themselves forward, and make themselves men of importance, and that they must not too scrupulously adhere to their duty — but in some cases venture to displease God by to secure the favor of men. But we are here taught that humility and the fear of the Lord are the straight road to everything desirable; and if we believe that God is the fountain of life, and every blessing — then the doctrine of Solomon will be clear as the light. For to whom do kings give their favors? To their friends or enemies — to those whom they love, or to those whom they hate? We know that the Lord delights in the humble, and takes pleasure in those who fear him. And as he waters the humble valleys with the fructifying showers — so he refreshes with his abundant blessing, those who are low in their own eyes, and willing to render the glory of all that they receive to the Giver. If the humble lack anything that is good in this world, they shall possess unfailing treasures and a crown of life in Heaven.

Proverbs 22:5. "In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them." When the children of Israel spared the Canaanites, in opposition to the commandment of God — they found the consequences of their sin, though it might seem a little one, very troublesome — for the remnant of the accursed nations were thorns in their eyes, and snares and traps to them, and scourges in their sides. Such shall sin be to every wicked transgressor.

It is generally allowed that the end of transgressors is miserable — but we are assured by Solomon that also their way is hard, and that it is all covered over with thorns and snares! The tyranny of lusts,

the cravings of inordinate desires,

the disappointment felt in the enjoyment of the pleasures of sin, which never answer expectation,

the stings of conscience,

the bitter fruits of many sins even in this world,

and the sore rebukes of providence —

are thorns and briers which pierce the souls of the wicked every day. And as Gideon taught the men of Succoth with thorns and briers — so men, if they were not brutish, would learn, from the pains that attend or follow the pleasures of sin — that it is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord. The wicked cannot get free of these miseries, for snares are in their way, by which they are held fast, as a bird in the snare of the fowler. They are compassed by God with a net, and all their efforts will be insufficient to disentangle them. There are snares also in their way, by which the devil holds them fast in sin — so that they cannot get free from his tyranny. They resolve to repent at last, but they find that Satan keeps them fast in the cords of their sins. They are like galley slaves chained to their work — and nothing but almighty grace can work out deliverance for them.

Such is the malignant nature of sin, that it turns everything into a snare, and an occasion of sin. Adversity and prosperity, the comforts of the table, the ordinances of God, and Christ himself —

are a snare to the wicked. Who is the man who shall be preserved from these snares and thorns? He who guards his soul by watchfulness against sin and temptation, by prayer, and, above all, by committing it to the care of him who is the keeper of Israel. He shall be preserved from every evil thing, he shall be far from those thorns and snares which the wicked man is continually meeting in his path. Are these things so? Did not Job keep his soul with all diligence, and even the souls of his children — and yet he met with snares, and nets, and darkness, in his paths! This cannot be denied — but Job was only tried for a moment, to improve his graces, to raise his name, and to brighten his crown. The people of God may expect manifold tribulations, but, amidst them all, they have peace in Christ. And what are the tribulations of the world, compared to the peace that is in him! They shall be preserved by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, and while they sow in tears they can rejoice in the hope of reaping in joy.

Proverbs 22:6. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

"Take this child," said Pharaoh's daughter to Jochebed, "nurse him for me, and I will pay you your wages." Children are a heritage of the Lord, and he lays claim, in a special manner, to the children of professing Christians, as his own. And he commands them to be nursed and trained up for himself, and those who obey his orders shall be richly recompensed, in the good behavior of their children, or at least, in the approbation of God, and the satisfaction of their own minds.

Satan will soon address himself to your children, to draw them into his service. Their reason will no sooner begin to operate, than he will take advantage of that foolishness which is bound up in their hearts, to fix them in his service. Endeavor therefore to be beforehand with him. Instruct them in the knowledge of God, of their own fallen condition, of the way that God has provided for their recovery, and the way of holiness wherein they should walk. Convince them, by methods suited to their tender years and weak minds, that true religion is pleasant, and necessary for them. Check the first appearances of vice, by such means as will not give them a disgust at instruction. Accommodate yourselves in the methods of your instructions to their capacities and dispositions, that they may be drawn to religion with the cords of love, and with the bands of a man.

Parents do not give the same food to all children — but attend to the difference in their constitutions and tastes, in their care of their bodies — and why should they not make the like difference in their management of their minds?

Let all your instructions be sweetened by kindness, and enforced by good example, which has a greater influence than precepts upon all men, and especially on children.

Correction must likewise have its place in training up your children; and God must be earnestly implored to crown the whole with his blessing. When children are thus trained up, they will be led into the paths of life and peace, and even when they are old they will not turn aside out of them. Timothy from a child was trained up in the knowledge of the holy Scriptures, and the faith which dwelt in his grandmother and mother, dwelt in him also, for the Scriptures made him wise unto salvation. It is a great pleasure to parents to see their children walking in the truth, and it is an unspeakable heightening of that pleasure, when their own instructions and admonitions have been blessed by God, as means of conducting them into that good path.

Parents love their children, because they were the instruments of their existence — but they will look upon the fruit of their bodies to be doubly their children, when they are spiritual fathers to

them, as well as the fathers of their flesh. How painful must it be to the heart of a parent who neglected the training of his child, to see the that child walk in the paths of wickedness. Every wicked act in such a child, must be a wound in the heart of his cruel father, who by his cruel negligence, left his child to be a prey to the devil, and, carried captive by that cruel tyrant, to be employed in his hellish drudgery.

If the father lives to see him die in such a situation, what a hell must it be to his own soul. Even the agonies of a wounded conscience are unequal to the torment of reflecting that, in spite of all the obligations of nature — his poor child was allowed to be carried away by Satan to the lake of fire; where he is now justly cursing the parent who brought him into the world, because he never used the proper means for preventing that horrible misery, to which he is now reduced. Will children always walk in that way wherein they are trained up? For the most part, this will be the case. God is a sovereign dispenser of grace, and he is not under any obligation to bestow it upon the children of his faithful people — but this proverb teaches us, that he often blesses the attempts of parents, to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

If parents are disappointed in their expectations from their children, they will be free at least of those terrible remorses which sting the hearts of careless parents, when their children prove wicked. They have the pleasing consciousness of having done their duty. They can pray, with humble boldness, that God may yet bless his own appointment for their children’s advantage. For the seed of early instruction may be many years buried under ground, and at last spring up. They may even form some pleasing hopes, that although they have not the pleasure of seeing their houses such as they could wish, they may see at the great day, some at the right hand of Christ, who gave them too much reason to fear the contrary. The instructions of Hezekiah had no influence upon Manasseh, until he had been long in his grave; and yet Hezekiah will be able, we hope, to say at the last, "Here am I, and the son whom God has given me."

Proverbs 22:7. "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." When Job’s three friends endeavored to convince him that he was a great sinner, and could make no impression upon him, Eliphaz at last ventures roundly to tell him what his transgressions were — but as he had only conjecture to go upon, he could only judge what those sins were that he was most likely to fall into, and fixes upon those who were most natural to a man in his circumstances. Job was the greatest of all the men in the east, and therefore Eliphaz tells him that he tyrannized over the poor. For he knew that the pride of riches often displays itself in such conduct, and that those whose circumstances enable them to lend to others, are too often betrayed, by their circumstances, into insolence and oppression.

It is not for nothing that Paul directs Timothy to charge those who are rich in the world, not to trust in uncertain riches, nor to be high-minded. Rich people ought narrowly to examine their own hearts and conduct, whether they are not puffed up with vanity, and disposed to behave imperiously towards their inferiors — especially those who are obliged to have some dependence upon them, and whose circumstances oblige them to be in their debt. Let them remember that they have received their riches from God, by whose providence things are so managed, that this man is poor — and the other man rich; this man must borrow — and another man is able to lend. Let them attend to their own absolute dependence in respect of God, before whom the rich and the poor are equal, and by whose justice, those who take their brethren by the throat, because they owe them a

few pence, will have the many talents exacted, in which they stand indebted to God. This proverb is a warning to men to be industrious and frugal, that they may not lose their liberty. Men who labor diligently in their callings, need not cringe to the rich, nor live in any man's debt. Some people care not how much they borrow, never remembering that the day of payment is coming, and that a man has as many masters as he has creditors. Paul did not choose to be burdensome to any man, nor to be dependant upon the generosity even of those who were best affected to him — but he labored, working with his hands, and helped by his labors to supply the wants of his friends.

Proverbs 22:8. "He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed." The gardener does not expect to reap wheat if he has sown tares — and yet men are often so foolish as to expect, that, after sowing to the flesh, they shall reap the same thing with those who sow to the Spirit; and, therefore, Paul warns men not to allow themselves to be deceived in this momentous point. Solomon gives a like warning in this place, and so does Hosea.

He who lives in the practice of any sin, is sowing wickedness. For the thoughts of the mind, the words of the mouth, and the deeds of the hand — are seed which shall spring up and produce a corresponding harvest. Men expect pleasure and profit from sin — but it will yield them nothing but disappointment and harm. The wages of sin is death — and the truth of God stands engaged for the payment. This harvest of disappointment and misery is sometimes begun in this world, as Eliphaz assures us from his own observation. But the first-fruits of it only are reaped at present — the full harvest is at the end of the world! Then the wicked will be horribly amazed at the immense crop of misery, produced from that seed which they thought had been forever buried. In vain do the wicked think that their works are forgotten, because they are not presently recompensed. The gardener would be thought a fool, who mourned as if he had lost his seed, because he cannot reap in the beginning of summer — when all the world knows that there must be a long interval between seed time and harvest. The wicked shall reap in due time, if they do not repent of their evil sowing. Wicked men will not think of these things in time, but indulge their pride and folly, and many of them beat their fellow men with the rod of their anger, abusing their prosperity for the support of their insolence. But their rod shall not always abide in its strength, God will wrest it out of their hands, and break it in pieces, and punish them with the more dreadful rod of his own wrath. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows!" Galatians 6:7

Proverbs 22:9. "He who has a bountiful eye (a generous man) shall be blessed, for he shares of his bread to the poor."

"My eye affects my heart," says the mourning and merciful prophet, "because of all the daughters of my people." There is a correspondence between the heart and the eye in the merciful man. For the sight of misery produces compassion in his soul, and the tenderness of his heart beams forth in his eyes. The man whose eyes are the index of a bountiful heart, is a blessed man, for he enjoys the sweetest of earthly pleasures — that of kindness and beneficence, and pleasant reflections on his own conduct. He shall be blessed by all the wise and good, the blessings of widows and orphans shall come upon his head, the hands of the poor bless him, and he shall receive abundant blessings from God, who will not leave him unpitied in the day of his distress — but make all his bed in his sickness. He shall enjoy blessings in his body, and blessings in his outward estate, and blessings in his inner man. He shall be blessed in his person, and blessed in his family. He shall be blessed upon the earth, and blessed in the day of judgment, for his bountiful

works performed from a principle of faith and charity, will be produced as the evidences of his interest in the Redeemer.

He shall surely be blessed, for he shares of his bread to the poor, and his tears of sympathy are the expressions of genuine charity. He is not one of those hypocrites that say to their neighbors, "Go your way, be warmed and filled," while they give them nothing of what is necessary for the body. The generous man gives, and he does it with an air of kindness which cheers the heart of him whom he relieves. He does not give all his bread, for he does not think it his duty to rob himself and his family, that he may give to others — but he gives liberally out of what he possesses, and that which is left to himself is sanctified to him.

There are some who have a bountiful eye, but have no bread to give — they will give what will turn to as good an account to the donor, and sometimes will be as pleasing to the receiver — tears and attention, and offices of tenderness and prayers to him who is able to help.

Those who are unfeeling in their dispositions, and cannot open their hands but to receive, are already cursed with an hard and contracted heart. They have no true faith in Christ, nor does the love of God dwell in them, and their ears shall hear, at the great day, those dreadful words, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire!"

Proverbs 22:10. "Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended."

Hagar, for her insolent behavior, was obliged to flee from the house of Abraham. She humbled herself, and was again permitted for a time to dwell with that happy family — but her son Ishmael, by his contemptuous behavior, procured his own expulsion, and that of his mother, at the appointment of God himself.

It would be happy for all families, and churches, and societies of every kind, if mockers could be cast out of them, for they are the authors of strife and reproach, of debates, and revilings, and railings, whereby the sweets of society are poisoned, and turned into gall. But if this cannot be well accomplished, we ought at least to avoid all friendship and fellowship with them, and to exclude them from every voluntary society, formed for mutual improvement.

Peace is essential to the comfort of men — but peace cannot be maintained while scorners are allowed to sow the seeds of variance by their rude reflections and reproaches. Their behavior is such, that they will inflame the passions of the best natured men who are in their way; and when they have once kindled the fire, none can tell when it will be quenched. We are commanded, as far as lies in us, to live peaceably with all men, and therefore it is necessary to set a mark on those who cause divisions and offences, and to avoid them. But will contention cease, if these firebrands of society are cast out? Yes, unless we have too much of their disposition in our own hearts. We must expel from thence, the principles of scorning — those proud and fiery passions from whence all divisions arise. How long, O you scorners, will you delight in your scorning? Don’t you observe what brands of infamy are set on your name; what a plague you are to all around you, so that the wise exclude you from their company, because your dispositions are so wicked and perverse that there is no bearing with you? Why do you indulge that arrogance which makes you the serpents of human society? Go and learn of him who is lowly and meek, and you shall find rest to your own souls, and become the delight of those among whom you were an abomination.

Proverbs 22:11. "He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend." No saint can say that he is perfectly pure from his sin — but every saint may safely say, that he is a lover of purity, and a hater of hypocrisy. The pharisees loved the reputation of purity — and they were very pure in their own eyes. They thought themselves as clean as those pots and vessels which they purified with such exactness — while they were in reality like cups and platters, whose outside was clean — but the inward part filled with every impurity! But real saints are more anxious to approve themselves unto God, than to enjoy reputation from men — and their outward holiness proceeds from a love of purity in the heart. The pureness of heart, here meant, consists chiefly in sincerity and uprightness, and stands opposed to all deception and hypocrisy. A pure heart is necessary to grace in the lips, which must be directed by an honest heart, and admit no pollution of flattery and doubleness, which so much stains the communication of a great part of mankind. The lips may assume an appearance of purity and sincerity, when there is none in the heart — but this empty appearance cannot be long supported. A very small degree of sagacity will enable a man soon to discover it, and the discovery is attended with abhorrence.

Grace in the lips is necessary to reveal pureness of heart. We ought always to speak the words of truth — but we ought to speak it in the most pleasing manner possible, that we may not render it unacceptable by our manner of representing it. Daniel showed his integrity and politeness at once, by the manner of his address to Nebuchadnezzar, when he was called to give him very disagreeable information.

Every man ought to be a friend to the man of integrity, and the king himself, if he is not an absolute fool, will be a friend to him who joins purity of heart with gracefulness of tongue. Daniel, the captive, on this account, found favor with two haughty kings of Babylon.

It is the general opinion, that flattery is necessary in our conversation with great men, if we wish to recommend ourselves to their favor — but the surest way of gaining and securing the favor of any man, is to seek above all things the favor of Him who has the hearts of all men in his hands. The favor gained by flattery and fawning, soon decays.

The favor, lost by truth, is in time recovered.

Falsehood may support itself for a year or two — but truth stands on an immovable foundation, for it is supported by the God of truth, as we are told in the next verse.

Proverbs 22:12. "The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge — but he overthrows the words of the transgressor." When knowledge in the mind is attended by pureness in the heart and grace in the lips — they form an amiable and worthy character, which draws to it the eyes and hearts of wise men. But that is not the principal recommendation of it, for the eyes of the Lord himself preserve knowledge, and watch for good over the man whose lips and conversation are regulated by it. The king should be his friend — but there are Ahabs among kings who have no sense — but love only those who speak pleasing things to them, whether true or false. But the King of kings will surely be his friend; his eyes are upon him for good, and every loss that he sustains for his adherence to truth, shall be gain. But the words of the transgressor are overthrown by Him. He disappoints their hypocrisy, and brings evil upon them — instead of those advantages which they expected from their cunning and deceit.

It is mostly safe to follow the counsels of a wise man, for they are likely to be attended with happy success — and if it is in his power, he will contribute to the success of them. But it is always safe to follow the counsels of God, who can insure and command success, and will not allow any man to lose in the end, by obedience to his will. God did not indeed interpose in the same visible manner, for the support of John Baptist, as he had formerly done for the preservation of Shadrach and his companions. But John the Baptist had done his work, and was fit for a better world, and this world was not worthy of him. We cannot suppose him a loser, because his integrity procured him the crown of martyrdom, and he now praises God as cheerfully for the administrations of providence towards him on earth, as the three children who escaped the violence of fire, or he who came unhurt out of the lion's den.

Proverbs 22:13. "The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside!" or, "I will be murdered in the streets!" The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold, and he will not move out of his house lest a lion should meet him, and kill him in the streets. This is a very odd excuse for his laziness. Lions are seldom found in the fields in the day time, and it is a very extraordinary thing, if they are found in the streets. Does the sluggard himself believe there is any truth in it? If he does, why does he sleep in his house, since it is possible that it may be set on fire by some accident in the night? Why does he ever take a meal, for some have been choked by the bread which they put into their mouths? When we are employed in the duties of our calling, we need not vex ourselves with the apprehension of lions. "I will give my angels charge over you," says God, "and they shall keep you in all your ways." You shall tread upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the cobra shall you trample under your feet. But let the sluggard remember that there is a lion in that bed where he dozes away his time, and in that chamber where he sits folding his arms together. The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and he rejoices greatly when he lights upon a sluggard, for he looks upon him to be a sure prey! Poverty, like an armed man, is fast marching up to the sluggard, and will soon prevail against him, like a king prepared to the battle.

We are safe from the lions in the way of duty — and never safe when we avoid it. Lions, when they met David feeding his sheep, were torn in pieces by him. A lion unexpectedly came upon that young man of the sons of prophets, who declined his duty when he was commanded to smite his neighbor, and tore him in pieces.

Proverbs 22:14. "The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; he who is under the Lord's wrath will fall into it."

If you will believe the fond admirer of the immoral woman, her cheeks and lips are like the roses and lilies, her eyes are like stars, and her mouth drops honey. But if you will believe Solomon, speaking from the mouth of God — her mouth, and everything about her that charms the hearts of men, is like a deep ditch, made for catching the unwary passenger, and all her flatteries and blandishments are so many traps and snares, set by the devil to catch men, that he may take them captive and bind them fast until their doom becomes irreversible as his own!

Solomon had discoursed at great length on this point, in the beginning of the book — but young men need to be frequently put in mind of it. Those who fall into this ditch are cursed, for it is a proof of the Lord's abhorrence, when men are allowed to fall into it; and therefore, in order to be preserved from this danger, it is necessary for us, not only to observe the precepts of God, leveled against the sin of impurity — but to observe the whole system of divine precepts. The heathen

were given up to it, as Paul tells us in Romans one, for their idolatry. They had dishonored God by their vain imaginations and their abominable worship, and God in justice allowed them to dishonor their own bodies, and to make themselves brutes, as they had represented God himself by the images of brutes. Has God left us to fall into this sin? Our situation is very dangerous, for nothing less than divine power can raise us out of this ditch. And how can we expect miracles of divine power to be exerted in our behalf, when we have drawn upon ourselves the sore displeasure of the Lord? But our situation is not altogether desperate, for miracles of mercy have often been performed by the Lord. Let us acknowledge his justice, and humble ourselves under the tokens of his displeasure, and look to him with earnest expectation and ardent cries, until he raises us up out of the deep pit, and sets our feet upon a rock!

Proverbs 22:15. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child — but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

Men generally treat children like play-things, and amuse themselves with their childish tricks and follies. But there is another kind of foolishness in children, which is too serious and mournful to be the subject of sport. Sin is the very essence of folly, and sin dwells in young and old, and none of the children of Adam can ever deny that he was shaped in iniquity and born in sin. This sinful foolishness dwells in the hearts of children, and makes their way perverse and wicked — for their understanding is darkened, their will perverted, their affections sensualized, and their disposition is rendered averse by sin, to everything good — and it is turned to evil. Sinful foolishness is bound in the heart by cords that no man can loosen, and entwines to it like ivy to the walls of a house. It is not more natural for a man to breathe, than for a child of Adam to violate the law of the Lord, and to covet forbidden fruit. When parents rejoice with a fond heart over the fruit of their bodies, they should remember that they were the instruments of conveying a corrupt nature to their children, and be deeply concerned to have this mortal disease effectually cured. But how can this be effected? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean; or who can say that he has made either his own heart or any other person clean? God alone can loose the bonds of sin, and drive foolishness away from the heart, and therefore his grace must be sought for this end. But while his favor is earnestly supplicated, the methods appointed by his wisdom are to be used with a dependence on his blessing. Parents ought to join correction to instruction, and to use it as an appointment of God, on which his blessing may be expected. The rod of correction shall drive this foolishness far from the child, and he is a cruel parent that loves the ease of his son, more than his soul — and would rather see him grow up in folly, than endure those painful feelings which compassionate parents suffer, when they are scourging the son whom they love.

Proverbs 22:16. "He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth, and he who gives gifts to the rich — both come to poverty."

Sin pays its servants very bad wages, for it gives them the very reverse of what it promised. While the sin of oppression or injustice promises mountains of gold — it brings them poverty and ruin.

There is a flying scroll of curses which enters into the house of the thief and the oppressor, which consumes it with the timber and stones of it. Injuries done to the poor are sorely resented by the God of mercy, who is the poor man’s friend, and will break in pieces his oppressor. The threatenings of God against the robbers of the poor are sometimes laughed at by the rich and great — but they will find them in due time to be solemn realities. But if the oppression of the poor

is an impoverishing sin — then will not liberality make a man rich? True liberality, exercised to proper objects, will. But not that which is exercised to the rich. Some give to the rich for the same reason as they oppress the poor. They propose to gain the favor of the great, and to receive tenfold for every present they make, and so they expect to be soon rich. But he who gives to the rich with these motives, shall surely come to poverty. If he would give to the poor he might have an hundred-fold, but he has only God's Word for that — so he rather chooses to trust the generosity of rich men. But when they see the trick, they are on their guard, and will pay with scorn, the man who designed to impose on them with deceitful professions of regard.

It is plain from reason, as well as Scripture, that it is not always a sin to give to the rich — but it is very often a sin; and that, not only when men are in danger of hurting their families, or wronging their creditors by it — but likewise when they give that to the rich, which are due to the poor. We are not proprietors but stewards of the gifts of God's providence, and must distribute that which he has entrusted to our care according to his will. And it is his pleasure that we should make to ourselves friends, by the mammon of unrighteousness — not of the rich but the poor.

Proverbs 22:17. "Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach."

It signifies nothing to speak to a man who is sleeping or inattentive — and yet we are often inattentive when we hear the Word of God, especially the precepts of it, which we are too ready to look upon as a heavy burden, and a grievous yoke. Solomon was well acquainted with the heart of man, and knowing how many would read or hear his excellent precepts without bestowing proper attention on them — he rouses us by frequent calls for our most earnest heed to the things that are spoken. We must bow down our ears to hear him with attention, reverence, and humility. The words of the wise deserve this regard from us, for they are means of communicating their wisdom to us. And if the words of wise men merit so much respect — we can never attend too earnestly to the words of the only wise God. He made our ears — and shall he not be heard by us? Our hearts must be applied, as well as our ears, to the knowledge contained in this book. We should labor . . .

to understand it with our minds,

to fix it in our judgments,

to impress it on our consciences,

to have it treasured up in our memories, that it may be constantly ready for our use.

God requires us to give him our hearts, and if we only lend an ear to him, we render him only a little bodily service. The Word of God is very pleasant, and the sweetness of it is relished when it enters into the heart.

Proverbs 22:18. "For it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart, and have all of them ready on your lips."

Honey from the comb is sweet to the taste — but all the words of God are sweet to the soul. Wine gives a pleasant refreshment to the faint and thirsty — but the truths of Scripture are sweeter than wine, for they give refreshment to the inner man. Shall we value those things that are delightful to the organs of taste — and yet despise those pleasures that fill the soul with heart-felt satisfaction?

Shall every joy be pursued with eagerness — and that only despised which arises from the Word of God? Do you say that you never received any pleasure from the Word of God, and that an entertaining history gives you more entertainment than anything that Solomon has said? The reason is too obvious. Solomon tells you that the words of instruction are pleasant to a man when they are kept within his heart. It was a severe reflection, which Christ made upon the Jews: My word has no place in you. The same may be made, with too much reason, upon those who taste not the sacred joys of the Bible. As the Word of God is pleasant to the relish of a saint, so its dwelling in the heart is attended with happy consequences, for it shall be uttered by the lips. The knowledge of truth will supply the lips with wisdom, and enable them to talk with discretion and judgment. A talent of speaking with propriety and wisdom on any subject, is a great ornament to him who has it, and enables him to be useful to others — but it must be founded on knowledge, for how can any man communicate that knowledge which he does not possess. But clear and distinct apprehensions of things, will always enable a man to speak of them with ease and plainness, to others. The application of the heart to the words that have been spoken to us, will also tend to encourage our confidence in God.

Proverbs 22:19-20. "So that your trust may be in the Lord, I teach you today, even you. Have I not written excellent sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge." The chief design of this book, is to instruct us in every duty that we owe to God and man; and confidence in God is a fundamental duty, without which we can perform nothing aright.

Solomon calls the wicked, in the beginning of the book, to return unto God, depending on his mercy, according to his promise. He expressly enjoins us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, and to renounce all self-confidence. And the whole strain of his proverbs, wherein he constantly insists on the advantages of righteousness, and the misery that follows vice — encouraging us to commit our souls in well-doing unto God. Confidence in God, is our shield against temptations, and the means of deriving from God through Christ, all the supplies of grace needful for our assistance and support in the ways of holiness. Everything said in this book, when it is duly considered, will contribute to strengthen our trust, as well as to direct our practice. That our trust in God may be encouraged, and our steps directed, we must read and hear this book with application to ourselves.

"I teach you today, even you," says the inspired penman. It is God who speaks, and he speaks to each of us in particular, and we ought to receive what is said into our hearts, believing that the word of exhortation speaks to us in particular, as really as if it had been written for our own use, without a view to any other person in the world.

Until we hear the Word as the Word of God, and as his Word addressed unto us — we do not hear it with due regard. God has not only spoken — but likewise written unto us by Solomon.

"Receive I beg you," said Eliphaz to Job, "the law at his mouth, and lay up his word in your heart." Job did so, for he esteemed the words of God’s mouth more than his necessary food. Did the holy men pay such reverence to the Word of God, when there was no Scripture — and shall we show less regard to it, when God has been graciously pleased to write unto us the great things of his law and covenant. The things that are written are not only words of truth — but excellent and princely things, worthy to be written by the wisest of men, by inspiration of the spirit of wisdom.

God says that his counsels are excellent. If we do not discern their excellency, then we are blind and stupid. They have an excellency that far surpasses the most valued objects upon earth. Their value lies not in a glittering appearance, like gold, and silver, and diamonds — nor in affording entertainment to a intricate mind — but in affording counsel, to make us prudent in all manner of behavior, and in giving us knowledge, to enrich the mind with the most precious truths. To be wise, to understand our way to Heaven, to know God and his Son Jesus Christ, and the acceptable and perfect will of God — are excellent attainments; and the things written in this book are of excellent use to assist us in acquiring them. To have the judgment settled about the great things that are intimately connected with our best interests, is another benefit to be derived from a due attention to this book.

Proverbs 22:21. "Teaching you true and reliable words, so that you can give sound answers to him who sent you?"

If a man has a cause pending before a court of law, wherein his all is concerned — he will certainly be anxious to know what lawyers he may most safely trust, and what are the surest means of obtaining a happy outcome to the suit.

True religion is our all, and it is a criminal sluggishness and stupidity in men, to be careless whether they are rightly instructed in it or not. Our teachers have instructed us in the principles which they themselves believe, and ministers teach us every Sunday, those doctrines which are professed in the church to which they belong. We believe that their instructions are sound and good — but on what ground do we believe this? We do not believe in the infallibility of any particular church, and we must have better warrant for a right faith, than the testimony of men. This and other books in Scripture were written to establish us in the truth, by showing us whether that is the true doctrine of God wherein we stand. We have not a sure hold of the truths of God, unless we are sure that they are the truths of God — and we can be assured of this only by the Scripture. A scriptural knowledge will preserve us from being like children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine — of which we are in constant danger while we are unacquainted with the Scripture, although we had the knowledge of every truth in our religion, by instruction from men. But there is still another great advantage arising from a serious regard to this book. By establishing our minds in the truth, it will enable us to satisfy others that send to us for information about the principles of truth and duty. Men were not born for themselves only, we are members one of another, and ought to consult the good of the body, and of other members of it besides ourselves. As men, when they perform the duties of their callings, are useful members of civil society — so if we live as befits saints, and seek after the knowledge of the truth, we will be useful members of the church of Christ, ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us a reason of our faith and hope, to instruct the ignorant, to satisfy the doubts of the scrupulous, and to fix those who waver. Such are the pleasures and advantages to be found in the book of God, and in the Book of Proverbs in particular.

He has gained every point, says an heathen poet, who has mingled the pleasant and the useful together. These attractives of the soul are nowhere joined together with such exquisite skill as in the Word of God; and if we read it with a superficial eye, and hear it with an inattentive mind — we despise not men, but God. We despise him, when he is employing all the methods of divine condescension and wisdom to recommend his truths to our hearts.

O let it not be said, that we give a patient hearing to all that speak to us, except only to him to whom we are indebted for the faculty of hearing and understanding anything. He who has an ear, let him hear the great things which the Spirit of God speaks unto men.

Solomon now proceeds in his directions about the conduct of our life. His following proverbs, are generally expressed at greater length than the foregoing ones, for under the direction of infinite wisdom, he solicits our attention, by every method of address.

Proverbs 22:22. "Do not exploit the poor because they are poor, and do not crush the needy in the gate." The gate was in ancient times, among the eastern nations, the place of judgment, and therefore this instruction is be understood to respect judges. They are forbidden to take advantage of the friendless and indigent circumstances of the poor and afflicted — to oppress them by perverting justice in favor to the rich. The Scripture forbids us to show favoritism to a poor man in his cause — but it is far worse, and more ordinary, and therefore more frequently forbidden, to oppress a poor man in judgement. This is a crying sin, which contains, together with injustice, the most unmerciful cruelty, and is a plain evidence of inhuman and cowardly disposition. This was one of the sins for which Eliphaz guessed that Job's calamities had come upon him — but that godly man was a very opposite spirit. He did justice to all men — but to the poor he was merciful as well as just. Job says, "if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court — then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint." Not to relieve the poor and afflicted, when we can do it without injury to ourselves, is wrong. To oppress them, and add to their affliction, is brutal and monstrous. It is to act not like men — but like the monsters of the desert, which prey upon the weaker animals. For magistrates to be guilty of this crime, is a perversion of an institution of God into an engine of abominable wickedness. If poor men had rich friends to plead their cause, or avenge their injuries — then others would not rob them because they are poor. Well, they have a friend who will plead their cause and break their oppressors in pieces. If a great man should take the cause of a poor man, he would reckon himself safe — but God is infinitely greater than any man, and here it is declared that he will be the advocate and avenger of the poor and oppressed.

Proverbs 22:23. "For the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them."

God pleads their cause with admirable eloquence in his word. "What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor? — declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty." Who can answer such pleadings as these? However, wicked men look upon God's Words to be but wind. But God will plead the cause of the poor, by furious rebukes of providence also. He will render unto their oppressors severe vengeance for their wickedness. Have they rifled the poor of their little all? God will rifle the oppressor, not only of his substance — but of his life and eternal soul! The robber of the poor, is a poor unhappy creature. It is terrible to have the justice of God engaged against a man — but this is the unhappy case of the robber. He may obtain a temporary success in his extortions — but when he makes an end of robbing, he must be robbed himself. He has the mercy of God against him, as well as his justice. Mercy is that pleasant attribute of the divine nature, on which all the hopes of the wicked must rest — but the mercy of God is engaged on the side of the poor and afflicted, against their persecutors.

Mercy and justice meet together in this text, and make it both a promise and a threatening. What a terrible case is it, to have grace itself turned into a terror; and to be under the wrath of God,

because he is merciful! Yet such is the actual condition of those whose conduct is a contradiction at once to the rules of justice and mercy. "It shall come to pass," says God, "that when the oppressed cries unto me, I will hear, for I am gracious."

Let the mercy implied in this declaration, encourage the poor and afflicted to make God their refuge. Your tyrants may look upon these words as empty threatenings, which shall never have effect — but it would be a very ungrateful return in you for so much goodness, to consider them in the same light. The words of God whereby he encourages the needy, are pure words — they are like silver seven times purified. Have you such a glorious advocate? Then commit your cause to him, with meekness, in imitation of our great example. Make no deceitful compliances to avoid oppression, and take no unjustifiable steps to preserve yourselves — but trust to your great advocate, who stands at the right hand of the poor to deliver him.

Proverbs 22:24. "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered."

Friendship is the balm of life, when it is entered into with discretion — but it is a plague and a snare, when it is injudiciously contracted. Our divine teacher wishes us to be happy both in this world and the next, and extends his instructions to everything that is connected with our happiness. He forbids us to enter into friendship with any wicked man, and here he cautions us particularly against the friendship of angry people. We must of so much as keep company with angry men, nor take a walk with them, if we can possibly avoid it. But what will be the great evil of making friendship with a man of this temper?

Proverbs 22:25. "Or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared."

We are either like our friends — or will be like them soon. Friendship has a mighty influence upon our conduct. "Bad company corrupts good character." When we see bad things practiced by those we love, the horror of them abates, and we are insensibly drawn to the practice of them. And if we make angry men our friends and companions, we are in great danger of becoming like to them, on another account. Although we should be good-natured — yet their unreasonable behavior will be apt, on many occasions, to set our temper on fire, and from occasional bursts of anger, we may be led by degrees to contract obstinate habits of getting angry on every trifling occasion. For habit is produced by frequent acts, and in time becomes a second nature.

Thus we are in danger of being ensnared into sins of fatal consequence to our souls, for although anger is not always a sin — yet to be under the government of imperious passions, is very sinful and very dangerous. Our lives may be exposed to danger if we walk with furious men. When Cain walked with Abel in the field, his furious passions subdued his reason and his natural affection, and he slew his brother. There have been many Cains in the world, who have wounded or slain their friends by the impulse of fury. But if we should escape this danger — yet by contracting a habit of being angry, our tongues may in time become rebels to reason, and bring down harm on our heads.

Consider this proverb, you who give a loose to your passions. Perhaps you suppose that you have good qualities to atone for this bad one. But you are quite mistaken. The meaning of this instruction is plainly this, that no good qualities should induce us to enter into friendship with an angry man. It is taken for granted, that a passionate man may have some qualities that would

engage esteem, if they were separated from this wretched temper — for otherwise no person would be in danger of contracting an intimacy with a furious man. But it is plainly asserted, that these qualities in conjunction with such a temper, forfeit their claim on our friendship.

Don’t you see, then, that your miserable temper casts a shadow over everything that might otherwise adorn you, and that you are fit only for a desert, where you can disquiet none but yourselves. God himself is so much displeased with you, that he will allow none that will take his advice to be intimate with you, or so much as to keep your company. Fly then to his mercy for pardon, and implore the exertions of his power, to subdue your ungovernable passions. Let your souls be impressed with the example of our meek Redeemer, and watch over your hearts, that you may not again disturb the peace of society, and deserve to be sent forth to dwell among the beasts of the desert!

Proverbs 22:26. "Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge, or puts up security for debts."

Solomon has already said much against rash suretyship — but bad examples have a greater influence upon many people, than good precepts, and because many others make little scruple of putting their name to a bond for another man, we are in danger of being seduced into the same dangerous practice. But before we follow any man’s example in anything, we should observe what the outcome of it is likely to be.

If other men do bad things, and smart for it, it will be no motive to a wise man to run into the same error. Let us at least consider one thing, in this case: Suppose the principal debtor should prove unable to pay the creditor, will we be cheerfully willing to take his place, or are we sure that we will be able, it called upon, to pay his debt? We are rich at present — but we know not whether we will be rich or poor at the day of payment. And, Proverbs 22:27. "If you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you."

You may say, it will never come to this. The law of Christ will not allow the creditor, to exercise such rigor, if I should be unable to pay. How do you know that? Are you sure that the creditor, and his heirs, and executors, will not depart, in any instance of conduct from the law of Christ, when their interest pushes them, and the laws of the land will bear them out.

Religion, you see, allows and requires us to pay a proper attention to our own interest and comfort. It requires no instances of self-denial — but such as are more for our own interest, than self-gratification in those instances would be. It does not forbid us to love ourselves, when it requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Indeed, we cannot hurt ourselves, for the most part, without hurting some other men also. What can we do for the poor, for our families, for our friends — if our bed is taken away from beneath us? A philosopher, when he saw a generous young man spending his substance too liberally upon one who pretended great poverty, told him that "perhaps the man he was serving was an honest man — but he was certain that he himself was honest; and therefore," added he, "you are doing an unjust thing, for you are ruining an honest man, for one who is, for anything you know, a rogue."

Proverbs 22:28. "Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers."

Naboth would not sell the inheritance which his father had left him, when he was offered a very good price — but there are some who have so little respect for their fathers that they will remove, if

possible, the landmark which their fathers have set — and so little regard for justice, at the same time, that they intend to give no price at all for what they add to their estate by such unjustifiable means.

It may be alleged by the covetous, that our fathers were under a mistake about the just bounds of their inheritance. Could that be proved to the satisfaction of the other party concerned, or to the conviction of the judge — it would be a good plea. But this can seldom be done. If ancient custom is not allowed as a good claim to property, nations might soon be convulse and broken in pieces.

Landmarks are means of preserving peace, as well as maintaining justice, and therefore the removing of them is a breach both of peace and honesty. It is so great a sin, that a solemn curse was pronounced against it from Mont Ebal. It is more than three thousand years since this curse was pronounced, and we learn from it that land marks were a very ancient means of distinguishing property. It is the will of God that men should know what is their own, and that every unrighteous invasion of another man’s property, is an abomination to him.

Proverbs 22:29. "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men." To be a busybody in other men’s matters is a scandal — but it is a pleasant sight to behold a man diligent in his own business. Some people look upon the slothful, not to receive instruction, as Solomon did — but to take encouragement to themselves, in following his example or in being only a little better than he is. They would not choose to be the greatest sluggards in the world — but if they can name a man more slothful than themselves, they think that no man is entitled to censure them.

Solomon directs us, on the contrary, to look upon the industrious man, that we may be excited by the advantages which he gains by his labor, to go and do likewise. Such a man shall stand before kings. This does not imply, that every man who deserves this character can expect the honor of being appointed to the high offices of state — but it points out to us that great activity is necessary in the servants of kings, and that great activity in private stations is the way of obtaining honor and advancement.

If the diligent man does not obtain the honor of standing before kings, his industry, with God’s blessing, will, for the most part, preserve him from the disgrace of standing before obscure men. Some women, by their industry, joined with other virtues, have obtained the honor of an alliance with the noblest families, of which Rebecca and Ruth are famous instances. If we are diligent in our spiritual business, the advantage will be vastly greater. Let us watch, then, and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape those miseries which shall come upon the wicked, and to stand before the Son of Man.

# 01.23. Proverbs 23

Chapter 23.

Proverbs 23:1-35

Proverbs 23:1. "When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you"

We must add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control. Temperance is to be preserved at all times, and to be guarded in a special manner when we are called to eat with a ruler. For then is the trial of this virtue, and in a time of trial we are in great danger of falling, unless we consider the temptation, and watch against it. We ought, therefore, to consider diligently the plenty, the variety, the delicacy of the dishes that are served at the great man’s table, the danger of being drawn to intemperance, and the abominableness and danger of that vice.

Proverbs 23:2. "and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony." A man given to gluttony is in great danger of running to excess on such an occasion. For his fleshly lust within, and the well-spread table before him, combine to betray him. Men’s consciences are too often so lax, as to think that the laws of temperance are to be dispensed with, when there is a fair opportunity, and a strong temptation to break them. A man of a sensual and gluttonous disposition ought to mortify his appetite. Gluttony is a great sin, as well as drunkenness. "Take heed," says our Lord, "lest your hearts be overcharged with gluttony and drunkenness, and the cares of this life." If the disciples of Christ were under obligation to guard against this sin, although they sat almost always at poor men’s tables — then what need have those to take heed, who are admitted to entertainments where everything concurs to solicit their appetite, and to throw them off their guard.

"But it will be very painful," says the glutton, "to deny my craving appetite, when it is so strongly solicited. It will be as uneasy to abstain, as to have a knife stuck in my throat." Be it so, better to have a knife in your throat — than to have your soul betrayed by it to sensual indulgence. Is not affliction rather to be chosen than sin? Is it not better to pluck out a right eye, or to cut off a right hand — than to be betrayed by them to pleasant sins?

Sensual gratifications are harmful to the body, as well as the soul, and are the frequent causes of sickness, and weakness, and death. It has been often said, that the throat has killed more people than the sword.

Proverbs 23:3. "Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is deceptive." His dainties have a good appearance to the eye, and they are delicious to the taste, and powerfully tempt an ungoverned appetite. But remember that the forbidden fruit did the same — and yet the eating of it "brought death into the world, and all our woe." When you see a number of dishes of very different kinds, think with yourself, "Here are fevers, and ailments, and gouts, in disguise. Here are snares and traps spread along the table to catch my soul, and draw me into sin! Sense gives a good report of this plenty — but reason and religion tell me to take heed, for it is deceitful food." His food is

deceitful in another view. The ruler himself has no generous or friendly intention in treating you. He makes great professions of kindness and regard, and the civilities of a ruler open the heart, and put a man off his guard. His real design very probably is to pump out some secret from you, or to gain you by his flattering caresses to some base or sinful compliance with his pleasure.

Such are the ends designed, and too often effected, by means of those feasts that are given at the elections of members of parliament, and on some other public occasions of the like nature. It is often difficult, if we attend them, to return as temperate Christians as we went.

Proverbs 23:4. "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint." To be rich has been the lot of many saints; and when God bestows riches upon us, we are not required to throw them into the sea, as a certain foolish philosopher did. But when God denies us riches, we must not reckon ourselves unhappy on that account. Solomon often speaks of riches as a reward that wisdom frequently bestows on those who love her — but here he cautions us against supposing that wisdom encourages the love of riches — that universal passion which has been so mischievous to the human race, since the beginning of the world. In our fallen condition, we must labor and sweat for our subsistence — but that kind of labor is useful both to the body and mind. The labor after riches here forbidden, and is exceedingly hurtful to both. It arises from an immoderate esteem of present things, and an aspiring mind. It is joined with a distrust of God's providence, and a hurry and distraction of men's thoughts, which renders them unfit for the service of God. It destroys all relish for the comforts of life, which might be enjoyed at present — and is a continual incentive to unmerciful and unjust behavior. It is a pity that we do not more attentively consider the alarming things that are said by our Lord, and the apostle Paul, on this subject. But you will say that money is a necessary and an excellent thing. It keeps a man from poverty and dependence; it raises him to dignity and consequence; it furnishes everything that is desirable in life. But cease from your own wisdom, which is not the wisdom from above — but that earthly, sensual, and devilish wisdom so greatly condemned in the Scripture. Money, under the direction of wisdom, will indeed serve all these purposes, and some others too, of far greater value. But the love of money is not merely a bad thing — but the root of all evil, and a confidence in money is a very foolish thing.

Proverbs 23:5. "Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone; for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle." Will you let your eyes fly upon money with eager joy? You shall soon see it fly away never to return! To look at other men's money with covetous desires, and an admiration of the happiness of the possessor, to look upon our own money with rapturous delight, because our hand has gotten much — is to make to ourselves gods of gold, as the ancient Israelites did, and to give them the worship of the soul. Therefore covetousness is called idolatry; and to rejoice in money more than in God, is to say to the gold, "You are our hope, and to the fine gold, You are our confidence."

It is foolish, as well as sinful, to set our eyes and our hearts on riches. Will a man set his eyes upon a mere nothing? But what does Solomon mean by calling them so? Does not their splendor show that they are true substance? It must be confessed that they are glittering nothings — but so are bubbles upon the water, when they shine with the rays of the sun, which make them to glare for a moment — but don't hinder them from vanishing the next. Our Lord tells us that they are not the true riches, and that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of them. The wise

preacher has written a book to prove that they are the very vanity of vanities. Philosophers in every age have declaimed in proof of this point, and all men are sensible of its truth, at the season when the eyes of men are forced open to the sight of truth. But in this passage Solomon means the uncertainty of riches. They are not, for they fly away out of sight never to return. They were another man's yesterday — they are mine today — they will be another man's tomorrow — and where they shall have flown in a few weeks, we cannot tell. But how do they get away? They sprout wings! While you sit brooding upon them, they are fledging; and although you should try, by bills and bonds, and bars, and bolts, to clip their wings — you will not be able to hinder their elopement. And when you think to recover them, you are often making wings to what is left you. The eagle is the swiftest of birds, and with the swiftness of an eagle they mount up towards Heaven, and receive their commission to whom they should next go. Does the eagle fly by your command, or can you bring him back to your lure? Just so, you cannot recover those riches of which Divine Providence has bereaved you.

Those who place their happiness on worldly wealth, build their foundation on the sand. Their joy is short, and dashed with a large infusion of fear and vexation. Their disappointment is certain; their end is dreadful — for those who mind earthly things above heavenly things, are enemies of the cross of Christ, and their end is destruction. But true Christians seek for the true riches, their conversation is in Heaven, and their treasure is in a place where there is no moth nor rust, nor any of those feathers which compose the eagle wings of riches, with which they flee away.

Proverbs 23:6. "Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies." The Scripture directs us about the choice of occasional companions, as well as friends. There are some people whom we must not receive into our houses — and there are some to whose houses we are forbidden to visit, or to sit at their tables. We are not, on every occasion, forbidden to eat with a ruler, although his dainties are generally deceitful food. Nor are we absolutely forbidden to feast with heathen and wicked men. But we are forbidden to eat at the table of a stingy man, although it should be covered with dainty foods, and his words full of kindness. A selfish and churlish disposition reveals itself in the eye, so that the miser declares his character against his will. Perhaps, through shame, he endeavors to hide his churlish disposition under the mask of a plentiful entertainment — but his malignity peeps through his eyes, which betray him in spite of all that he can say or do. For nature abhors deceit, and often detects it. But why must we not eat his bread, nor partake of his dainties? Because it is not the quality of the food which you are to consider — but the disposition of the company, and especially of the entertainer.

Proverbs 23:7. "For he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. 'Eat and drink,' he says to you, but his heart is not with you."

It is not a man's words and professions that must determine his character, and direct our correspondence with him — but the disposition of his heart, which is often revealed by the general course of a man's behavior, to be very different from what he would have men to believe it is. A man who rolls in his mind impious thoughts of God, is a wicked man — however good his words may be; and a man who indulges a selfish disposition is unfit to be a companion or a friend, although he invites you to his table, and never ceases, when you are there, to tell you how welcome you are, and how earnestly he wishes you to eat and drink.

You see how vain it is for men, to pretend that kindness which they do not feel. They are revealed more easily than they imagine, and the professions they make are means of rendering their dissimulation more evident. For true kindness delights not in many words. Let men then either be what they profess, loving not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth — or else let them lay aside the profession of what they are not, for it is idle to add the guilt and shame of hypocrisy, to that of a sordid and selfish disposition. But when that which is set on his table is full of fatness, may we not make a very delicious meal, and pay him for it, to his satisfaction, by agreeable conversation? No.

Proverbs 23:8. "You will vomit up the little you have eaten and will have wasted your compliments."

Men often think it a noble piece of diversion, to sponge off a miser, and to take advantage of an invitation extorted from him by shame, to prey upon everything that is in his house. But Solomon teaches us that this diversion will end in vexation. You may eat the morsel with pleasure — but you shall repent of eating it, as much as if you had vomited it up. All your agreeable or useful conversation is lost upon him, and he is so far from thinking it a proper recompense for the expense he has bestowed upon you, that he will endeavor to extort something in return, which it may be very inconvenient to grant. And when you refuse, he will brand you with the character of the ungrateful guest. When we are called by God to a feast of fat things, and hear his blessed voice calling us to eat that which is good, and let our souls delight themselves in fatness — we may safely venture at the gracious invitation, to make use of Christ, and the blessings of his salvation, as our own. To suspect the sincerity of the gospel call, is to suspect the God who is abundant in goodness and truth of an evil eye.

Proverbs 23:9. "Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words." A fool cannot utter wisdom — but there might be good hopes entertained of him, if he could hear it — but there are many fools, who are equally unfit to speak and to hear. Concerning such, this direction is given, and not concerning fools of every kind, for there are some that lack wisdom, and have some conviction of the lack of it — and these are on the road that leads to wisdom, the first step of which is to become a fool in one’s own eyes. The fools to whom we are forbidden to speak the words of wisdom, are those who will despise the wisdom of our words. Yet even these are sometimes to be dealt with by those who have a call, by their office or church connection, to do so, even after they have refused admonition. For the souls of men are precious, and if there is some hope, though faint, of doing them good — we must not decline the disagreeable task of reprovers. Our Lord orders the gospel to be preached to everyone who will hear it, not excepting scorners. But he will not have his gospel forced on those who obstinately reject it. He himself left the Gadarenes, when they preferred their swine to him — and the Nazarenes, when they wanted to destroy him. Although the worst of sinners are to be invited to repentance, in the public assembly — yet there are some to whom our Lord tells us, it is needless and unsafe to administer personal reproofs. These are the dogs and swine that would trample our pearls under their feet, and turn again and rend us.

How pitiable is the case of such people, when our Lord himself directs us to give them up to themselves.

Those who are reproved by ministers, and Christian friends, may learn from this verse, that they have no reason to take it amiss, or to think that they are treated with contempt. They are considered as offenders — but at the same time as those who are not incurably perverse. They would be treated in a very different way, and might reckon themselves with more justice to be considered in the light of scorners, and dogs, and swine, if there were no means used to recover the to repentance.

Proverbs 23:10. "Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless."

Wicked men are afraid to do any injury to those who have it in their power to retaliate, or powerful friends to espouse their quarrel. Pure and defiled religion before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless, and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. And yet there are none so easy to be trampled upon, in this evil world, as the fatherless and widows. But let the poor and fatherless commit themselves to God, and the widows trust in him — and he will make their adversaries to know that the mightiest on earth are not more dangerous to be meddled with, than themselves.

Proverbs 23:11. "for their Redeemer is strong; he will take up their case against you."

He who meddles with the widow and fatherless, needs better armor than he who touches the sons of Belial, who must be fenced with iron and brass. God himself has undertaken their defense, and dare we provoke the Lord to jealousy — are we stronger than he? He graciously calls himself their kinsman or Redeemer. They have lost the best of earthly friends. But there is one in Heaven who calls them to trust in him, as their husband and father, their Redeemer and advocate. He has promised to supply their needs, and protect them from every enemy. Their enemies set themselves in opposition to God, and endeavor to make him a liar, by frustrating his promises — but they do it at their peril.

Perhaps those who oppress the widow and fatherless, may allege that God is the Redeemer only of his own people, and that the poor and fatherless, whom they oppress are none of them. To this it may be answered, that God executes righteousness and judgment for all who are oppressed. He is the great lover of righteousness and mercy, and the avenger of all that are unrighteous and unmerciful.

One part of the office of the kinsman-redeemer under the law, was to avenge the harms done to his poor friend. And this part of it God will perform for all who are oppressed, without exception, so that the oppressor will feel the terrors of the threatening contained in this declaration, although the fatherless and the widows through their unbelief, should lose the comforts of that grace, which is revealed in it. But how do you know, O you presumptuous opposers of God’s mercy to the poor, that those whom you wrong are not God’s people? Can you know the hearts of men? If you can do this, can you also look into the heart of God, and into the book of life, to know who are the objects of his special favor? How do you know but God may choose those whom you afflict, in the furnace of affliction.

Here the widow and the fatherless, may find comfort under every injury, and instruction how to derive the greatest advantages out of the greatest wrongs, by making use of the injustice of the enemy, as a motive to flee to God as their Redeemer, and a plea in their supplications for help.

Proverbs 23:12. "Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge." This direction is often repeated — but there is need for it — too often we hear as if we heard not. An hour or two passes after we have been reading a chapter, or hearing a discourse on one of the most important subjects — and scarcely a trace of it is left upon our minds.

I have read of a minister, who was preaching a sermon on the day of judgment, and the solemn truths which he delivered made such an impression on the audience, that they all appeared to be alarmed — but the preacher told them that he had something yet to tell them more awful than anything he had said — that in two hours they would be as little affected with these things, as if they had not heard them; which accordingly proved to be the case.

Let us take heed that we be not found among those of whom it is said, that the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it — for the word will not be a means of salvation to us, unless it is received with meekness, and engrafted into our souls.

Proverbs 23:13-14. "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from Hell."

Parents are here required to give due correction to their children, with their own hands, and not to entrust that office entirely to others. At the same time they are forbidden to withhold correction from them, even when they are under the care of others. If teachers are employed to instruct them, they must have the power of correcting likewise — and no offence must be taken at them for using it. Parents would take it amiss, if anything they thought necessary for their children was withheld from them by those under whose care they are placed — and what is more necessary than correction? The world will think that man cruel, who does not give food and clothing to his child — but Solomon looks upon him also to be a cruel man, who does not give needful correction. But the fond hearts of parents will suggest several objections to this duty. They cannot bear the cries and sobs of their children; they are afraid they will die under their hands. There is no fear of this, answers the wise man, they only wish to frighten you by their complaints. They shall not die, but live. Punish them with the rod, for it is one of the means that God has appointed for delivering them from an untimely death in this world, and destruction in the eternal world.

What an idea does this give us, of the usefulness of the rod of correction! What parent who loves his child, and has any sense of the terrors of eternal punishment — will spare his rod, after he has heard this saying of God? Would you not force your children to undergo an operation by the surgeon, if you saw it necessary for the preservation of their lives? Are their souls less precious than their bodies?

You think that gentle means are always the best — but does not God tell you that this does not hold in every case? No doubt Eli and David wished well to their children, and their parental fondness told them that gentle admonitions and time, would correct all the disorders in their families. But they mourned at last over these children, who had been so much hurt by their indulgence.

Whether the disorders in David’s family were the occasion of Solomon’s making so many proverbs on this subject, I shall not say — but after what he has said, and after what Eli and David suffered — those parents who do not perform this duty, are more inexcusable than these godly men were. Your children may perhaps complain of your severity, when there is no ground for it. But this is

easier to be borne, than it would be to hear them curse you, at the last day, and from the bottomless pit, for allowing them to take their course in sin.

Proverbs 23:15-16. "My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right."

Solomon was a wise father, and had the same wishes for his son as for himself. He did not greatly mind whether his son was to be very rich or not — but his main concern was that he might be wise. For he knew that if his son was a fool, the riches he was to leave him would do him no good.

Just so, parents may form a judgment of their own dispositions from their wishes about their children. Worldly men make it their great work to provide those things for their children, which they account their own best things. Saints desire above all things, that the hearts of their children may be richly furnished with wisdom, and that their lips may speak right things. For the heart is the throne of wisdom, and by the lips she reveals her possession of that throne.

Those who are evil cannot ordinarily speak good things. Those lips will undoubtedly speak good things — when there is a good treasure in the heart. Language cannot express the cordial joys that a wise parent feels from the wise and good behavior of a son. When parents enjoy this blessing, let them consider, to heighten their joy and thankfulness, the smart that others have felt from the undutifulness and folly of their children.

Let parents use every means recommended by God, for making their children wise. Then shall their souls be glad, and their hearts rejoice, in the happy effect of their endeavors, or at least in the consciousness of having done their duty.

Proverbs 23:17. "Do not let your heart envy the wicked, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord." When we see the wicked flourishing in prosperity, and the people of God languishing under oppression — we are sometimes tempted to doubt whether there is a divine providence, and whether the promises and threatenings of God are true or not — and to grudge that there is not a present distribution of rewards and punishments, according to the works of men.

Unfit as we are for managing our own affairs, we are too much disposed to usurp God’s office of governing the world; and if he does not shower down blessings into the lap of those whom we esteem, and fire and brimstone upon the head of the wicked — then we think that God cannot see things through the dark cloud, or is unfit to manage them. But we are here directed to banish envy from our hearts, and as an antidote to this mischievous passion, to be in the fear of the Lord continually. Envy of the wicked is a great enemy to the fear of the Lord. Asaph’s feet had almost stumbled when he looked with a grudging eye at the prosperous circumstances of the wicked — but by the fear of the Lord, he was preserved from falling, and was recovered from his dangerous situation. For a deep and heart-affecting impression of the infinite excellencies of the divine nature, will silence our murmurings and subdue the insurrections of our hearts. If we are deeply impressed with a sense of the righteousness and holiness of God, and of his wisdom and goodness — we will believe that his ways are always right, and that there can be no unrighteousness in his administration, even when we cannot discern the reasons of it. "Clouds and darkness are round about him — but righteousness and judgment are still the habitation of his throne."

We are required to live in the fear of the Lord all the day long. Whether we are in prosperous or in adverse circumstances, and whether the wicked around us rise into affluence and power, or sink into insignificance and misery — an impression of God's perfection, and of the happiness that attends true religion, and the misery that follows sin — must dwell upon our hearts, and govern our conduct. This fear of God will banish from our minds impious reflections upon God, and dispose us to keep his way, even when wicked men are in power, and threaten to banish all religion out of the world. For still we shall believe that it will be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked, perhaps in this world — but most certainly in the next.

Proverbs 23:18. "There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off."

If things were to continue in their present state through eternity, or if there were no eternity before us — much might be said for the wisdom of impiety, and the folly of religion — but reason gives us probable arguments for a future state, and the Bible assures us of it. Job saw the prosperity of the wicked with astonishment — but he knew that their day was coming. And when he saw that some of them died amidst friends and prosperity, and were honorably buried — he inferred that there was a day of wrath to which they were reserved. He was in like manner fully persuaded, that his living Redeemer would raise his own dust at the last day, and wipe off all his reproach, and give him the transporting sight of the divine glory, to his eternal happiness. His hope of this blessedness was so lively, even when there was no Scripture, that he expresses an ardent wish that his profession of hope might be inscribed forever in the rock, with a pen of iron. And it was written, not on a rock, to be read by the dwellers in the land of Uz — but in the book of God, to be seen and read of all men. Did Job triumph in this blessed hope amidst afflictions that would have swallowed up all the courage of a philosopher and hero? Shall we faint, who are instructed by Moses and the prophets, by the Apostles, and the Lord himself, concerning the unspeakable felicities of a future state, and the right we have to look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? Besides, we have a great cloud of witnesses to assure us that it is not a vain thing to wait for the salvation of the Lord, and that the expectation of the godly, although it may seem to be cut off, shall not perish forever?

Abraham had a promise of a son, by whom his seed were to be like the stars for multitude — and yet he waited until Sarah's womb, which was formerly barren, was now dead, before he had the promised son. He waited sixty years longer, before he saw any children by Isaac — but still he was persuaded that the Word of God was true, and that his promise was the same thing as performance. He had the promise of Canaan — and yet he traveled through it as a stranger and pilgrim — but he trusted God, and what he had promised, he performed long after Abraham went to sleep with his fathers. And those who give credit to the testimony of God, and wait with patience in the hope of the promise, are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Soldiers, in the uncertain hope of spoil, endure all the severities of the campaign, and encounter all the dangers of the battle — and shall not the professed soldiers of the Redeemer meet every discouraging providence without terror and complaint, when the God of truth says their hope shall not be cut off?

Proverbs 23:19. "Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path."

It is not sufficient, although it is necessary, for us to hear the instructions of the inspired moralist. We are called to learn wisdom, which is to be acquired by hearing under the influence of that blessed Spirit by whom these truths were dictated. Hearing without being made wise, will aggravate our guilt, and make our condemnation more dreadful. But to expect wisdom without hearing, is to expect nourishment without food. Let us hear then, with all that meekness and affection which is due to a kind father instructing his beloved children. With hearing let us join prayer to that God, by whose direction and in whose name Solomon speaks to us as children. For our heavenly father will give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to those who ask him.

What is that wisdom that we are called to seek after? Wisdom to guide our heart in the way, for Zion's travelers must have the way that conducts to blessedness in their hearts. Our feet and our hearts must be in the same good paths, for no man is truly religious, whatever his outward conduct is, unless his heart is right with God. The Word of God is then truly useful to us, when we rejoice in the way of God's testimonies, more than in all riches.

If we would have our hearts guided in the way, then we must hear what the wise man is going to say to us against intemperance in eating and drinking. For as those who run in the Grecian races, and strove for masteries in their games, were obliged to be temperate in all things, in the view of a corruptible crown — so those who have the eternal crown in their eye, must exercise a proper care over themselves, that they may not be pressed down with the immoderate use of food and drink, and thereby rendered unfit for the Christian course.

Proverbs 23:20. "Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat."

Although we do not dethrone reason by drinking — yet if we impair the vigor of it, and render ourselves less fit for the business of life, and the service of God, than we are at other times, by the free use of the bottle — then we are drunkards. Food is fit provision for our bodies, and it is freely allowed us by God for bodily provision, under the New Testament dispensation — but it is great ingratitude to God to abuse his goodness in order to serve the lusts of the flesh. The body ought to be the servant of the soul, and ever ready to execute its commands — but when, by gluttony, or anything else, our bodies are disabled from doing their duty, or have their vigor impaired, and the seeds of weakness, and drowsiness, and disease, sown in them — we sin against our own souls and bodies.

We are forbidden, not only to be drunkards or gluttons — but to be found in the company of such people. For bad company is the common temptation which the devil uses to draw men to these sins. By giving them our company, we are exposed to their solicitations, and many who were once sober, have been enticed by them to go to excess, and, by a repetition of the same rash conduct have been led on, step by step, to the greatest excesses, and the most confirmed habits of intemperance — until they became senseless brutes, a burden to their friends, and fit only for being laid in the grave, and consigned to those regions which shall be the everlasting habitation of those who make their belly their God.

Those who have been long inured to a temperate course of life, must not think that they are at liberty to infringe this precept, and to mingle themselves with gluttons and drunkards, because they are strong enough in their own eye to overcome all the temptations of sensuality. Christ charges his own disciples, who had been practiced in every virtue under his own eye, and who

had less temptations to this vice than any other men, to take heed to themselves that their hearts might not be weighed down with self-indulgence and drunkenness; and we find the apostle Paul, who was so often in want, very anxious that he might not transgress this precept. But what harm is there in learning the ways of the drunkard and glutton? Much harm even in this world, as any man may see, who will but open his eyes!

Proverbs 23:21. "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

Poverty may be born with patience and cheerfulness, when it is merely a misfortune. But that poverty fills the mind with remorse and vexation, which is the fruit of a man's own bad conduct. And no self-contracted poverty is so disagreeable as that which a man brings upon himself by gluttony and drunkenness, which at the same time that they deprive a man of the necessities of life — create in him a craving appetite after superfluities and luxuries. As miserable as men must be, by being reduced to such unhappy circumstances — they are almost unpitied when they fall into them. For who will pity one for misfortunes into which he rushes with his eyes open? If a man will not pity himself, it is vain for him to expect pity from his neighbors. The drunkard or glutton may flatter himself with vain hopes that he shall escape poverty, and that tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant — but reason and experience, as well as Scripture, confirm the truth in our text. For if the slothful man bring himself to poverty, the waster must do it much sooner, especially as luxury and reveling bring drowsiness and sloth in their train. For by a course of sensual indulgence, a man is indisposed to labor and prudent care; so that, while he throws away with one hand — he gathers nothing with the other to supply his numerous needs. The slothful man is brother to him who is a great waster — but when the great waster is likewise a slothful man, as is generally the case, poverty is coming to him with hasty steps, and with resistless force.

Hell is at a great distance, the sensualist thinks, and lies quite out of the view of mortals, and wine has so besotted him, that he cannot think seriously about it — but here he is told of one part of his punishment, which he cannot put off to a distant day, and must feel, unless he is stupefied to an extraordinary degree. For his wicked relishes might themselves excite a proper sense of the harm of poverty — and how hardened must they be in sin who cannot be driven from it, either by the terrors of the world to come, or the miseries of this world?

Christians have nobler motives to keep them on their guard against intemperance. For the grace of God teaches them to live soberly, and their character as children of the light is inconsistent with drunkenness and reveling, which are works of darkness and of the flesh.

Proverbs 23:22. "Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old."

Solomon takes it for granted that our fathers and mothers will give us good counsel and instruction. For they are monsters, and not parents, who are unconcerned about the present and eternal welfare of their children, and quite negligent of those means that may contribute to such valuable ends. Children should consider what they owe to their parents, and what affection they manifest in their good counsels and instructions — and what monsters of ingratitude they are, if they do not show respect to those who have conferred obligations upon them, for which they can never make a sufficient recompense, and to those instructions which can have no object but their

own benefit.

Mothers are to be honored as well as fathers; nor must we despise them — but reverence their good advices, and kindly sympathize with their infirmities when they are old. They may then prove peevish and fretful, and lose much of their understanding, and become children a second time. But they took care of us when we were helpless children, and our froward passions did not then provoke them to cast us away — but engaged their pity and help. It is only when the instructions of parents are good and sound, that we must receive and comply with them, for we are bound to cleave to the truth at all risks.

Proverbs 23:23. "Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding." The truth revealed in the Word of God is infinitely valuable and interesting, and therefore we are commanded to buy, and not to sell it. Men are enriched by buying and selling other commodities — but in our dealings about truth we are enriched by buying alone, whatever is the price — and impoverished by selling, whatever price we might receive. But why are we commanded to buy? Does God receive a price from us for his truths? By no means. But we are commanded to buy, because we must grudge no expense or toil in seeking the truth. The wise merchant is he who is so impressed with its value that he is willing to go and sell all he has, that he may obtain possession of this precious treasure. Merchants will venture their money and their lives for those commodities by which they expect to make profit, although they often meet with disappointments and losses. Why then should those who profess to value the truth above everything, be so careless about obtaining the knowledge and experience of it, when the value of it will abundantly recompense all our pains and losses in the search of it, although we should lose our life on its account? On no account must we sell the truth. Had Paul been offered all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glories of them, for one article of truth, he would have answered, "I have suffered the loss of all things already for Christ, yes, doubtless, I count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord."

We must rather part with our lives than with the truth, and here we have the example of the noble army of martyrs who loved not their lives unto death for its sake. He who loses his life for the sake of truth, and a good conscience, is a great gainer.

If it is a great sin to sell the truth, even when our life is offered for it — then what shall we say of those who part with it in profession or practice, without receiving any price at all for it? Surely they have a small regard for the truth, or for the great Author of it, who wantonly cast away this precious pearl, and take a pebble in its place.

We must show the same sacred regard to wisdom, and instruction, and understanding, which are inseparably connected with the truth. For we have no true hold of the truth, however clear our apprehensions of it are, or however zealously we profess it — if we are not made wise, and led in the way of duty by its influence. That wisdom and understanding which is not grounded in truth — is but cunning craftiness and splendid ignorance. That instruction which is not according to truth, is poison to the soul. Truth is to be received into the mind and heart, and rule our conduct. Those only are wise unto salvation, who receive the truth in the love of it, and hold it forth in their profession, and walk in it until they reach the end of their course.

Proverbs 23:24-25. "The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son, delights in him. May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice!" And what son is there so unnatural as not to wish for the happiness of his father and his mother? Your father has spent many anxious thoughts, and endured many toils on your account. Your mother has born you with sorrow and danger, and reared you up with tender concern — and what requital do they ask or expect from you? They love you with a unselfish affection; they earnestly desire you to pursue those courses which will make you happy. They will be satisfied, and glad, and bless God on your account — when you walk in the ways of wisdom, because all their labors and toils are richly recompensed. Can you resist the wishes of your parents, and blast their hopes of gladness, when the joy they expect from you is no selfish pleasure — but that pure and unselfish joy which arises from your own happiness? Can you bear the thoughts of embittering their old age, when it is attended with so many unavoidable pains and griefs — which will be sweetened by your good behavior? Will you be the wretched instruments of bringing down the gray hair of your parents with sorrow to the grave?

What a blessed thing is righteousness! It gives great pleasure to him who practices it. It diffuses joy all around. Your parents and all who fear God, will be glad to see you walking in God’s truth. Our Father who is in Heaven takes pleasure in it, and all the angels of God are glad to see righteousness and wisdom among the sons of men.

Proverbs 23:26. "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes keep to my ways." This divine teacher, in the name of God, requires our hearts to be applied to the word of exhortation. "Set your hearts to all the words which I testify among you this day," said the Jewish lawgiver, "which you shall observe, to do all the words of this law." The same demand is made on us in this and in several other passages of this book. And the demand would not be so frequently made, if it were not necessary.

We are naturally indisposed to give a due attention to the Word of God — for our hearts are vain, and earthly, and carnal. And yet, unless we give our hearts to God and to his truths — we can receive no benefit by them.

Paul gives thanks to God for the saints at Rome, because, from the heart, they had obeyed that form of doctrine which was delivered unto them — that their whole temper and life might be formed into a correspondence with it. Our Lord, in his parable of the sower, speaks of four different sorts of hearers of the word, and there was only one sort who received real benefit from it, and that was the set of hearers who understood it, and received it into an honest and good heart. Our hearts are naturally intractable and perverse and we cannot work them into a proper disposition for receiving his truths — but we must give them up to him who fashions the hearts of men at his pleasure. Our hearts, vile and worthless as they are — are claimed by him. He is our Creator and Redeemer, and he calls us to give up our souls and bodies unto him. He will form them anew, and take the stony heart out of our flesh, and give us hearts of flesh, and put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes. Our eyes must be fixed upon the ways in which God directs us by his inspired penmen. Thus David regulated his life — he laid the judgments of God before him, and kept his mind fixed upon the directions of God in his Word, and his feet were kept from stumbling and falling. The ways in which Solomon walked during a part of his life, are a warning to us that we may not involve ourselves in those snares that brought him into so much danger and distress —

but the ways that he instructs us to walk in are those good paths wherein rest is to be found. He smarted greatly with the wounds made in his conscience by his correspondence with immoral women, and none of the Old Testament writers sound so loud alarms of the danger that we are in from the arts of such seducers. He fell into the deep and narrow ditch — but by the grace of God he escaped with life, and warns us all not to risk our souls in the manner he had done.

Proverbs 23:27. "for a prostitute is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a narrow well." And when it is both deep and narrow, the danger is extreme. Who would choose to be in the situation of Jeremiah when he was cast into the cistern, out of which Ebed-melech and his companions delivered him with so much difficulty? But it is far more dangerous to fall into that narrow pit of which the wise man is now speaking, for none who go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. Righteous men, such as Sampson and Solomon, were scarcely saved when they fell into this ditch — and where shall the abhorred children of the devil appear?

Proverbs 23:28. "Like a bandit she lies in wait, and multiplies the unfaithful among men." The profligate woman is not only a deep pit — but a robber. For a single comparison is insufficient to show the numberless harms occasioned by her seductions. She lies in wait, not to rob men of a few pounds — but to rob them of all their substance and credit, of their health and comfort, of their bodies and souls! And those who voluntarily comply with her alluring insinuations, are confederates with her and the devil, against God and themselves. She increases the transgressors among men. For she spreads her nets and entangles those unwary men, of whom better things might have been reasonably expected, if they had escaped her. And when she has them fast, she blindfolds them, and leads them on through the ways of sin and folly, until she plunges them into the gulf of eternal perdition!

She is not only a servant, but an emissary of the wicked one, drawing as many as she can into his snares. Therefore if we love our own souls, we must avoid the doors of her house. Would we be preserved from this mischievous enchantress, who has been the instrument of drowning such multitudes in destruction and perdition? Let us turn our hearts to the divine instructions of this book, and call wisdom our sister, and understanding our kinswoman. Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Proverbs 23:29. "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?"

He is no doubt a miserable man on whom all these misfortunes meet at once — and yet he scarcely deserves pity, for he brings them upon himself. If any man were attacked with a disease that had so many dismal symptoms, he would certainly draw pity from every beholder — but those of whom Solomon speaks, are people who choose both sin and misery at once.

Proverbs 23:30. "Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine."

Wine is very useful to men when used to serve them — but when it is allowed to become their master, it is a raging tyrant, like fire or water, when they are not kept in their proper bounds. But who are those who allow wine to rule over them? Those who are so fond of it, that they cannot rise when they have sat down to the bottle — but continue from noon-day until evening, until wine inflames them. And those who cannot do without it — but go in search of it, feeling themselves quite unhappy when they are not pouring it down their throats, and who are such sensualists that

they cannot be satisfied, unless a variety of ingredients are mingled with it, to make it higher flavored, and more grateful to their palates.

These are not the only people that sin by abusing this good creations of God. For when men render themselves heavy, and languid, and unfit to think and act with composure, or to draw near to God in spiritual exercises — they are guilty of excess, although they do not make themselves brutes, and bring upon themselves all the present harms that are here mentioned. But those who give themselves up to sensuality, to such a degree as to tarry long at the wine, and go to seek mixed wine — bring upon themselves, in part, the present recompense of their error, for they pull down sorrows upon themselves with their own hands. They have some present pleasure to suit their vitiated taste — but woe to that pleasure that brings so much pain and vexation along with it! Wine is raging, and pushes on the people that swill it down, like madmen, to fightings and contentions. It takes from them, in a great measure, the use of their tongues, and makes them to stammer — and yet it fills their minds with so much vanity and wickedness that they must speak and pour forth floods of profaneness and ribaldry, of nonsense and wickedness. By this means drunkenness stirs up squabbles and fightings, which end in wounds without cause. For the drunkards themselves, when they are sober, confess that their quarrels had no object earthly — but were produced by their own self-contracted madness.

Redness of eyes is another effect of immoderate drinking, which ends in a weakness of the sight, in violent pain, and sometimes in total blindness. If drunkenness is attended with so wretched consequences, then,

Proverbs 23:31. "Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly!" And what harm is there in looking upon the pleasant liquor sparkling in the cup? What harm, you may as well ask, was there in Eve’s looking at the fruit of the forbidden tree, or in Achan’s looking at the golden wedge, or Babylonian garment? Or what harm is there in looking at a beauteous face, until lust is excited in the heart? To look with pleasure at a tempting object, is very unsafe, for the imagination catches fire, and the passions are inflamed, and reason is gradually deposed from its throne. Such are the natural consequences of looking at the delicious liquor. Caesar came, and saw, and conquered — but the drunkard comes to the tavern, he sees the flowing blood of the grape, and is conquered. He drinks and tastes a little pleasure while the liquor is passing down his throat, but, Proverbs 23:32. "In the end it bites like a serpent, and poisons like a viper!"

If drunkards saw a viper at the bottom of the glass, although it were dead, they would rather pour all the liquor into the street than drink it. But the wine itself is worse than any viper. It infuses a deadly though slow poison into the drunkard, and his body becomes the seat of disease. Nor are the miserable effects of it confined to himself — but they are frequently entailed upon his posterity, who suffer by their father’s fault, and are often obliged to drag out a wretched life in weakness and disease, and suffering. But it poisons the soul worst of all, for it breeds that worm of conscience in comparison of which the bite of an adder is pleasure and health. It exposes the drunkard to the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death, where the wine of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God must be drunk, without intermission or end, and where the drunkard shall be punished, not only for drunkenness — but for a countless multitude of sins, to which this vice led the way!

Other vices work their own way into the soul — but this mischievous vice makes way for every other vice, and especially for the damnable sin of immorality and filthy speech.

Proverbs 23:33. "Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind imagine confusing things." Your eyes shall behold strange women, and your heart shall utter perverse things.

Drunkenness produces new vices, and discloses the old. It removes every fence of reason and religion, and makes the person overpowered by it to resemble a city without walls, into which the besiegers find an open passage that they may enter, and commit what ravages they please.

Lot kept himself pure in Sodom — and yet his daughters, by making him drunk, knew that they could easily draw him to incest, for they had seen the men of Sodom tempted, by their gluttony and intemperate drinking, to every excess of wickedness. A Roman author tells us, that, in the good days of Rome, drinking of wine was absolutely prohibited to women, lest drinking should tempt them to unchastity. For, as the same author observes, it shuts the door against every virtue — and opens it to every vice. Drunkenness besots the heart, and makes it to utter perverse and abominable things by the tongue. For blasphemy is wit, and ribaldry is eloquence to a man who is turned into a brute. How loathsome would the heart of a wicked man be, were it laid bare to the world — but drink lays it bare as far as the powers of language can go!

Proverbs 23:34. "You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of a mast." Your brain shall be giddy, your reason disordered, your mind altogether unhinged, and your danger shall be extreme, like his who lies down on the top of a mast, the most dangerous of situations imaginable. Can a man who is a slave to strong drink find no possible means of escape from his bondage? He will not make his escape, for his heart is infatuated, and he cannot prevail upon himself to forego a momentary indulgence, although it should cost him the torments of a whole life, and of an awful eternity! He feels the inconveniences that result from his indulgence to his appetite. But his appetite has a sovereign dominion over his reason, and forces it to find out some pitiful shifts and pretenses to excuse his continuance in his abominable habits.

Proverbs 23:35. "They hit me," you will say, "but I’m not hurt! They beat me, but I don’t feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?"

"Drink," says one, "steals away a man from himself, and leaves a brute in his stead." This is saying much — but not all. A drunkard is a self-made brute, and is far more senseless than a natural brute beast. It has been found upon trial, that a brute, after being once deceived by wine, would not venture upon it a second time. But the self-made brute, after he has felt an hundred times the harms of drinking, becomes still fonder of his misery, and makes his understanding to serve only for palliating his folly.

If wicked men can patiently bear such harms for the sake of a beloved lust, which will at length bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder — then why should we grudge at the little hardships that we sometimes undergo for the sake of religion, which will be so richly recompensed. If the servants of Satan are willing to bear innumerable crosses and curses for the love they have to his service — then why should we bear with reluctance, in the service of God, those crosses which are blessings in disguise?

Let those drunkards who have any remainders of understanding, compare the inconveniences that might attend the mortification of their appetite — with the miseries that God has inseparably joined to a continuance in their criminal indulgences. And if they can say that it is not a thousand times better to put a knife to their throat, than to be tyrannized over by such a pernicious lust — let them swallow down gallons every day of their life. The Lacedemonians used to make their slaves drunk in the presence of their children, that when they saw what monsters men were turned into by sensuality, their children might contract an irreconcilable aversion to this vice.

Solomon gives us such a lively picture of this vice in the paragraph before our eyes, that we need not the sight of a drunken man to excite our detestation of drunkenness. Isaiah gives us a description of it equally shocking. What excuse is left for a drunkard who has ever read the Bible? How will his mouth be stopped at the last day! How will he curse himself through eternity, for making himself first a beast, and then a devil! A master in the art of moral painting, gives us a just picture of drunkenness in these words, "Drunkenness is a distemper of the head, a subversion of the senses, a tempest of the tongue, a storm in the body — the shipwreck of virtue, the loss of time, a willful madness, a pleasant devil, a sugared poison, a sweet sin. He who commits it, does not only commit sin — but is himself altogether sin."

Let us therefore follow the counsel of the wise man. Be not among wine-bibbers. For he who goes to the tavern for the love of company, will soon go there for the love of strong drink. Let us follow the counsel of another inspired writer, "Be not filled with wine wherein is excess — but be you filled with the Spirit. Let us walk in the spirit, and we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

If, after all, we rather choose to follow the council of the wicked one, there is no help for it — but those who walk according to the prince of the power of the air, and fulfill the lusts of the flesh, must have their portion and dwelling with him whose galling yoke and crushing burden they prefer to the sweet yoke and light burden of the Redeemer. Christ would heal you — but if you will not be healed. Howl, O you drinkers of wine, for the fruit of the vine shall be cut off from your mouths. Joy shall wither away from your eyes, and a cup must be put into your hands, of which the wine is red. It is poured out full of mixture, and the dregs thereof you must wring out, and drink!

# 01.24. Proverbs 24

Chapter 24.

Proverbs 24:1-34

Proverbs 24:1. "Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company."

We must be careful of our hearts as well as our lives, for out of the heart are the issues of life. Our hearts are well known to God, and he warns us, in the precepts of his Word, against indulging an evil disposition, or corrupt passion, which might pollute our souls and conduct.

He warns us particularly in this passage, against all envious thoughts at the sight of wicked men's prosperity, which are so natural to us, that the best saints have not been altogether free of this root of bitterness. When we see the material blessings poured out to the wicked, and behold these gains and pleasures which are the present fruits of sin, we are too ready to say in our hearts, "O that God would relax in some degree his laws, that we might without incurring his displeasure, revel in those pleasures which the sons of Belial enjoy. Those men have a happier life at least than we have, whose consciences will not allow us to imitate their lawless conduct." Such wicked imaginations are strictly prohibited in this place of Scripture. We must not account the proud happy, although they enjoy the world at their will. We must not entertain a thought of imitating their cursed manners. Why? Their hearts and their lips are as black as Hell!

Proverbs 24:2. "for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble." And which of the two is best for us, to have our hearts beautified with the luster of holiness, and purified into sincere love of our brethren — or turned into a den of every malicious fiend? To have our tongues sweetened with honey and milk — or set on fire of Hell? The punishments of sin are very dreadful — but sin itself is such a deformed ugly monster, that we are lost to understanding if we do not abhor it for its own sake. But you will say, that the wicked enjoy great advantage from their way of life. They acquire fine houses and elegant furniture, and everything delightful in the service of sin. Is sin then attended with better fruits even in this world, than wisdom and holiness? By no means.

Proverbs 24:3. "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established."

Houses have been sometimes built through wickedness — but never established. By wisdom and knowledge they are built as it were on a rock, to stand firm against every blast. Convenient furniture is desirable, as well as a sure house; and this also is a fruit of that wisdom and industry which belongs to religion.

Proverbs 24:4. "through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."

Wicked men are represented by Solomon as entertaining their imaginations with high expectations of the precious substance, with which robbery and fraud will fill their houses. But what wicked men vainly expect — godly men find, if God sees it to be good for them. Should the wicked prosper in their pursuits, their joy is mingled with the racks of a tormenting consciousness of guilt, and the

apprehensions of a speedy end to the pleasures of sin. If godly men are disappointed in their expectations and wishes as to this world — they have the consolation of knowing that they have mansions of blessedness prepared for them in Christ's father's house, and that their substance is the better and enduring substance, laid up for them in Heaven.

Although the Old Testament dispensation of grace abounded in promises of earthly blessings — yet many of the ancient saints met with innumerable crosses and afflictions. They were obliged to dwell in dens and caves of the earth. They were destitute, afflicted, tormented — and still they believed that God was faithful to his word, although outward events contradicted it. Or if at any time, doubts of God's faithfulness and goodness arose in their minds, they resisted the abominable thoughts so derogatory to the Most High, and called themselves brutes and idiots before God.

How inexcusable then must it be for us, who live in the sunshine of the Gospel, to give place to blasphemous doubts of the providence of God, and the truth of his word — when God does not think fit to give splendid palaces and fine furniture to his people! The promises respecting this life, belong to godliness under the new testament as well at the old — but they are to be understood in a consistency with the nobler promises that respect spiritual blessings, and the happy influence which crosses of different kinds have in the accomplishment of these promises. When God appoints poverty and losses to the wise, and bereaves them of the native fruits of their honest labors and temperate course of life, he is not breaking, but fulfilling, his word. And the most afflicted saints will find reason to say in the end of their curse, "we know that all your judgments are righteous, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted us."

Proverbs 24:5. "A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength"

Health and vigor of body are not inseparable from that temperance and labor which religion requires — but they ordinarily accompany these virtues. Religion is at any rate fitted to give us strength, and animate us with courage, because it directs us to depend on the arm of the Almighty, and to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Wisdom teaches us not only to trust in God — but to take advantage of that wisdom which God has granted to other men, not merely for their own benefit — but to render them useful to others who have the meekness and humility of wisdom to consult with them.

Proverbs 24:6. "For waging war you need guidance, and in multitude of counselors there is safety."

Wars are too often necessary because of the pride, covetousness and ambition of men. Those who have most of the meekness of wisdom, are sometimes dragged into them — and then wisdom is found to be of far greater value than strength, or weapons of war. A multitude of wise counselors are far more useful to a nation engaged in war, than a great number of valiant soldiers. The wisdom of statesmen and generals is of great use in its proper sphere — but the wisdom of saints is of incomparably greater use in fighting for the cause of liberty and religion. In the wars of Israel, piety was commonly attended with success, for those who knew their God were strong and did exploits. If the wisdom of one poor man could deliver a city besieged by a powerful king — then what may not be expected from the combined wisdom of many? But as useful as wisdom is, there are some men so egregiously foolish that they cannot attain this quality.

Proverbs 24:7. "Wisdom is too high for a fool; in the assembly at the gate he has nothing to say." A fool does not see the excellency of wisdom. Although he may value the reputation of it — yet he lacks eyes to behold the real glory of wisdom. Or if he has any sense of its value — yet he cannot bring his mind to that degree of care, and diligence, and self-denial, which is necessary to obtain the knowledge of it. Far less can he resist the imperious tyranny of his passions, to put his soul under the government of wisdom. Therefore he continues a fool under all the means of wisdom that are used with him. A desire to get wisdom is of no use but to render his folly more inexcusable. For he has no heart to it — but is deeply in love with his folly, and must bear the shame and misery to which it exposes him. But if wisdom is too high for a fool — then how can he be blamed for not getting wisdom? Because the fault is not in wisdom, nor in the means of it, which God has given us — but in the fool himself. Wisdom speaks to men in plain language. But fools have corrupt minds, and perverse hearts, and refuse to hear the voice of wisdom, or to receive the instructions of wisdom into their hearts. A fool, through his incapacity of getting wisdom, is unfit for speaking in the assembly — the place of concourse and of judgment. He is either made speechless by his consciousness of having nothing to say which deserves to be heard — or if his self-conceit opens his lips, he betrays his folly by speaking, more effectually than others do by their silence. That the wisdom which is the gift of nature and learning is necessary to qualify men for public offices is universally allowed; and that wisdom which is the gift of the Spirit, is likewise highly requisite, if not absolutely necessary. Jethro would have none to be rulers in Israel who did not fear God and hate covetousness. For the fear of God is the most effectual preservative against all those temptations that attend power and high offices.

Proverbs 24:8. "He who plots evil, will be known as a mischievous person." That tree is rotten which is broken by a gentle gale of wind. Just so, that man has a rotten heart, who sins upon a slight temptation. But words are insufficient to express the malignity of that man’s heart, who needs no temptation from the devil at all — but contrives and plots sin in his own mind, spending his thoughts devising iniquity when he is lying on his bed, or sitting in his house, and searching out the most dextrous and effectual methods of gratifying his own depraved mind, and doing harm to others. To be driven or drawn to sin is a bad thing — but to draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and to sin, as it were, with a cart rope, is hellish! The person who does so shall be loaded with infamy. He may think himself a man of genius and wisdom; he may acquire to himself an honorable name among fools — but the God from whose sentence, promotion or infamy comes, calls him a master of harm, and by this vile title he shall be known among all that are wise.

He may be really a man of genius and learning — but all his talents, natural and acquired, concur to sink him so much the deeper in the gulf of disgrace. All his honor shall consist in his being not a private soldier — but a leader in the bands of Hell. And in this dignity he shall share with Balaam, the son of Beer, who taught Balak to seduce the Israelites; with Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin; with Jezebel, the wife and tutor of the most infamous of the kings of Israel; and with Beelzebub, the prince of devils.

Proverbs 24:9. "The thought of foolishness is sin, and the scorner is an abomination to men."

It is too general a notion that thoughts are of little consequence, and that words and actions only expose men to danger of punishment from God — but we are to remember, that there is an infinite distance between the judges of this world, and the Judge of all.

Earthly judges cannot penetrate into the hearts of men, and have no business with their secret thoughts — but it is the glory of the universal Judge, that He is the sovereign and searcher of minds. He requires from us, truth in our inward parts; and when he comes to judge the world, all shall know that he searches the hearts, and tries the thoughts of men.

If we study to show ourselves approved unto him, we must not only cleanse our hands — but likewise purify our hearts. For foolish and sinful thoughts are contrary to his law, and abominable in his sight. He beholds with detestation, all the impure workings of the mind — in wicked contrivances, in impious reasonings, in vain and foolish musings. When he bestows the grace of his Spirit upon any man, he makes him to hate vain thoughts, as well as wicked actions.

If the thoughts of foolishness are sinful — then how sinful are scornful words. There is much more sin in the thoughts of wicked men, than in their lips or lives — but when the lips are employed to express contempt of all good admonitions, it is an evidence that the heart is desperately corrupt, and that thoughts of foolishness abound and overflow. The thoughts of foolishness are abominable only to him who sees the heart — but the scorner is an abomination to men also. And if he is abominable even to those who have so much impurity of their own — then how detestable must he be to him who sees more evil in the least sin, than we can discern in the greatest sin?

How long, you scorners, will you delight in your scorning? You are so miserably polluted with the defilements of sin, that your fellow sinners cannot bear with you — and how then will the Most Holy God allow you to escape unpunished? Sit no longer in the seat of the scorner — but humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, lest your bands be made strong.

Proverbs 24:10. "If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength!"

If we sink into despondency, and think that our happiness is forever lost, because God has been pleased to afflict us with some grievous calamity — then it is plain that our strength and courage is but small. Where is the vigor of our faith, if we cannot believe that there is help for us in God? A lively faith in the God of Jacob as our refuge and our strength, would make us to stand firm and unshaken, although the mountains were removed, and the earth shaken, and overwhelmed by the swelling waves of the sea. It would make us to rejoice in the Lord, when everything looks dreary around us.

If we faint in our Christian course, and use unlawful means of escape when dangers surround us — then it is a sign that our strength is almost nothing. The church of Philadelphia had a little strength, and she held fast the name of Christ, and did not deny his faith. Peter’s strength was so far lost, when he denied his master’s name, that he needed in some sense a new conversion. As gold is tried in the fire, so our strength is tried in the furnace of affliction. And surely when men are tried, it is their interest and honor to see that they come forth as gold, and not as reprobate silver. Trials are necessary for us, and appointed to us — and the times of trial are critical seasons. Therefore we ought to be prepared for them, that the trial of our faith may be found unto praise, and honor, and glory. But how shall we be furnished with strength to stand in the evil day? Paul gives us necessary directions for this purpose. Christ is the author of all grace. Faith, hope and patience, are fruits of his Spirit; and we must not only receive those militant graces — but depend on his power to maintain them in our souls. And then neither persecution, nor distress, nor anything else shall be able to overthrow our souls, or destroy our comfort.

Proverbs 24:11-12. "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?"

We are required by God to love not in word or profession — but in truth and in deed, taking every proper opportunity to show our love in its proper fruits. One of these is recommended in this text, which enjoins us to appear in the defense of those who are unjustly doomed to destruction. Christ laid down his life for us — and we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren, and to risk everything dear to us, in the cause of righteousness. By the same law of love, we are required to interest ourselves in the cause of those who suffer any injurious treatment, and to do it without hesitation or delay. We must not be slack to afford relief to our enemy's oxen or donkeys, if they have fallen into a pit — far less may we defer the giving of needful relief to our distressed brethren. The wise man represents this piece of charity as a duty which we owe to our neighbors without exception — and our Lord agrees with him, in the parable of the good Samaritan. We are not the disciples of Solomon or of Christ, if we show love only to those who are nearly related to us, or who are of the same religious profession with ourselves. The wise man knew that this is a duty against which we are too ready to muster up exceptions, because the performance of it may expose us to trouble or danger — so he answers every exception that can be made to it in few words — and with strong and convincing arguments. We cannot pretend that it is not our duty to relieve the oppressed, as far as our power extends. As the priest who passed by the wounded man, kept at a distance, that he might not behold that object of compassion — so we are too ready to allege that we knew not the peril in which our neighbor was involved, or did not know that he was an innocent man, that did not deserve such treatment. If this is strictly true, and if our ignorance was not voluntary and affected, the excuse is good — but it is to be remembered, that no excuses for the neglect of duty ought to be sustained by our own minds, that will not be sustained by God our judge.

Excuses may serve to blind the eyes of men who are short-sighted, and who are obliged to judge on the charitable side in a doubtful case — but God is greater than men, and knows all things, and will not be imposed upon by any false pretense. God ponders our hearts, and knows with certainty how far we act from a careless and selfish spirit, when we neglect the offices of charity to the distressed. In weighing the hearts of men, the lack of charity alone serves to turn the balance; and the omissions of charity, which are known by God to spring from the lack of that necessary virtue, exclude men from the kingdom of Heaven.

God is the keeper of our souls, and therefore we need not be afraid to risk our lives in obedience to his will. We cannot exist one moment without his kind providence — so why should we scruple to risk everything dear to us in the service of him in whom we live, move, and have our being? We are always safe in the way of duty — and we are never safe in neglect of it. For safety comes from the Lord our judge and lawgiver; and if our lives are exposed in his service, be can easily preserve them, or compensate the loss, if he allows them to be taken from us. But if we preserve them by declining our duty, we expose them to more dreadful dangers than death.

God renders unto every man according to his works. He will not forget the works of faith and the labors of love, and he will never allow any man to be a loser by them. The greatest gains in the

world — are the losses suffered for the sake of a good conscience. The greatest losses — are the gains of sin. If we neglect duty from the prospect of safety or advantage — the honor of God is engaged, to convince us by experience, that no profit is to be found in disobeying his will.

Queen Esther could not have reasonably expected to secure herself, even in the house of her imperial husband, from the vengeance of God — if she had neglected to exert all her influence at the peril of her life for the deliverance of the Jews, when Haman was pursuing them with deadly hatred.

These truths are so plain, and so decisive in the present case, that the wise man propounds them in the form of questions, and leaves it to the consciences of men to return answers to themselves. A lively impression of our absolute dependence upon God, and our accountableness to him, would answer millions of objections against the hardest duties. If we must not forbear to support those whose lives are exposed to danger — then it must be the extreme of wickedness to allow immortal souls to perish, when our persuasions and instructions may be a means of preventing it. It is indeed still worse by bad example or corrupt doctrine — to destroy the souls that must be happy or miserable through endless ages!

Proverbs 24:13-14. "Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off."

God, in his great goodness, has provided for our delight as well as our subsistence, and has given us leave to use honey, because it is sweet to the taste — as well as bread to strengthen our bodies. How great is his goodness — and how great is his bounty! But how great is our ingratitude — if we do not serve him with gladness, amidst the abundance of our enjoyments!

All men relish those things that are sweet to the palate — but there are many that have no spiritual taste to relish those things that are sweet to the purified soul. Had we senses spiritually exercised, we would readily confess that honey, and milk, and wine, are tasteless — when they are compared with that knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, which makes us wise unto salvation. Honey is sweet to the mouth — but knowledge and wisdom are sweet to the soul. The sweetness of honey lasts for a moment — but the sweetness of wisdom is everlasting. Honey soon satiates, and when it is taken in too large a quantity it is bitter in the belly, and hurtful to the constitution — but wisdom is the joy and happiness, the health and vigor of the soul.

There is pleasure in knowledge, and pleasure in the practice of wisdom. As soon as we become wise, we taste exquisite satisfactions, of which we could not formerly frame an idea to ourselves — any more than a man who wants the sense of taste, could form a conception of the sweetness of honey. The sweetness of it is experienced more fully in our religious progress, and most of all at the end of our course.

There shall be a gracious and abundant reward unto the wise man, for God has promised it; and the hopes that are founded upon the Word of God can never make us ashamed. The wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and shall enjoy celestial delights in the presence of him with whom is the fountain of life! Let Christians hope to the end, for the grace that shall be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps they may be brought into very trying situations, and the tempter will persuade them to think that their hope is lost. But the devil is not to be believed at any time, especially when his suggestions are so manifestly contrary to the word of the living God, who says, there shall be a reward, and your expectation shall not be cut off. The living hope of the glory that is to be revealed to us, will sweeten every bitter thing that we meet with in the pursuit and practice of wisdom. For when the Christian soldier is sure of victory and white robes, and of admission to the new Jerusalem, and the tree of life — then the toils and dangers of the field of battle are turned into gladness!

Proverbs 24:15-16. "Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against a righteous man's house, do not raid his dwelling place; for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity." The people of God have many enemies. The principalities and powers of Hell lay wait for their souls; and there are men so desperately wicked, that they will not scruple to lay wait for their lives or properties. Christians may entertain assured hopes of the eternal rest — but if they expect an uninterrupted rest in this world, they will find themselves mistaken. They have, nevertheless, a ground for strong consolation under every attack, and every instance of success in their enemies. They must not expect exemption — but they may firmly hope for deliverance from the cross. They may fall — but they shall not be utterly cast down. For strong is the Lord God who helps them.

It is vain for the wicked to hope that they shall be able to do any real harm to the righteous. They may flatter themselves with the hopes of success in their unrighteous designs; they see the righteous fall before them, and persuade themselves that they shall not be able to arise — but the God who maintains their cause, allows them to fall into trouble to try and refine them, and when he has accomplished his work upon them, will raise them up with renewed vigor, and take a severe vengeance upon their enemies. When the wicked fight against God's people, they fight against God himself. He is a wall of fire round about his people, and their enemies are like stubble, fully dry. Be not afraid, you righteous, of the strength or cunning of your adversaries. Do not believe those tempters, who tell you that there is no help for you in God. Be not dismayed at their success, nor let your falls into calamity dampen your hopes. You are taught by Solomon and Micah, to triumph even when you are defeated, because your losses will end in victory, and the victories of your enemies will end in ruin. "Rejoice not against me, O my enemy, though I fall, I shall arise, though I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me, etc."

Perhaps you will say, had I fallen only once, I would not be much afraid — but I have often fallen before the enemy, and one day I must perish. But hear what God says: the righteous man falls not once or twice — but many times, and still he rises. Your experience of former deliverances should encourage your hopes of new deliverances, for the salvations of the Lord are never exhausted. In six troubles he will deliver, and in seven there shall no evil touch you.

Woe to the wicked, and to the enemies of the righteous, they shall fall never to arise. They shall fall into misery. They shall fall into the grave. They shall fall into the lake of fire, from whence there is no returning. They have a load of sins and curses upon them heavier than mountains of lead; and when they begin to fall, they shall, like Haman, utterly perish.

Babylon intended to destroy Zion — but Zion was purified and redeemed, while the vengeance of Zion and of Zion's Redeemer, sunk Babylon into irrecoverable perdition, as a millstone is sunk in

the mighty waters!

Proverbs 24:17-18. "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice — or the Lord will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him."

He who is glad at the calamities of others, shall not be unpunished, says Solomon in another place. But may we not be glad at the calamities of our enemies? By no means. It would be unlawful and inhuman. We must not be glad at the calamity of our enemy's donkey — but help it out of a ditch if it has fallen into one. It is very opposite to the spirit of Christianity, to rejoice at the misfortunes of our enemies. Our blessed Savior prayed for his enemies, and commands us to pray for our enemies. If we neglect prayer for them, we neglect a plain and positive duty, enforced by the noblest example. If we pray for them — and yet rejoice when they fall, or even when they stumble, or are in danger of falling — we are gross hypocrites. If we have the hearts of monsters, and not of men — why do we pretend to be Christians? But does not Solomon say, elsewhere, when the wicked perish there is rejoicing? And are we not frequently told, that the righteous are glad at the vengeance executed upon the wicked? This is true — but they do not rejoice, on such occasions, from a vindictive or selfish spirit. They rejoice that God is glorified, that wickedness is suppressed, and the people of God delivered from oppression.

Such was the joy of Moses and the children of Israel, when Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea. Of this kind, shall be the joy of the church of Christ in the day of Antichrist's destruction. But to rejoice because harm has befallen our fellow men, or because we expect some advantage from the misery of our enemies — is to behave like heathens or devils — and not like Christ, or his saints. We must still remember that the eye of God is upon us, and he observes all the movements of our hearts, and the workings of our passions. He is well pleased when we look with a pitying and generous eye upon the sins and miseries of our worst enemies — but looks with displeasure on those selfish souls who rejoice at the calamities of those who hate them. An unforgiving and revengeful spirit, in those who need so much forgiveness from God — must be very provoking to him. Our joy at the fall of our enemies cannot procure their reconciliation to God — but it may kindle God's displeasure against us. He may suspend the present execution of judgment against them — and transfer it to ourselves. For if they wronged us, and exposed themselves to punishment — we have wronged both God and them, and have exposed ourselves, in no less a degree, to punishment. If we rejoice at the fall or danger of our enemies, we ourselves have fallen into a greater evil, for sin has more evil in it than affliction, and brings affliction along with it. The whole book of Obadiah seems to be written to show the miseries which men bring upon themselves, by triumphing in the ruin of their enemies; and many chapters of the Bible insist on the same necessary subject. If this sin was so dangerous under the dispensation of Moses, then how is it possible that those should escape punishment who are guilty of it under the Christian dispensation, when the law of love to all men (enemies not excepted) is so wonderfully enforced, that it is called by Christ, his new commandment.

Proverbs 24:19. "Do not fret because of evil men, or be envious of the wicked"

It seems that wicked men were often prosperous, and that there is a strong disposition in men to make a bad use of the wise and good Providence of God, in sometimes allotting prosperity to the wicked — otherwise Solomon would not have so frequently cautioned us against indulging this propensity. He had guarded us against this sin by telling us of the future happiness of the

righteous, and of the cursed disposition of the wicked. He now gives us another motive to quietness and composure under this strange providence of the universal sovereignty.

Proverbs 24:20. "for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out!"

What benefit is a happiness (if it can be called by that name,) which continues only threescore and ten years — when the person who enjoyed it must continue for millions of ages in Hell? Will it be any comfort to the wicked in the eternal world, to reflect that they enjoyed their good things in this world?

Heaven is despised by the wicked at present, for they are stupefied by their earthly enjoyments — but it is not despised by the damned in Hell. They know, to their sorrow, the immense value of the heavenly inheritance, and weep, and gnash their teeth, and melt away with envy, at that celestial happiness, from which they find themselves forever excluded, and separated by a gulf that cannot be passed. There is no merciful reward — but there is a reward of justice and vengeance to evil men. They are shut out from the celestial city, and have their everlasting abode in those regions where rest and peace and hope never come. A perpetuity of bliss is alone bliss — and those immortal souls who have no title to it, are the objects not of envy but of pity. When a prosperous transgressor is pining away under a loathsome and mortal distemper, we don’t reckon him worthy of our envy, although he drags out his days in a magnificent palace, surrounded with pleasures which he cannot taste, and to which he must soon bid farewell. If we viewed things in the light of the Word of God, we would not envy his prosperity, when he enjoys the most perfect health, for even then his soul is pining away to death, and his prosperity is precarious and transient. The joys of the godly are permanent and increasing, like the light of the sun, which shines more and more unto the perfect day; but the prosperity of the wicked, is like the light of a candle — if you leave it to itself it will soon consume away — but it may very probably be extinguished before it has time to burn to the socket. Shall those who rejoice in the light of day, envy the happiness of those who dwell in a dungeon, enjoying only the light of one candle which must soon expire, and leave them buried in perpetual night?

Proverbs 24:21-22. "Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with those who are given to change — for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?" To fear God is a duty so necessary, that there can be no true religion without it. The excellencies and works of God,

the favors we have received from him,

the relations we stand in to him,

the account we must give to him,

and our absolute dependence upon him

— loudly call upon us to fear him. He is so much to be feared, that the wise preacher tells us that to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man. To the fear of God, must be joined reverence to the king, for God’s sake. For by him kings reign, and they are his ministers for our protection from enemies and wicked men, and for promoting virtue and suppressing wickedness. God has conferred dignity and power upon them, and they are entitled to honor for

the sake of their office and work.

Yet we must not carry this reverence of royal dignity to a degree of adoration. We must be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake — but to the Lord for his own sake, because absolute dominion belongs to him. Although kings are called gods — yet they shall die like men. When their commandments clash with the authority of God, they are worthy of no regard. Our safety lies in fearing him who has power to kill both soul and body, and to cast both into hell-fire. If the wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion — then the wrath of God is infinitely more to be dreaded!

If we would preserve our religion and loyalty, we must not meddle with those who are fond of changes either in religion or government — for "evil companions corrupt good character." The people of Israel, when they mingled with the nations, learned their ways, and changed their glory for that which did not profit. They were so fond of being like their neighbors, that they rejected the Lord from being king over them, and desired rather to have a royal tyrant like the other nations. When Absalom rebelled against his father, many followed him in the foolishness of their hearts. The Scripture does not require us to be subject to the wicked laws of tyrants — but single acts of bad administration do not justify men in casting off the yoke of government. In most cases, it is our duty and wisdom to be quiet and peaceable subjects, to those who have the possession of the throne granted them by divine providence, and to say with more sincerity than Hushai the Archite, "whom the Lord and this people choose — his will I be, and with him will I abide." Impiety and disloyalty are great and dangerous sins.

Kings are terrible enemies. But God is infinitely more dreadful, and he is the avenger, not only of insults against himself — but of indignities and injuries to those powers that are ordained by him.

How many were destroyed in the gainsaying of Korah, and in the rebellion of Absalom? Who knows what ruin awaits those who are guilty of rebellion, which is as the sin of witch craft; or how suddenly the tempest of vengeance may hurl those men into perdition, who fear not God, or do not reverence those who are authorized by him to administer justice among men. The apostle Paul spends a large part of a chapter in considering the sin and danger of those who do not submit to the higher powers. How miserable shall they be, who refuse subjection to that great king whom God has placed on the throne of grace, and to whom he has given a rod of iron, to crush those rebels that attempt to break his bands, and cast away his cords! The princes and judges of the earth must serve him, as well as the lowest of their subjects, and his enemies shall lick the dust. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him, and obey him.

Proverbs 24:23. "These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good."

Princes usually have a sufficient sense of those duties which their subjects owe them; and they would generally find these duties better performed, if they had a proper sense of their own duties. The precepts of wisdom are binding on them, as well as on poor men — and the dominion of God extends alike to the prince and to the peasant. All the precepts already delivered are precepts of wisdom, and those which follow were likewise dictated by the father of lights to the wisest of men. The best proof we can give of our wisdom, is to observe the precepts of God. They are fools that will not hear the voice of wisdom, or look upon any of her precepts as superfluous.

We may more reasonably complain of too much money in our purses, or too many clothes in our closets — than of too many precepts of wisdom in the book of God.

We have no reason to complain that God is strict in requiring our obedience to rulers. He is no less strict in requiring rulers to govern justly, and to make their subjects happy. In this verse, he commands them to do justice and judgment to all their people. Whatever favors they may confer on particular people — they must be impartial in judgment. They must not show partiality to the rich and great, nor their own favorites, nor even a poor or a righteous man in his cause. To show partiality to any man is not good — but very wicked. Elihu dared not show partiality to Job, although he was the best man on the face of the earth, when he gave his judgment about the cause which he had debated with his friends.

Although absolute dominion belongs to God, and he dispenses his favors according to his sovereign pleasure — yet in judgment he shows no partiality to his own favorites. When he determined by his providence the cause between his beloved servant David, and Saul whom he had rejected — he examined David, and found nothing, judging him according to his righteousness, and not according to the special favor he had to him. And when the same David had dealt injuriously with Uriah, he was punished before all Israel, and before the sun. In like manner, when the Gibeonites were treated with abuse and cruelty by the king of Israel — God gave full satisfaction to the Gibeonites. Kings and judges are honored with the name of gods on earth, and they ought to imitate the justice of God in all their administrations. But may not criminals be allowed to escape by a merciful perversion of the law, although the righteous must not be wronged? No!

Proverbs 24:24-25. "Whoever says to the guilty, "You are innocent" — peoples will curse him and nations denounce him. But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come upon them."

He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; and his iniquity is attended with such mischievous consequences, that he is an abomination to men also, and provokes against himself the execrations of whole nations. If robbers and murderers escape unpunished — then how can any man think himself sure of his life or property, when public encouragement is so evidently given to the pests of human society? Mercy is to be showed to wicked men, as far as it consists with equity, and the public good — but when it is carried farther, it becomes cruelty to millions.

Those magistrates who faithfully execute their trust, shall have much pleasure from the testimony of their own hearts, and from the happy effects of their faithful and impartial administrations. They shall have the blessings of those who live under their government — and the blessings of men, when they are well earned, are ratified by God.

Job looked upon it as one part of his happiness, that he enjoyed the blessings of those who were ready to perish, and of every eye that saw him. We may safely risk the abhorrence of all mankind, and despise their favor — when our duty requires us. For if we seek to please men at the expense of sinful compliances, we are not the servants of Christ. But as far as we are allowed by the law of God, it is our duty to practice those things that are of good report, living unblamably and usefully in our respective stations — that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

How important is the behavior of men in elevated stations. Thousands or millions of men are losers or gainers by it, and applaud or abhor those who rule over them. Kings and magistrates have much need of our prayers, that they may receive wisdom from God.

We who are in inferior stations, have likewise our contracted sphere of influence, and ought to consider how much others are affected by our behavior. Let us endeavor to deserve at least their blessings, and to avoid everything that may justly incur their displeasure, or hurt their interests.

If it is of so much consequence to the public, that magistrates should punish the wicked; and if they would incur universal hatred by the neglect of this part of their duty — shall we then deny to the sovereign Ruler of the world, that praise to which he is entitled for his acts of just vengeance? He is glorious in his administrations of justice as well as mercy. Who would not fear him and glorify his name, for he alone is holy, for his judgments are made manifest! If he did not punish the wicked, we would have reason to say that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them — and where is the God of judgment? Those magistrates who give a right judgment in any cause that comes before them, procure universal respect and good will, as the wise man instructs us in the following verse:

Proverbs 24:26. "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips."

History of all ages proves the truth of this proverb. When we are asked an important question, or consulted on an affair of consequence, every man will esteem and love us, if we give an honest answer; and that our answer may be honest, it is necessary that it should be sincere, prudent, and meek. We must not give an answer calculated merely to please the person who questions us. For that would not be consistent with integrity. We must consider all the circumstances of the affair, that we may give a proper and pertinent answer; and we must speak with that meekness, which renders wisdom lovely. If our answers to those who question us have these qualifications, although they may be sometimes distasteful, because truth compels us to speak things disagreeable — yet they will tend, on the whole, to the advancement of our character. Our character is no contemptible object, because the goodness of it is necessary for us in accomplishing the great business of life, glorifying God, and doing good to men. The instances of Joseph in his first conversation with Pharaoh, and of Daniel’s plain dealing with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, are illustrations of this truth.

Let us never give a wrong answer to any man, if kings should favor us for it. Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah, will tell us how little the royal favor which he obtained by his court flattery availed him, and how short its continuance was.

Proverbs 24:27. "Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house."

Things absolutely necessary are to be sought after, in the first place; and, in the next place, those things that may minister delight and satisfaction. For this reason we are commanded by our Lord, in the first place, to seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, because the salvation of our souls is infinitely more vital than our welfare in this world. But as there is a lawful care about the things of this world also, we are directed in this place, to mind the things most needful to our present subsistence and comfort — before we proceed to those things that have an inferior influence upon the comfort of our lives.

Solomon takes it for granted, that we have already a house in which we can live, and enjoy shelter from the inclemencies of the weather — but perhaps we wish to have a more elegant and commodious house. A wish of this kind is not unreasonable, only it must be kept in due subordination to our most important concerns. The work of the field, on which our subsistence depends, is of more importance than the building of a better house, and ought therefore to be first attended to. And then we are at liberty to build our house, if we can afford time and money for it. This rule of the wise man is of great use for the wise management of our secular concerns, and by neglecting it, many have been reduced to poverty and contempt. Nor is it so remote from religion — for religion requires us to act prudently in the common business of life, and to do nothing that may reduce ourselves, or our families to poverty, or deprive our creditors of their just claims upon us. In our religious concerns, the same rule ought to be observed. There are first principles which ought in the first place to be well studied, and then we must go on to perfection. To think of going on to perfection without learning the first principles, is as foolish as to think of raising the superstructure of a house, without laying the foundation. And to rest in the first principles, is as foolish as to lay the foundation of a house, and then to think that all our work is over.

God is a God of order; and he requires us to do all things in their proper order, both in our civil and religious business.

Proverbs 24:28. "Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, or use your lips to deceive."

It is in many cases a man’s duty to bear witness against his neighbor — and then the glory of God and the welfare of society, call loudly upon him to perform this necessary but disagreeable service. But it is a great sin for a man to bear false witness against his neighbor, or to bear testimony against him from a principle of malice and revenge — when there is no call to declare even the truth against him. The real faults of other men must not be published by us, when there is no good to be done, nor any danger to be obviated by it.

We would not wish our own faults to be wantonly blazed abroad to the world — so why should we behave in one way to others, and expect another way of behavior to ourselves? This would be as unreasonable as keeping one kind of weights and measures for buying — and another for selling.

We must not deceive with our lips, either before a judge or in private conversation. The gift of speech was given to us for glorifying God, and doing good to men. It is a wicked perversion of it to make use of it for dishonoring God and deceiving men, by flattery or falsehood, or by speaking truth in such a manner as to deceive. The history of the false testimony that was borne against our Lord, shows us that truth falsely and deceitfully represented, may become an instrument of deceit and harm. That truth is generally to be spoken, you will allow — but perhaps you will allege that you have some wicked neighbor, who has no right to truth from you — because he has borne testimony against you without cause, or by some other injury deserved a harm at your hand. But,

Proverbs 24:29. "Do not say: I’ll do to him as he has done to me; I’ll pay that man back for what he did!" To speak in this manner would be the same thing as if you said, "Vengeance belongs unto me, I will repay it." I will step into the throne of God, and hurl the thunderbolts of vengeance upon my adversary.

What would become of us, if God should render to us according to our evil works. We need great mercy at the hand of God — and shall we render nothing but rigid justice to our fellow men, in

direct opposition to the royal law of love? When our neighbors do us an injury, shall we borrow weapons from Hell to retaliate? When we revenge injuries at our own discretion, we may do hurt to our enemies — but we do much greater hurt to ourselves. For the punishment of malice and revenge to which we expose ourselves, is far worse than any vengeance which our feeble arm can inflict. Let us therefore show ourselves to be the disciples of Christ, by loving our enemies and recompensing evil with good. Thus we shall heap coals of fire upon the head of our enemies, to melt them — but by following an opposite course, we heap them on our own, to our destruction.

Proverbs 24:30. "I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man void of understanding." The sluggard is wise in his own conceit — but in Solomon's judgment, sluggard is another name for a man void of understanding. For what understanding can that man have who buries himself alive, and neither performs the duties of life, nor takes the proper method of being able to enjoy and relish its comforts. The slothful man hopes to escape poverty, because he is born an heir to fields and vineyards — but Solomon, that great observer of the manners and conditions of men, passed by these fields and vineyards, and saw what was sufficient to convince any man, of the folly of such hopes.

Proverbs 24:31. "And behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down!"

How could it be otherwise? Thorns and thistles, since the fall of man, spring up everywhere, to remind us of our rebellion against God — and the greatest industry can scarcely keep them down. But where slothfulness leaves them to spring up at will, the field must be covered with them, and every useful plant choked. Or, if anything useful springs up among them, it becomes a prey to every spoiler, because the stone wall is broken down and left in ruins. Such is the situation of the sluggard's field and vineyard!

Just so, spiritual sloth is productive of the like effects in the soul of man. If we are careless about our spiritual interests, our souls will soon be overrun with noisome and pernicious vice, and left without guard against those destructive enemies, "who go about seeking whom they may devour." A neglected garden is disagreeable to the eye — but a neglected soul is a spectacle of horror! The stinging nettles of envy, the thorns of anger, and ungovernable lusts — spring up abundantly in that scene of desolation. Every lust and every temptation have an uncontrolled influence — and the roaring lion out of the bottomless pit wastes it at his pleasure! But what pleasure could Solomon have in looking at the sluggard's vineyard? He saw nothing that did not afford instruction to his enlightened mind. For wisdom teaches us to improve every object, however unpleasant, to useful purposes, and finds nourishment for itself even in the folly of other men:

Proverbs 24:32. "I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw"

Solomon did not take a cursory and superficial view of this field — but spent many thoughts upon it. How useful is MEDITATION? It is the nurse of knowledge and prudence. It furnishes our minds with truths, and applies them to the heart, and teaches us to live in a manner suitable to them. Solomon was already wise — but he wished to be wiser, and learned wisdom every day.

Another man would have learned self-conceit or self-indulgence, from the field of the sluggard. Some people, when they see the faults of others — applaud themselves for their superiority in virtue. No man, they think, can say they are wicked men, because they know that some other men

are worse. There are other people that think it safe for them to do like other people, and to let alone what other people omit. Our wisdom lies in learning from the example of other men, compared with the law of God, what we are to do, and what we are to avoid. We see the sluggard, the drunkard, the lukewarm professor — but we see no good arising out of their vices — but much harm to themselves. They are condemned by the providence as well as the Word of God. Their souls are unprosperous, and the outward circumstances of some of those kinds of sinners, have the marks of divine displeasure mingled with them. Is it not better to learn wisdom at the cost of other people, than at our own expense? Solomon learned instruction from this dismal spectacle, the field and vineyard of the sluggard; and the instruction which he received, he communicates to us in a proverb, which, for its importance, is repeated from a former chapter.

Proverbs 24:33-34. "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest — and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." The sluggard had no intention of allowing his field to be all covered with weeds, he only wished to indulge himself a little while in ease and sleep, and then he designed to rouse himself and root up all the weeds. His ruin was, that, when he had got a little sleep, he wished for a little more; and when he had taken the little more, he felt himself as little disposed to work as before. And so he loitered and wasted away the time, day after day, doing nothing at all, or nothing to purpose — until his field was all overrun with noisome weeds, and every good plant destroyed, and his vineyard lay in ruins. Thus poverty came upon him swiftly and unexpectedly, and with irresistible fury, and plunged him into the gulf of misery and remorse! Would you avoid sloth? Beware of every temptation to it, and allow no place to any thought of delaying a necessary business. It was a maxim of a certain prince, who was celebrated for his success in every undertaking, never to defer that until tomorrow, that which should be done to day. Putting off things until tomorrow, is the thief of time. It is unsafe in any business. It is infinitely dangerous in our spiritual concerns. Boast not therefore of tomorrow. For you know not what a day may bring forth — but whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might!

# 01.25. Proverbs 25

Chapter 25.

Proverbs 25:1-28

Proverbs 25:1. "These are more proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, copied out." A book written by Solomon, and published by the order of Hezekiah, would deserve very high regard. But the proverbs of Solomon need no human recommendation. Their intrinsic worth, and their divine original, place them far above the compositions of the greatest philosophers and kings who were not favored with divine inspiration.

Those servants of Hezekiah who copied out the following part of Solomon's proverbs, and joined them to the rest, are here mentioned to their honor. They were the publishers, and not the composers of the following chapters — but they performed a piece of service to the church for which their names shall live.

Just so, if we cannot do so much for God and his people as some others have done, let us do what we can, and we shall never lose our reward. The contributors of goat's hair to the tabernacle are mentioned to their honor, as well as those who gave silver, and gold, and precious stones. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not.

Many of the following precepts respect the duties of kings. Hezekiah walked in the good ways of David and Solomon, and he desired instruction in his duty as a king. Every one of us ought to study the duties that belong to our respective stations, that we may be thoroughly furnished for every good work.

Proverbs 25:2. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."

How arrogant are those men who must know the reasons of all God's works. Or, if that exceeds their capacity, to call them into question, or find fault with them — as if they knew better what God ought to do than God Himself! There are unsearchable mysteries in the excellencies and ways of God. His way is in the sea, and His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known — and it is His glory that they are not known. He would not be God — if we could understand Him to perfection. Nor would His sovereignty absolute — if He were obliged to do nothing but what His creatures would approve. The lowest of the creatures of God have qualities that we cannot fully understand; how strange then is it, that we will not allow His providence to transcend our comprehension, or that a doubt should be entertained about the mysteries of His grace — because they are incomprehensible to our feeble understandings? It was a good saying of a pious divine, "Lord, preserve us from a comprehensible God!" It is our duty to venerate and wonder — and not to pry with curious eyes into the secrets of God. The history of the fall is an everlasting warning to the sons of Adam to prefer the tree of life to the tree of knowledge. But the kings of this

earth are infinitely inferior to the God of Heaven, and their honors are of a humbler kind. It is their honor to search out a matter. When God is said to search the hearts of men, he is spoken of in the language of men, for he beholds all things past, present, and to come, by one glance of his infinite mind. But kings, who need a great deal of knowledge and wisdom, must obtain it, like other men — by labor and diligence. It is their honor to be diligent in searching out everything that princes ought to know.

They must employ much care, and make use of the wisdom of other men to inform themselves about all the interests of their kingdoms, and their various connections with foreign states. They must endeavor to acquaint themselves with the dispositions of their subjects, with the best means of suppressing vice, and encouraging goodness, and making their people happy, and the proper methods of preserving peace, or of defending their crowns and kingdoms from foreign enemies. When kings act the part of judges in their own people, as they did in ancient times, their sphere of labor is greatly increased. For every cause they must search out. They must neither refuse to judge in it because it is difficult, nor must they pass sentence without good ground, to save their own labor. But they must search things to the bottom, and judge wisely and righteously, as Solomon did in the case of the two harlots. On these accounts kings cannot conceal their important affairs within their own minds. They must have assistants to bear the burden of government, and make use of the counsels and abilities of other men, to whom they must communicate their secrets.

It is the glory of God to need no counselor. It is the honor of kings to choose right counselors and to follow their beneficial advises. Yet it is not to be expected that their subjects in general should be their privy counselors.

Proverbs 25:3. "As the heavens are high and the earth is deep, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable." No man can measure the height of the heavens, or the depth of the earth — and as little can the hearts of kings be searched out. But is every king a Solomon, with a heart as comprehensive as the sand on the sea shore? Every king needs a very enlarged heart. The throne is not a bed of repose — but the seat of care and labor. What knowledge and prudence is requisite to understand the intricate science of government, and to manage the complicated affairs of kingdoms? And as kings are not born wiser than other men, they certainly ought to improve the many advantages they have, for acquiring that knowledge which is suited to their station, and to pray earnestly for wisdom to him by whom kings reign, and whose servants they ought to be.

Without a large measure of wisdom they are fit only to be the tools of their own ministers, who are often lovers of themselves, and of their own families — more than of their king and country. But the heart of kings is often unsearchable another sense. Their designs cannot be known by their subjects, or by foreign princes — because they industriously conceal them from the knowledge of all but their privy counselors; and this is often necessary, because a discovery of their counsels would obstruct the execution of them. Besides, the affairs of government are so various and complicated, they have so many designs to carry on, so many harms to obviate, so many opposite tempers of men to consider, and so many unknown difficulties to encounter — that people in a lower station cannot possibly understand the reasons of a great part of their conduct, or the ends which they have in view. It is therefore presumptuous in subjects to pry too narrowly into their behavior, or to be rash with their censures on the public management. Those who take a liberty to

despise authorities, and speak evil of dignities, should be sure that they do not speak evil of those things which they do not understand. If the heart of kings, who are infinitely inferior to God's, is so unsearchable — then how foolish is it to think that we can search out God unto perfection!

Proverbs 25:4-5. "Remove the dross from the silver — and out comes material for the silversmith. Remove the wicked from the king's presence — and his throne will be established through righteousness." The interests of prince and people are so evidently the same. A bad king is so evidently his own enemy, that it may well be wondered at that so many kings have proved tyrants, and exposed themselves to the danger and infamy which are the inseparable attendants of oppression and injustice in men of high place. To account for this fact, we must consider that kings cannot govern their people without the assistance of ministers and counselors, and these servants of government have private interests of their own, different from those of the prince and people, which they too often prosecute with a selfish and wicked spirit. To serve their own covetous and ambitious views, they too often corrupt the mind of their prince with the sweet poison of flattery, and lead him, by their misrepresentations, into false notions of the state of things in his kingdom, and of the character and behavior of many of his subjects, and draw him on to compliance with their own interested or malicious views, to the harm of his kingdom, and the ruin of many of his faithful subjects.

If we read the histories of nations with attention, we shall find that unjust wars, oppressive taxes, iniquitous laws, unjust executions, seditious and civil commotions, the overturning of thrones, and the confusions of kingdoms — have originated in the wicked counsels of bad ministers. The histories of Rehoboam, and Joash, and Ahasuerus, are scriptural instances of this truth.

Wicked men are often compared in Scripture to dross; and as the dross must be separated from the silver before a beautiful vase can be framed, so the wicked must be removed from before the throne, that it may be established in righteousness. Kings need our prayers, that they may be furnished with wisdom to choose their counselors and ministers from their best deserving subjects, and to turn all flatterers and self-seekers out of public employment.

If Rehoboam had possessed so much wisdom, the kingdom might have remained entire in his hand — but Solomon his father could not infuse this wisdom into his mind by all his instructions, and God left him to his folly, that his solemn purpose of dividing his people, and diminishing the kingdom of the house of David, might be fulfilled.

Proverbs 25:6-7. "Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men. It is better for him to say to you, 'Come up here,' than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman, whom you have seen with your eyes."

Impudence is a very disagreeable vice to any man, and it is especially odious to kings, who are jealous of their honor and dignity, and cannot bear those who would intrude into their presence, or push themselves into places of trust or power under them.

It is selfish ambition that prompts people to seek high station and royal favor — but ambition often disappoints its own designs, by an eager pursuit of them, and by those methods which it uses to accomplish them — and where it expected honor, it meets with shame and disgrace.

How mortifying must it be to a man who places his chief happiness in the smiles of a king, and those honors which are derived from earthly majesty — to find himself disgraced in the eyes, and by the order of that prince whom his eyes have beheld, and of whose favor he supposed himself secure!

Kings, if they are wise, will look with a suspicious eye on those who court them for high posts, and will seek out the modest and unassuming to fill every station of importance. If we consult our interest and duty, we shall be contented with the stations in which the all-wise God is pleased to set us, and rather avoid than covet the place of great men. David was anointed with holy oil — and yet he could appeal to God for the falsehood of the charges that were laid against him, of an aspiring mind, and ambitious attempts to obtain a superior station to that which he occupied. It is our business to mind the duties of our present station; and, if providence thinks fit to raise us higher, to follow its calls with humility and gratitude.

If it is a sin for us to put forth ourselves in the presence of a prince — then what lowliness of mind befits us in the presence of him, who regards not the prince more than the peasant! A due impression of divine majesty would humble us in the dust, and fill us with wonder at the least smile of God’s countenance. Our Lord spoke a parable like this proverb of Solomon, and gives a wider extent to the instruction contained in it (the Pharisee and the Tax-collector). It is our duty to entertain such a low opinion of ourselves, as willingly to take a place even below our inferiors, as far as the duties and decencies of our station will permit. None are so likely to meet with disgrace, as those who are too fond of honor, like the Pharisees, whom our Lord severely censures for loving the best seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts. None have so much honor from God or man, as the meek and humble, whose temper it is, in honor to prefer their neighbors, and to serve them in love, and condescend to men of low degree.

Proverbs 25:8. "Do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame?" That is a good maxim, "Do nothing until you have well considered the end of it." Many might have prevented shame, and poverty, and destruction, had they duly considered the possible and probable consequences of their words and conduct. Beasts have not the gift of reason and foresight, and therefore mind only present ease and comfort — but rational beings should act with reason, and not incur lasting misery, to gratify a fit of humor, or a transient passion.

If men considered the consequences of every important action before they entered upon it, it would cut off ninety-nine out of a hundred of the law-suits with which the world is pestered. If it is the desire of saving or gaining money that pushes men to go forth to strive with their neighbors at the bar, they should consider that going to law is little better than fishing with a golden hook. A few fish may possibly be caught — but something may be lost of more value than many fish.

If men are instigated by their pride to go to law, (and pride is the real cause of many more pleas than covetousness,) they should well consider whether they are most likely to gain or lose the cause; or, if they gain it, whether the gain will compensate the loss of time, and money, and temper, which are inseparable from law-suits. That sense of honor which leads so many into contention, would keep them out of it, if it were under the regulation of prudence. That pride which plunges men into the gulf of the law, must end in the most galling remorse, when the cause is lost, and shame, instead of honor, is gained by it.

Contention of every kind ought to be avoided by us. Before we venture to gratify our rage by strife and debate, it is necessary for our peace and comfort, to consider with coolness, whether we have reason on our side. Self-love will tell us that he have met with wrong, although no real injury was done, or intended to us. We cannot expect that the other party, or the judge, (if the matter is referred to a judge,) should have the same bias in our favor, as ourselves.

Proverbs 25:9-10. "If you argue your case with a neighbor, do not betray another man's confidence — or he who hears it may shame you and you will never lose your bad reputation."

If we are forced into debate, the more privately it is managed the better; and therefore, if we think ourselves ill used, our best course is to reason the matter with the offender in the spirit of meekness, to convince him of the wrong he has done to us; and to show him a forgiving spirit, which will be the most effectual means of bringing him to repentance, and to put an end to the difference — if possible, without exposing ourselves or our neighbors to the censure of the world, which will conclude that there are faults on both sides.

If we cannot bring our neighbor to a sense of his fault by this method, our great teacher allows and prescribes other methods of convincing him, which we ought to put in practice only when we are sure that we have met with an offence which will justify our conduct. In other cases, we must keep the matter to ourselves, as the wise man here directs us. When we make complaints of the injustice done us in another manner than our Lord directs us, we will not be believed, and ought not to be believed, until the other party has given in his defense. For he is an unjust judge who passes sentence until both parties are heard. Those who are ever complaining of the injustice of others, may or may not be believed, to the harm of those concerning whom they may complain — but strong suspicions will most certainly be entertained to their own harm, and by their own tongues they bring an indelible reproach upon themselves, as men of a quarrelsome and unforgiving temper.

It is not uncommon for people, when they are at variance with those who had once been their friends, to take every opportunity, and to use every means, however unfair, to blacken their characters. If they have been entrusted by them, in the days of intimacy, with any secret, they will divulge it, to gratify their present irascibility. This is base conduct, and must fix an everlasting stain on those who make use of such abominable methods to support their own credit and interests. A man who has the least degree of generosity in his nature, would rather suffer blame, or lose a cause, than defend himself by such dirty and dishonorable means. But when a man is reduced to such pitiful shifts, it is a strong presumption that cause is not good. On the whole, if we would preserve ourselves from lasting disgrace, we must either leave off contention before it starts — or, if that cannot be done, manage it with the weapons proper for a man and a Christian.

Proverbs 25:11. "A word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." That words may deserve this character, they must be the words of truth. For falsehood and error are on no occasion fit to be spoken. And therefore Job reproves his friends for endeavoring, by false doctrine, to comfort him in the time of his distress. But words may be true and yet unfitly spoken, for although nothing is to be spoken but truth — yet truth is not always to be spoken. Doeg the Edomite was guilty of murder before he killed the priests of the Lord, by telling the enraged tyrant that David had received bread and a sword from Ahimelech. Jonathan was a man of a very opposite spirit, and revealed it by the seasonable mention he made to his father of David's exploit

in slaying Goliath. By putting Saul in mind this noble action, he disarmed for a time his angry resentments.

It is necessary to consider, not only what we speak — but likewise the people to whom we speak, and the time and the place of speaking.

Job complains with justice concerning Bildad, that he spoke things to him, which, though certain and important truths, were not at all fit to be spoken to him in his distressed situation. "To whom have you uttered words?" says he.

Nabal deserved a severe reproof from Abigail — but she did not think it proper to speak to him about his foolish conduct towards David, until he awoke from his drunkenness.

Paul preached in a very different manner at Jerusalem and Athens, when he was before Agrippa, who believed the prophets, and when he was before Felix, who acknowledged no other rule but the light of nature.

"A word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." The words themselves are like apples of a golden hue. The manner of speaking them is like picture of silver, whose elegant apertures give an additional grace to the pleasant fruit that is served up in the exquisite workmanship and precious metal. By words fitly spoken, the fiercest passions have been allayed, and the strongest emnities dissolved. By such words . . .

wicked men have been checked in their career,

fainting souls have been revived,

the perplexed have been relieved from their difficulties, and

Christians have been often invigorated in their work and warfare.

Words fitly spoken unite the pleasant and the profitable, and thereby gain every point that words can gain. In a time of persecution, some ministers met together to consult what was proper to be done in their situation. All of them wore a dejected countenance, and appeared almost at an equal loss to determine what their duty was in their distressed condition — until one of them observed, that they were all immortal until their work was done. This seasonable hint cleared up every countenance, and they parted with spirits ready to encounter every difficulty.

Proverbs 25:12. "Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold, is a wise man’s rebuke to an obedient ear." No words have greater need to be fitly spoken, than words of reproof. Few are capable of reproving wisely, and fewer still are able to receive a reproof in a right manner. Wisdom is necessary in a reprover, to direct him about the time and manner of giving the reproof.

Elihu showed great wisdom and great faithfulness, in performing this difficult office; and when Job had been irritated by the unjust reproofs of his other three friends, he was silent under the smart reproofs of Elihu. For he charged nothing upon Job — but what had some truth in it, and revealed his friendship for Job, and his good opinion of him, with regard to the general course of his behavior, at the time that he rebuked him with great severity, for the unjustifiable expressions which came from when his mind was fretted with the weight of his troubles, and the injurious reflections of the former speakers. An obedient ear to reproof, is a very rare thing. It is observed by

an eminent divine of the last age, that the professors of religion are generally more stubborn against reproof than fornicators, or common swearers, and that they are ready to fly at the faces of men who reprove them, for those very faults which they daily confess to God!

If there was more of the meekness of wisdom revealed in giving reproof, it is probable that greater meekness and submission might be showed in receiving it. Yet a due sense of the evil of our faults, and of the necessity of amendment, would make us to value just rebukes even from the mouth of an enemy.

It is a false sense of honor that makes us to fret at reproof — but if we had the same sense of honor with the wise man, we would not judge ourselves on a supposition that we are unblamable and irreprovable — but reckon it our honor to receive reproof with gratitude, and improve it for the correction of our vices.

Gold earrings were worn in ancient days by people of distinction — but nothing adorns the ear so much, in the judgment of the inspired philosopher, as the obedient hearing of wise reproof. It would be a great honor to us to need no reproof — but this is not to be expected in our degenerate race. We ought, therefore, if we have forfeited our credit by falling into sin, to recover it by welcoming needful rebukes — and if others have been overtaken in a fault, to hold them in the same esteem as formerly, when they have given proper evidence of their repentance, by submitting to reproof. By their sin, they have showed themselves to be men of like frailty with ourselves — by their obedient hearing of reproof, they have revealed a degree of meekness too rarely to be met with among Christians.

Proverbs 25:13. "Like the coolness of snow at harvest time, is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters."

Nothing is more refreshing in the sultry heat of harvest, in those southern climates where the harvest time is very hot, than the cold drink in the sweltering heat.

Equally refreshing to the soul, is the faithful execution of an important message by those who are entrusted with it. It is required of all servants that they be found faithful, and it is required in a special manner of messengers who are employed in distant and important commissions. Fidelity is the more praiseworthy in them, because they are not under the immediate eye of their masters.

Such a messenger was Eliezer to Abraham and Isaac, for he valued the service and interest of his master more than his necessary food. God blessed him with success, to the great satisfaction of his venerable master, and his son Isaac.

If we are employed in any business for another person, we should make a point of managing it with the same activity as if it were a business of our own. Whether we are successful or not, we shall give satisfaction to our employer, and receive his thanks, if he is not wholly destitute of the feelings of gratitude.

If we are obliged to perform any affairs of consequence by the hands of other men, it will be our wisdom to entrust men of honor and tried fidelity with our affairs. For he who is faithful in one thing, is likely to be faithful in another thing also, though of much greater consequence. Ministers of the gospel are messengers of Christ, for the benefit of the churches. If they are faithful, they are accepted of Christ and useful to men.

Proverbs 25:14. "Like clouds and wind without rain, is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give."

Covetousness is so much detested in the world, that the people who are guilty of this vice are ashamed of it, and desire to be esteemed liberal; and therefore, if they have ever been able to master their disposition so far as to perform one generous action in the course of their life, they will boast of it as long as they live, and think themselves ill-used if they are not honored by other men with the character of being generous people. But it is moreover very usual for them, to talk of charities which they never bestowed, and thus they add vice to vice. Their arrogance and deceit, added to their stinginess, makes them doubly detestable. They are like clouds carried about with the wind, which seem to be full of rain — when there is not a drop for the refreshment of the weary earth. Those who boast and are ready in promising — but are never ready to perform, are likewise like clouds without water. When you ask any favor from them, they give you great reason, by their frankness and professions, to believe that they will serve you — but when they are called on for performance, some unlucky accident has come in their way, and they can do nothing for you at present. They will only give you new promises, which you may believe if you can — and they will be sure to perform them as well as the former ones.

It is shameful to behave in this manner, raising expectations — and then disappointing them, and perhaps reducing to great straits and perplexities the very men who were trusting to their friendship. The apostles Peter and Jude speak of a set of men that may be compared to clouds without rain, because of their religious professions and promises. These are false teachers, who make large boasts of their knowledge in the mystery of the gospel, and promise liberty to men who will receive their doctrines, while they themselves are ignorant of all sound principles, and in bondage to corruption. No kind of corrupt teachers in our times answer this description so much as those of the Church of Rome, who pretend to make a monopoly of Heaven for those of their own church, and who sell, for small pieces of money, the most wonderful promises — all which will be found by their deluded votaries to vanish into smoke when the performance is expected!

Proverbs 25:15. "Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone." A prince is not easily pacified when he reckons his dignity despised, and is authority trampled under foot. He is little used to contradiction, and therefore has small experience of those situations in which forbearance is to be exercised. Yet strong as the passions of princes generally are, such is the power of patience and meekness, that those virtues allay their stormy passions, and a soft answer softens their hearts, although they were as hard as their bones!

Saul was so fierce in his rage against David, that in spite to him, he slew eighty-five priests of the Lord — and yet David melted his heart unto softness by his kind behavior, and his calm defense of his own innocency. The tyrant felt a temporary change in his temper, and said, "Is this your voice, my son David? Return, for I will no more do you hurt."

If meekness and gentleness have such a powerful influence upon princes; if they can break hearts of stone — then how great must be their influence upon private men, and people of moderate passions? It is certainly a piece of great folly if we will not make use of these harmless weapons to end debates, when they are the most effectual means for that end. But are there not some men that will not be wrought upon by such means? Yes. But they are savage brutes, and not rational creatures. Their hearts are made of something harder than adamant; and they are objects of our pity, because they are cursed with such unrelenting hearts that they cannot possibly taste any of

those social pleasures that sweeten the life of man. Nothing can subdue the fierceness of their spirits, but that grace which turns the flint into a pool of water.

Proverbs 25:16. "If you find honey, eat just enough — too much of it, and you will vomit." The God who has replenished the earth with his goodness, has not required us to lead a beggarly and uncomfortable life. He allows us to eat as much honey, and to enjoy as much of every earthly comfort as is sufficient for us, to strengthen our bodies, and to refresh our spirits. All that he forbids is that excess in eating and drinking, and other physical enjoyments, which would enfeeble our frame, clog our souls, and end in bitterness.

Although we are allowed to eat as much honey as is sufficient, we must not eat what would suffice to satiate a ravenous appetite. Reason, and not appetite, must direct us when we have enough, otherwise there would be no such sin as intemperance in the world.

Nature itself makes us to feel the harmful effects of immoderate indulgence, which overloads the stomach, and turns the sweetest things into bitterness, so that no ease can be obtained until they are vomited up. When we are at a well spread table, there are more guests present than such as are invited, for the devil comes to graft some temptation upon the dishes which are served up, and very often he finds an opportunity of getting some iniquity to pass down the throat along with the food or drink that is used.

We are to remember at all times our chief end; and this is explained by the Apostle in these words, "Whether, therefore, you eat or drink, or whatever you do — do all to the glory of God." From God we received our food, and it is a very wicked thing in men to use it as a weapon of rebellion against him, by making a god of our bellies. Nothing earthly must be allowed to engross our affections, so as to sensualize our souls, and alienate our minds from spiritual objects. The time of our connection with the world is short, let us therefore rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world is passing away.

Proverbs 25:17. "Seldom set foot in your neighbor’s house — lest he be weary of you, and hate you."

We must not indulge ourselves without restraint in any of the pleasures of life, however delightful. Honey is not so sweet to the taste — as friendship, among those who have a cordial love to one another, are to the heart. But as we must eat only so much honey as is sufficient for us, so we must use a prudent caution in our familiarities with our most affectionate friends. Although their houses are a home to us — yet we must not be frequenting them at every hour, nor continue in them until our company becomes wearisome. It is highly proper for us to visit our friends, and preserve by that means our mutual friendship, and enjoy the sweets of it — but it is very improper to weary a friend by too frequent visits, which may have the unhappy effect of dissolving the closest intimacy, by creating disgust where love in former times took place. Our friends have their business to mind, and their time is valuable to them. Friendship is bought too dear, by him who ceases to be master of his own time, and is called off the most necessary employment to receive a visitant.

Besides, we ought to consider the circumstances of our friends, and take care not to load them by our visits with expense which they may be unable or unwilling to bear. The freedom of friendship does not consist in a liberty to weary one another — but in a liberty to contribute to one another’s

happiness and comfort.

How different are the pleasures of earthly friendships, from those which are given to Christians in their admission to fellowship with God! The oftener we visit the best of all friends — the more we are welcome; and the more we frequent his house to partake of the provisions of it — he is the better pleased with our conduct.

Proverbs 25:18. "Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow, is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor." This proverb is sufficient to strike an alarm into all evil speakers who spread scandal against their neighbors, merely because they have nothing else to do, or because they have some little quarrel with them. Consider, you who deal in such evil conversation, whether you could think of treating the objects of your defamatory discourse as Jael did Sisera, or as Joab treated Abner. Would you shrink with horror at the thought of beating out your neighbor's brains with a hammer, or of piercing him with a sword, or a sharp arrow? Why then do you indulge yourselves in a piece of the like barbarity, destroying, as far as you can, that reputation which is dear to men as their life, and wounding all their best interests by mangling their character?

It is a happy thing to be free from this terrible miss chief of a virulent tongue. We should therefore live unblamably, that we may take away all just occasion from those who would reproach us. And yet the purest innocence will not be a sure protection to us from the tongue that speaks evil. We must commit the care of our good name, as well as all our other interests, to the Lord — and he will preserve us from the scourge of the tongue, or from all the evil effects of it.

Proverbs 25:19. "Like a broken tooth or a foot out of joint, is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble." A broken tooth, and a foot out of joint, are not only useless for their respective offices — but the causes of great pain and uneasiness. In like manner, a friend that does not show kindness in the day of distress, is not only an useless friend — but likewise causes many painful feelings in those who trusted to his kindness. The supposed insincerity of Job's friends produced great bitterness of spirit in that venerable sufferer, and added greatly to that load of distress which lay upon his body and spirit; and he compares them to the brooks of Tema, which abounded with snow in the winter — but had no water in them for the thirsty traveler in the sultry heat of summer.

Let us be faithful in our friendships, as well as in the duties of every other relation. Insincerity and inconstancy in friendship, is immoral and impious. As the before mentioned sufferer observes, "To him who is afflicted, pity should be showed by his friend." In the times of our distress, we have reason to expect sympathy from our friends — but we must not be too optimistic in our hopes; they may prove unable to help us, or unfaithful, or some temporary alienation may estrange them from us. Or God for our chastisement or trial, may bereave us of the comforts of their friendship, or trouble may fret our spirits, and make us to think that they are become cold to us, when they show us all that friendship which ought to be expected from frail creatures like ourselves. When we lament the treachery or insincerity of our friends, we should remember that David, and Christ himself, felt all the bitterness of this calamity. One of our Lord's disciples betrayed him, and his most affectionate, and highly favored friends forsook him. In many cases of this kind we have greater reason to complain of ourselves, than of our false friends. For had we chosen our friends more wisely, and fixed our regard to then upon the ground of piety — we would not have found so much reason to complain of violated professions.

Proverbs 25:20. "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on nitre — is one who sings songs to a heavy heart."

He who takes away a garment in cold weather, leaves the person whom he robs of it to freeze, and perhaps to perish. Vinegar poured upon nitre deprives it of all its virtue and usefulness. Just so, he who tries to charm away deep-rooted sorrows by the help of music, only sinks the person whom he designs to cheer, into a deeper melancholy.

It is to be confessed that sorrows of a slight kind may be diverted and soothed by the charms of music, as the spirit of Elisha was composed for prophesying by a minstrel. But when the heart is laden with grief, it is exasperated and not revived by unseasonable and ill-directed endeavors to dispel the sorrow which feeds upon it. Mirth and gaiety, and the sprightly airs of vocal and instrumental music, deaden the spirit, as vinegar does nitre, and are just as ineffectual to restore gladness, as the taking away of clothes in cold weather is to restore heat. Is any man afflicted? Let him pray. Does any man wish to administer comfort to the afflicted soul? Let him weep, and not laugh, with those who weep. Is the heart oppressed with anguish, or the conscience laden with guilt? Let the Scripture, and not instruments of music, be applied for relief. The music of David's harp may indeed be still used for driving away the evil spirit. His psalms are full of strong consolations, and we shall never sink into despondency while we muse on the precious and reviving truths which he presents to our consideration, and endeavor to walk in the steps of his faith.

It is doubtless our duty to administer comfort to the mourners — but we must take heed to use those means which are proper to the end, that we may not deserve that reproof which Job, with great justice, gave his friends, "Miserable comforters are you all!"

Proverbs 25:21. "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." This precept is grievous to flesh and blood. We are disposed by our pride and rage to inflict a severe revenge, not only on our enemies — but even on our offending friends. To do unto them as they have done unto us, is not reckoned sufficient — but sevenfold vengeance must be rendered into their bosom. A perceived insult has been often returned by an angry barrage. But we who are Christians have not so learned Christ. Enmity against God is infinitely worse than enmity against us — and yet God spares his enemies, and does them good, giving them sunshine and rain and fruitful seasons. We ourselves were once alienated from God, and enemies in our mind by wicked works. If we had been recompensed according to our works, we would now have been in the lake of fire and brimstone! But God who is rich in mercy, sent his Son to accomplish our redemption from ruin. By Christ, we who were guilty of horrid enmity against God, have received his sin-atoning sacrifice. We are reconciled to God, and blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Shall we now think that God lays an unreasonable command upon us, when he requires us to be charitable and kind to our enemies, and not to return railing for railing — but courtesies for injuries?

It is easy for us to say that we forgive our enemies — but do we make it evident in our works that we forgive them in love? We may bring our minds without very great difficulty to overlook their injuries, and to bury them in silence — but a sullen disdain of injuries is no Christian grace. Our duty is to wish real happiness to our enemies in this world and the next, and to show the truth of our love in praying for them, and in doing them good as opportunity presents, and their needs

require.

It was so habitual to Bishop Cranmer to show kindness to those who had wronged him, that it became a proverb: "If any man would have a good turn from the bishop, let him do him an injury." But will not behavior of this kind lay a man open to injuries? No.

Proverbs 25:22. "In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."

It is said to be a custom to this day among the Arabians, to cure some diseases, by the application of burning coals to the head. The disease of rancor and spite will certainly be healed, for the most part, by those coals of love that Solomon here directs us to heap upon the heads of our enemies. As the hard metals are softened and melted by the fire — so the hard and stubborn spirit is softened and melted by the solid expressions of charity and meekness. He is a wild beast of the most untameable kind, who feels no shame for his own conduct, nor any warm emotions of gratitude to him whom he has offended — when he sees him returning good for evil. No enmity is stronger than the enmity of man's heart to God — and God makes use of his own kindness to subdue it! We are to be followers of God as dear children, and try the like experiment upon our own enemies, as far as the infinite difference of people and circumstances will admit the resemblance. If our enemies are warmed into friends, have we not gained a nobler victory, by gaining our brother, than if we had humbled them to the dust? The pleasantest and noblest of victories is to overcome evil with good. But perhaps we shall be losers by kindness to our enemies? Who knows but their hearts may be untamably savage, and then our gifts are thrown away upon them? Let them be what they will — our gifts are not thrown away. If they persist to return evil for good, the Lord shall graciously reward you. The Lord loves mercy and goodness, and there are no instances of it that he loves better, and rewards more bountifully, than those by which we most resemble himself, and cross our selfish and haughty spirits.

David preserved the life of a railing Shimei from the rage of Abishai, as he had formerly done the life of a persecuting tyrant. The godly man hoped that God would return him good for the evil which his enemies did to him, when he showed kindness to them, and his hopes were not disappointed.

Proverbs 25:23. "As a north wind brings rain, so a gossiping tongue brings angry looks."

It is a great encouragement to tale-bearers, to observe that their wicked stories are heard with attention. If a man looks upon them with a cheerful countenance, and listens to their tales, and makes them welcome to his table — they naturally conclude that the person to whom they speak has as bad a heart as themselves, and they will not fail to bring him new stories of the like kind, as soon as they have got an opportunity to learn or to fabricate them. But if the receiver of stolen goods is a sharer with the thief in his guilt, and if any man who encourages another in evil partakes in his sin — then he who hears the backbiter with delight is little better than himself, and would probably follow the same trade if he had the same talents for it.

We cannot, therefore, clear ourselves from the sin of backbiting, unless we refuse to receive a bad report of our neighbor, and testify our displeasure, by all proper methods, at the base conduct of the assassins that would murder in the dark, the good-name of their fellow-creatures. When the murderers of Isbosheth brought their master's head to David, judging from their own disposition

that it would be an acceptable present to him — he treated them in such a manner that no man ever sent another present of the like kind to him. And if we gave proper evidence to those who expect to entertain us by ill-natured stories, that we have no relish for them — then they would not trouble us a second time.

Anger is a bad passion, as it is commonly exerted — but we may be angry and not sin, and in this case, we sin if we do not put on an angry countenance. But as the north wind not only drives away rain in some places — but likewise brings it in other places, or at other times in the same place — so an angry countenance brings a backbiting tongue.

He who meets with insolent and surly treatment, may conceal his sense of the injury from the person who slanders him in this manner, because he thinks it more prudent to stifle his displeasure — but he will be tempted to take revenge by speaking evil of him in his absence, for nothing is commonly more irritating, or sticks more deeply in the heart, than angry and imperious treatment, and no injury is harder to be borne with patience.

If other men speak evil of us, we should examine our own conduct impartially, that we may know whether we have not given them some provocation. If we have, we should look upon ourselves to be the more criminal people; as Judah acknowledged that Tamar was more righteous than himself, because his own behavior had tempted her to the sin, for which he thought she deserved to be burnt.

Other people have at least as good a right to talk against our ill conduct, as we have to give them occasion for it.

Let us neither speak evil of men,

nor countenance evil speakers,

nor give any man a just occasion to speak evil of us,

nor burst into rage when they have treated us in this manner.

Let us in all things follow meekness, righteousness, charity, and the example of Christ.

Proverbs 25:24. "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."

Solomon put this proverb into his own edition of the proverbs — but the men of Hezekiah finding it likewise in those papers from which they extracted this appendix, inserted it here likewise. They justly considered it as a useful admonition to women, and to men that have wives to choose — and wished it not to be forgotten.

Proverbs 25:25. "Like cold water to a weary soul, is good news from a distant land."

Nothing is more the object of desire in a hot country, than cold water when men are thirsty; and nothing is more agreeable than to hear glad tidings from a distant country. Good news is always agreeable — but good news from a far country is most agreeable, because they have been the subject of tedious and anxious thoughts, and because they generally respect some object of importance.

Solomon had experience of this fact, when he sent his ships on voyages that lasted three years, and when he had affairs of importance to be transacted in other kingdoms. We who move in the lower sphere of life, have little concern with foreign countries — but if we have the generous spirit of Christians, it must give us great pleasure to hear of anything that tends to the happiness of other nations, or the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom among men. We daily pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, and it would certainly give us much joy to hear of any event whereby our prayers are fulfilled.

Let us in the mean time rejoice at the good tidings brought to us from far countries by the ministers of God, who tell us of things that they have heard from the uttermost parts of the earth, even glory to the righteous.

Heaven is the better country from whence we have heard tidings that will forever gladden our hearts, and fill our mouths with praise. Messengers from that blessed region have been sent to our earth with glad tidings of great joy to all the people of God, and to every Gentile nation, that to us is born a Savior, and that he is now gone to his native Heaven; and will appear again on earth to our complete salvation!

Proverbs 25:26. "Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked." A righteous man falls down before the wicked when he is oppressed and cannot obtain justice — but is obliged to submit to injury and violence. When such injustice prevails in a country, everything is in a state of disorder. The fountain of justice is poisoned. The public administration, instead of being public blessing, is a general curse. Those who should be the fathers and guardians of the poor, are worse than street robbers, for they not only pillage them of their property — but grind their faces, and pull of their skins and pick their bones.

He who poisons a public well or fountain, deserves a thousand deaths. Just so, those who corrupt the fountains of justice must be equally criminal in the sight of God. He is an enemy not to men only — but to God, by giving encouragement to wickedness, and suppressing goodness, and perverting an ordinance of God into an engine for serving the designs of Satan! Those righteous men who fall before the wicked, must take care that they fall not into sin, for they are strongly tempted to it by their unjust circumstances. When wicked men drive the righteous into sin, the fountains become corrupt, in another and worse sense than that now mentioned. For those who are like springs of water for the refreshment of their neighbors becoming polluted and loathsome, are a means of perverting and poisoning those who are too much disposed to judge of religion and duty from the behavior of religious people. When the righteous persist under temptation in duty, they have rich sources of comfort in the promises of God, and the doctrine of a future judgment.

Proverbs 25:27. "It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one's own honor."

Men may eat some honey, so likewise men are warranted to pay due regard to their own honor. If there is anything worthy of praise, Paul recommends it to us to think on it; and our Lord enjoins us to make our light to shine before men, that they may glorify our Father who is in Heaven. But it is a loathsome thing to the stomach to eat too much honey — and it is a loathsome thing for a man to be anxious about his honor, and to fish for praise, as too many do, who use a variety of methods to obtain the applause of men; sometimes putting on all the external appearances of humility with

that view, and saying things of themselves which would inspire them with fury if they were said by another person, or believed by that very person to whom they are spoken.

We must value our own reputation because it enables us to be useful to men, and to glorify God. But when we indulge an unbridled desire after honor from men — we forget our chief end, we disqualify ourselves for the most important duties, and we expose ourselves to the worst temptations. If our fortune were equal to that of Caesar, our ambition might draw us to equal in crimes of that cut-throat of mankind. The humble are sensible that they deserve shame rather than honor, and would be content that all their honor were taken from them, that it might be ascribed unto God to whom it truly belongs. The vain and proud would rob God Almighty of his crown — that they might set it upon their own heads. But God will not allow them to escape without a punishment suited to their crime. When Herod was affecting the honors of a God — he perished by a viler death than if he had died in a ditch!

Proverbs 25:28. "He who has no rule over his own spirit — is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

It is necessary for our happiness and peace, that we should have the government of our own spirits. He who possesses not himself, possesses nothing — although he should possess all other things. As a city that is broken down, and without walls, is exposed to the invasion of every enemy — so the man who has not a mastery over his own desires and affections, is a ready prey to every devil. His imagination is tainted, his corrupt desires are inflamed, and his active powers hurried into the most criminal excesses by every slight temptation. A city in flames, or a ship seized by a drunken and mutinous crew, are not so terrible spectacles — as a soul where the judgment and reason are laid desolate by intemperate passions and appetites. What harms have been wrought, and what oceans of blood have been poured out by the passion of anger alone, when it was unrestrained by the principle of conscience? When Simeon and Levi heard the dying blessings of their father upon the rest of his sons, and the severe censures that he passed upon themselves — what remorse must have torn their hearts at the thought of that fatal day when in their cruel fury they slew so many men, and destroyed the city of Shechem.

Let us hold in with a strong and steady hand our disorderly passions, otherwise they will make us wild beasts, of a more furious kind than wolves and leopards; because our rational powers will be forced into their service, and tend to no other purpose — but to make us more evil and destructive enemies of mankind. No leopards or lions ever destroyed men or beasts in such multitudes, as those tyrants have done, who were slaves to their own love of glory and vindictive spirits.

It is a happy thing when the body is subject to the mind, and the mind deeply penetrated with a habitual sense of the authority of God. That we may be placed in this delightful state, we must give up ourselves to the Lord, and pray for the accomplishment of these promises, "I will put my Spirit within you, and I will cause you to walk in my statutes." "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid."

# 01.26. Proverbs 26

Chapter 26.

Proverbs 26:1-28

Proverbs 26:1. "Like snow in summer or rain in harvest — so honor is not fitting for a fool."

Snow in summer and rain in harvest are unseasonable, disagreeable, and sometimes very hurtful. In like manner, honors bestowed on foolish and wicked people sit very ungracefully on them, and enable them often to prove hurtful to their inferiors. When Haman was raised to high station, he soon became hurtful to all men by his pride; and if providence had not baffled his designs, he would have ruined a whole nation of innocent people, and banished true religion out of the world. This proverb contains a very important instruction to those who have the disposal of offices and honors in their hand. By advancing unworthy people to stations of influence in church or state, they may render themselves deeply accountable for the follies and crimes of other men. One of the Caliphs of Babylon, was so sensible of this, that he voluntarily resigned his authority, and refused to choose his successor, that he might not be accountable for his conduct.

Most men are fond of honor and preferment, as if happiness were inseparably connected with it — but few are sensible how difficult it is to wear honors with a befitting dignity, and how much better the providence of God has chosen their situation than they could have chosen it for themselves. Great numbers of those princes who make a despicable or hateful figure in history, might have befit a private station very well, and left the world lamented by all their acquaintances.

It belongs to God to determine our station in life, and to us to believe that he has determined it in his wisdom and goodness, and to fulfill the duties of it without aspiring to those honors that God has not been pleased to bestow upon us. Those that are in stations of honor ought not to trust for honor to their stations — but to seek it by wisdom, without which, their exalted situation will only render their disgrace more visible. The infamous names of Pilate and Tiberius, and Caiaphas, might have been buried with those of the meanest instruments of their iniquities, if they had not, to their great unhappiness, filled high stations while they lived.

Proverbs 26:2. "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow — an undeserved curse does not come to rest." As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come. When you see a bird wandering about, or a swallow flying hither and thither, you are not afraid of any hurt from them. They will not touch you — but fly back to their nests.

You have no more reason to be afraid of hurt from unmerited curses, whoever the people are that pronounce them. They will fly back to the place from which they came, and light with dreadful vengeance on the heads of those who profaned their Maker’s name, and gave scope to their own malice in uttering them. For as they delight in cursing — they shall have cursing for their portion; and unless the pardoning mercy of God prevents, their curses will enter into their bones.

Groundless fears are real torments, for no passion is more distressing than fear. Whether it has a just cause or not, its present effect is the same, and therefore God in mercy has given us antidotes against every needless and unprofitable kind of fear. The curses which wicked men sometimes pour forth from their vindictive spirits, have such a dreadful sound, that they strike an impression of horror into the tender spirits of the innocent and conscientious, although they know they have not deserved them. But if our consciences do not condemn us, we need not be afraid of the blasphemous imprecations of the wicked, although they were expressed in the coarsest language of Hell. The curses of a conclave of cardinals, or the excommunications of an assembly of divines — could do no harm to one whom his own heart does not reproach. They may open their mouths wide, and speak great swelling words of terror — but their arm is short, and God has not entrusted them with his thunderbolts. Their curses, instead of being harmful, will be very useful to us, if we are wise enough to imitate the conduct of David, whose meekness was approved, his prayers kindled into a flame of desires, and his hopes invigorated by them. But we have just reason to fear the undeserved curse.

Although people when they meet with ill usage, are not warranted to wish a curse upon those who wrong them — yet the curses that are extorted by anguish from their hearts, will not fall to the ground. The most just curse in the world is the curse of God, which lies upon all the children of disobedience. We cannot escape the execution of it — but through Christ, who was made a curse in our stead.

Proverbs 26:3. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the backs of fools!" A fool is more brutish than the horse or the donkey. For the horse, as well as the ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib — but foolish sinners are insensible of the obligations they are under, both to God and man. The horse needs the lash to chastise it when it is unruly, and to urge its speed when it is dull. The donkey, when it was used for riding, needed the bridle to govern its course — or the spur to push it on its way. The rod is equally needful for the fool's back. Are you the unhappy fathers of foolish children? You must make use of the rod and reproof to give them wisdom. Are you authorized to bear rule in the church? The rod of church discipline must be applied to offenders, that they may be reclaimed, and others warned. Are you magistrates? The rod which God has put into your hands may be a means of preserving young malefactors from the gibbet at a more advanced period of life. Are you wise? Beware of turning aside unto folly, that you may never need the rod. Are you fools? Learn wisdom, or do not blame those whom duty and charity will oblige to use the rod for your correction. Is it not better that you should be treated by your superiors with love, and in the spirit of meekness, than to be beaten with the rod? Are you obliged, for your faults, to undergo the pains of church censure, or criminal law? Kiss the rod, and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you. Have you formerly endured the rod? Let the impressions and effects of it abide with you for life, lest the sword of divine vengeance be unsheathed against you, because you refused to hear the voice of the rod and him who has appointed it.

Proverbs 26:4. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself."

There are many cases in which a fool is to be heard, and not answered at all. When a scorner reviles us, it is needless to reprove him for it. For he is a dog, and the best way you can deal with him, is to let him bark until he ceases of his own accord — if you cast a stone at him, he will only

follow you the longer and bark the more furiously. When Rabshakeh railed at Hezekiah, and blasphemed the God of Israel, the servants of Hezekiah were expressly forbidden by their master to answer him a word, for he knew that an answer would only produce some blasphemous reply. Our Lord himself often kept silence when impertinent questions were asked of him. He was well acquainted with all the secrets of wisdom, and, if he had spoken, his words would have been the fittest that could be spoken in these cases — but silence was, in his infallible judgment, fitter than any answer that his perfect wisdom could make. But must this be a rule for us in every case? Should not the multitude of words be answered; and when the fool mocks, shall no man make him ashamed? In many cases it is very fit that a fool's words should be answered — only you must take care in answering not to imitate him. If he speaks unreasonable, profane, peevish, or passionate words — then you must not answer him in his own style. You are angry at him for his folly, and reprove him for the extravagance of his behavior — and therefore you cannot but confess that yourselves are worthy of a very sharp reproof, if you behave like him at the very time that you are testifying your displeasure at his conduct. You cannot allege that his passionate manner of speaking and acting will justify you in behaving passionately. For if one fire kindled from Hell burns so fiercely, and threatens to devour everything that comes in its way, why should another fire be lighted from it to do still greater harm?

It does not befit the followers of Jesus to return railing for railing, or one angry word for another — but in whatever manner others talk, our tongues ought still to be governed by the law of meekness and charity.

There are no cases in which this rule is more frequently transgressed than in religious disputes. Passion and railing, when they are employed in the support of truth, appear to many to be just expressions of Christian zeal; and that noble and necessary grace of humility has been brought into suspicion, and regarded with a very jealous eye, by reason of those who have substituted passion in its place, and called it by a name to which it is as well entitled as the prince of darkness is to be called an angel of light. The Scripture enjoins Christians to instruct opposers in meekness. It declares expressly that the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God; and it informs us that Michael, that great prince among the heavenly hosts, dared not bring a railing accusation against Satan.

Proverbs 26:5. "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes." When we answer a fool, we must give him the answer which his folly deserves and requires. If you do not answer him at all, other men may believe that he is in the right, and where there is any danger of that, the edification of your neighbors calls upon you to show the folly of what he has said. Besides, if he is not answered, he will conclude that you cannot answer him, and his vanity and self-conceit will be increased by your silence. The fool when he is not answered, will conclude that his cause is good. For although prudence binds up your tongue from speaking in the ears of a fool — yet there is no man who reckons himself less a fool than he, when he is not baffled in argument. It will be doing a good piece of service to the world, and to the fool himself, if you can answer him according to his folly, so as to humble his vanity, and make him ashamed of himself. Our Lord triumphed by his wisdom over his insolent enemies. When they blamed him for curing distressed people on the Sabbath day, he exposed their self-inconsistency and inhumanity, to the conviction of the people, and their own shame. When Pilate insolently pretended to a sovereign power of life and death, and thereby entrenched on the prerogatives of the God of Heaven, our Lord (who did

not open his mouth, because he knew it was to no purpose, to vindicate his own injured character,) gave his assuming judge an answer which reminded him who he was but a man.

Let us seek wisdom from God, that we may know when we should speak, and when we should be silent; and that we may be preserved from speaking such things as are improper for the mouths of saints, and taught to give an answer with meekness and prudence to the words of wise men or fools, as occasion requires.

Proverbs 26:6. "Like cutting off one’s feet or drinking damage, is the sending of a message by the hand of a fool."

It would be very ridiculous in a man when he sends a servant on an errand, to cut off his feet, and disable him from doing that business in which he was employing him. It is equally foolish to employ an unwise or unfaithful man in a business of importance. For he is like a man whose feet are cut off, for any good he can be expected to do, and his employer not only meets with damage in his affairs — but he drinks damage in great abundance, losing his reputation for sense, and suffering great loss in his important interests. This proverb, like many others of those who were copied out by Hezekiah’s men, is instructive chiefly to princes and other great men. But it is not without its use to us also in the management of our less important concerns, which we ought for our credit and comfort to manage with prudence.

One great branch of prudence, consists in employing those to assist us in any affair, who will discharge that trust like wise and honest men. Have we a vote in the election of the legislative body? We are accountable for the use we make of it.

If we choose for our representative, one who is likely to betray the interests of the nation, for serving his private interest, or the purposes of a faction — then we concur, in his person, in all the public harm that he does. Do we choose a minister to take the oversight of our souls? We must beware of fixing our choice upon an ignorant, or erroneous, or graceless man, otherwise we cut out the tongue, (to use Solomon’s style,) and bring great damage, for anything we know, not only upon our own souls — but upon the souls of thousands of our fellow men.

Proverbs 26:7. "Like a lame man’s legs that hang limp, is a proverb in the mouth of a fool." The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a proverb in the mouth of fools. A lame man is very awkward in his manner of walking. But a fool appears with a still worse grace, when he presumes to talk of subjects beyond his reach, or to speak in praise of those virtues to which he is a total stranger in his practice. A clown would be laughed at, if he were to talk about wisdom and knowledge. It would fill a person with indignation, to hear a thief speak in praise of justice, a drunkard commend temperance, or a hypocrite talk in praise of holiness. Our tongues and our lives must be of a piece, otherwise all our professions will serve no other purpose but to condemn ourselves, and to procure us a portion in the eternal world with hypocrites. A grave and wise sentence befits the mouth of a wise and holy man. It is very unfitting in a Christian to be silent on occasions when he is called to glorify God or edify men. It is still more unfitting in a saint, to allow himself on any occasion in foolish and vain talking. When open sinners profane the Scripture and religion, by their unhallowed mouths, they are like an donkey dressing himself in a lion’s skin.

There must be a conformity between every part of our character and conduct, if we wish to be upright in the way of the Lord, and like Caleb and Joshua to follow the Lord fully. No man in this

world is perfect in wisdom and goodness — but a uniformity of conduct in the general course of life is attainable. Although we cannot all run in the way of God's commandments, or mount up with wings as eagles — yet we may walk on with an even course in the way of holiness, showing an equal respect to those precepts which regard our speech, and to those which regulate our heart and conduct.

God denounces vengeance upon those hypocrites that take his covenant into their mouths, while they join with the wicked in their sinful courses — but to him who orders his conduct aright, he promises to show the salvation of God.

Proverbs 26:8. "Like tying a stone in a sling is the giving of honor to a fool."

Honor is not fitting for a fool, and he who gives him honor is himself a fool, for he acts like one who means to sling a stone at some mark — and yet binds it up in the sling that it cannot get away from it. He disappoints his own intentions, by taking the most absurd means in the world to accomplish them. When we give our applause to foolish people, expecting their favor, or hoping that our praise will induce them to respect their own honor in their manner of conduct — we only make them more arrogant and domineering, and swell that pride in their hearts which makes them insufferable to all about them.

If those who have the disposal of high offices, bestow them upon undeserving men, they are only preparing disgrace and repentance for themselves — as king Ahasuerus found to his great vexation, when he was deceived so far by that wicked minister whom he had foolishly advanced, that he ignorantly signed a death-warrant for his much beloved queen and her whole nation.

Men cannot search the hearts of their fellow creatures, and if they are the means of advancing some to public offices who disappoint the hopes that were entertained of them, they cannot help it. But we can form some probable opinions of the dispositions of men from their behavior, and ought to do so, before we take any share in placing them in those stations where they are likely to do much good or much hurt.

Besides, we should pray to the Searcher of hearts to direct our judgments on all such occasions, as we find the disciples did in the choice of an apostle. Without consideration and prayer, we run a great risk of sharing in other men's sins, when we contribute to the elevation of men to places, where, if they are fools, they will find great scope for their folly. But does not God himself often give honor to fools? Yes. But who are you, O man, who questions God? God is the absolute sovereign of the world, and is not bound to give an account of any of his matters. He is the judge of nations, who has a right to punish men by subjecting them to the power of fools. He is the infinitely wise God, who brings good out of evil.

We must be holy, as God is holy — but we must not pretend to claim the prerogatives of sovereignty, because God alone is the sovereign of the world. Our business is to acquiesce in the disposals of God, to adore where we cannot comprehend him, and to regulate our conduct not by his secret will — but his revealed will. We are thereby taught that wicked men ought to be despised in our eyes, and that we must honor those who fear the Lord.

Proverbs 26:9. "Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand, is a proverb in the mouth of a fool."

Wise and holy sayings, especially on deep and mysterious subjects, are not only improper for the mouth of fools — but often hurtful to themselves and others. They are like thorns, or sharp-pointed weapons in the hands of drunkards — which wound the hands that hold them, and may be used to wound others who happen to be in company with them.

Proverbs have sometimes been hurtful even in the mouths of wise men, through the imperfection of their wisdom. Job's friends dealt much in proverbs, which they had learned by tradition from their wise ancestors — but they misapplied them to the case of Job. Although they meant to plead the cause of God — yet they displeased him so much by their uncharitable speeches against Job, which they drew by unjust inference, from undoubted truths, that he told them they had not spoken the thing that was right concerning him, as his servant Job had done. If Job had not been a strong believer, their management of truth must have sunk him into despondency.

If wise and holy men have done hurt to themselves and others, by meddling with proverbs beyond their capacity, or by unjust comments upon them — then what harm may a fool do by dealing in them! When he speaks of the wonderful mercy of God, he will praise it at the expense of divine justice, and maim the attributes of God by dashing them one against another. When he speaks of the necessity and beauty of holiness, he will bestow on it a part of that glory which is due to Christ. When be speaks of the efficacy of the atonement, he will insinuate encouragements to sin into the minds of his hearers. Every doctrine will be perverted by his management.

Or, if he speaks correctly and properly on any religious subject — yet the inconsistency of his life with his words, will bring suspicions to the harm of truth into the minds of those who converse with him. And if he shows the true way to heaven — and yet takes the road to Hell — those who pay any regard to him, will be disposed to think that the way in which he chooses to walk is preferable in his eyes, to that of which he only talks. From this proverb we learn, that all ministers of the gospel must be men of knowledge, soundness in the faith, and a pious conduct. Without the former qualities, they cannot handle the Word of God in an edifying manner, and may harm precious souls. Without pious living, their conduct will do more evil than their sermons can do good. Christians ought to have their speech seasoned with salt. Knowledge of sound doctrine is necessary to furnish their lips with this kind of discourse. And their practice must correspond with their words, otherwise they make themselves, and, perhaps, their profession likewise, to be abhorred.

Proverbs 26:10. "The great God who formed everything, gives the fool his hire and the transgressor his wages."

Sinners shall in due time be punished, whether their wicked courses are the effect of folly and inconsideration, or of stubborn and hardened dispositions. Fools will not be excused, because they did not know, or did not think upon the evil of their courses. For men are accountable not only for the knowledge they possessed — but likewise for that which they might have gotten, if they had not wickedly neglected to make use of the means of grace, and to improve those talents which were given them. Our Lord clearly shows this in the parable concerning the talents, where he tells us, that the man who had received but one talent was punished, not for spending it in riot and dissipation — but for hiding it in a napkin. Those that have been eminent transgressors, that have rebelled against the light, and stifled the loud clamors of their consciences, and led others in the way of sin — shall be repaid in proportion to the greatness and aggravations of their offences.

Every sinner that continues impenitent, shall receive from God that recompense of his error which is fit; and divine omniscience and justice shall shine in proportioning the severity of punishment to the nature and number of the offences that have procured it. The judge of all the earth is the great God, who is clothed with awesome majesty. His greatness shows the greatness of the evil of sin, for the greater that any superior is — the more aggravated is any instance of disrespect showed to him.

God is infinitely great, and therefore we are under infinite obligation to obey him; and if we transgress his laws, that grandeur which was insulted by our disobedience, must be vindicated and glorified by inflicting a vengeance worthy of itself.

It is a terrible thing to provoke the wrath of a prince — but who knows the power of God's anger? According to his fear — so is his wrath. God is the Creator of all things, and he made all things for himself — and will not allow his creatures to frustrate his purpose of glory to his own name. Rational creatures may abuse the gifts of reason to the dishonor of the Almighty — but if he is not glorified in the obedience of his laws — then he will be glorified in the execution of the penalties denounced in them against transgressors, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Revenging justice belongs to the great Creator. He punished sin even in his own beloved Son, who never knew sin. For the Lord made the iniquities of all his people to meet in Christ — and he was oppressed and afflicted, and bruised, and put to unspeakable grief. He pardons no sin to any man, that was not first punished in Christ. If the great God dealt in this solemn manner with his own Son, and with his chosen people in the person of their surety — then how can impenitent and hardened sinners escape the damnation of Hell? They sometimes indulge hopes that the God who made them will not finally destroy them — but their obligations to God as their Creator and Preserver, make their sins inexcusable — and therefore he who made them will not have mercy upon them.

It is true that he gives them space for repentance at present, and loudly calls them to turn and live, and swears by his own life that he has no pleasure that they should die. But the words of this gracious oath are a plain evidence that the glorious mercy of the Lord will not exempt the obstinate sinner from punishment, who goes on still in his trespasses. To those who are found unbelieving and impenitent, the precious displays of grace will at last be like rivers of oil to enrage those flames in which they are tormented! This text has a very different translation in the margin, which appears agreeable enough to the original: "A great man grieves all, when he hires the fool, he hires also transgressors." This makes it a political instruction, teaching us what harm a prince does to the country by employing foolish and wicked ministers. This was exemplified in the administration of Saul, who did great hurt to the nation, and grieved the hearts of all lovers of their country, by employing such ruffians in his service as Doeg the Edomite.

Just so, we are accountable not only for the harms which we do with our own hands, or by the orders which we give — but likewise for those which we do, by enabling people of corrupt dispositions to gratify them, to the hurt of other men. If one puts a sword into the hand of a drunkard, or madman, he deserves to be punished for all the harm that follows upon it.

Proverbs 26:11. "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly."

Sin is called by the worst names in Scripture, and the vileness of it is represented by comparisons taken from the most loathsome objects. Sin is . . .

folly,

the vomit of a dog,

the poison of asps,

and filth. But no words are sufficient to describe, and no images are sufficient to represent, the malignity of sin. The worst thing that can be said of any sin is, that it is exceedingly sinful.

Sinners are fools and dogs. All sinners are unclean beasts; and some have so much of the temper of a surly dog, that Christ forbids us to admonish them, lest they should turn and rend us. When the wicked hear of the vengeance of the great Creator against themselves, they are sometimes startled, and in some degree convinced of the necessity of reformation. Therefore they will stop short in their wicked course, and forbear those gross sins which press hard upon their consciences, and, like Herod, do many things which they are commanded to do, that they may obtain some ease to their minds, and reputation among saints. But unless their nature is renewed by the grace of the Spirit, which turns dogs into sheep — their hearts are still much the same as formerly. Their awakened consciences resist sin — but their love to it is not diminished. For the most part, their corruptions obtain the victory over their consciences, and they return to their former course of life with redoubled eagerness. The sight of a dog returning to his vomit is very loathsome — but it is much more detestable for the wicked to return to their former wickedness. Nothing is more dishonoring to God, or insulting to his majesty; nothing is more hurtful to the souls of men, and especially of the sinner himself. For if any man draws back, it is to perdition of the most terrible kind. Impenitent sinners, who never showed any disposition to repent, shall be severely punished — but not as severely as those who, after they have known and tried the way of righteousness, have turned aside from the holy commandment delivered unto them. The reproach which they cast upon God, as if iniquity were to be found in him, is intolerably provoking. God, in righteous judgment, allows the devil, when he returns into these wretches, to take with him seven devils, and the last, state of that man becomes worse than the first.

Turn, O fools, at the reproof of wisdom — but if you will return, return unto the Lord, and put away all your abominations; make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit; and if you cannot perform this great work, (as indeed you can no more make to yourselves a new heart than a new Heaven and earth) give the Lord no rest until he performs his great promise of making you a new heart and a new spirit. A dog chained, and silenced from barking, is a dog still, and cannot find entrance into Heaven. You must be created anew in Christ Jesus, otherwise your partial reformations will only tend to your greater security in your present condition — to your greater reproach, when your convictions are stifled by the rage of your corrupt passions, and to your greater condemnation in the day of the Lord.

Proverbs 26:12. "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him!" When a man has left some of his follies, he thinks himself a new man; old things, he imagines, are passed away, and all things are become new. For there is no thing in which the power of folly appears to a greater degree, than in the judgment which a fool passes on himself. For this reason those fools are in the most dangerous condition of all others, who persuade

themselves, either from some change in their conduct, or from any other cause, that they have become wise. Many of the publicans heard the sermons of John Baptist with pleasure, and of Christ, concerning repentance; while the self-conceited Pharisees and scribes rejected the counsel of God against themselves. The Gentiles in like manner were made to see the folly and wretchedness of their former course of life, and to receive with thankfulness the offer of a better righteousness than their own — while Israel, trusting to their own righteousness, did not submit to the righteousness of God.

There is some hope of a fool and a sinner, if you can make him really to believe that he is what he is. The first lesson to be learned in the school of wisdom, is our own folly. And when we are deeply sensible of this truth, the revelation of Christ, as our wisdom, and our salvation, will be pleasant to our ears. But if we still think ourselves wise, when we are fools — we shall despise Christ as much as the pharisees did, and the discoveries of the Gospel will be either idle tales, or tasteless stuff, in our apprehension.

Woe to those who are wise in their own conceit, and prudent in their eyes. They depend on wind and vanity. Or if they really possess some of that kind of wisdom which a fool may have, they lean on a broken reed, which will go into their arms and pierce them, and rend their souls with eternal remorse, because, in their vain opinion of their own understandings, they rejected the light of the world. "For judgment," says our Lord, "am I come into this world, that those who do not see might see — and that those who see might be made blind." None are more blind than those who are readiest to say, with the Pharisees, "Are we blind also?" They say that they see, and take away all excuse from themselves, and shall have the mortification, at the great day, to find that God has revealed those things unto babes, which he has hidden from the wise and prudent.

Proverbs 26:13. "The sluggard says: There is a fierce lion roaming the streets. I shall be slain in the streets!"

Solomon published many proverbs against slothfulness in his own edition of this book. The men of Hezekiah repeat some of them, and join some others to them on the same subject. The slothful man is reduced to such pitiful shifts for excusing his conduct, that he says, contrary to all reason and experience, that there is a lion roaming the streets, and that he may be killed in the very streets of the city if he should go forth to his work. This sign of sloth is in nothing more observable than in the excuses that people make for excusing themselves from the duties of religion. The first Christians never minded lions, when they were in the path of duty, for they were deeply impressed with the love of Christ, who regarded neither the bulls of Bashan, nor the lions of the pit, in working out their salvation. But when we make religion our smallest concern — then a frown, or a jeer, or a few drops of rain, will be a sufficient reason to us for declining the most important services. We should remember that our consciences are God’s deputies in our bosoms, and not bribe them to sustain any plea that will be rejected by our omniscient Judge.

Proverbs 26:14. "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed."

How dearly does the sluggard love his sleep! But, to his great vexation, he cannot sleep always. When he finds himself half awake, and wearied with lying so long, he tries to get a little more sleep by changing his posture. As the door turns upon its hinges — but still continues in the same place, so the sluggard turns from one part of his bed to another, and from his right side to his left, and

then he turns himself on his back, and on his face. For to put on his clothes is a dreadful and intolerable toil. But when every part of his body is wearied with the fatigue of lying and turning, he slowly goes to his clothes, and with great difficulty gets them thrown about him, and perhaps necessity or weariness drives him to some kind of work. But still he is like a door moving upon its hinges, for he only trifles about the most serious affairs, and the night finds his work in much the same state as the morning. In this manner do sluggards trifle and sleep, not only in the things that concern their present happiness — but in things of solemn and eternal consequence. As if they could work out their salvation with faint wishes, and spiritless endeavors — their hearts sleep when they are calling on God for the pardon of their sins. When they come to church, the words of the preacher are forgotten almost as soon as they are heard. It is ten to one, that their pew serves for a bed to them. And, as if the devil had given them some opium on the Sabbath morning, they can scarcely be awakened out of their sleep by the united voices of the congregation in the praises of God.

Alas! how do men loiter and doze away their time, which can never be recalled — while their grand adversary is ever busy and watchful for their ruin. Awake, sleepers, and call upon your God. Who knows but God may think upon you, that you perish not! As drunkards and gluttons enjoy less pleasure it eating and drinking than the sober and temperate — so the sluggard never enjoys that sweet and delightful sleep by which the laborer is refreshed. For his excess in this bodily indulgence, makes his slumbers broken and interrupted; nor can he taste that pleasure in eating which other men enjoy, for although he could procure meat without work, eating is a toil to him.

Proverbs 26:15. "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth." This is a strong expression of the power of laziness — and yet it is literally true of the spiritual sluggard, who will not put forth his hand to receive the richest blessings, nor open his mouth to eat that which is good. But when laziness is so prodigiously foolish, and productive of such harms — may not the sluggard be reasoned into another kind of behavior?

Proverbs 26:16. "The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes, than seven men who can render a reason." The sluggard reckons himself wiser than all the seven wise men of Greece put together. The wisdom of Chalcol and Darda, and Ethan and Heman, and Solomon, in one man, could not convince him of his folly. "What," says he, "if I should go forth to work in such a sultry day, I might catch a headache; and an headache cost the Shunamite’s son his life. If I should expose myself to the terrible cold of winter, I might catch a cold which would bring on a fever or a consumption. For cold is the beginning of almost all diseases; and what is a little worldly gain compared to one’s health or life? Is not a life of ease and tranquility incomparably better, though attended with poverty — than a life of toil and anxiety with riches?"

These and the like reasons for his behavior, appear to him demonstrations, and his disease is incurable, because he cannot be made to believe that he is sick. Self conceit never fails to attend spiritual sloth. For it prevents the receiving of those instructions that tend to the humiliation of the soul.

Kings were commanded by Moses to read the Bible with care, that their hearts might not be lifted up above their brethren. For truths abound in the Scripture, of the great need to mortify pride — but the sluggard never learned them, or will not take the trouble of thinking upon them. He has perhaps heard or read, that wisdom’s ways are pleasantness, and from thence concludes that

they are fools who are at the pains to enter into the strait gate, or walk in the narrow way. He expects, by the gift of grace, to obtain Heaven, as well as the most laborious Christian. He thinks himself a far happier and wiser man, than those who work out their salvation with fear and trembling. None are more foolish than those who have the highest opinion of their own wisdom. Those only are truly wise, whose understandings and wills are regulated by the wisdom and will of God, revealed in his word.

Proverbs 26:17. "Like one who seizes a dog by the ears, is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own."

He who takes a dog by the ears, can scarcely escape without a wound, for the enraged cur will be sure to leap at him as soon as it finds itself at liberty. Just so, he who meddles in quarrels that he has no business with, can as little expect to escape unhurt.

It is foolish for us to quarrel about our own concerns if we can possibly avoid it. For contention is like an unfathomable gulf, into which a man may easily leap — but will find it a great difficulty to get out. But it is the height of folly for men to engage in quarrels where they have no interest, for we cannot derive any advantage, and are very likely to get much damage from it.

If we can make peace, by interposing between contending parties, and persuading them, in the spirit of meekness, to compose their differences — we are doing a very good work, and are in little more danger than a man who is casting a piece of bread to a dog.

Yet, if either of the parties have a contentious spirit, his angry passions may lead him to say very disagreeable things to the most friendly mediator, as the quarrelsome Israelites did to Moses in a like case. But if we become a partner in the dispute, by taking one of the sides, we will either receive blows, or hear something to inflame our passions into rage, or suffer some harm on another occasion, from the person whom we have offended. The apostle Peter insinuates to us that men are very liable to suffer by this means, and that sufferings of this kind do not befit saints. "If any man suffers, let him not suffer as a thief, or as a busybody in other men’s matters." Let us therefore make it our ambition to lead a quiet life, and to mind our own business — and this will keep us from thrusting ourselves into the business of other men.

Proverbs 26:18-19. "Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows, is a man who deceives his neighbor and says: I was only joking!" The apostle forbids all that kind of jesting, which is not edifying. A jest is not in every case unlawful — but it is unwise and wicked, under pretense of jesting, to expose our friends and neighbors to scorn, or to say something that will inflame their passions, and kindle up strife and contention. It is still worse to deceive and flatter them into something that will prove hurtful to their interests, or harmful to their souls, and then to pretend that we were only amusing ourselves with a little harmless diversion! No diversion is harmless that puts an honest man to the blush, or wounds his spirit or his interests. He who sports himself in this rude and unchristian manner, is like a real or pretended madman, who amuses himself with casting about at random firebrands, and arrows, and other instruments of death.

Let those who would be jokers at the expense of friendship and charity, consider in what class of men Solomon so justly places them, and be ashamed. He counts them not only fools but madmen, and ranks them with the worst kind of madmen, in the height of their rage. But may not a man use freedoms with a friend? Yes. But such freedoms only as cement friendship, and not those

freedoms that turn a friend into an enemy. To carry on a scheme of imposition, under the mask of friendship, is the worst kind of wickedness, and places a man in the same black list with Joab and Judas. There are some men with whom it is safer to be at variance, than to possess their friendship. From such friends may the good Lord deliver us. For open enemies are far less dangerous.

Proverbs 26:20. "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down." A gossip is one who tells stories which ought not to be told, whether true or false, whether fairly or unfairly represented. The worst kind of gossips are those who tell their stories to those who are most likely to be provoked by them, and at the same time do not wish to be mentioned as authors of the story, or witnesses in it.

There is sometimes a propriety in telling secret stories — but the most part of those who carry tales of their neighbors, are to be numbered not only with the basest — but with the most corrupt of mankind. They are serpents in the way, and adders in the path! They are firebrands kindled from Hell, who kindle a fire among men, which spreads from one to another, until parishes and counties are in danger of being set on fire!

He who listens to gossips, is like a man who sees a house ready to be set on fire, and uses no means to prevent it. He who turns an angry countenance to the back-biter, is the friend of mankind, who carries water to quench the burning.

It would be happy for society, if such pestilent members could be banished from it, for they are like madmen that cast around firebrands. But as we live in a world where such incendiaries are still going about, we should do what we can to prevent them from carrying any coals from our own houses, or fetching them within our walls. Tale bearers little consider the evil they are doing, and the extent of that harm which may be justly charged upon them, or the misery they are heaping up for themselves — for they shall (unless pardon interposes) be cast into a deep pit, and a fiery furnace, from whence they shall never get out! Contentious men are the brethren and friends of the tale bearers, and merit the same censure and condemnation.

Proverbs 26:21. "As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire — so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife."

Men of proud, and passionate, and selfish spirits, give scope to their corrupt dispositions in kindling strife and debate, which seem to be as agreeable to them as a fire to one who is ready to perish with cold. We ought to avoid the society of such people. If we are cast into their company, it is absolutely necessary for us to keep a strict guard over our hearts and our tongues. For their provoking or seducing words, have the same tendency to kindle strife, as burning coals have to kindle dry wood into a flame. The conflagration that was raised by Korah, and that which was kindled by Sheba the son of Bichri — soon spread itself through all the armies of Israel. Let none who calls himself a Christian give any occasion to call him a contentious man, for Christ is the prince of peace; his gospel is the gospel of peace, and all who believe it in truth, are the sons and the lovers of peace. The lovers of strife are children of the wicked one.

Proverbs 26:22. "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts!" This proverb was inserted by Solomon himself in chapter 18:8, but the men of Hezekiah annex it to the former proverbs about contention. For they wished if possible to banish

tale-bearing, that grand engine of harm, out of the world.

Proverbs 26:23. "Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart."

Everything that glitters is not precious gold. You may sometimes observe a piece of metal that you take to be silver — and yet, when you examine it, there is nothing but a thin coating of silver dross, which conceals a worthless piece of potsherd below it.

Similar to this, is a wicked disposition concealed under the mask of a tongue that flames with holy zeal, or burns with professions of the most ardent friendship. The Pharisees, in the time of our Lord's humbled state, were men of this disposition, and therefore he compares them to white-washed sepulchers. They were enemies to all goodness — and yet their zeal for religion was so great that Christ himself was a profane person, if their testimony was of any worth. These abominable hypocrites are a smoke in God's nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

There are some who practice similar hypocrisy towards their fellow men, and they are the most dangerous members of society that can be found in the world! Absalom was a perfect master in both these kinds of hypocrisy, and therefore his name will be infamous while the world stands. Against those who cover their malignity with professions of kindness, we are warned in the following verses.

Proverbs 26:24-25. "A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit! Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart!" An angry man is dangerous; but, if you are on your guard, the danger will soon be over. The malicious man is far worse, and much more dangerous, for his hatred ferments in his heart, and his head is, in the mean time, projecting methods for wreaking wrath in such a manner as will be safest to himself, and most hurtful to its object. He is not like the dog that barks before it bites — otherwise you might stand to your own defense. But he is a dog that fawns upon you, and, when you are never dreaming of it, viciously attacks you, and inflicts an unexpected and dangerous wound.

Solomon warns you that your safety lies in refusing to trust him, even when he makes the largest professions of friendship. When he speaks charming words, believe him not, although he should swear to the truth of all he says. If you have any reason, from your knowledge of a man's character, or from his former behavior, to think that he is one of this stamp, and capable of such wicked conduct — his ardent professions of love should rather confirm than remove your suspicions of him. For the darkest designs are always covered under the greatest shows of virtue and friendship.

You may as safely believe the devil himself, as one who joins malignity of heart with flattery and caresses — for he is a man after the devil's own heart. His character is a compound of all those vices of the blackest and the vilest kind, which make a consummate villain, and render a man a disgrace to human nature, by his exact resemblance to those infernal fiends who are to be dreaded equally for their malice and subtlety.

Abner and Amasa lost their lives by believing a man of this character. But the providence of God will not always bear with such abominable wretches.

Proverbs 26:26. "His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly."

He is ashamed or afraid to reveal his malice — but God shall bring it to light in the view of all men, and make him the object of universal abhorrence. This is often done by his own agency, for malice ordinarily reveals itself sooner or later. When Saul could not destroy David by the hands of the Philistines, or by his javelin in private — his hatred became too violent to be smothered by his prudence.

Sometimes God, by a strange train of providences, exposes the wicked purposes of men's hearts — but even if it continues hidden through the whole course of this life, there is a judgement day which will declare it. Let us never harbor anything in our minds that we would be ashamed if all the world would know it. For all the world shall certainly know it, in the day when the secrets of hearts shall be judged. For, God will not only reveal — but punish the malignity of men; for,

Proverbs 26:27. "If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him."

"Whatever you would that others should do unto you — do so unto them," says our Lord, "for this is the law and the prophets." But if neither Moses, nor the prophets, nor Christ himself, can prevail upon us to observe this golden rule — then our own interest may be expected to work us to a compliance with it. For the harm that we do to others, must at last recoil upon ourselves, with a heavy aggravation of remorse and self-condemnation attending it. When Haman was hanged on his own gallows, his miserable end must have been attended with anguish and self-reflections a thousand times more grievous than anything that Mordecai could have felt if Haman's malice had been accomplished on him. Here is encouragement for the faith and patience of the saints, Here is ground for the highest praise to the righteousness of God.

Proverbs 26:28. "A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering tongue works ruin."

It might be expected that when a man has wronged his neighbor, by his lies or flatteries — he would be filled with remorse, and try to make some reparation. But the loss is, that he judges of other men from himself; he does not believe that there is enough of generosity in any man to forgive him, and therefore persists in his hatred. It is not easy for us to forgive the injuries we receive — but it is far more difficult to forgive the injuries we do.

Flatterers are the worst kind of liars, and the most likely to be believed, because self-love favors their deceits. Flatterers are commonly men who intend to betray with a kiss. But, although they should only design to gain our favor by their fair speeches — yet they are very corrupting, because they are the friends of our pride, which is the worst of our bosom enemies.

# 01.27. Proverbs 27

Chapter 27.

Proverbs 27:1-27

Proverbs 27:1. "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." In God we live, and move, and have our being. But we too often forget this important truth, and speak, and act, and think — as if we lived, and moved, and had our being in ourselves. We boast of what we will do, or of what we shall enjoy at the distance of days, and months, and years. This presumption is forbidden in this and in many places of Scripture; and a reason is given for the prohibition that every person must acknowledge to be a true and good one — that we do not know what a day may bring forth.

Every new day brings forth the accomplishment of some decree of the Most High — but these decrees are written in a sealed book, and no man can unloose the seals, nor open the book, nor read what is written therein. We know that the sun will rise tomorrow — but we cannot tell whether it will rise on us, or on our survivors. We can guess what the weather will be — but we cannot say whether we shall be rich or poor, sick or in health, left in the possession of our friends, or bereaved of those who are dearest to our hearts. In the morning Haman went forth from his magnificent palace, expecting to be gratified before the evening came with the blood of his hated enemy, which would have been sweeter to him than wine. But, before the evening came, he was hanged like a dog on the gallows, and went to the place appointed for him.

We ought to boast of nothing. For our life is but a vapor! What are our bags of gold, but a glittering nothings? What are our honors, but a puff of wind? Or what are our earthly hopes, when their basis is a shadow which flees away, and never returns? But the hopes that are founded upon the rock of ages can never fail us, and the believer in Christ can, upon solid ground, triumph in the expectation of eternal joys, and unfading crowns! He boasts not of himself — but glories in the Lord, whose promises are more stable than the everlasting hills, or the pillars of Heaven. The same reason that should check our boasting of tomorrow, may preserve us from desponding fears. It may be stormy weather today — but storms do not last all the year. We are filled and tormented with fears of some impending evil — but we often give ourselves real pain by the prospect of calamities that never were appointed to us by the providence of God. This is now the spring of the year, and within the last twelve months, the country has been three times alarmed with anxious fears, all of which have been most agreeably disappointed.

Proverbs 27:2. "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips." For a man to trumpet his own glory, is no glory. When a man publishes his own praises, it is a sign that he has none else to do it for him.

Suppose a man has really done some good things — yet when he boasts of them, he destroys all their honor. For no man will think himself obliged to praise the man who is arrogant enough to publish his own praises; and every one will believe that he did those actions which are the subject

of his talk, not from any principle of love to God or man — but merely with a view to his own honor. The Pharisees had but a poor reward for their alms and prayers, in the praise of men — but the vain boaster has a poorer reward, for he is his own paymaster, and must be content to lack the praise of other men, as well as of God. But we ought to do those things which deserve praise. Our hands, and not our tongues, must be employed to publish our worth, and thus we shall comply with the precept, and follow the example of our Lord. He had a good title to praise himself, and could appeal to his works, which bore witness continually on his behalf, and published his praise through the world, in spite of all the rage and cunning of his adversaries. In some cases a man is at liberty, and has a call to speak to his own praise — but these cases are few. When Paul was laid under a necessity of this kind, he often reminds us that he speaks like a fool; and blames the Corinthians that they had reduced him to this necessity, by neglecting to interpose in the behalf of his injured character.

Although we must be very cautious how we praise ourselves — yet when we are called to speak in the praise of another man, we are not only at greater liberty — but may expose ourselves to just blame by unseasonable silence.

Proverbs 27:3-4. "Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but a fool’s anger is heavier than both. Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before envy?" A wise man endeavors to live under the influence of that meekness so strongly recommended, and so wonderfully exemplified by our Lord. But a fool has no government over his passions, and it is better to meet a bear bereaved of her cubs, than a fool in his folly. For his wrath is heavier than the sand of the sea, it is fiercer than the rage of tigers — it is more stubborn and inflexible than the rocks. May we never come within the reach of a fool when his passions are roused. For they must be gratified and satiated, even if they should bring him to a gibbet. May we ever possess our souls in patience and calmness. Boisterous passions are a whirlwind in the soul, which threaten to rend it in a thousand pieces. But as terrible as wrath is, envy is a great deal worse. Envy is the grief that a man feels for the prosperity of another person; it is a compound of pride and malice; it derives misery to a man from his neighbor’s happiness. The blessings and mercies of God, are turned by it into curses; and the life of another man is the envious man’s death. As the devil fell by pride, so he wrought the fall of man by his envy. And when envy takes possession of a man, it makes him a devil to his neighbors. The envious man is far blacker than the angry man. For the outrageous behavior of an angry person sounds an alarm to his neighbor to be on his guard — but the envious man conceals his malignity, until he has a fit opportunity to strike a mortal blow without danger of missing his aim. The one is a dog, which barks before he bites; the other is an adder in the grass, that stings the traveler when he is dreading no hurt. For the malice of the envious man is generally unsuspected, because no occasion was given for it. It is the good and happiness of the envied object that excites his malignity, and he does not so much as pretend (unless he adds lying to envy,) that he has received any provocation. Anger may generally be appeased — but envy is the vice of a dark and hellish spirit, that has not the least spark of generosity to give any hope of pacifying it. The only way you can take to soothe envy is to be miserable. For it makes a man such a utter devil, that evil is his only good. The fall of man, the murder of Abel, the slavery of Joseph, the persecutions of David, the crucifixion of our Lord — are monuments of the rage of envy, and the danger incurred by being objects of it. But the curse of the serpent, the miserable end of Saul, the horrors that pursued Cain, the desolations of Jerusalem, and the torments prepared for devils —

are terrible proofs that envy is infinitely worse for the person who harbors it, than for the innocent object of it.

Proverbs 27:5. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love."

There are two qualities very requisite in a friend — love and faithfulness. The last is as necessary as the first, to make our friendships really beneficial to us. There are some who love us with sincerity and warmth — and yet lack the courage that is necessary to make them faithful in reproving us when we deserve to be reproved. But reproof, although it should be severe and cutting, is better than love which does not reveal itself in needful rebukes. A true friend will not disclose our faults to the world — but he will be sure to reprove us for them. For virtue is the soul of true friendship, and must not be entrenched upon, out of regard to our dearest friends. Therefore that friend is to be valued, who does not spare to tell us roundly to our faces, wherein we have erred. For he gives good evidence that he esteems our real welfare, above his own interest in our regard. A friend who is afraid to reprove us when we deserve if, does not reveal a very high measure of love for us. For he seems to think us incapable of bearing reproof, and rather chooses to enjoy our smiles than to do us an essential service. Our Lord loved his Apostles with a tender regard; and with admirable prudence and kindness he rebuked them when they spoke or behaved amiss. He would never allow sin upon them — and yet he reproved them in such a manner as to increase and not diminish their love to himself.

Let us learn, from this proverb, to exercise the fidelity of friendship to those whom we love, and to thank our friends when they reveal the sincerity of their regard in their concern for our souls. We ought to value honesty above politeness, and to excuse a little defect in the last quality, for the sake of the first.

Proverbs 27:6. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend — but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

Friends are not to be loved chiefly on account of the pleasure they give us, although nothing earthly is more pleasant than a true friend. Their integrity and faithfulness are their most valuable qualities; and they will sometimes have occasion for them, by speaking to us things that are a great deal more useful than pleasant.

David esteemed a friend who would wound and smite him to his profit, as much as a wise man values a surgeon who makes needful but painful incisions in his flesh, for the restoration of his lost health. Abishai, who revealed such zeal for his honor, was not dearer to him than Nathan the prophet, who reproved him, in the plainest manner, for the murder of Uriah.

All men allow that the kisses of an enemy are deceitful and detestable. An enemy speaks sweetly with his lips — but in his heart he imagines how to throw you into a pit! He will weep with his eyes — but if he finds opportunity, he will not be satisfied with blood. The caresses of an enemy are very base and dangerous — but it deserves to be considered whether we have not a greater quantity of revenge than generosity in our temper — when we hate the kisses of an enemy more than we value the wounds of a friend. If we value the image of Christ, it is certain that faithful reprovers express a friendship that resembles his love to his people to a greater degree than those who withhold from us this plainest token of real regard.

Proverbs 27:7. "He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet." The poor generally reckon the rich a great deal happier than themselves, because they are clothed in fine apparel, and dwell in elegant houses, and feed upon the richest dainties. Yet the envy and discontent of poor men is very ill founded, for the rich, being accustomed to these things, receive no more gratification from them than the poor derive from their homely fare, and shabby clothing, and poor accommodations.

If the sight of a well furnished room, and of fine paintings, could give any considerable pleasure to those who are accustomed to see them, the poor might enjoy as much pleasure by looking at the verdant clothing of the earth, and the glorious canopy of Heaven. The man who fares sumptuously every day, has no more relish for honey and wine than the poor man has for bread and water — for he seldom experiences hunger, and so he lacks the best sauce that any food can have. When a man's appetite is excited by hunger and labor, every kind of food is welcome and pleasant to him. While the rich are exposed to weariness and listlessness in their abundance — the poor have strong excitements to be cheerful and thankful although scanty meals are all they can afford. The children of Israel loathed the manna, although it was bread given them immediately from God, and was called the food of angels. They wished to be in Canaan, and eat common bread in the sweat of their brows. For the abundance of manna made them to despise it. If we have fullness of bread, we ought to be cautious lest we despise the mercies of God, the giver of them.

We ought especially to be on our guard against despising our spiritual privileges, which we enjoy in so great abundance without molestation. Estates have been given in former days for a few leaves of the Bible, and gospel ordinances were attended at the hazard of life. For those who know what spiritual hunger means, will break through stone walls for the bread of life — but those who are full in their own apprehension, will despise the riches of divine goodness, and God will send them away empty.

Proverbs 27:8. "Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home." When a bird wanders from her nest, and flies about at random, she is in danger of becoming the prey of the fowler or the hawk. Just so, when a man abides not at home, when he ought to be employed in his business, or when he leaves his calling without a sufficient reason — he exposes himself to great inconveniences, and sometimes to dangers. He loses his good name, and his estate is likely to go to ruin; he learns habits of idleness and dissipation, and gets into company that may very probably corrupt his morals.

Let every man abide with God in that calling in which he is called, endeavoring to perform the duties of it conscientiously, that the teaching of God our Savior may be adorned. God assigns to every one of us our station in life, and we ought to keep it until the call of Providence warrants us to make a change in it. When our health, or the necessities of our families, or a well-grounded respect of doing greater service to God, or some other important consideration, will justify our change of place — then we do not come under the censure of the wise man, nor do we run the risk that others do, who wantonly and causelessly change their place. We are safe in following Providence, although it is dangerous to run before it, or to attempt to set ourselves free from it — as Jonah did, who sought to flee from the presence of the Lord by wandering from his place — but soon found that the way of duty is the only way of safety and comfort. Paul joins with Solomon in testifying against those who abide not in their place, to fulfill the duties of it.

Proverbs 27:9. "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel."

Perfume and incense diffuse their fragrances around, by which men’s spirits are refreshed, and their hearts cheered. But the sweetness of a well chosen friend cheers the soul better than the sweetest flowers, or the most precious fragrances. His amiable virtues, and his affectionate fondness beaming from his eyes, and breathing in his words and actions, make him the joy of our hearts, and diffuse the sweetest sensations of delight into our bosom. Friends are useful at all times. They give a relish to the pleasures of life, and their society makes the labors of it delightful — but at the times when we need advice, or meet with perplexities, the advantage of their friendship is best understood.

Other men often give us such advice as suits their own interest or humor; they cannot, at least, enter into our interests, and judge what advice is most proper to be given to us, so well as the friends of our bosom, who are acquainted with our business and our dispositions, and whose fidelity will dispose them to give us advice, according to the best of their understanding. In many cases advice is necessary for us, as Solomon frequently tells us. For a man perplexed with difficulties, or surprised by some unexpected accident, is not so well qualified to judge what is fit to be done, as another person would be who has no superior degree of wisdom — but has the advantage of more composure and sedateness. To have a bosom friend at such a time to take a share of our sorrows, to direct our behavior, to assist us in our time of need — is a great relief to the mind, and a restorative to the disquieted heart.

We ought to value a wise and faithful friend more than gold and silver. For how great a part do they contribute of our comfort in life, who turn even our days of sorrow into joy, and lighten our heaviest burdens. If we expect the pleasures of friendship in their full extent, let us remember that our friends have the same claims upon us, and the same grounds for them — that we have on the other side; and we ought to take the same pleasure in giving, as in receiving happiness. For this end we must be furnished, not only with an honest and a feeling heart — but with such a measure of wisdom as will qualify us for conversing with our friends to our mutual improvement, and for giving them counsel in the time of their perplexity. He who has friends, must show himself friendly, and must continue to do so until the end of his life.

Proverbs 27:10. "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father. Do not go to your brother’s house when disaster strikes you — better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away."

Clothes and houses are valued for being new — but old friends, like old wine, are entitled to the greatest share of our esteem, and we must not forsake them when they give us no good reason for it. To exchange an old friend for a new one, is to manifest a fickle disposition, unfit and unworthy to enjoy the blessings of friendship. Some people cool in their friendships through an instability of mind, and can give no reason for it but their own humor. Others are no less unfit to taste the pleasures of a cordial and lasting friendship, because they are so peevish that they can bear with no one, or so unforgiving that they cannot love those by whom they think they have been offended. The faults that we ourselves have been guilty of towards our friends are more likely than anything to cool our affections to them, through an apprehension that they must stick in their hearts. But if we can forgive the trivial offences of our friends, why may we not believe that they can forgive ours also? Do we imagine that all generosity is confined to ourselves?

Those who are capable of such unpardonable faults were never fit for being friends to any man. If the faults of our friends, or the differences that may take place between them and us, will not justify us in giving up with them; it is a scandalous thing to desert them in the time of their distress, when they have most need of our friendship. A brother is born for adversity, and a friend loves at all times. He is no genuine friend who proves to us in our time of calamity, like a broken tooth or a foot out of joint.

"A friend cannot be known in prosperity, and an enemy cannot be hidden in adversity." We must not forsake our own friend, for that would be to forsake our second self; and we must not forsake our father's friend, for that would make us guilty of a double ingratitude of the basest sort that we can practice towards men. Our father's friends, if they are honest, are the best possessions that they can leave us. If Naboth would not sell, for any price, the inheritance left him by his fathers — but kept it in spite of an Ahab and a Jezebel, until he was stoned — then shall we show such irreverence to the memory of our fathers, as to give up, without any price, the most precious possessions which they have bequeathed to us. Solomon carried on his father's friendly fellowship with Hiram, because he had shared with his father in all his afflictions. Rehoboam would have been a wiser and happier man, if he had followed the example and precept of his father.

Trust in our friends is a duty which we owe them, as well as fidelity, and our confidence will be made to appear in the use we make of their kindness in the time of our distress. The house of a trustworthy and warm friend is then preferable to that of a cold and unreliable brother. Brethren by birth, have, for the most part, less attachment to one another than those friends who single out one another, not from accident, or relation of kindred — but from the harmony of their minds, and their mutual kind affections. Greater acts of heroism have been performed by those who have been knit by such voluntary and endearing ties, than by any kind of relations for one another.

There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother, and we do him honor by placing an entire confidence in him when we need his assistance. At his house we shall meet with a more cordial reception, than we can expect from a brother, and shall hear none of those upbraidings which the unfortunate too often hear in the houses of their near relations. When David's brethren of the tribe of Judah proved treacherous, his gallant friend, the son of his great enemy, maintained his cause against his own father, when David was persecuted by him. If we must not forsake our own and our father's friend, shall we ever forsake our own God, and the God of our pious father, who is infinitely the best of friends, and disdains not to call us by the endearing name of friends to himself.

Proverbs 27:11. "Be wise, my son, and bring joy to my heart; then I can answer anyone who treats me with contempt."

Wise children are not only the joy, but the crown of their parents. Foolish children are their disgrace, as well as their torment. How unnatural are those children who bring grief and dishonor on those to whom they are under obligations that can never be cancelled!

'As is the mother, so is her daughter,' was a very ancient proverb. As some vices, like some diseases, run in the blood, the father will be to some degree liable for those vices which disgrace his son. Even if his character is so clear that there is no room for this — yet it will be judged that the father is in part accessory to his son's faults, by neglecting his education, by imprudent rigor, or foolish indulgence, or by carelessness in the example which he set before him. Although men

are frequently guilty of great injustice, by making a whole family accountable for the behavior of those who are the blemishes of it — yet there is often too much reason for concluding that some neglect or mismanagement of the father has afforded scope for the irregularities of his family.

David was justly chargeable on this account, in his behavior towards the three eldest of his sons, of whom we have any particular account. God himself ordered that under the New Testament, none are to be admitted into holy offices, who have disorderly children, because a man must be unfit to rule the house of God — who cannot rule his own house. Parents ought to inculcate wisdom on their children for their own credit, as well as the benefit of their children.

Proverbs 27:12-13. "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it. Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger; hold it in pledge if he does it for a wayward woman."

These instructions were already given us by Solomon. Perhaps there is a new motive to enforce them implied in the connection of them with the foregoing verse; that the wisdom by which men are preserved from these harms will tend to the comfort and honor of our parents, and if we are so foolish as to run into needless dangers, or to ruin our substance by our connection with strangers or harlots, the comfort of our parents will be ruined, and their credit impaired, as well as our own.

If we are wise, we are wise for ourselves, and if we are foolish, we alone must bear it; and yet by consulting our own happiness, we give happiness to those whom we ought to love; and by our own voluntary misery we bring down sorrow and dishonor upon those gray hairs and hoary heads which are well entitled to our reverence.

Proverbs 27:14. "If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse."

We cannot tell whether morning greetings were in use among the Israelites in Solomon’s time, as they afterwards were among some other nations. If they were, there is no doubt that people who wished to thrust themselves into favor with their superiors would take the opportunity to appear among the first to pay their court. The blessing or praising of one’s friends is not here absolutely condemned. When praises and blessings are a proper expression of gratitude, when they are a probable means of exciting to virtuous conduct, when they are needful to vindicate a character unjustly attacked, and when they are needful to revive a spirit overwhelmed with a false humility and groundless terrors, they deserve no blame. But he that blesses and praises his friend in high swelling words, and seeks opportunities for that purpose, letting no time pass, however unseasonable, for loading with commendations the person whose friendship he affects — is to be suspected of flattery and base designs, and therefore his blessings shall be counted for a curse either to his friend, or to himself, or to both. If his friend is wise, he will be as much displeased with these blessings as if they were curses. For they are an evidence that the fawning flatterer has a very poor opinion of the person whom he hopes to gratify by such methods, and that he looks upon him to be a man so weak and self-conceited as to swallow gross flattery without knowing it.

If those whose favor is thus solicited have their judgments so much biased by self-conceit as to relish it — then every one of their vices is strengthened, their pride in particular is swelled, and their character is ruined by it — for all men will look upon them to be fools overrun with vanity and self-esteem. Such flatteries will be a curse to those who utter them. For they are guilty of

spreading a net for their neighbor’s feet, and whether they are entangled or not, the crime is the same.

Proverbs 27:15-16. "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."

"The contentions of a wife," says Solomon, in one of his former proverbs, "are a continual dropping." He goes farther in this passage, and tells us that they are like a continual dripping on a very rainy day. When a man is exposed to the weather in a very rainy day, he finds his situation very unpleasant, only he has this great comfort that his house is not far distant, and therefore he will soon find a shelter — but how much is the man to be pitied who is joined for life to a contentious wife! His ears must be stunned, and the whole time of his life, for anything he knows, embittered by clamor and noise beating constantly upon him like a tempest. He may sometimes obtain a respite, by absence from his house — but a man cannot be always away from home without leaving behind him the means of his subsistence, and his beloved children, and everything dear to him. And when he is in the field, or in the house of some friend — yet the noise that he has heard, and is still doomed to hear within his own walls, rings constantly in his ears. But may not a man subdue the haughty spirit of a vexatious wife? He may as soon tame the fierce spirit of a lion! The grace of God, and nothing of less power, can do this great work. May he not then conceal his dishonor from the world? He may as soon shackle the wind, and command it to blow where he pleases, or hinder the ointment which is poured on his right hand (which is almost constantly in motion) from spreading its fragrance through the whole room where he sits. The clamors of an imperious wife will be heard, not only in the house — but in the street, and through every corner of the town. It is impossible to force into her so much sense, as to make her regard either her own honor, or the credit of her husband. For if she had the least degree of common understanding, or if she were capable of receiving any advice — she could never bear the thought of being the scourge and torment of that man to whom she is bound by every motive of duty and interest to be a comfort and a crown. The uninspired sages of ancient days concur with Solomon in condemning the behavior of bad wives with great severity. "I had rather," says the son of Sirach, "dwell with a lion and a dragon, than to keep house with a wicked woman. He who has an evil wife, is as though he held a scorpion." And nothing better can be said of a tyrannical husband. If a king deserves to be branded with the most odious names when he oppresses his subjects — then what words can paint the baseness of that man who tyrannizes over the wife of his bosom, his other self.

We wish for comfort in our various relations — but to obtain it, we must in the first place mind the duties of them, and endeavor to be a comfort to those with whom we are connected.

Proverbs 27:17. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." When iron tools were blunt, it seems they used to be whetted and sharpened by files or some other instrument of iron. In like manner, when the heart is dull, and the countenance overcast with melancholy — the pleasing society of a friend infuses gladness and new life into the heart, and scatters the gloom that sat upon the countenance.

"A faithful friend is a strong defense, and he who has found such an one, has found a treasure. Nothing can countervail a faithful friend, and his excellence is invaluable. A faithful friend is the medicine of life". Friendship cheers the spirit, brightens the understanding, and inspires us with alacrity and vigor for every useful employment of the mind. If we are dejected with grief, their kind

attentions, and seasonable discourse, have a happy effect in alleviating our distress, and softening our sorrows. They keep the soul from sinking into despondency, and enliven it with hopes of better days. What reason have we to be thankful that this evil world affords some who are qualified to afford such pleasure and advantage to us. In choosing our friends, we ought to consider religion as one thing necessary to be regarded, for that alone, attended with the blessing of God, will effectually serve all these valuable purposes, and others of equal importance. A pious friend will be of great use to animate our souls in the service of God, to assist us in combating the difficulties that meet us in our Christian course, and to warm our souls with holy zeal. "Those who fear the Lord shall find him. Whoever fears the Lord shall direct his friendship aright. For as he is, so shall his neighbor be also."

Proverbs 27:18. "He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored."

It is the business of a servant . . .

to wait upon his master with respect,

to obey his orders with cheerfulness and fidelity,

to promote his interest and happiness by all proper means, and

to prevent, as far as he can, everything that may tend to his harm. But perhaps those who are in this humble station may think that they have very little encouragement to perform the duties of it, because the baseness of their condition places them below the hope of any valuable reward. In answer to this, the Spirit of God tells them that they shall have a very good and honorable reward for their service, however lowly. Who plants a vineyard and eats not of the fruit — or who takes care of the fig trees, and is not allowed to share in their delicious product? And if the care of fig trees be thus recompensed — then shall not that servant be honored who shows a zeal for everything which concerns the comfort and interest of his master? Certainly! He will be respected by all wise men who know him; his master especially will show him who respect which his fidelity deserves, and will find occasions perhaps to please him more than he expected.

Servants are indeed often unnoticed by their masters, when the time of their service is over — but that is owing, perhaps, as much to the lack of merit in the servants, as the lack of gratitude in their masters. Masters are bound by the law of God, to behave not only justly — but kindly, towards honest servants. But even if they should prove ungrateful, there is a master and Lord in Heaven, who shall recompense with divine liberality those servants who performed their duty, not as eye servants — but as the servants of Christ, adorning the doctrine of God their Savior by the pious performance of their duty to men.

Proverbs 27:19. "As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man." The water is nature’s looking glass, in which we discern our faces; and the face which is seen in the water has a resemblance, though not an exact and perfect image of that face which looks into it. So likewise there is a resemblance in one man’s heart to another. As God has fashioned the bodies of men like one another, so the heart of every man has the like faculties and passions, and none of the human race is born either a brute or an angel.

There is, indeed, a difference of faces, although in water that difference is not well discerned. There is likewise a natural difference in the tempers and understandings of men. And yet none of us have reason to be proud or insolent, for we are but men, and our neighbors are men also. Some of them have miserably disgraced the human nature — but others have improved upon that corruption of human nature which is common to all. Instead of triumphing over the the wicked, we ought to mourn over the ruins of our condition, and to adore that mercy which has kept us from sinking down, by our natural weight of corruption, to the same deplorable depth of wickedness. When the holy martyr Bradford heard of any person that had been guilty of an atrocious act of guilt, he used to strike his hand upon his heart, and say, "Here is the seed of all that wickedness!"

There is a mighty change made upon the heart by the grace of God, creating it anew in Christ Jesus. But the saints will not boast on this account, for they well know what they once were, and who made them to differ from others, and from their former selves. They still feel the body of death within themselves, and heartily sympathize with them who are yet nothing but flesh. As the corrupt heart in one man is like the heart in another man — so there is a resemblance in one Christian to another. There is a difference between Christians, as there is a difference of stature and feature and understanding among men. But there are the same outlines of character among all real Christians, so that the representations made of the hearts of David, and Paul, and other godly men, in Scripture, are of great use to us, not only to direct our course of life — but to assist us in searching our own hearts. We have not the same degrees of faith in Christ, and love to God, and delight in his word, as these holy men — but if we are true saints — then the same dispositions, though with less vigor, will rule in our lives, for every Christian has the same sanctifying Spirit, though his operations in all are not equally signal.

Proverbs 27:20. "Death and destruction are never satisfied — so the eyes of man are never satisfied."

Although heart answers to heart — yet there are such varieties in the hearts of men, that we cannot search out the secret workings of the hearts of our fellow men — and it is a happy thing that we cannot do it. But because it is of importance to us to know in some degree the thoughts, and wishes, and designs of others, we have some means of revealing them. They can inform us by their tongues what is in their hearts. And when they think proper, for reasons of their own, to lie with their tongues — their eyes often betray them, for in the eyes love, and anger, and envy, and desire, often paint themselves so visibly, that they cannot but be perceived in spite of every endeavor to conceal them.

One of the many things in which men agree with one another, is the insatiableness of the desires of the heart, (which are revealed in the eyes.) The invisible world is never full of souls, and the grave is never satiated with the carcasses of men. After the innumerable millions that have been buried in death — they are still crying, "Give! Give!" and will continue their importunate demands until that day when death and Hell are to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. The heart of men is equally clamorous for something to satisfy it. They enlarge their desires as Hell, and cannot be satisfied. If you should give them a world, they will weep for another world. They think if they had this and the other object of their wishes, that they would be happy — but they find that the gratification of their desires, is but like drink to one in a dropsy, which does not allay — but increase his thirst. The improvement of this truth is taught by Solomon himself, at great length, in

the book of Ecclesiastes. The insatiableness of men’s desires is one of the arguments by which he proves the vanity of the world, and the unsatisfactory nature of its richest enjoyments. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever — and he will never be happy until his heart is suited to his end. To seek happiness in this world, is to seek the living among the dead. It is to seek to be happy in opposition to the irreversible determination of the author of happiness, who framed our souls with such large and boundless desires that they never can he filled — but by him who fills all in all. The only way of being happy is to comply with the gracious invitation of our Redeemer, "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink."

Proverbs 27:21. "The refining pot for silver and the furnace for gold — but man is tested by the praise he receives." The refining pot tries silver, and the furnace reveals whether gold be genuine and pure, so praise bestowed upon a man, reveals the reigning temper of his mind. If a wise and humble man is praised, he will not be thereby elevated in his own mind. If the criticism conferred upon him is not just, he will not think himself warranted to lay any stress upon it, for it is an evidence of pride when a man despises undeserved reproaches — and yet prides himself on commendations which are equally groundless, and therefore equally vain. If it is a piece of baseness to be dejected by undeserved reproaches — then it is a piece of vanity to be puffed up by praise. But if a wise man is commended upon good grounds, he does not consider himself as entitled to the chief praise of those good qualities which he possesses, or those good actions which he has performed — because it is God alone who makes him to differ from other men; and everything that is of him, and through him — ought to be ascribed to him. When a bad man is praised for those qualities that he has, or those actions that he has done — he spoils all their value and credit by the greediness with which he swallows the commendations. He does not ascribe the praise of them to God — but like Herod wishes to appropriate all the glory to himself. Or if he gives the praise to God, he does it only in words and professions, like the self-conceited Pharisee. But when a fool receives praise that is founded only on falsehood, or on flattering misconstructions of his actions, he is so fond of everything that tends to his own advancement, whether right or wrong — that he swells with pride. And as if other people knew him better than himself, he can prevail on himself to believe everything they are pleased to say in his favor. Darkness will be light, and vice will be virtue in his eyes, when it serves to nourish his pride and self-esteem.

There is one good effect which may arise out of undeserved commendations to a wise man. They will be a motive to him to deserve them, that men may not run into mistakes by their good opinion of him.

Praise ought to be administered with great caution to the best of men, for as it reveals some men to be nothing but dross, so it shows godly men to have too much dross in their composition. The compliments of the ambassadors of Babylon were harmful to no less a man than Hezekiah. And to Herod, the praise of men proved deadly.

Proverbs 27:22. "Even though you should pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle, yet his foolishness will not depart from him."

How deplorably perverse are the hearts of fallen men! Let favor be showed to the wicked — yet will they not learn righteousness; they will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Let them be afflicted, and bruised, and crushed under the judgments of God, or punishments inflicted by the hand of men, as wheat is crushed in a mortar, or between the upper and nether

millstones — yet they will refuse to part with their folly.

Pharaoh was broken by the terrible plagues which God inflicted upon him, and sometimes he confessed his folly, and promised amendment — and yet he returned to his folly, like the dog to his vomit, until he was utterly destroyed. For when God fights against a man, he will be sure to overcome.

Ahaz had the sermons of the prince of the later prophets to enforce the language of the rod. Isaiah preached with celestial eloquence. God smote him with a succession of the most alarming judgments — yet in the time of his distress, Ahaz sinned more and more against the Lord. Multitudes walk in his paths, refusing to receive correction, and thereby exposing themselves to tenfold condemnation. To what purpose then, does the rod serve for the fool's back? Does not the rod of correction drive foolishness away from the heart? It does when the blessing of God accompanies it, and it must be used with a dependence upon him who has appointed it. Without the concurrence of divine grace, the rod will not drive away folly from the hearts of young people, and far less from the hearts of those in whom corruption receives double strength, from the superadded force of custom. The judgments of God against the wicked tend greatly to aggravate sin, when they have not a reforming effect; and therefore when they are in the earth, we ought to pour out fervent supplications to God that he may subdue, by his almighty grace, the stubbornness of the hearts of men, and make them to learn righteousness.

If we are under the rod, let us consider the design of it, and the intolerable load of guilt which we must contract by continuing unhumbled; and under a sense of the hardness and instability of our hearts, let us turn unto the Lord with those supplications which God himself puts into our mouths.

Proverbs 27:23. "Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds;" To the precepts so often given us about diligence in the business of our calling, some will object that they have plenty of servants to manage their affairs, and they have no occasion to toil their own bodies, or fatigue their minds with them. But Solomon tells them that they may soon come to poverty, if they will not take the trouble of minding their own affairs, and inspecting their servants. Every man ought to be acquainted with the state of his own business, and look to it with his own eyes. "I am in affluent circumstances," you will perhaps say. But if you will not mind your business, you may soon be as poor as Lazarus.

Proverbs 27:24. "for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations."

You have not the riches of a crowned head — but if you had, they might be wasted and scattered by carelessness, which has often turned princes into beggars or bankrupts. Although there was never a richer king than Solomon — yet he was sensible of the necessity of attending to his affairs, and acquired a part of his reputation for wisdom from the management of his domestic concerns.

Solomon tells us in another place, that the instability and uncertainty of earthly things, after all our care, is a motive to draw off our hearts from them, and to fix our eyes upon nobler objects. But he tells us, in this place, that the perishing nature of earthly things is likewise a reason for bestowing a moderate and lawful share of our attention upon our temporal interests. Let us do what we can, the world cannot be secured to us, and therefore we must choose a more durable portion. But by the blessing of God upon our honest labors, we may in most cases expect to enjoy a competency of earthly blessings. Whereas negligence in our earthly business will in all probability reduce us to

those straits which would embitter our days, and those shifts which would harm our credit and our consciences. God’s bounty is a great encouragement to our industry.

Proverbs 27:25. "The hay appears, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the hills are gathered."

God has given us great testimonies of his goodness, in giving us rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons. By his kind providence the springing of the earth is blessed, and the hills are covered with herbage, which may be gathered for the use of those beasts which serve for the use of man. Does God stretch out his hand with blessings — and shall man, ungratefully and foolishly despise the bounty, and lose the benefit of it by his own neglect and sloth? If God puts a price into our hands, to get either heavenly wisdom or the needful blessings of life — then we are fools if we have not heart to employ it for the intended purpose. The valleys and the mountains, which rejoice and sing to God, cry out against sluggish men. The necessity and advantage of industry and care are very visible,

Proverbs 27:26-27. "The lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field. You will have plenty of goats’ milk to feed you and your family and to nourish your servant girls." By industry you shall have clothing, and food, and rent for your fields, or money to buy new possessions. You shall not perhaps be able to procure the luxuries of life — but these are not to be sought after. You shall have a comfortable maintenance for yourselves and your families; your maid servants shall have plenty of that food that is proper and convenient for them. On the other side, if you neglect your business, you bring poverty not only upon yourselves — but upon those for whom you are bound to provide. "If a man provides not for those of his own house — he is worse than an infidel," or even a robber in the Arabian desert. But how does our Lord say, "Do not labor for the food that perishes — but for that which endures unto everlasting life?" His meaning is, that we are to labor in the first and chief place, for that enduring bread. If we must not be careless about our bodies, and the interests of this life, which passes away like a cloud — then what care can be too great about our everlasting interests? If men must look well to the state of their flocks and herds, they are guilty of insufferable negligence who have some of Christ’s flock committed to their care, as parents, or teachers, or pastors — and yet thoughtlessly allow them to perish.

# 01.28. Proverbs 28

Chapter 28.

Proverbs 28:1-28 Proverbs 28:1. "The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." The wicked are so desperately hardened that they have no fear of the most horrible dangers — at least they have not such an apprehension of them, as to flee to that sure and only refuge which Divine grace has presided. At the same time they are so wretched that that they are never in security, and are liable to the most distressing terrors, when there is no reason for them. The Syrians that besieged Samaria heard the noise of chariots and horsemen, which threw them into such a panic that they fled away, and left their bread and clothes behind them. In like manner, the wicked are liable to terrors which sometimes encompass them like waters, when no reason can be given for them. For the objects which ought to alarm transgressors, and have a tremendous reality in them, are not the things that take hold of their minds. They are like madmen who fear not a drawn sword — but tremble at the shaking of a leaf, as if it were a devil ready to hurry them away to the bottomless pit. No passion is more tormenting than fear, and a sense of guilt producing it. It was a punishment threatened against the people of Israel, if they revolted from God, that they should flee before their pursuing enemies — but it is a sign of the utmost wretchedness, when men flee away through terror when there are no enemies — but such as are conjured up by a timorous imagination.

Sinners have great reason after all to fear, even when the objects of their fear are mere fantasies. God is angry with them every day, and their anxious alarms are a part of the punishment of their sins. They cannot expect tranquility and happiness of mind, but in Christ, by whom we are delivered from the guilt of sin, and enjoy that peace which passes all understanding.

Those who are justified by his righteousness, and led in the paths of righteousness by his Spirit, are as bold as a lion, the most courageous of creatures upon earth. For they are delivered from all danger of condemnation, and they are at peace with God. They may have many enemies — but God is their friend, and no weapon formed against them shall prosper. They may meet with adversities and deaths — but they shall meet with nothing to separate them from the love of God, with nothing that was not designed for them by an all wise and gracious providence, with nothing but what shall contribute to their good. The righteous are sometimes timorous like doves — but they have reason to be bold as lions. They are partakers of those graces which have a native tendency to expel tormenting fears, and to produce quietness and assurance forever. Their natural constitution, their remaining corruptions, their unhappy falls, their numerous enemies — may counteract their principles of holy courage — but they are commanded to be always strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The day is coming when every fear shall vanish away, and be followed by eternal triumphs. What effect righteousness has to produce boldness, and to banish fear — appears from the history of the elders who obtained a good report through faith, and of the apostles and first Christians, who triumphed in the midst of daily deaths, and in the face of bloody tyrants. Nor have later ages been destitute of testimonies to the truth of this proverb. Martyrs have

rejoiced in flames, as if they had been beds of roses; and Christians on a deathbed have often said, "O death, where is your victory! Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Proverbs 28:2. "When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order." The providence of God allows not a sparrow to fall unnoticed to the ground — how much less is it to be supposed that the affairs of men, and of societies consisting of millions of men, are unobserved by the great God, whose kingdom rules over all. We often rejoice, and often mourn, when we observe the occurrences of public governments — but we attend too little to the justice of God concerned in them. When frequent changes happen in the administration by the deaths of princes, or by those revolutions which seat a new family on the throne — God is carrying on his purposes of mercy or judgment. And although the same princes continue sitting on the throne, when public measures are continually changing, we may see the justice of Providence, and the provocations of the land calling down that vengeance which is executed in the miseries brought upon a land by these means. For the transgressions of Israel and Judah we find many princes, sometimes cut off in a very short space of time; and even the good Josiah was removed from an earthly to a heavenly kingdom, to make way for that punishment which was due to the guilt of the land. But a man of wisdom and piety is a great national blessing. A private man of such a character may sometimes be a happy instrument of rescuing a nation from destruction, or establishing its peace and happiness. But a prince furnished with skill to govern a nation, and with piety to govern himself, is an inestimable gift of God. His wise choice of counselors and magistrates, his good example, his just and vigorous administration, the countenance he gives to virtue, and the checks he gives to wickedness — concur to establish the land in peace and prosperity, and the blessing of God attends his government. The history of the good kings of Judah, and of almost all the good kings with which any nation has been blessed, are confirmations of this truth.

Proverbs 28:3. "A poor man who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops."

One would naturally think that poor men, though exalted to high stations, would, through their knowledge of the heart, and experience of the hardships of a poor man — look down with tenderness upon the poor, and use their newly acquired authority for the protection of those who are left in that state out of which they were raised. But experience tells us that the worst of all oppressors have ordinarily been the poor, when they were advanced to rule. The poor who oppress the poor, are like a sweeping inundation that carries everything along with it, and scarcely leaves anything in the ground to be the seed of a future crop. When poor men are exalted to power, their new dignity too often turns their brain. They know not themselves, and they cannot be expected to know their former brethren. Their experience of the hardships of poverty meeting with a selfish heart, disposes them to guard against its return, by oppressing those below them, and dragging everything into their own possession, that they may set their nest on high, and be delivered from the power of evil.

It is therefore very improper to place the poor in stations where they may have an opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of others — unless they are well known to be men like Joseph, of inflexible integrity. Those who might behave well in private stations, are often tyrants when temptation and opportunity concur to make them so. History is full of the harms which arise from

the unwise neglect of the instruction given to nations and kings in this text.

How lovely is the character of our Redeemer! He made himself poor for our sakes, and he is now exalted to an heavenly throne. But his heart is not exalted above those poor men on earth, whom he deigns to call his brethren. He knows the heart of a poor man, and he will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper.

Proverbs 28:4. "Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law resist them." The wicked not only destroy their own souls — but contribute to the ruin of other men, by praising their sinful courses, and encouraging them in evil. No wicked man wishes to be called wicked, and therefore he puts false colors upon his own and other men's sins, baptizing them with the names of those virtues to which they seem to have most resemblance. Drunkenness is called good fellowship. Covetousness is called prudence and frugality. Courage in sin is called bravery. Peevishness has the name of honesty and plain dealing.

If no good quality can be found to put a gloss upon their sins, then the wicked will flatter one another by praising them for good qualities to which they have no shadow of a title — and at the same time excusing their faults, as if they had no proportion to their good qualities. To forsake the law of God is a very bad thing — but to take pleasure in those who do the same, and to strengthen their hands in wickedness, is to walk in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. The practice of sin, is praise to evil-doers. Our example is of itself an encouragement to those who are like us in their behavior; and when those who have fallen into sin through temptation, and resolve to reform, see others continuing in the practice of iniquity — they will be emboldened to go on in the same path — they see that they are no worse than other men. Of all the wicked, those who have left off to be wise and to do good, are the most pernicious enemies to holiness, and give the most effectual encouragement to sin. The language of their practice is, "We have tasted of the new wine of religion, and we find that the old wine of the pleasures of sin is better."

Why should I leave my present practices, says the wicked man, to take the yoke of religion on my neck; others have tried it, and they find they are not able to bear it, and have been obliged to shake it off.

Those who forsake the law, are living infections to all around them, and little consider what loads of guilt, their own and other men's, lie upon them. But those who keep the law resist the wicked. For they love God, and hate everything that provokes and dishonors him. God promised Abraham to be a friend to his friends, and an enemy to his enemies. All the children of Abraham are heirs of this promise — and can they forbear to hate those who hate God, and to be grieved with those who rise up against him? But their hatred to those who hate God has no ill-will to their persons in it. They wish well to their best interests, and are zealous against their sins for the harm which they do to their souls, as well as the provocation they give to God.

Those who keep the law are in very different stations, and have very different degrees of influence. Magistrates and ministers, parents and masters, if they have a zeal for God — contend each in their places against sin. Even those pious people that are in the lowest rank of life have an opportunity of striving against sin, by their practice and prayers, and in many cases by their admonitions. God is well pleased with those who rise up for him against the workers of iniquity.

Great were the honors bestowed on the tribe of Levi for their impartial zeal against sin.

Yet we must remember that we ought to strive against sin with God’s weapons, and in our proper ranks, under the banner of him who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and in the imitation of that example which he left us, that we might follow his steps.

Proverbs 28:5. "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully."

Evil men may have great talents, and much learning — but they do not understand justice, and therefore they cannot be said to understand anything that is worth the knowing. Their corrupt affections spread a dark cloud over their judgments, that they cannot understand the way of wisdom and holiness. Their eyes are disordered and darkened by the malignant influence of sin, and therefore their whole course of life is full of darkness. It is true, they know their duty in many cases better than they practice it — but the knowledge which they have is at best a learned ignorance, for they are unacquainted with the necessity and excellency of doing their duty, and with those means that would be of for enabling and disposing them to do it. The understandings of the wicked are perverse as well as their will. Some error is mingled with the knowledge they have, which, unknown to others, and undiscerned by themselves — misleads them continually. They cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God — but their minds and hearts are both sensual, and therefore there is no judgment in their goings. Those who know not justice, know nothing at all — they are more brutish in their knowledge than the stork, and the crane, and the swallow. But those who seek the Lord know justice, and therefore they know everything that is needful to be known by them. They are acquainted with the method of salvation, and with the way of being holy and happy. And what knowledge can be compared with this? All the things that we can desire, all the things that are accounted precious on earth, are but dross and dung, compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and of the way of salvation through his blood, and of being conformed to him in his death and life. The people blessed with this excellent knowledge, are those who seek the Lord. They are set in opposition to evil men. For they are all wicked, who call not upon the name of the Lord, and who do not seek his favor as their chief happiness — but those who seek the Lord with the desire of their souls, are haters of evil, and lovers of goodness, and have their portion with the saints.

Perhaps they dare not say that they have found him whom their souls love — but their desires shall not be always disappointed. For those relishes which the Spirit of God has excited in their souls, shall be gratified in due time.

Those who seek the Lord search the Scriptures, and make them the subject of their meditation — and God blesses their diligence by giving them wisdom through his statutes. They pray with great fervency for the promised Spirit, and God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. This spirit is a spirit of wisdom and revelation to them, leading them into all necessary truth; and therefore the spiritual man is said to judge all things. If he is sometimes at a loss to know his duty in particular cases — yet he has sure promises to plead with God, and to encourage his own soul in the hope that God will be pleased to reveal those things that he knows not, unto him.

Proverbs 28:6. "Better a poor man whose walk is blameless, than a rich man whose ways are perverse."

We had the sense of this proverb in the beginning of the 19th chapter — but it is here repeated because of the important instruction contained in it. Gold and silver glitter in our eyes, and dazzle our sight to such a degree, that a rich sinner appears more respectable than a saint in rags. The fatal consequence is, that men labor rather to be rich than holy. To direct our practice aright, it is necessary to have our unreasonable judgements of things corrected, and to esteem the poorest saint above the most prosperous transgressor.

Uprightness is so valuable in itself, that it gives a luster to the possessors of it beyond what all the dignity and wealth of the world can do — but double-mindedness and insincerity are so vile, that they stain the glory of the highest man on earth. Let us therefore choose the portion of God's people, however lowly they are, and pray that we may not have our portion with the men of the world, although their bellies should be filled with God's bounty.

Proverbs 28:7. "He who keeps the law is a wise son, but a companion of riotous men disgraces his father."

Let us suppose that two men have each of them a son. The son of the first is polished in his manners, has his understanding adorned with every liberal science, and is placed in a way of life wherein he has the prospect of making a large fortune; but, after all, lacks the grace of God, and has no deep impressions of religion. The other man's son has none of these advantages — but is so deeply impressed with a sense of religion, that he shows a respect in his behavior to all God's commandments. Which of the two parents has most comfort and honor in his son? Solomon would answer — the second, because he is a wise son. This wisdom will make a young man to choose good company, and to avoid the society of riotous people, and everything that might reflect disgrace upon himself or his father. But he who is unrestrained by a principle of religion, is in great danger of associating himself with riotous and dissolute companions. And he who is a companion of riotous people, shames his father, for he will soon imitate those whose company he loves. Or, if he preserves himself from their vices, (which can scarcely be expected,) he at least exposes himself to suspicions, and loses his character. Do you wish to have comfort and honor in your children? Let your first and great care be to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. For the wisdom in a son whereby he honors his father, lies mainly in keeping the law. Do you wish to give comfort to your parents, and to reflect honor upon them? Let religion be your great business, and choose for your companions, those who fear the Lord. But have no fellowship with dissipated youths. Let not their mirth and humor allure you into their company. For you may as soon touch pitch and not be defiled — as have fellowship with wicked men, without being in a lesser or greater degree corrupted.

Proverbs 28:8. "He who by usury and unjust gain increases his substance — shall gather it for him who will pity the poor." The reason why men grind the faces of their poor neighbors, by usury and unjust gain, is that they expect to make themselves rich by such means. The reason why men are averse from pitying the poor, is that they fear poverty will be the consequence to themselves. These hopes and fears are equally groundless.

Solomon, in many places of this book, teaches us, that oppression and unmercifulness is the surest road to poverty — and that liberality to the poor is the surest and shortest road to riches; because God makes men rich or poor at his pleasure, and by his secret methods of providence makes the money of the wicked to find its way into the purses of the righteous and merciful. This is

a truth which experience often verifies. If it is not constantly, it is generally the case, and when things appear to be otherwise ordered, we ought to acquiesce in the sovereignty of God, and to believe that his Word has, or will have, its accomplishment, though in a manner as yet unknown to us. Job was reduced to extreme poverty, after all his wonderful acts of generosity to the poor, and never expected to enjoy any more happiness in this world — yet he never doubted of this truth. "Though he heaps up silver as the dust, and prepares clothing as the clay" — he may prepare it — but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver.

Let us not be afraid of bringing poverty upon ourselves by well-doing. Do we not see multitudes of men endeavoring vainly to enrich themselves by unjustifiable means? Do these men trust to the dictates of the devil and the flesh — and shall we refuse our confidence to the God of truth?

These men squeeze the poor to bring money into their own pockets — but God will disappoint them, and bring their unjust gains into the possession of those who are good in his sight.

Proverbs 28:9. "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are an abomination."

If a subject refuses to obey the commands of his prince — then what face can that subject have to appear with his own requests before his royal master, or what hopes can he entertain that they shall be granted? How strange then is it that the wicked can expect any favor at the hand of the King of Heaven — when they are provoking him to anger every day to his face! The law of God signifies the whole revelation of his mind, concerning our faith and practice. When we reject the salvation revealed in the gospel, we are guilty of the most ungrateful disobedience to God; and by refusing an interest in Christ — we render all our prayers unacceptable and abominable to God, who hears no prayers but those which are presented in the name of Christ. When we live in a willful disobedience to any of God’s commandments — we declare all our professions to be insincere, and our faith to be a dead faith, and therefore we cannot impose on the hearer of prayer, if we hope that any of our requests will be acceptable to him.

If we have the genuine and living faith of God’s people, and trust in God as the hearer of our prayers — then we will surely hear what the Lord God will say unto us, and regard every one of his precepts as the apple of our eye. When the wise man tells us that even the prayer of the sinner is an abomination to God — he plainly insinuates that no act of devotion or charity can find acceptance from such a person. He who disobeys the law of God may be in some cases liberal to the poor, and in many things he may gain the praise of men — but everything that he does is detestable to God, who sees how corrupt his principles and views are. Such a man is without Christ, and can have no happy fellowship with God. His heart is under the reigning power of sin, and the best thing that he does is sinful. He is a rebel to God, and God is an enemy to him for his wicked works.

Proverbs 28:10. "He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own pit — but the blameless will receive a good inheritance."

He who digs a pit for any man shall fall into it. How then can they escape, who dig a pit for the favorites of God, or by their artful persuasions, and deceitful misrepresentations, seduce the people of God into those pits which have been dug for them by others? The Lord is the protector of the righteous, and the avenger of the injuries that are done to them by violence or deceit. Their enemies are considered by Christ as his own enemies — and he must reign until he has put all

enemies under his feet. Those who contrive and execute mischievous designs against the righteous, are contriving harms for themselves, and drawing a sword out of its scabbard to be sheathed in their own hearts! For every event in the world is over-ruled by a righteous providence. They may indeed meet with success at first, for the righteous sometimes fall into the pits prepared for him — but they have no reason to triumph. For if the righteous should fall seven times in a day — yet he has an Almighty helper present with him, who will not allow him to perish — but will raise him up, and put him in possession of all those good things which are promised by that faithfulness which never could deceive. The wicked man may soon bring abundance of harm upon himself, by his malignity to those whom God supports — but he can bring no evil upon them which shall not be made to work together with other things for their good, and he shall not be able to keep from them any of those good things which are the sure portion of the heirs of God.

Earth and Hell may rage against the righteous — all the force and cunning of the old serpent and his seed may be exerted against them — but they have constant encouragement to trust in God, and have no reason to despond, for God does not withdraws not his eyes from the righteous — but with kings are they on the throne. Yes, he does establish them forever, and they are exalted.

Proverbs 28:11. "A rich man may be wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has discernment sees through him."

Riches are good in themselves, and are very useful in the hands of a wise and godly man — but the greatest part of rich men, in the judgment of Solomon and of Christ, are the worse men for their riches; because they are a means of making them more proud and self-conceited than they would otherwise be. They think themselves men of greater abilities than poor men, because they attribute their wealth to their own skill in business. Or, if they possess wealth by inheritance, they take to themselves airs of importance, as if they were men of a superior species to the rest of the human race. The respect which is showed them by discretion, and the honor paid them by flattery, they consider as a tribute of praise to their great merit. The importance which they assume, and the respect which they exact, render them the objects of scorn or pity to many of their poor neighbors.

God has imparted his gifts variously. To some he has given much wealth and little understanding. To others, he has not given riches — but what is of incomparably greater value, a sagacious and comprehensive mind; and, therefore, no man ought to be proud on the one hand, or dejected on the other hand. Let each of us be thankful for the bounties of God to ourselves and others. It would be a great presumption to grudge other men what God has thought fit to bestow on them — or to be displeased because he has not given us everything. The poor man who has understanding sees through the weakness and folly of his rich neighbor who boasts of his wisdom, and despises him, not so much for his lack of sense, as for his groundless pretensions to it. No man would make himself the object of laughter, if he would be content with his due — but when one exacts more respect than he is entitled to, he loses that respect which he would otherwise have.

Let rich men consider, that much of that regard which they think is paid to themselves, is in reality paid to their purses; and that a horse might, with as much justice, be valued according to the splendor of its trappings, as a man by the extent of his possessions. Let them take care lest they expose themselves to the censure and scorn of their inferiors, by exacting respect, and, what is worst of all, lest they make the gifts of providence an instrument of their own destruction, by

turning them into nourishment to their vanity, and obstacles in their way to the kingdom of Heaven. Paul enjoins Timothy to charge the rich not to trust in riches; pointing out to us that rich men are too much disposed to trust in riches, and that trust in riches is a very dangerous vice.

Proverbs 28:12. "When the righteous triumph, there is great elation; but when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding." When righteous men are exalted to power in a nation, the state of it is happy and honorable. For they punish wickedness, and encourage virtue; they protect the liberty and property of their inferiors; and all men rejoice in their administration. But when the wicked enjoy the places of power, no man thinks himself sure of his life and property. Villains may rejoice, because their crimes are countenanced — but honest men run into corners to hide themselves. For many are oppressed, and all the rest are afraid.

Such was the situation of our own country a hundred and fifty years ago. Let us bless God that things are now on a very different footing: and let us pray that our judges may be always righteous.

How valuable is a righteous man! If he is not a blessing to all around him, the reason is because the sphere of his influence is narrow.

How much is wickedness to be abhorred! It is the ruin of a man’s own soul, and it makes him a plague to all who are connected with him. Wicked men themselves hate wickedness, when they find it pointed against themselves; and tyrants have been execrated by all nations.

Proverbs 28:13. "He who covers his sins shall not prosper — but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."

Sin is the source of all misery and ruin! It has turned angels into devils, and peopled the regions of horror with those who once dwelt in the abodes of perfect bliss. It has brought misery and woe into our world, which might have been a lower Heaven, if we had not revolted from God, and destroyed ourselves by our iniquity.

But, blessed be the Lord, our condition is not desperate, like that of the angels who kept not their first habitation. God looked upon our race with an eye of compassion, and provided us effectual relief. The Son of God is our great atonement, and we are called to the enjoyment of pardon through faith in his blood. Under a deep sense of our guilt and danger, we are warranted to claim salvation from sin and wrath — from that mercy that reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. But such is the folly of many sinners, that they would rather hide their sins from their own eyes, and, if possible, from the eyes of God, than receive mercy under the character of wicked sinners. They will allow themselves to be sinners — but they will not confess their sins; or, if they cannot altogether deny them, they endeavor to save their honor, or rather their pride, to the ruin of their souls, by excusing and extenuating them, or by transferring, like our first parents, the blame of them to others. How foolish is it for those who pine away under a mortal disease to conceal it from the knowledge of the world, rather than seek a cure from the physician?

Those who cover their sins shall not prosper. For it is impossible to cover them from the eye of our Judge; and to endeavor to shelter ourselves under coverings, is an additional provocation to the eyes of his glory. If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But if we cover our sins with excuses, and will not allow ourselves to be sensible of our absolute need of sovereign mercy — then how can we expect to share in that salvation, which is bestowed on men to the praise of

the glory of the grace of God? If we will not acknowledge our disease — then we refuse to the physician the praise of a cure.

There are some who expose themselves to the censure of this text, by hiding their sins from men, when providence, by bringing them to light, calls for a public confession as one evidence of repentance. Such people think it would be a dishonor to them to confess their faults — but the dishonor lay in committing them — and confession, with other proofs of repentance, is the only possible means of wiping it away. They stand upon a false point of honor, and expose themselves to disgrace and misery. For they shall not prosper, because they refuse to give glory to God by taking the guilt to themselves.

Those who hide their sins shall not prosper, because they reject that mercy without which they must be eternally miserable. They prefer their own fig-leaf coverings to that covering of sin by pardoning mercy which is the ground of blessedness to the guilty. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Under the law, the offerer of an atoning sacrifice was appointed to lay his hands upon the head of the victim, as a token of the translation of his guilt unto his sacrifice. In like manner, we are to confess our sin, with a dependence on that blessed sacrifice which takes away sin, claiming the pardon of our iniquities through the Messiah, whose soul was made an offering for sin. Through him all who believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. But what shall we say of those who confess their sins, like Pharaoh, and again return to the practice of them? These people are not partakers of mercy, for their confessions were never sincere. They were never produced by a genuine humiliation, nor mingled with faith in the atonement — and therefore they are not accompanied with reformation. They are provocations to God, because he is mocked and insulted by such deceitful professions. But he who confesses and forsakes his sins shall have mercy. It was divine mercy that wrought in him such a happy temper. The sincerity of his repentance is an evidence of his interest in the blessings of saving mercy. That mercy which he has already experienced shall still follow him, until he is crowned with loving-kindnesses and mercies.

Proverbs 28:14. "Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble."

"The righteous is bold as a lion," says the wise man. How then does he pronounce a blessing upon the man who fears always? Christian courage is very consistent with a holy and child-like fear of God, although it is opposite to that slavish and dispiriting fear which often possesses the hearts of the wicked. The believer in Christ trusts in God as a father — but his confidence is mingled with a deep veneration of the holy name of God — which makes him to dread the thoughts of sinning against him more than death, and to tremble at the Word of God, lest he should break any of its precepts, or deserve the execution of any of its threatenings, or seem to come short, through unbelief, of any of its promises.

Paul was a triumphant believer, who feared neither men nor devils, and reckoned himself perfectly secure against every charge that might be produced against him; and yet he lived in the constant exercise of holy fear, which disposed him to keep his body in subjection, lest when he had preached the gospel to others, he himself should be a castaway. He is not an unhappy man, but a

blessed man, whose heart is continually governed by this fear. It has a happy influence upon his soul, to guard it from the temptations of Satan and the world, and to keep it close to the Redeemer. It tends to promote the exercise of faith, and hope, and joy in the Lord. Thus fear is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and a blessed means of establishing the heart in the love of God. It is a happy sign of a saving interest in the everlasting covenant of mercy, and in that special favor of God which is the source of all our joys.

Josiah's heart was made tender by this fear; and judgment could not light upon that land where he reigned, until he was removed out of it to a better kingdom. But wretched is the man who is not afraid to sin against his maker and judge. His heart is hard as the nether millstone. He thinks himself a man of courage — but his courage is the bravery of an infernal fiend. He is not impressed with the solemn authority of God, nor melted with the astonishing declarations of his mercy, nor terrified at the tremendous thunders of the threatening law. Shall such a man escape the divine vengeance which he defies? Is he stronger than the Lord? Let Pharaoh's ruin in the Red Sea, and the destruction of Israel in the desert, and the misery of that nation which rejected our Savior, be considered by headless sinners, that they may judge whether a man can harden himself against God and prosper. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "today, if you will hear the voice of Christ, harden not your hearts." Do you find your hearts stubborn and insensible, after all God's dealings with you by his Word and providence? Put them into the hand of God, that he may take away from you the hearts of stone, and give you hearts of flesh.

Proverbs 28:15. "Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people." The lion and the bear are two of the fiercest kinds of animals — but they are doubly dreadful when the one is roaring, and the other charging the prey, seeking in the rage of hunger whom they may devour. No less dreadful is a tyrant who spreads desolation and terror through the country, by oppressing his helpless subjects. He is a general enemy — but his cruelty is felt most by the poor, who have no means of resistance in their power, and who can least bear his exactions.

Oppressors are called benefactors by their slavish flatterers — but they are called wild beasts in Scripture. The fiercest of animals, at the time when they surpass themselves in fierceness, are used by Solomon as emblems of their savage nature. But these emblems were insufficient to represent the monstrous barbarities that have been often exercised by those who were at the head of the Roman empire in its pagan or anti-Christian state. Therefore, Daniel and John represent them under the figure of monsters more dreadful than any that were ever beheld by the eyes of men. The language of inspiration could not furnish out more terrible images for the devil himself, than those which have been used to represent the wickedness of tyrannical and persecuting powers.

We ought to be thankful for the wounds that have been given to the beast with seven heads and ten horns — and for the civil and religious liberties which we enjoy; and to pray with fervency, that those nations which groan under the oppressions of civil or spiritual tyranny, may be rescued from their bondage, by that great king of whom it was promised, that he would judge the poor and needy, and break in pieces their oppressors.

Proverbs 28:16. "A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life."

Those princes are cursed with a blind mind as well as an iron heart, who oppress their subjects. For otherwise they could not, for the gratification of a senseless lust for money and power, make themselves the plague and curse, the abhorrence and execration of thousands and millions, and expose themselves to those plots from men, and that vengeance from Heaven, which seldom allow a tyrant to fill a throne for many years. Lack of understanding is the root of covetousness in any man, especially in a sovereign prince, whose proper treasure lies in the hearts of his subjects. A wise prince not only abstains from oppressive exactions — but hates covetousness, and would far rather deny himself the pleasures and splendors of royalty, than impose excessive burdens on his subjects. Happy is the prince who is possessed of this disposition. He shall live and reign for many years. He has a throne in the heart of every subject; and there is not one in his dominions, who has any sense of gratitude and generosity, who will not venture his life in his defense.

Proverbs 28:17. "A man tormented by the guilt of murder will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him." As he who digs a pit falls into it, so the murderer of his neighbor is his own murderer; for God commands his blood to be shed by men, and his providence seldom allows a murderer to escape. The pit of destruction is prepared for him, and he is driven to it by vengeance which will not allow a murderer to live.

Let no man conceal or support the destroyer of his fellow-men; let no man plead for him; let no man solicit a pardon for him; let no man do anything to hinder his just punishment — but let every man contribute his endeavors to bring the assassin to the gibbet. Whatever have been his merits in other respects, whatever excuses he may plead for his crime, whatever connections you may have with him by relation or friendship — you make yourselves sharers in his guilt, if you help him to escape justice. The land is defiled with blood, if the murderer (when he can be found, and the crime can be proven,) escapes unpunished; how deeply then must they be defiled, who support or conceal him! Justifying the wicked, is a crime of the same nature with condemning the righteous. Saving the life of a murderer, has the same relation to the guilt of slaying the innocent. Is God so severe in his laws and providence against murderers? Then let us give no indulgence to any of those passions or dispositions, that lead to such a black and atrocious crime. Hatred and malice do not always end in blood — but blood commonly begins with hatred and malice. These malignant passions are viewed as murder by the holy eyes of God; and the man who indulges them has committed murder already in his heart.

Proverbs 28:18. "He whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but he whose ways are perverse will suddenly fall."

He who walks blamelessly, walks surely. But may he not stumble and fall into calamity? Solomon never meant to deny that he may — but although he may fall, he shall not be utterly cast down. He shall be preserved and rescued by the power of God, who looks upon the upright with delight, and glorifies his power and faithfulness by the salvations which he bestows on them. The upright are exposed to the same calamities with other men, and sometimes they meet with special hardships and dangers for the sake of their uprightness. And if they should die for the sake of a good conscience, they are safe, for Christ has assured us, that he who loses his life for bearing an upright testimony for the sake of Christ, shall save it. The double-minded man expects safety from his pliable temper. He is not like the inflexible oak — but like the pliant willow, which bends with every wind, and therefore he thinks that no tempest shall blow him down. But God has said it, and

his Word will stand that he shall suddenly fall to destruction. His deceitful arts may succeed for a time to spin out an infamous life, or to preserve his property and credit — but the ruin which he endeavors to avoid, shall seize upon him when he is not expecting it, and to his great mortification, he shall find himself ruined by those very arts which he employed for his security. He is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walks upon a snare. His destruction, when it comes, shall be complete and irremediable. It may be delayed for a time — but when it comes it shall not need to rise up the second time.

Proverbs 28:19. "He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty."

We must seek from God our daily bread — but we must not expect to have it rained down like manna from the clouds without any labor of our own. Let us join industry to our dependence upon God — and we shall have bread enough for ourselves and our families, and something to give to the poor. But the man who chases fantasies and loves idle company has no relish for the business of his calling. He learns habits of idleness and dissipation, which will soon bring him to poverty. He behaves as if he were hungering and thirsting after poverty — and he shall soon be filled with that which he is so eagerly seeking after!

Proverbs 28:20. "A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished."

He is a faithful man who prefers his duty, and would rather suffer poverty and disgrace a thousand times, than obtain riches as the reward of iniquitous compliance with the wicked, or any violation of his duty to God or man. Covetousness is absolutely inconsistent with Christian faithfulness. For when men are more eagerly solicitous to be rich, than to be approved of God, their ruling passion will on some occasions hurry them over the belly of their consciences to iniquity. By a course of bad actions their consciences will be hardened, and they will be reconciled to everything, however unfair and unjustifiable, which promises to put money in their pockets. As the men who love God with a supreme affection will displease their dearest friends, and mortify their most eager desires, rather than offend God — so those who are determined to be rich will venture on every danger, and displease all the world and God himself, rather than lack that shining metal which darkens the splendor of every other excellency in their eyes. The faithful man, like Job, shall abound with blessings, for men will bless him, by applauding his integrity, and by prayers in his behalf; and the blessing is not causeless — but shall come upon him. His faithfulness, when it is a fruit of the Spirit, is an evidence that he is blessed by God, and an heir of blessings of the richest kind. But the man who loads himself with guilt, by endeavoring to laden himself with thick clay, shall be heavy laden with well-earned curses, that shall sink him deep in perdition and destruction!

Proverbs 28:21. "To show partiality is not good — yet a man will do wrong for a piece of bread." When judges are first perverted from integrity, it is owing to some powerful temptation addressed to them, which they think irresistible; at the same time, they think that they will never transgress the rules of justice for any paltry consideration. "If justice is to be violated," said Julius Caesar, "it is to be violated for the sake of empire." Few of the covetous or ambitious keep their integrity at such a high price — but they must have some valuable consideration in exchange for their conscience and honesty. Some will sell justice for an estate or a title, who would scorn to barter it away for a trifle of money, or to sell their souls at such a pitiful price as that which Judas Iscariot had for his

master. But there is great danger in yielding to any temptation, however great. For besides that it is the sign of a corrupt heart — the conscience that is once violated, will, in time, be prostituted and debauched, and the most trifling temptation will become a sufficient motive for the greatest iniquities. The second step in wickedness will not raise such a conflict in the soul as the first, and the third will be easier than the second. Just so, the most detestable villainies will appear less horrible to a man accustomed in iniquity, than the slightest deviations from justice once did to the same person. He who would not transgress without the offer of thousands, will at length transgress for a piece of bread; and he who once refused a whole estate, if he allows himself at last to be perverted, will become so degenerate, that he will sell the righteous for a few pieces of silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes!

Oppose the beginnings of sin, and give no place to the devil. If he can prevail upon you to comply now and then with his temptation, he will bring you by degrees into such a compliant humor, that he will have no occasion to put himself to the trouble of tempting you at all!

Proverbs 28:22. "He who hastens to be rich has an evil eye, and is unaware that poverty awaits him."

Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare. An evil eye is one of the products of a heart governed by the love of riches. A man of this temper is so tenacious, that everything he can catch sticks to his fingers, and he cannot look with a bountiful eye upon the distresses of the poor, or stretch forth his hands for their relief. It is an eye-sore to him to see any man prospering but himself — or to behold any fish coming into the net of his best friend. He is so thoroughly immersed in selfishness, that he can hear no good news, except of some profitable bargain for himself, or of some deceased friend, who has left him a sum of money.

Such a man shall be baffled in all his labors, and all his hopes will be disappointed — for poverty shall come upon him. He lies under the curse of God; and since it is the blessing of God that makes rich, poverty must be the fruit of his curse. He makes both God and men his enemies; and if either the justice of God, or the vengeance of men can rifle his stores — he must be reduced to poverty. The covetous man will not believe that poverty is coming upon him, for he imagines that he is taking the most effectual way to become rich — but it will bring upon him so much the greater distress and pain which he was not expecting. Those calamities, which are afflicting if they are expected, are shocking when they were unlooked for.

Saints themselves find great difficulty in bearing sudden reverses of fortune — but what a terrible impression must they make upon wicked men, who have none of those consolations which mitigate every distress to the people of God! If the covetous man does not feel the assaults of poverty while he lives, death will turn him out naked and stripped of everything, to the eternal world! His sins alone shall cleave to him, and the curses which he was collecting to himself in greater quantities than gold — shall cleave to him through eternal ages!

Proverbs 28:23. "He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue." A desire of enjoying the good favor of our friends and neighbors, is the reason that we are so averse to give them faithful admonitions when they do amiss, and so ready to flatter them with our tongues. But is the neglect of faithful reproof, or a flattering tongue, the true way of gaining the favor of our friends? By no means! God has declared otherwise, and God turns the

hearts of men at his pleasure. If our ways please the Lord, we have reason to hope that he will turn the hearts of our enemies to love us. But if our ways displease him, he will make those to become our enemies whose favor we courted by unworthy means.

Flattery may gain us a transient flow of kindness, and faithful reproof may excite a temporary disgust. For the unbridled self-love of men makes them unwilling to hear any negative reflection on their own conduct, and disposes them to swallow down their own praise, without examining whether it is just or not. But the force of truth and reason will in time appear, and flattery will render the person who presented it odious, when the bad effects of it are found by bitter experience. On the other side, the faithful reprover is still esteemed, and in time it will be found that his faithfulness will procure him a greater measure of that good-will and friendship which he seemed to forfeit.

If we wish to enjoy a permanent interest in any man's love, we should make it our first point to secure his esteem by deserving it. But, that we may experience the truth of this proverb, we ought to administer needful reproofs in a friendly manner. For if we behave like enemies in doing the office of a friend — we must not think it strange if we are taken for enemies.

Proverbs 28:24. "He who robs his father or mother and says, 'It is not wrong' — he is partner to him who destroys."

Some graceless youths imagine there is little harm in robbing their parents. They would take it very much amiss if you should class them with common thieves, for applying to their own use, their father's money, without his knowledge or consent. They say in their hearts, that they are guilty of no transgression — but the corruption of their principles is no extenuation of the wickedness of their practice. In the judgment of God, they are to be ranked with the worst sort of villains, for they are guilty of violating, in a gross manner, the strongest bonds of nature. They waste the estate, and wound the spirit of one whom they are bound to love and honor. Their relation to their parents is not an extenuation — but a grievous aggravation of their crime. To say that we did not look upon a thing to be a transgression, will be no just excuse for any piece of conduct that we might have known to be criminal. It will only show us to be so depraved, that even our minds and our consciences are defiled.

Proverbs 28:25. "He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife — but he who puts his trust in the Lord will prosper."

Only by pride comes contention — and pride never comes without contention. The proud man has a high opinion of his own merit, and cannot bear with those who have not the same respect for him, that he has for himself. When he finds a man who does not cringe to him, or submit implicitly to his opinions — he is instantly alarmed as if an attack were made on his honor, and by his angry words and overbearing behavior kindles up the fire of contention. The proud man trusts in himself, and not in the Lord.

He who trusts in the Lord is not high-minded and insolent. He has a low opinion of himself, and although he is not careless about his own reputation — yet he trusts God with his honor, as well as all his other concerns; believing that if his righteousness should be eclipsed, God will in due time bring it forth to the light. The weapons he uses for the support of his character, are the meekness and gentleness of Christ; and the consequence is, that he lives at peace, and rather pacifies, than stirs up strife. The proud are much to be pitied, for they have a poor wretched life. They can

scarcely enjoy one day's tranquility, because there are never lacking some to mortify their pride, and cross their ambition. But those who trust in the Lord enjoy an inward tranquility and outward peace. The God whom they trust takes care of all their concerns, so that everything which they do shall prosper. If anything happens to cross their wishes, they know that it is agreeable to the appointment of God, whose will they prefer to their own. Their souls are like a watered garden, and like a well of water, whose waters fail not, for they are refreshed with the manifestations of the love of God, and the communications of his grace, and their hopes are full of immortality. O Lord God Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you! But miserable are the proud, and those who trust in their own hearts!

Proverbs 28:26. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool — but whoever walks wisely shall be kept safe."

We must not trust our own prudence, even about our worldly business, without acknowledging God in it — for it is a piece of folly to neglect him in whom we live and move, and whose blessing is absolutely necessary for our daily labors, and our daily bread. It is still more foolish to trust our own hearts in our spiritual concerns — and yet we are guilty of this folly in a thousand instances. When we consult with our own judgment what worship we ought to give to God, instead of consulting with implicit submission of heart the oracles of God, who best knows what service will please himself — when we form our apprehensions about the doctrines of religion, without searching the Scriptures, and supplicating God to send forth his light and truth to direct and fix our judgments — when we try some other way of salvation than the way revealed in the gospel — when we form resolutions in our own strength, or persuade ourselves that we are able to keep them in opposition to temptation — when we endeavor to purify our own hearts, by closely applying to them moral persuasions, or even divine truths, without a sense of our absolute need of Christ as our sanctification — in all these cases, and in many others, we are chargeable with this folly. How gross the folly is, may appear upon a slight examination of it. If any cheat had deceived us a hundred times, we would certainly deserve the character of fools if we trusted him any more. Just so, we are great strangers at home, if we are not sensible that it has been the common practice of our hearts to impose falsehoods on us from our youth up. The idolatrous heathens and Roman Catholics, the falls of saints, and the general wickedness of mankind, might be adduced as proofs of the danger and folly of this carnal confidence. The only way of walking wisely, is to have no confidence in ourselves — but to trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and to follow his counsels wherever they lead us. Those who trust in their own hearts lean upon a broken reed, which will soon fail under them, and they will fall into harm. Those that trust in the Lord and walk wisely, may fall into calamities and temptations; but, for their comfort, they have a sure promise of deliverance. Their distresses are the trial of their faith, and they shall end in joy and happiness.

Proverbs 28:27. "He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses."

Look upon the distresses of the poor, and your hearts will be melted into tenderness. If the sight does not affect your hearts, listen to their complaints and petitions. If you disregard the voice of the poor, hear the voice of God commanding you to give to the poor. Do you grudge to give a little, at the command of him who gave you all? God has answered every objection against his precepts in his promises. He condescends to assure you that you shall be no losers but great gainers, by a

cheerful compliance with his will. The poor cannot recompense you — but God will do it liberally. Are you afraid of bringing poverty upon yourself by your bounty? Many have been ruined by withholding — but never any by giving according to the will of God. Giving to the poor is the best preventive of poverty, for it is putting your money into the bank of Heaven, which can never be lost. The best securities on earth will not hinder your money from making wings and fleeing away. But he who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and shall surely receive it again when he needs it, with abundant increase. The uncharitable man closes his eyes to the poor, lest his eyes should melt his hard heart, and tempt him to sin against his god, the unrighteous mammon. He is as much afraid of anything that might excite him to goodness — as a saint is of temptations to sin. But shall he save his money by his unrighteous withholding? Will this procure him the blessing of God, which makes rich? He can expect nothing but curses as his reward. The curse of him who is ready to perish shall come upon him. The curse of God is upon his hardened soul, and upon his basket and his store. He is miserable upon earth, in the hatred of God and men, and he takes the way to be cursed at the last day, and to secure himself an abode in that place where judgment without mercy shall be executed upon those who show no mercy!

Proverbs 28:28. "When the wicked rise to power, people go into hiding; but when the wicked perish, the righteous thrive." The reign of wicked princes is a general calamity, more dreadful than war and pestilence. Those that are not cut off, or stripped of their property, live in continual terror, because they know not how soon the overflowing scourge may reach themselves. These enemies of mankind are like raging bears, or roaring lions while they live — and when they die their end is no more regretted than the death of a mad dog. For it is a deliverance to the nation, and a blessing to the church. The righteous are then freed from their restraints, and take courage to themselves, to support and spread the interests of religion and virtue.

It is well known what happiness was caused by the death of Ahaz in the kingdom of Judah, and how Christianity was advanced in the Roman empire by the death of Julian; and how the death of Queen Mary of England, and the abdication of James II, tended to the restoration of happiness and religion in our own island.

How wretched are wicked rulers! They are hated while they live above the ground — and the curses of a nation pursue them to their long homes. They are accountable for the wickedness of thousands whom they draw or drive into sin; and they lie down in the dust loaded with innumerable iniquities of other men. The mercy, as well as the justice of God, is engaged to chase them out of the world. Those who are perverted by their influence upon earth will load them with execrations through eternity!

# 01.29. Proverbs 29

Chapter 29.

Proverbs 29:1-27

Proverbs 29:1. "A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy."

Asa, king of Judah, was a godly man — and yet when he was reproved by a prophet, he stormed instead of repenting. This piece of history shows us that we must not despair of reforming those who depart from the path of duty, although they are not reclaimed by the first admonition. Perhaps they may relent at the second or third admonition, and then we are richly recompensed for our trouble. But woe to that man who is stubborn and obstinate after many reproofs. He despises a merciful appointment of God for his recovery, and tramples upon precious pearls. He refuses to bow before the Lord — and he shall be dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel! He perhaps designs to reform at some other time — but he is hardened in sin, and puts off his intended repentance until judgment comes upon him unexpectedly, and he is ruined forever! The reproofs which he received will then be like hot thunderbolts to him, and the remembrance of them will feed the worm that never dies.

All of us meet with many reproofs from God. The warnings of his Word, and the addresses made to the wicked by the ministers of Christ; the kind advices of ministers and friends, the crosses which providence brings upon men in the way of sin, and even the favors which are showered down from Heaven upon transgressors — are admonitions to them to leave the ways of sin. How shall they escape the most aggravated condemnation, who continue impenitent?

All of God's dealings with them are aggravations of their guilt, and they are not to expect that the day of God's patience will continue forever, or that he will strive with them for so long a space as he did with the old world. Today, O sinners, if you will hear the voice of God, harden not your hearts. Those who fell in the wilderness are examples unto you; your guilt will be heavier than theirs if you harden your hearts, when such a monument of vengeance is placed before your eyes in the Word of God. The oath of God still stands in force against those who always err in heart, and refuse to know God's ways. Unless God can lie, they shall never enter into his rest!

Proverbs 29:2. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice — but when the wicked rule the people mourn."

Like the ointment that was poured upon the head of Aaron, and flowed down to the skirts of his garments, is the administration of a wise and pious prince. He diffuses peace and happiness around him. He is blessed, and he is a blessing to thousands. But the people groan under the oppression of a wicked prince, and all the comfort they have is, that he is not immortal, and that either a kind providence will cut him off, or some provoked stroke of violence will rid the world of such an intolerable burden.

Let us bless God for the establishment of our happy constitution of government, by which princes are at liberty to do much good, and have their hands bound up, in a great measure, from harm, if they were disposed to do it. And let us rejoice in that blessed administration of grace, under which it is promised that the mountains shall bring forth peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness.

Proverbs 29:3. "A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth."

It is not the youth who has got much knowledge — but he who loves wisdom, and takes more pleasure in it than in all the delights of sense, who is truly a wise son, and gives joy to the hearts of his parents. He who loves wisdom will regard the happiness of his parents as his own, and he will have no greater joy than in giving them pleasure. The love of wisdom will be a preservative from those dissolute courses to which young men are too much disposed. But he who follows them reveals himself to be and under the reigning power of folly. He spends his father’s substance, and grieves the hearts of those who are the means of his existence. There are indeed stronger motives than the loss of substance — but this is a consideration fitted to work on the minds of the thoughtless, unless they are so deeply plunged in sensuality as to be almost beyond hope of recovery. The everlasting world is at a distance, and, therefore, it appears to young men a piece of superfluity to think much about it at present — but poverty, and the unhappiness of those who love you, are miseries that follow hard upon a dissolute course of life. You are double fools — fools for time and fools for eternity, if neither present nor eternal punishment can convince you of the danger of lewdness and bad company!

Proverbs 29:4. "By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down."

If you would you practice integrity, then take heed and beware of covetousness. For the love of bribes is sufficient to prevent even a king from the paths of judgment. The prince that hates covetousness shall prolong his days — but that is not all his happiness. He has the pleasure of seeing millions made happy by his means, and rejoicing under the shadow of his government. He establishes a land, and bears up the pillars of it — for religion and righteousness, which are the safety and honor of a nation, are effectually promoted and encouraged by him. His authority and influence, his example, and his proper choice of magistrates, are unspeakable advantages to his people — and a race yet unborn shall rise up and call him blessed. But the fountains of justice are poisoned, and the pillars of it subverted by a prince that is too fond of money. He perverts law into oppression, and makes his subjects unhappy. He destroys the foundations of his own throne, and plunges himself and his people into inexpressible miseries. He brings down the judgments of God upon a land, and is himself one of the greatest judgments that an angry God can inflict upon a nation.

Proverbs 29:5. "Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet."

Solomon was a great enemy to flattery. He tells us that the flatterer works ruin; and that he is as bad as the man who curses his friend. Here he illustrates the harm which he does, by comparing him to a fowler that catches the unwary birds with his net. The flatterer sometimes intends to ensnare the person whom he praises, and to persuade him to serve the flatterer’s interest, to his

own damage. "You are a man of a generous and friendly disposition," says the fawning hypocrite, "and I am sure that you will serve me in this matter." Such arguments win upon a man's vanity, and seduce him to do himself the greatest hurt, or to expose himself to very great dangers, that he may not disappoint the expectations that are formed of him. Many have been cheated into poverty, and many have been deluded into sin and Hell by such artifices. But although the flatterer has no other design but to selfishly insinuate himself into the friendship of the person whom he caresses — he may be justly said to spread a net for his feet, by betraying him into the hands of his worst enemy.

We all flatter ourselves; and our self-flattery makes the praises of other flatterers welcome, and these gratify and feed our pride, so that we are in double danger of falling into the condemnation of the devil. If flattery is a net — then we ought to be on our guard against it, and to keep a suspicious eye upon those who praise us to our faces.

Birds are silly animals, and there is no wonder that they allow themselves to be caught in the snare of the fowler; and yet when they find themselves fast in the snare, they flutter, and use every possible effort to escape. Men are like silly birds when they are caught in this net — and they are sillier than birds, when, after all, they make the flatterer welcome to their houses, and his fair words welcome to their ears!

Proverbs 29:6. "An evil man is ensnared by his own sin, but a righteous one can sing and be glad."

Wicked men are ensnared, either when they are seduced to sin, or when they are involved in miseries from which they cannot deliver themselves — and in both these senses, they find a snare in their transgression. One act of sin makes way for another act, and the second for a third. The repetition of many sinful acts produces a settled habit, which gains an irresistible power over the soul, so that the sinner who meant to repent after he had indulged himself for a time in the pleasures of sin, finds himself quite indisposed to put his resolutions in practice, and walks on in his trespasses until destruction comes upon him without remedy!

Besides this, one kind of sin prepares the way for another that is worse, because the natural effect of sin is to stupefy the understanding, and harden the heart. He who has entered into the way of the ungodly, proceeds, in the next place, to stand in the counsel of the wicked, and then sits down in the seat of the scorner.

Wicked men find the thorns and snares of inevitable and irremediable calamity in the way of sin, and this will make them at last to curse themselves for their folly, in drinking down the delights of sin, which they find, too late, to be sugared poisons! They think that they walk at liberty, because they have broken the bands of the Lord, and cast away his cords from them — but they will groan at the last, when they find themselves entangled in the cords of their own sins. But the righteous are free from these snares, and cannot but sing and rejoice, and praise the name of the Lord, when they think of that sovereign grace which has delivered them, like a roe from the hunter, and a bird from the snare of the fowler. They walk in a safe way, and the sins and miseries which others meet in the way of destruction, excite at once their sorrow for the miserable creatures that expose themselves to such tremendous dangers, and their joy at their own happiness in escaping them all. The way of sin is broad — and the way of holiness is narrow. Those have reason to mourn, who are traveling to the gibbet, although their path should be strewed with flowers. And

those have reason to sing and rejoice, who are walking over a rugged path to take possession of an eternal kingdom!

Proverbs 29:7. "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern." The wise man does not say that a righteous judge will favor a poor man in his cause, for that would be to respect people in judgment, and to consider his poverty rather than his cause. But he tells us that a righteous man will endeavor so to investigate and manage the cause of a poor man in judgment, that he shall not lose it, for his inability to defend himself.

Such a man was Job. The cause which he knew not, he searched out. He delivered the needy when he cried, the poor also, and him who had none to help him. He broke the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil from his teeth. Thus he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and his judgment was as a robe and a diadem.

All just magistrates will endeavor to follow the example of that venerable prince, for this is one article of the commission which they have from the great King who entrusts them with this power. Lawyers, and people in every station, as opportunity offers, are bound to testify their righteousness and charity in like manner, as far as it consists with the station in which they are placed. But the wicked have no such concern for justice to the poor. It is the person that he regards, and not the cause. He considers which of the two parties will give him most money, and passes such a decision, if he dares, as he thinks will tend most to his own interest. Or, if he is not yet so far gone in the ways of sin as to pervert justice in the most open manner — yet he will not be at the trouble of searching out the cause of a man who has no money to pay for it, and if his sentence should happen to be right, he is entitled to no thanks for it.

Let judges remember that they must give an account of every act of their administration to him by whom kings reign. Let the poor that suffer oppression, comfort their souls by considering the grace of the Redeemer's administration. He shall spare the poor and needy, and he shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem them from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight.

Proverbs 29:8. "Scornful men bring a city into a snare; (or rather, scornful men set a city on fire,) but wise men turn away wrath." The proud in heart stir up strife; and the fire which they kindle is not confined within the narrow circle of their own immediate connections — but often spreads with fury through every part of the city where they dwell. They are public incendiaries, who must have everything done in their own way — or, if their pride and honor is not gratified, they excite universal disorder, drawing over as many as they can to their own party, by all the methods of fraud and villainy; and provoking other men by their conduct, until there is a kind of civil war raised within the society to which they belong, and the city or country is in great danger of destruction. These proud and scornful men are the bane of the place where they live — but divine providence has scattered some wise men through many places, who counteract their harms, and by prudent management, keep under or extinguish the flames of contention. To such people, the places where they dwell are under the greatest obligations, and they ought to be respected — as much as the haughty and insolent deserve to be abhorred.

There is another sense in which this proverb is verified. Men that despise God and goodness, and laugh at instruction and admonition, kindle the wrath of God against the country to which they

belong. For they not only provoke the displeasure of God against themselves — but their example corrupts their neighbors — and those who do not follow their pernicious ways are in a lesser degree sharers in their guilt, when they do not mourn for the abominations of the land, nor bear a proper testimony against them. And thus the whole community is involved in guilt, and exposed to punishment. But wise and holy men turn away wrath by their fervent prayers, and by the success with which their endeavors are sometimes blessed, to stem the torrent of corruption. Such men stand like Moses in the gap, and prevent the execution of deserved indignation, and they justly deserve that glorious character of the protectors of the nation. The wicked may call them the troublers of the land — but that is no strange thing, for Ahab reproached Elijah in such words. The holy seed are the substance and strength of a land. The wicked of a land are its most dangerous enemies. Have we any love for our native country? Let us reveal our patriotism by endeavoring to turn away wrath. If this cannot be done, then perhaps we shall be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger; and it is certain that we shall never lose our reward.

Proverbs 29:9. "If a wise man contends with a fool — the fool rages and scoffs, and there is no peace."

Those who keep the law contend with the wicked; and prudence must direct us in what manner we should contend with them. Men have very different dispositions; some must be addressed with severe and sharp reproofs, that they may feel the iniquity of their conduct. But others are to be addressed in the language of mildness and gentleness, and will be won to goodness, although they could not be driven to it. We find that the prophets sometimes thundered, and sometimes wept, and sometimes allured men by the language of love, to repentance. God, who is well acquainted with all the springs of conduct in human nature, taught them to deal with men in these various ways — but experience proved how generally this proverb agreed with the temper of foolish men. For the prophets seldom had much success in their exhortations, though diversified with all that wisdom and prudence in which God abounded towards men. The forerunner of our Lord, who was greater than the former prophets, lamented unto the people of his generation — and yet they did not mourn. Our Lord himself preached unto them, and the people wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. But they only wondered and did not generally repent.

Let us endeavor to turn the wicked to the wisdom of the just by all the prudent methods competent to our station. If we do not succeed in our charitable endeavors, our reward is with the Lord — and obstinate sinners must give an account to the Judge of the living and the dead. This proverb teaches us to avoid all personal contentions with foolish men. For whether we are angry at them, or endeavor by gentle means to reason them out of their folly, they will give us no rest — but behave in such a manner as may throw us off our guard, and deprive us of peace. When conscience and charity do not oblige us to enter into disputes with them for their own good, it is best to let them alone, except when the object of strife is sufficient to compensate our loss of peace. The fool, who is so intractable, either storms against the wise man who contends with him, or laughs him to scorn, and treats him with contempt. If we enter into dispute, we ought to behave with a gentle temper. Fury and scorn are the fool's weapons of warfare — but a wise man scorns to make use of them. As he wishes to do all things with charity, so he can carry on a necessary dispute, either about religion, or property, or anything else that will justify a dispute, with that meekness of wisdom which befits saints. The enemies of our Lord were remarkable examples of

the fool’s method of managing disputes. Our Lord himself is the great example whom Christians are to imitate in this and in every other point.

Proverbs 29:10. "Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity, but the upright seek his well-being."

"If the world hates you," says our Lord to his disciples, "you know that it hated me before it hated you." If God’s people are conformed unto Christ in suffering the hatred of men, they need not think it a strange thing, nor allow themselves to be dispirited on that account. There are some men whose hatred is better than their love, and such are the haters of the upright. They are bloodthirsty men, the successors of those who have been drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Every man who hates his brother in his heart is a murderer, and those are murderers of the worst kind who hate men for that which is good. They are the true children of him who was a murderer from the beginning. The upright are of an opposite disposition. They seek his well-being, (or care for it, as the word is translated,) and it is a comfort to the upright to consider who they are that hate, and who they are that love them, and care for their welfare. "Hereby know we the children of God and the children of the devil. Whoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he who loves not his brother." He who loves his brother will be zealous for his welfare, and will endeavor to screen him from the malice of the wicked. It is the duty of all men, and the disposition of the upright, to deliver those who are ready to be slain for their integrity.

Justice is not a lazy inactive virtue; it does not rest satisfied with doing no evil — but it will dispose men to do good, and to prevent evil to the utmost of their power. Do we profess to be just? We must remember that love is a debt which we owe to men, and especially to the upright; and that we must love, not in word and in tongue — but in deed and in truth.

Proverbs 29:11. "A fool utters all his mind, but a wise man keeps himself under control."

There are many people who boast of their honesty in telling others what they think, and concealing nothing that comes into their mind. Such people may call themselves by any honorable names they please — but Solomon calls them fools.

Some things come into our minds that we should never speak — but suppress the very thought of them; and other things may be very fit to be spoken at a fit season — and yet very improper to be spoken at present. The fool’s thoughts lie at the tip of his tongue — and there is no door at his mouth to keep them in! The thoughts of the wise man lie in his heart; and there is a door upon his tongue, which he keeps close barred, that nothing may get out of his mouth that may harm himself, or other men. Some things occur to him, which he will never utter to the wife of his bosom, because they could do no good. Other things he thinks proper to be spoken at a fit time, and then he keeps in his thoughts until afterwards. He will never speak against his mind — but he will not always speak his mind. And when he speaks it, he does not think that honesty obliges him to speak all that is in it.

Samuel told the elders of Bethlehem a part of his design in coming to their town — but he concealed the principal part of it by divine direction. There is a time to be silent, and a time to speak. There is a time to be silent even from good, because he wicked are before us. There is a time to speak a part of our mind, and a time to declare all that is in our hearts. The wise man’s heart knows both the proper time and circumstances. When a fool is in a passion he pours forth all his mind in a torrent of evil language, and speaks words which afterwards cut him to the heart.

Does he mean to reprove? He will do it at the most improper season, and inflame with rage the person whom he reproves. He may show something of the temper of the dove — but he imitates it rather in silliness than harmlessness. The wise man is sensible that it is as much his duty to practice the wisdom of the serpent, as the harmlessness of the dove. He will take care what he says, when he finds himself or sees others under the influence of passion, and will abstain from talking with which he can do no good.

Proverbs 29:12. "If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked."

Great is the accounting which rulers must give. For they are accountable for thousands of actions which they never committed, and of which it is possible they never heard. Their behavior has such a mighty influence, that we find, in the history of the kings of Israel and Judah, the nation behaving well or ill according to the example and influence of their sovereign. If a ruler takes pleasure in flattery, the greater part of his servants will be so wicked as to poison him with their fulsome and ill-grounded praises. They will make him glad with their lies — but at the same time they make him more wicked, while they are polluting their own hearts, and debauching their consciences, by prostituting themselves to such base means of ingratiating themselves with their prince. The servants of a ruler are still more wicked, if he hearkens to slander and false accusations. For some of them through fear, and others of them to gain his favor, will join in persecuting the innocent, and encouraging that pestilent vermin of a nation, called slanderers. The reigns of those princes who gave an easy belief to accusations, are stained with the most atrocious crimes. Tiberius Caesar put to death the greater number of his own privy counselors, by giving ear to lies, and encouraging his servants to be wicked. It is probable that the worst action that ever was committed since the fall of Adam, the murder of the Prince of life, was occasioned by Pilate’s wicked and cowardly regard to the temper of that tyrant, and his fear of being accused as an encourager of treason, if he had allowed our Lord to escape.

It is a base and unmanly vice in any person to hearken to idle tales, that may very likely turn out to be lies, or misrepresentations of truth. The man who encourages people to tell him what this or the other person says of him, can never live in peace and friendship with his neighbors. And he makes other people wicked, by the countenance which he affords to slander, and whispering, and evil speaking in all its different kinds.

Proverbs 29:13. "The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The Lord gives sight to the eyes of both." The poor too often look with an envious eye upon the rich, specially those to whom they are in debt, and the oppressor looks with an eye of contempt upon his poor debtor. But what has the rich more than the poor — or why should the poor grudge at the riches of another man? The Lord is the maker of them both, and gives them equally the light of understanding. He bestows comfort upon the poor as well as the rich; and although they have not the pleasure of looking at splendid ceilings, and fine furniture in their dwellings — yet the cheerful light of day shines upon his eyelids, and he beholds those wonderful glories of the skies, which darken the luster of all earthly pomp.

If the rich man has acquired his fortune by deceit, he has no advantage from it above the poor, but to load his soul with guilt. The light of life, and reason, and comfort, is granted to the poor, at least as much as to himself. And the light of grace, which is enjoyed by the poor, is hidden from his eyes. He cannot think that the poor man is hated by God, because he is not worth so great a sum

of money as himself; nor can he flatter himself, unless he is sunk in stupidity, that God loves him because he is wealthy.

God continues with him the light of life, for his patience and mercy is very great, and he waits for the repentance of the wicked — but the impenitent must soon have their eyes closed in darkness, and their souls shut up in the place of utter darkness — when the poor of this world, who were rich in faith, shall no longer meet with the deceitful man, because they are admitted to that world of light into which no deceitful man, without pardoning and converting grace, shall be permitted to enter.

Proverbs 29:14. "If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne shall be established forever."

All kings are anxious to have their thrones established, and their crowns transmitted to the last posterity. But by what means shall they establish their thrones? By forming alliances, by fortifying their cities, by providing powerful navies, and by supporting great armies? These things may be useful — but honest government is the best and surest way of establishing their thrones, for that will secure them the love of their subjects, and render their kingdoms prosperous. And what is of still greater consequence, the blessing of the Lord will attend that administration, which is managed according to his own directions.

Kings are obliged to do justice to all men — but the God of mercy gives them a special charge of the poor, who are most liable to oppression and harm. The Lord looks down from Heaven with an eye of compassion to the poor and needy, and commands the princes and judges of the earth to be very merciful to them, and will not allow the justice and kindness that is showed them to pass unrewarded. The poor may expect good at the hands of all who regard the Word of God — but if they are treated with scorn by men, they may safely commit themselves unto him who testifies so much kindness to them in his promises and precepts.

Proverbs 29:15. "The rod and reproof impart wisdom, but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame."

"Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him." This is true, especially of old fools that are hardened by a course of foolish conduct. But the rod of correction is a means appointed by God, and often blessed by him, for driving away folly from the hearts of young people. God never prescribed any vain or unprofitable precepts; and he would not have insisted so much on the duty of correcting children, unless he had designed in general to give a blessing to it. But the rod of correction is of no use without the concurrence of God, the great and only author of wisdom. Those, therefore, who desire the blessing of God to attend it, must administer correction in the manner appointed by him — and he requires reproof to be joined to the rod, that the child who is corrected may be made sensible of the evil for which he is treated with severity.

Some parents follow the dictates of their own passion in correcting their children, and strike without mercy, when they use no means to make them sensible that they deserve the rod. They deal worse with their children than shepherds with their dogs, who beat them when they have done something that displeases their masters — but do it in such a manner, or at such a time, that these animals may perceive the fault for which they are punished. The rod, joined with reproof, is a means of giving wisdom, and of making a child behave in such a manner that he may be a credit

to his parents — but a child left to behave as he pleases, will never, in all probability, be a comfort or an honor either to his father or to his mother. All are naturally corrupt, and those who are left to follow the propensities of nature will be a grief to their fathers, and bring their mothers to shame. Their mothers deserved much blame for the indulgence so foolishly given them, and when they feel the torment which the bad behavior of their children cannot fail of giving them, they must see their sin in their punishment.

Proverbs 29:16. "When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall." When the pestilence rages in a country, multitudes are infected with the dreadful distemper. There is no disease more fatal or more infectious than sin. When the generality of men are profane, the restraints of shame are removed from sin, and wicked men thrive. They must possess a spirit like that of Noah or Lot, who are untainted by the spreading contagion. When wicked men possess authority, the danger is extreme. The countenance which they give to sin is a dreadful temptation, which few have the resolution and courage to resist. One Obadiah in the court, and seven thousand worshipers of the Lord in the kingdom of Ahab, were more than Elijah dreamed of. The abundance of wickedness in such evil times is very distressing to the righteous — but they have the comfortable prospect of seeing the fall of the wicked. God is their enemy, and although he bears with them for a time — yet he has doomed them to destruction. Their iniquity shall come into remembrance with the Lord, and when the measure of it is full, they shall be swept away with the broom of destruction. The righteous shall see their fall and shall rejoice, (not that they entertained hatred to the wicked, for they ardently desired their repentance, but) because their fall is a check to wickedness and an evidence that there is a God who reigns in the earth, and has an invariable love for Righteousness.

Proverbs 29:17. "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul."

Why does Solomon so often press this duty of disciplining children? Because it is a necessary duty; and yet many parents are very averse to the practice of it. When there is a great drought in the ground, it requires many showers to make it fruitful. Just so, when there is a violent aversion to any duty, precept must be upon precept, and line upon line, before we will practice it. But does correcting of children gives great pain to the parent? On the contrary, it gives great pleasure. The pain is transient — the pleasure is lasting. The rod and reproof give wisdom; and how delightful to a parent, is wisdom in a child! But what if a child still continues obstinate? This is not ordinarily the case. Correct like a kind parent and a friend — and your child will learn at length the duty of a child. Join prayer with your corrections, to that God who has appointed them. He never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek me in vain — and he never appointed useless and unavailing means for any end. But God is sovereign; perhaps he will not be pleased to communicate wisdom by the rod to my child? Make the trial. If you should be unsuccessful, you shall be free of those tormenting stings of remorse which thousands of parents feel.

Isaac was the beloved son of Abraham, and never did a parent taste such pleasure in a son as the venerable patriarch, except the Virgin Mary — but Abraham did not refuse to sacrifice his son with his own hands, when God gave the order; and shall we refuse to administer a little beneficial correction to our children at his command? Abraham never found so much pleasure in his son, as when he showed that he feared and loved God above his son, in not withholding him from God. Just so, other parents may look for greater or lesser degrees of comfort in their children, as they

observe or neglect the commandments of the Lord, about the management of them. Eli honored his sons above God, and they proved the greatest of his crosses; "for those who honor me," says God, "I will honor; and those who despise me, shall be lightly esteemed."

Proverbs 29:18. "Where there is no vision, the people perish; but blessed is he who keeps the law."

It is a distinguishing mercy to us that God has made known in our land, the great things of his law and covenant. There are nations that never heard of the name of a Redeemer, and under the influence of corrupt traditions or false prophets, they are serving those gods that are no gods, with detestable ceremonies. They are born, like ourselves, in a sinful and wretched condition — but are left in utter ignorance of that great Savior in whose name our blessedness lies. They are left naked and exposed to the assaults of their spiritual enemies, who are still walking about seeking whom they may destroy. Where there is no Christian vision, the light of philosophy cannot supply its place. The Greeks were admirably enlightened by science — and yet Paul tells them, that before the gospel of their salvation was preached among them, they were strangers to the covenant of promise; without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world.

Blessed be God who made light to arise in darkness to us. Britain was, in ancient days, one of the darkest places of the earth — but through the tender mercies of our God, the day-spring from on high visited us. By the cruelty of the Popish clergy, the key of knowledge was almost taken from us in later ages — but through the good hand of our God upon us, we have now great plenty of Bibles and sermons.

Let it be our daily prayer, that all the nations of the world who are perishing through lack of knowledge, may be made to share in our privileges. But what will unimproved privileges avail? He is not the happy man who has a Bible — but the man is blessed who delights in it, and meditates upon it day and night; who believes the doctrines of it, trusts in the Savior whom it reveals, and respects all the precepts of it in his practice.

"Not every one who says unto Christ, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven — but he who does the will of Christ’s heavenly father." If those who sin without the law perish without the law — then there must be a deeper perdition, and more intolerable torments for those who despise both law and gospel.

Proverbs 29:19. "A servant cannot be corrected by mere words; though he understands, he will not respond."

We apply what is here said to a stubborn servant only; and it is plain, from fact, that Solomon meant this proverb only of such, for there are many hired servants every way equal to their masters in every generous quality, and the character of those servants that must be corrected by blows, does by no means belong to them. There have been even slaves who have showed a noble disposition, and have not only served their masters with fidelity — but performed acts of heroism that might have done honor to any station. But it is very probable, that in Solomon’s days, when servants were commonly bond-slaves, the greatest part of them were sunk and debased, so far as to be of the temper here represented. The loss of liberty is often the destruction of everything good and noble; and servants that were treated like cattle would need a strict hand to govern them; because words would not be much regarded by those who had neither attachment to

their masters, nor any sense of honor. The proverb teaches us that masters ought to keep up their authority in their families. Without this everything must be in a state of confusion, and go to ruin. If they have servant that will not yield obedience, they must either be compelled to do it, or dismissed from the house. But it teaches us likewise, that methods of severity are not to be used by heads of families, when milder means are sufficient to answer the end. It is only when servants, though they understand the wishes of their masters, will not answer by respectful words and due obedience, that masters are warranted to use harsh methods of dealing with them.

Let servants learn from this passage, how much God is displeased with them, when they are sullen and disobedient to their masters. God commands masters to give unto their servants that which is just and equal; at the same time he gives them commission to support their authority over stubborn servants, by such means as are sufficient to answer the end. If servants are reproved with sharpness for their faults, they must blame themselves and not their masters. The apostle Peter tells them, that they deserve no thanks, if they are patient, even when they are buffeted for their faults. If they deserve no thanks for their patience under just buffetings — they deserve very great blame when they are impatient of merited reproof.

Proverbs 29:20. "Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him!"

"Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." But how shall we know the man who is wise in his own conceit when we see him? This text gives us a sure mark of such a person. When a man speaks everything that strikes his mind, rashly and inconsiderately — or when he is rash and headstrong in the management of his business, disdaining to take any advice from others, and so confident of his own wisdom and abilities, that he takes little time to consider the most important undertaking — but pushes on in the way that seems best to his own unadvised mind, hoping to command success by his own power — then it is evident that he is wise in his own conceit. And he who is wise in his own eyes, is the greatest and most hopeless of fools in Solomon’s estimation.

If rashness in the things of this life is a sign of great folly, then it is a great deal more dangerous to make too much haste in matters of religion. The Bereans are commended because they candidly examined Paul’s doctrine by the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The apostle condemns those who are heady, and joins them with the high-minded; and it is certain, that people of that character have been the authors of those heresies and divisions which have plagued the church of God, and are still the fire-brands of Christian societies.

There is another kind of rashness in religion forbidden by Solomon as a token of great irreverence to God; I mean rashness in vowing or in praying. God is in Heaven, and we are upon earth — and therefore our words before him ought to be few and well considered.

Proverbs 29:21. "If a man pampers his servant from youth — he will bring grief in the end." The greatest part of masters cannot be blamed for too much indulgence to their servants — and yet some err on that side. Solomon, who wished us to stand perfect and complete in all wisdom, guards us against it. Men must condescend to them of low degree — but they ought at the same time to respect their own place and station, and not to debase it, by such familiarities towards their inferiors as may expose themselves to contempt, and tempt their inferiors to forget their distance.

Joab, by the indulgence of David, became such a great man, that he killed the commander in chief of David's army, at the head of his troops. As an officer in the army would deserve to lose his place, if he did not oblige his soldiers to obey him — so the man shows himself unworthy of his station in the family, or church, or nation, who does not know the authority which God has given him, and uses no care to preserve it.

Servants are taught by this proverb, to respect, as well as to obey their masters. The apostle Peter enjoins servants to obey their masters with all fear, whether their masters are wicked — or good and gentle. Whatever condescensions our superiors use in their behavior towards us, we must not forget our distance — but give fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor is due. Job was a prince of extraordinary goodness to his servants and all his inferiors — yet he never, until the time of his severe trials, forfeited, or lost any part of that respect which was his due.

Proverbs 29:22. "An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins."

Solomon has told us already, that the angry man stirs up strife. His anger pushes him on to bitter contentions, and makes him the incendiary of the place where he lives. But strife is not the only evil produced by anger, for when it is roused to fury, it becomes a fruitful source of every iniquity. We read in the 24th chapter of Leviticus, that a man in his passion cursed the name of the God of Israel, and was stoned for it. David, although he was a meek man in the general course of his life, swore a very rash oath, by the name of the Lord, when he was incensed at Nabal.

Railing, and reviling, and backbiting, and evil speaking, and lies, and wars, and duels, and murders — are only a few of the transgressions to which men have been a thousand times tempted by their unbridled anger. He who indulges anger, gives place to the devil. He puts that malignant spirit in possession of the throne of his heart, and commits to him the direction of his heart, and tongue, and hands. The wrath of man never works the righteousness of God; it utterly disqualifies him for praying, or doing any other holy action — but it works the will of the devil with both hands earnestly.

Many volumes of history might be written in proof of this point — but the evidences of it are every day before our eyes. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath, and let the meekness and gentleness of Christ be still before your eyes.

Proverbs 29:23. "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of a humble spirit gains honor."

Pride raises a man as high as Heaven in his own apprehension — but it shall bring him as low as Hell. All men are the enemies of the proud, and proud men themselves are the bitterest enemies to one another. For other vices unite men in confederacies and friendships — but pride has often set fathers and sons, husbands and wives, at variance.

God is the enemy of the proud, he looks upon them with disdain and abhorrence, and will abase them.

Pride itself is the enemy of the proud, and will bring them down from the highest honors to the deepest pit of disgrace. What was it but pride, that brought Haman to the gallows — and made angels, devils? But those whose hearts are humble enjoy true and solid honors. The honors of the proud are feathers and wind. They soon fly away and never return — but honor shall uphold the man of a humble spirit. His crown consists, not of such corruptible things as silver and gold — but

it is a crown of life and glory which never fades away. He is exalted to safety, and shall reign with God forever and ever.

Let us all beware of the devil's first-born sin — and learn humility from him who was meek and humble in heart.

There are remainders of pride even in believers, which, if left unmortified, will do them great hurt. For any man's pride (were he as good as Hezekiah) will bring him low, until his spirit is effectually humbled.

Why does the wise man insist so much on this point? Not because he needed new matter for instructing us, for his wisdom covered the whole earth, and he filled the world with dark parables. But because humility is a lesson which we must learn — and yet are very backward to learn. Our Lord frequently repeats this proverb in other words. "He who exalts himself shall be abased, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Proverbs 29:24. "The accomplice of a thief is his own enemy; he is put under oath and dare not testify."

Stealing is an abominable crime. It was to be severely punished by the law of God, and is still more severely punished by our own laws. Thieves, and all who are partners with thieves, are haters of their own souls, for they love money more than salvation. They are the enemies of all men — but they are worse enemies to themselves than to those whom they plunder. How poor a recompense do they obtain by their ill-gotten gains — for the harms which they bring upon themselves here, and in the eternal world.

There are some who would be afraid to steal — and yet they venture to partake with thieves in their crime, by receiving a part of what is stolen as the price of concealment, or by buying commodities which they have reason to suspect for stolen goods, because they can have them at a low price. The Scripture assures us, that men may bring such guilt upon themselves by partaking of other men's sins; and that he who is a partner with a thief, is a hater of his own life and soul, as well as the principal thief. The devil is not content with drawing men to single acts of sin — but he makes one evil thing the preface to another. The devil makes one transgression a snare for leading the sinner into another; and he who joins with a thief, is prepared for lying and perjury. In court he is put under oath and dare not testify — and thus he adds to the guilt of stealing the greater guilt of falsehood and concealment, when he is upon his oath. Those who are under examination upon oath, should consider this text. If they swear that they will tell everything they know about the affair before the judge, or if they are required, by proper authority, to bear witness about a crime which ought to be punished — they are enemies to justice, and haters of their own souls, if they do not give a faithful and honest declaration of the truth. Men may partake of other men's sins, not only by countenancing them — but by refusing to concur in proper endeavors to have them punished, for a warning to others.

Proverbs 29:25. "The fear of man brings a snare — but whoever puts his trust in the Lord shall be kept safe." When men are more afraid of offending their fellow men than of sinning against God, they are in great danger of being drawn or driven into some of the worst of sins! It was this fear which made David sometimes lie, although he hated lying. It was the fear of a woman who made Peter deny his gracious master; and the same passion afterwards induced him to behave in a very

unedifying manner at Antioch, that he might not give offence to his bigoted brethren. If the fear of man has sometimes misled such men as David and Peter, (and we may add, the father of the faithful, and Aaron the priest of the Lord) — then how ensnaring must it be to those who are entirely destitute of faith in God. Many are kept by it from performing necessary duties, like those who believed Jesus to be the Christ — and yet dared not confess him, lest they should have been excommunicated. Many are driven to rebel in many things against the light of their judgments — to gratify masters, or parents, or princes, or friends, whom they wish not to displease.

It will be no sufficient excuse for sin, that the fear of men led us into the commission of it. Who are we that we should be afraid of men who shall die? Are men more worthy of fear, than the Almighty God? Was it right in our first parents to obey the devil, rather than God? Do we not imitate their conduct when we prefer the pleasing of men, to the pleasing of our Maker? If we rather choose to venture on the wrath of God than the wrath of men — can we complain if we have our choice? The great antidote against the fear of man is confidence in the Lord. The true believer, acting like himself, goes on in the path of duty, without fearing the wrath of men or devils. "The Lord," says he, "is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is my helper, what can mere man do unto me?" In our tormenting and ensnaring fears, our Lord teaches us to discern the weakness of our faith. He who trusts in the Lord shall be safe from the snares of sin. For his faith is a shield to quench all the fiery darts of temptation. He shall be safe from every danger in the way of duty, which timorous men fall into. He shall find that there is no lion, nor any ravenous beast in the way of holiness. Or if there are, that they are chained, and cannot do him any evil which shall not turn out to his advantage in the end.

Proverbs 29:26. "Many seek the ruler’s favor, but it is from the Lord that man gets justice."

Confidence in men is no less dangerous than the fear of man, and there is a dreadful curse pronounced upon those who trust in man, and make flesh their arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord. Princes are the idols of those who are honored with their friendship. Men in lower stations make idols of those who are most likely to do them any service, and solicit their kindness oftentimes with greater earnestness than the favor of God. This behavior proceeds from a secret disbelief of the providence of God. Men seem to think that earthly things are managed by a train of inferior causes, without any superintendence of the Most High God. If they have the favor of great men, they are happy for this life, whether they have an interest in the favor of God or not. But we ought to believe and remember this great truth — that every man’s portion comes from the Lord. It depends upon his sovereign pleasure whether we shall be prosperous or unsuccessful in any particular business; whether we shall be rich or poor; whether we shall enjoy the favor of men, or suffer the effects of their displeasure. Riches, and honors, and friendship, and hatred — are under the control of the Ruler of the world. Not a hair can fall from our heads, nor can the least addition to our comfort be made, without his pleasure. A sense of this truth would dispose us to acknowledge God in all our ways; to make our requests in all things known unto him with fervency of spirit; to thank him with greater cordiality for every happy event, than those who were the instruments of his kindness. It would be a strong antidote against the ensnaring fear of men, and every fleshly confidence. It would keep us from sinking under adversity, and from abusing prosperity into provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof. A persuasion of this truth disposing us to cleave unto God, is the best means of ensuring success in all our undertakings.

Esther prayed more earnestly to God, than to Ahasuerus, for the safety of her nation, and her success is celebrated by the Jews unto this day. Nehemiah acted upon the same principle, when he petitioned his master for the place of his father's sepulchers — the Lord gave him great favor with the king of Persia, and his fame shall live forever. All who place that confidence in any creature, which is due to the Sovereign of Heaven and earth, are reproved by this precept. They are directed to expect everything they need from God as the first cause, although the warrantable means of obtaining our wishes, are not to be neglected.

Proverbs 29:27. "An unjust man is an abomination to the just. He who is upright in the way, is an abomination to the wicked." That an unjust man abhors the just, we have already heard. But how can the just abhor the wicked? Christ commands us to love our enemies, although our enemies, in all appearance, must be the enemies of God also. We are required to love our neighbors as ourselves, although we know that great multitudes of them are unrighteous men. How then will the law of God permit us to hold the unrighteous in abhorrence? The just man wishes no evil to the wicked, for he would have them all to be saved. Paul could have wished that he was accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh — although they were the worst enemies of the gospel in the world. But the unjust man is detested by the just, as a rebel against God, although, as a man, he is the object of charity. The just man abhors the sins of the wicked, and shuns their company and testifies by every regular method against their iniquities, and joins his influence to bring them under the beneficial rod of discipline. His abhorrence of them is a part of his conformity to Christ, who exposed hypocrites, and spoke with a voice of thunder against the wickedness of men — and yet called all to repentance, and prayed for the wicked when they were crucifying him. Hatred to sin in ourselves and other men — is one necessary branch of the Christian temper. If we are the friends of Christ, we shall be determined enemies to that which brought him to a cross. The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, are ended.

# 01.30. Proverbs 30

Chapter 30.

Proverbs 30:1-33

Proverbs 30:1. "The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh — an oracle. This man declared to Ithiel, to Ithiel and to Ucal."

Agur was honored, like Obadiah and Jude, to write a very small portion of the Holy Scripture — but every part of the Word of God is precious, however small. The words of Agur are called an oracle or burden, for they were indited by the Holy Spirit, and are profitable for our correction and instruction in righteousness. This oracle is added to the proverbs of Solomon, because they treat on the same subjects, and are written in a like form. The name of Agur is not given to a distinct book of the Bible — but his memorial shall be everlasting, for he was furnished with that wisdom which is from above. We can give no historical account of this wise man; we only know the name of his father, and his two chief disciples, who were doubtless men of credit in their generation — but their names only live in our days, for the current of time swallows up the names of the greatest part of men, and leaves little or nothing but the names of the rest. It is an honor to these men that their names are mentioned in the book of God as the disciples of Agur. If we are diligent learners at the school of Christ, and of those men who were inspired by the Spirit of Christ, although our names be not recorded in this blessed book — yet we may rejoice that they are written in Heaven. In this oracle, Agur expresses his humble sense of his own ignorance, and tells us what need we have of a divine teacher to explain the glories of God to us. He recommends the Word of God to us, and calls us to the exercise of that faith for which we have a foundation in the Word of God. He directs us by his own example how to pray. He warns us against several dangerous sins, and makes several instructive observations on the characters of men, and the nature and qualities of many of God’s creatures. These are perhaps a summary of what he spoke to Ithiel and Ucal while he lived; and although he is now dead, he speaks them to us.

Proverbs 30:2. "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man."

One of the best proofs of wisdom, is a sense of our own ignorance and folly. Pythagoras would not allow himself to be called a wise man — but a lover of wisdom. Socrates, who far exceeded him in wisdom, said, that he knew nothing — but that he knew nothing. Agur goes still further, and calls himself a brutish man.

All men are naturally brutish in respect of spiritual things — and Agur calls himself more brutish than any man. He was well acquainted with the fallen and degenerate condition of men, and deeply affected with his own particular share in it. Man is born like a wild donkey’s colt; and a humble man is ready to acknowledge that there is none to whom this debasing comparison can be so justly applied as to himself. But did Agur speak truth, or was he sincere in speaking so humbly of himself? No doubt he uses very strong language — but he was perfectly sincere in it. For he

thought about God and eternal things — but felt so much difficulty in understanding them, he found himself naturally so much indisposed to the most important duties, and was filled with such grief at the darkness of his mind, and the perverseness of his heart — that he could not find words strong enough to express his inward sense of his own vileness and darkness.

It is a literal truth concerning the wisest of us, that we are more brutish in relation to the noblest objects that can occupy our minds, than any man is about the affairs of life. Men have retained their wisdom about things of small consequence — but surely every man is brutish in his knowledge if divine things, until his mind is opened by the Holy Spirit to receive the knowledge of them.

"Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place where gold is refined;" and men have found methods of forcing their way through mountains and rocks, that they may fetch out these shining metals; and bring out to the light of day, the stores of darkness.

"But where is wisdom to be found, and where is the place of understanding? Man knows not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of the living." None are so ignorant, and so likely to continue so, as those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. None are so wise, and so likely to increase in wisdom, as humble souls who are deeply conscious of their folly and ignorance. They will open their mouths, and pant for God’s commandments. They will rejoice to hear that Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, and will sit at the feet of Jesus, and receive from him the words of eternal life.

Proverbs 30:3. "I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One."

Perhaps Agur means the same thing with Amos, when he says, "I was not a prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son." He was not trained up in the schools of the prophets — but God lays up sound wisdom for the righteous, and dispenses it with or without the ordinary means, as he pleases. For although he has required us to make a conscientious use of these means — yet he has not restricted himself to them in the distributions of his favor.

Paul was of the same humble temper with Agur. He counted himself less than the least of all saints; and Agur accounts himself inferior in divine knowledge to other saints. The spirit of Diotrephes is in those men who court the pre-eminence among the brethren — but the lowly temper of a true saint will dispose us in honor to prefer one another. When Elihu began to speak, in the dispute carried on between Job and his friends, he prefaces his discourse with high, though just praises on the wisdom that God had bestowed on him. Agur introduces his discourse with confessions of his own ignorance — but their situations were very different. Elihu was afraid that his friends would despise him for his youth, and lose the benefit of his speech. Agur thought he had reason to be afraid of the contrary extreme. When Ithiel and Ucal applied to him for instruction, they revealed a high opinion of his understanding.

We ought not to affect too great a name for knowledge and learning, nor to encourage men to expect too much from us, lest they should be disappointed to our own shame. Or lest they should place too great a dependence upon us, and too little on the Author of wisdom. A good name is valuable — but a great name is dangerous; and a wise man would rather decline than desire it.

"As the refining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold — so is a man to his praise." A fool swells with vain conceit, if he finds his wisdom admired. A wise man is humbled to find how far he falls short of the opinion that is entertained of him. A fool, when he is praised, seeks more praise — for the wind after which he hungers cannot fill him. But a man of Agur's spirit will endeavor to moderate those high opinions which are entertained to his advantage.

Herod was destroyed by worms, for the vain joy which he felt in the ungodly applause given to his wisdom and eloquence. Agur is recorded in Scripture as a pattern of humility to those men whose wisdom is admired. As Agur himself was insufficient to satisfy his friends' thirst of knowledge, so he directs them to look above all men for instruction.

Proverbs 30:4. "Who has gone up to Heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!"

It is just as impossible for men, without divine illumination, to discover God — as to ascend into Heaven, or descend from it; to bind up the waters in a garment, or to gather the winds in their fists, or to establish all the ends of the earth. Has any man ever been able to achieve such wonders? Where did he live? What was his name? What is the name of any man who has the honor to spring from such a wonderful ancestor? If you can tell me the name of such a man as this, or his son, then I will confess that he is possessed of treasures of wisdom sufficient to supply all your needs, and to satisfy all your desires of knowledge. The God, whose name is beyond our comprehension, and whose Son's name is Wonderful, does all these things. Heaven is his throne, and the clouds are his chariots, and the earth has often felt his solemn presence. "God alone understands the way to wisdom; he knows where it can be found, for he looks throughout the whole earth and sees everything under the heavens. He decided how hard the winds should blow and how much rain should fall. He made the laws for the rain and laid out a path for the lightning. With him is wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding!" And from him, the Father of lights, every ray of useful knowledge comes.

It deserves to be observed that our great Teacher makes use of the truth delivered in this verse to prove his absolute perfection as our instructor. "No man has ascended up to Heaven," to fetch down the knowledge of God to men — "but he who came down from Heaven, even the Son of man who is in Heaven." He showed his mission, by issuing forth his commands to the winds and the waves, which instantly obeyed him. He establishes all the ends of the earth, and by him all things in Heaven and in earth are held together. "He is the Lord our God, who teaches us to profit." Let us therefore acknowledge with Agur that we have no knowledge of our own, and wait for his instructions as the earth for the latter rain. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in him, and these treasures are not sealed up — but spread before us in the word of Christ, which we ought to read with an humble dependence on him for his light and truth, that we may learn to set our hope on God.

Proverbs 30:5. "Every Word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who put their trust in him."

There are no superfluities in the Word of God, as we are too ready to imagine. Every Word of God is useful and holy, righteous and true. When we hear the words of men, our reason must try them, as the mouth tastes food — for any man may be a liar, or deceive us by his own

misapprehensions. But the words of God are all worthy of himself. As the power of the Creator shines in all the works of his hands — so his inviolable truth and untainted holiness, give dignity and credit to everything that he speaks. The Bible has the same impression of divinity upon it that appears in the sun and the stars.

Because the Word of God is very pure, we ought to love it, and to believe it with all our hearts, and to trust in God, as he is revealed to us in it. For it reveals him to be forever possessed of all those infinite excellencies which make him the proper object of confidence to creatures, of all that mercy and grace, and plenteous redemption, which are sufficient to encourage the confidence of guilty creatures. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him. The world is full of harm and miseries sufficient to destroy or embitter our lives, and of invisible enemies, who seek to destroy our souls — but those who trust in the Lord, are completely safe and happy. His mercy is their refuge from condemnation, through Jesus' sin-atoning sacrifice which his word reveals. His power will shield them from every enemy, and they shall be kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on him, because they trust in him.

"Fear not," said the Lord to Abraham, I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward." All who walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham, enjoy the benefit and comfort of this promise. They shall travel in safety through armies of enemies, and at last inherit the better country, where the father of the faithful now dwells. But our trust must be in the name of the Lord, as it is represented to us in the Word of God — the ground of our faith in him. To alter or to add to it is very dangerous.

Proverbs 30:6. "Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar."

It is strange — but true, that men have been often disposed to add to the words of God, by establishing some rule of faith beside the Scripture, or intruding into the secrets of God, and devising religious doctrines not taught in the Scripture; or means of divine worship, which never came into God's mind. Surely such presumption shall be reproved and punished by the Most High. Princes would require the blood of those daring subjects who presumed to insert some additions in their laws — and God will add unto those who add to his words, all the plagues contained in the last and most dreadful book of the Scripture. To add to the true meaning of the Scripture, in order to accommodate its doctrine to our own prejudices or taste, is a sin of the like kind. If we do so, we shall be reproved by God, and found liars, by saying that God has taught things which he never taught. Errors and sin are incident to man in his corrupted state — but we ought to guard against the former as well as the latter, by perusing the Bible with diligence and humility, and praying for that unction from the Holy One, which is truth, and will effectually preserve us from every dangerous mistake.

Proverbs 30:7. "Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die."

Agur has taught us faith in God. He now teaches us by his own example, to pray, although he does not mention, by name, the object of prayer. He never dreamed that any person who professed to believe the Word of God, would think of any other object of prayer than God himself. But, since his days, men have found means to jumble together, in their systems of religion, the most incompatible truths and errors.

Two things comprised the objects of his petitions. David had one thing that he chiefly desired, and our Lord sums up every necessary request in six petitions. The great blessings that we need from

God should be habitually present to our minds, that when we have occasion to appear before the Lord, without time to premeditate, we may, in our requests, present the meditations of our heart in the words of our mouth. The wisest of the heathens were at a great loss to know what blessings they should ask from God — but God in mercy has instructed us what we should pray for, and has promised the Spirit to help the infirmities of our understandings and souls, in this duty. When we observe the directions of the Scripture about our prayers, we know to ask things agreeable to the will of God. The gracious Hearer of Prayer never said unto any of the seed of Jacob, "seek me in vain;" and he will not refuse hearing to those prayers that are dictated by his own Spirit. But when we pray, we must pray in faith, nothing doubting. This holy man used great boldness at the throne of God. He insisted for these two things, and requires them, and pleads against a denial. The revelations of the New Testament give us greater encouragements than Agur had, to exercise boldness in the presence of God, and to plead with unceasing earnestness until we obtain the blessings that we need. God sits on a throne of grace, and we have a great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, and there appears in the presence of God for us. Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace. This great High Priest is also our instructor, and teaches us to pray always, and not to faint, assuring us that our importunity shall at length prevail. The most glorious name of any mere man spoken of in the histories of the world, was obtained by such importunate supplications. Jacob wept and made supplication at Bethel; yes, by his strength, he had power with the angel and prevailed, and his name was called Israel, because as a prince he had power with God, and received the blessing for which he wrestled.

Agur prayed to God with proper impressions of his frailty and mortality upon his mind. He spoke like a dying man to the eternal God, and requested that he might enjoy the blessings of God while he lived. Spiritual blessing were the grand object of his wishes; and if we duly considered the uncertainty of our lives, and the approaches that death is constantly making to us, we would never ask these blessings with such coldness as if we desired a denial. Thoughts of death should inflame our desires after heavenly things, and moderate our exorbitant desires for the blessings of the present life.

Proverbs 30:8. "Keep vanity and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread."

Agur’s first petition is for deliverance from sin. Whether he means particularly the sins usually known by these names, or the sin of idolatry, or sin in general — he no doubt desired freedom from all sin. The holiest of men need preservation from the worst sins, for they are conscious that they might fall into the deepest mire of iniquity — if God withheld his mercy. "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" But all kinds of sin may be justly called vanities and lies, because all sin is empty and unprofitable, and imposes the most mischievous falsehoods upon men, promising them pleasure and gain — and giving them nothing but disappointment and damnation. An impression of the unprofitableness and danger of sin would make us very earnest in our prayers for the removal of it from us. "O Lord, the Gentiles shall come unto you from the ends of the earth, and shall say: Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit." The removal of sin includes in it both pardon and sanctification, and therefore the petition may include both the fifth and sixth petition of the Lord’s prayer. When God pardons sin, he removes it far from us as the east is from the west, and casts it into the depth of the sea! When he sanctifies a soul, he removes sin from its throne, and gradually drives it out of its residence in the soul. Both these

blessings are absolutely necessary for us. They are to be the subject of our most earnest petitions, and we have great encouragement to plead for them, because they are graciously promised in his word. These rich promises are yes and amen in Christ, who purchased them for us by his blood, and gives us all possible assurance of obtaining them from God.

We are not only to pray for the removal of sin — but for the removal of it at a great distance from us. "Keep vanity and lies far from me!" As God removes it far away in pardon, the soul that abhors sin desires to have it far removed from the heart and life. Our Lord teaches us not only to pray against sin — but against temptation. For there is a strong inclination in the hearts of men to comply with temptations when they are presented to the soul. If a man has a bag of gun-powder in his hands, he will certainly wish to keep at a distance from the fire.

We must seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof — but we are not forbidden to seek also those things that are needful for the body. We are forbidden to seek great things for ourselves — but directed to seek daily bread. And accordingly, Agur prays for it in these words, "Give me neither poverty nor riches."

Poverty is a very disagreeable thing to all men, and none will wonder that Agur prays against it. Yet our Lord, for our sakes, endured extreme poverty. If Providence should appoint poverty to us as our lot, we ought to be content with that situation in which Christ himself lived among us. Yet such is the kindness of God to us, that we are warranted to pray against it, as a state of sore temptation. Had Agur prayed against poverty only, we would have all joined with him — but few men would choose to have him for their chaplain, because to poverty he adds riches, as a thing equally undesirable to him. Riches are the desire of all men — except for those who know the weakness of their own hearts, and believe what our Lord tells us of the danger of riches. Riches are good if they are rightly used, and have been the instrument of much good when they were in the hands of very godly and wise men — but there are few even of the saints who have a sufficiency of wisdom and grace, for using, without abusing them.

Agur desired to have nothing, however agreeable to the natural and ordinary wishes of men, if it might prove injurious to his soul.

What then would this godly man have from God, if he desires neither poverty nor riches? He prays that God would feed him with daily bread; bestowing on him whatever was needful for his support and convenience, and suitable to the station in which he was placed. Having food and clothing, and all that is commonly included under the name of bread in Scripture language — he would be content and thankful, and ask no more.

Agur teaches us, in this account of his prayers, to look upon God as the dispenser of the good things of life, who gives riches or poverty at his pleasure; from whom we receive our food and clothing; on whom we ought to depend for the supply of all our necessities; to whom we should pray for every good thing, and render thanks for every blessing.

We are taught likewise to offer our most fervent petitions for the blessings of God’s salvation. Agur did not think that vanity and lies could be removed too far from him — but he thought that poverty might soon be too far removed. How opposite was his spirit to the spirit of the world! The greatest part of men seek earthly blessings with all the desire of their hearts, and the blessings of salvation with more moderate desires, and only so far as they may consist with the main objects of their

affection. But Agur desires outward conveniences for the good of his soul, and only in such a measure as might consist with his best interests.

Proverbs 30:9. "Otherwise, I may have too much and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

He prays for daily bread, that he might not be led into temptation; and for the same reason he prays against riches. If his riches increased, he was afraid that, through the depravity of his nature, they would tempt him to the dangerous sin of luxury — to impiety, presumption and arrogance. Such are the effects of riches upon men of corrupt minds. "When I fed them — they were satisfied. When they were satisfied — they became proud; then they forgot me." Hosea 13:6

Riches are the gift of God — but they are too often used to the harm of the giver; and those who receive those common gifts in the greatest abundance, are generally the most ungrateful of all men, to him from whom every good gift comes. They do not perhaps deny the Lord in words, or say with their tongues: Who is the Lord? But deeds speak louder than words. When men willfully transgress the laws of God, they say in effect, "Who is the Lord, that we should serve him?" When they neglect prayer to God, they say that they are their own masters, and will no more come unto God. Such was the practical language of a great part of rich men in former ages, and it is the same at this day.

"They spend their days in wealth," says Job, "Therefore they say unto God: Depart from us — what is the Almighty that we should serve him? What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" But are real saints ready to be snared into such sins by the influence of riches? Saints have flesh as well as spirit — and riches are a powerful temptation to them as well as other men. It requires more than a Solomon's wisdom and grace, to preserve men from the corrupting influence of prosperity. Job was the best as well as the richest man in the East. But where is the saint who has received such rich communications of grace as Job? God grant that we may never be so rich as Job, unless God is pleased to make us as good and upright.

Some people think they are in no danger of making a bad use of riches, if they could but obtain them, because they feel no disposition to make a bad use of anything they have. "But he who trusts in his own heart is a fool!" Is there a greater fool in the world, than the man who thinks himself wiser than Solomon or Agur, or Christ himself — who tells us that it is hard for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God? A wise man will not choose to leave a country of ordinary fertility, for another whose soil is far richer — but the air very pestilential, although his constitution of body is at present very healthful. Nor will he choose to walk in a flowery path where there are secret pits, and where the country is infected with robbers — if he can find another path, which is less pleasant and more safe. But poverty is not without its temptations also. Pinching necessity may tempt a man to use unlawful shifts for his subsistence, and even to steal. And therefore this wise man prays that he might be kept from poverty as well as riches, for he had no confidence in his own heart, which he knew to be so foolish and treacherous. But what made him so much afraid of stealing? Did he think he would be disgraced and punished for it? That was not the thing for which he chiefly abhorred stealing — but he knew that this sin brings a great guilt, and a deep stain on the soul — and besides is a snare to the soul, which brings it into the devil's power, and gives him advantage for drawing on men to sins of greater guilt. One sin needs to be supported by another sin, and lying and perjury are the common refuges to which thieves have

recourse for screening themselves from shame and punishment.

Agur abhorred all sin — but the sin of profaning the name of the Lord was one of the most dreadful wickedness in his apprehension, because the Lord was his God. He believed in God and loved him with all his heart, and he earnestly wished to be kept at the utmost distance from everything hat might lead him to dishonor or profane the name of his God.

Proverbs 30:10. "Do not accuse a servant to his master — or he will curse you, and you will pay for it."

Agur teaches us not only to keep a good conscience in the things that relate immediately to the worship and service of God — he enjoins us, likewise, to exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence towards men, not excepting the lowest of them. We must not hurt the lowest slave on earth. For although he is not able to revenge the injury — yet God will do it with severe justice. As we must do no hurt to a poor servant, so we must not tempt any other person to hurt him. Agur forbids us to accuse him to his master, lest we should expose him to severe treatment at his hands. But is accusing a servant to his master in every case unlawful? Did not Abraham accuse the servants of Abimelech to their master for robbing him of his wells? He did — but there was no danger in that case, for Abraham knew that Abimelech was too selfish a man to punish his servants because they exceeded the bounds of justice in their zeal for his service.

There are other cases in which we may lawfully accuse servants to their masters — but they are not common. Men are too ready to take too much liberty in this point; and Agur does not think it necessary to mention the excepted cases, because any man can see them, and most men would take too great a license in applying them to particular cases. But what is the evil of accusing a servant to his master? It is inhumanity and cruelty. It is adding to the distress which we should rather relieve if it were in our power, (for servants in those days were generally slaves.) It is a sowing of discord in families; and it may provoke the poor man to curse you. And what if he does? It is his sin to curse me. It is your own sin; or if the sin is his, you are the devil that tempts him to it; and the weight of his curses, aggravated with the guilt of them, may come down from a just God upon your head. You may be found guilty of bringing a false accusation against him; guilty of the poor man’s revengeful curses; guilty of his master’s tyranny, through the bad opinion of his servant that you infuse into his mind.

Men by their indiscreet and sinful conduct, do often bring upon themselves the guilt of many more sins than they ever think about.

Proverbs 30:11. "There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers."

Many of Agur’s sayings are better remembered than many other things, by his method of classing his observations into a certain number of particulars. His petitions were two; and his observations on the manners of men, and the qualities of creatures, are four on each subject. He begins at this verse to speak of four sets of people, who deserve a particular remark on account of their extreme wickedness.

"There are those who curse their fathers." It is the disgrace of human nature that ever one man was found that could be guilty of this sin. Will a man curse the instrument of his existence? This is the next degree of guilt to that of cursing the author of it. The prophet Isaiah pronounces a woe

upon him who strives with his Maker, and proceeds next to pronounce a woe against him who says to his father. But there is a whole generation of men upon whom this atrocious guilt may be justly charged, and therefore we find a law in the writing of Moses appointing the punishment of it; and the punishment is the same which was to be inflicted on the blasphemers of God himself. Although men do not expressly make use of their tongues to curse their fathers — yet they are to be ranked with this cursed generation, if they do not bless their mothers. Mothers are to be honored as well as fathers; and the neglect of duty to parents is criminal, as well as the commission of offences against them. But perhaps you will say, "My mother deserves not to be blessed." Is she not your mother? Then she deserves your good will and tender affection, and prayers. If you cannot praise her, you have no call to say anything to her harm.

Proverbs 30:12. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes — and yet is not washed from their filthiness." No man is truly pure, unless he is washed from his filthiness. All men are naturally polluted with sin, and rendered abominable by it. Nothing on earth is comparable to sin for vileness — and no creature on earth is so abominable and filthy as man, who drinks iniquity like water. We cannot be washed from our filthiness, but by the blood and Spirit of Christ. The blood of Christ is the fountain opened by God for sin and immorality, and it is the Spirit of Christ who applies it to our souls, and purifies our hearts by the faith of it. But there are many who are strangers to Christ — and yet reckon themselves pure. They never saw their pollution, because they are unacquainted with the law of God, or with themselves. Or they have washed with soap, and flattered themselves that they could wash away their own filthiness by it. Or they are mistaken about the way of making use of Christ, for the cleansing of their souls. Or they persuade themselves upon false grounds, that they are cleansed by his grace. Do you see a man who is clean in his own eyes, although he is yet impure in the sight of God? There is more hope of a publican or a harlot, than for him. He says unto Christ, "Depart from me, for I am not a sinful man." He is covered like the leviathan, with scales that render him impenetrable by the sharpest pointed arrows. No sinners do worse things than those who do whatever is right in their own eyes, (Judges 18:1-31. etc.) and none are farther from righteousness than those who are righteous in their own eyes. They are a smoke in God’s nostrils, and a fire that burns all the day. Christ found such self-conceited men to be his greatest enemies while he was tabernacling among us, and spoke some parables, and denounced many heavy woes against them.

Let us examine our hearts impartially, lest we should deserve to be classed with this wretched generation, which, we have reason to fear, is more numerous than the generation of those whose hands are clean, and their hearts pure. We all profess to be Christians — but Christ will deny us if we belong to this set of men. For he has declared, that unless he washes us, we have no part in him.

Men are unwilling to class themselves with the impure, lest their consciences should fly in their faces — but those who falsely pretend to purity are the people whose consciences shall lash them with greatest severity at last. Why should we seek to cover our nakedness with fig leaves? Why should we exclude ourselves from the fountain, through a pernicious shame of confessing our vileness? The promise of God stands upon record: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean." Is it best, sinners, to claim the benefit of this promise, or to allege that you have no need of it? Men are generally ashamed to be thought poor — yet who would not confess himself to be poor, if the king should offer great wealth to every poor man in the town and to none else?

Proverbs 30:13. "There is a generation, O how haughty are their eyes — whose glances are so disdainful."

There is a generation of men who are swelled with pride and vanity — and yet put on the dress of humility. Such are a great number of the generation last mentioned — but God knows their hearts; and the fruits of their pride often reveal them to men. But there are some men who seem to be proud even of their pride. They do not hide their sin — but declare it as Sodom; and the show of their countenances witnesses against them. Agur was surprised how the sons of Adam, who are but worms, should put on such arrogant airs, and behave with so much insolence. Solomon likewise speaks of this race of men as a generation abhorred by the Lord. The prophets, in their predictions against Moab; and Ezekiel, in his prophecies against Tyre and Egypt, give us a striking picture of their manners, and a terrible description of the vengeance of God against such insolent despisers of God and men. For God will save the afflicted and humble people — but will bring down those with haughty looks.

Proverbs 30:14. "There is a generation whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives, to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind." By these monsters of men, the inspired writer means false accusers, extortioners, oppressors, bloody tyrants, and their wicked instruments, who are the common enemies of men, but plunder and destroy especially the poor and needy, because these cannot resist them. To what kind of creatures does Agur compare these wretches? Not to lions or tigers, for neither these nor any other kind of animals are so fierce and brutal. These men are brutes with iron teeth, sharp as knives, to cut off, and to destroy. While they grind the faces of the poor, and rob them of their means of subsistence, they do in effect eat the flesh of the poor, and flay their skin from their bones. And they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh for the caldron. To what wickednesses are men driven, by the cursed love of gold! The horse-leech sucks until it bursts. The grave, and the barren womb, and the parched earth, and the fire, can never be satisfied — but the hearts of wicked men are still more insatiable! They are still crying, "Give, give!" Hell is evidently set forth before them, and flaming with tremendous fury; and yet the insatiable lust for wealth, drags them on to purchase for themselves one of the chief places in that burning lake — by heaping one horrid instance of inhumanity and cruelty upon another. Had Job reigned among this generation of men, he would have broken their jaws, and forced the spoil from their teeth. But punishments inconceivably more dreadful, are appointed to them by the just Lord, who will not do iniquity, nor allow it to pass unrevenged.

Proverbs 30:15. "The leech has two daughters. ’Give! Give!’ they cry. There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, ’Enough!’" Proverbs 30:15

Agur had been speaking of the dreadful effects of the lust of covetousness, which still cries, "Give, give!" Some think that he intends, in the two following verses, to represent the insatiable nature of this lust, by comparing it with the most craving and unsatisfied things which men are acquainted with.

He does not expressly draw any moral instruction out of the account which he gives of the four things that cannot be satisfied, only he teaches us to make observations on the works of God, and the nature of things that we see or hear of. Such observations enlarge our minds, lead us to admire the Creator, and to raise pious meditations in our minds. Besides, the Scripture makes use

of such observations to illustrate the important instructions which it gives us about the things that we are to believe or do. The leech is a blood-sucker. It will suck the blood of other creatures until it bursts — but covetous men will suck the blood of their fellow-men until they are damned! Agur calls anything remarkable for its greediness, a daughter of the leech. Covetousness of spiritual and eternal blessings, deserves to be exempted from this humiliating comparison — but a heart set upon earthly treasure, is more like the leech than any of its daughters. For there is no satisfying of a covetous man; with shame he cries, "Give, give!" And if you should give him whole rivers of blood to drink, he will still cry for more; as you see in the example of those tyrants, who gratify their lust without restraint.

Proverbs 30:16. "The grave; the barren womb; the earth, which is never satisfied with water; and fire, which never says, 'Enough!' Proverbs 30:16

"Hell and destruction" says Solomon, "are never full, so the eyes of man are never satisfied." But because the invisible world is never full, it is folly to be greedy of earthly things. For the grave will soon receive us, and then what will all earthly treasures avail us? The invisible world keeps its gates wide open for us, and therefore we should be laying up our treasure in the eternal world.

If the grave were full, or if we could make a sure covenant with death, and obtain exemption from its power — then we might have some excuse for living as if we were to live always. The barren womb is never satisfied. Rachel was led into much sin and sorrow by her passionate desire of children. Let others in the like circumstances beware of following her example. Discontentment with our lot, in any part of it, is a tormenting and a dangerous sin. The earth, when it is parched, can scarcely be satisfied with rain. It gapes for the showers; and although it is well refreshed at present, it will soon thirst for more. This teaches us our entire dependence upon God, who has the key of the clouds in his hand, and could soon make the rain of our land into powder and dust, and our earth as iron under our feet. As the thirsty land cries for rain, so let our souls thirst not for those blessings that spring from the ground — but for the salvation of the Lord from on high; then will he rain down righteousness upon us. The fire is more greedy than any of these things. Lay on fuel as long as you please, it will soon make an end of it, and seek for more. There is a fiercer flame in the corrupt hearts and tongues of men, kindled from Hell, and sufficient to set on fire the course of nature!

Proverbs 30:17. "The eye that mocks at his father, and despises to obey his mother — the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

Agur, as well as Solomon, insists much on the respect due from children to their parents. Children that disobey or despise their parents are the kindred of those who curse them, for the one sin is the natural introduction to the other. Such unnatural children were to be punished with death by the law of Moses; and Agur represents the disgrace that attends this death, to affright men from the sin. The ravenous birds will pick out their eyes. Let children think of this, and let it be a motive to them, (if better ones are ineffectual,) to respect their parents. If human laws, or the carelessness of magistrates, free disobedient children from this punishment — God allows them, by the violation of other laws, to bring themselves to the gibbet, or at least will find means to convince offenders by fatal experience, that his laws and threatenings are not vain.

Proverbs 30:18-19. "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand:

the way of an eagle in the sky,

the way of a snake on a rock,

the way of a ship on the high seas,

and the way of a man with a maiden." An eagle is speedily out of our view when she soars aloft, and no trace of her flight is to be seen. A snake slides over the rock, without leaving any slime like worms, or feathers like birds. A ship leaves no mark in the waves by which you can discern its track — but the way of a man with one a maiden, is more indiscernible than all of them together. The companions in lewdness have a thousand arts to draw one another into this abominable sin, and to conceal it when it is committed.

Proverbs 30:20. "Such is the way of an adulterous woman. She eats, and wipes her mouth, and says: I have done no wickedness."

"Stolen waters are sweet, says the foolish woman, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." And secret bread is so much the more pleasant, because, when it is eaten, the theft cannot be found out. She wipes her mouth, and no marks of it are to be seen upon her lips. The sweetness and the hiddenness of this sin make it very dangerous. People commit theft with fear and trembling, and they are often revealed; and the reproofs and punishments they meet with are means of conviction and repentance. But adulterous people taste a deceitful pleasure in their sin; and they have a thousand ways of concealing their guilt. And so they add one sin to another, and contract those habits which become a second nature to them. The devil entangles them in strong twisted cords of a thousand folds; and they are seldom recovered from his snares. They obtain, by their lying arts, a miserable deliverance from the means of repentance; and by degrees they almost bring themselves to think that they have escaped the watchful eye of God. Do not imagine that the secrecy of sin is your security from divine punishment — it is the snare of your souls. By your arts to hide your wickedness, you are only hardening your hearts, and twisting thick cords for yourselves, that you may be held fast in sin, and prevented from ever enjoying the liberty of the children of God.

Proverbs 30:21-23. "Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up:

a servant who becomes king,

a fool who is full of food,

an odious woman who is married, and

a maidservant who displaces her mistress."

Pride is a sin detestable to God; and its effects are such, that even men cannot bear them, especially when it is raised to an high pitch, by a sudden and unexpected rise from a low and despised condition. Therefore a wise man would not wish to be raised by God to a condition much above his present state, unless God would give him grace to bear it with moderation. When a servant is raised to a throne, or to some high station in the government, he thinks himself almost a

God; and unless everyone gives him homage, he is filled with wrath and revenge. Haman was raised so high by Ahasuerus that he became giddy; and he thought the offence of one man who would not bow the knee to him so grievous, that it required the blood of a whole nation to make atonement for it.

Joseph and David were indeed raised by God to high places, and behaved well in them — but God knew their hearts, and gave them such grace that they were still humble, when their condition was high. The greatest tyrants in the world have generally been those who never expected to reign — such as Maximin the Roman emperor, who put to death all who knew him in his low condition, and, among the rest, those who had relieved his father and himself — that he might blot out the memory of his former baseness.

Servants have not more seeds of pride in their nature than other men — but they are sown in human nature, and are wonderfully nourished when the sunbeams of prosperity shine upon them with extraordinary warmth. Leave men of low condition where you found them, and they will behave in their station as well as kings. Raise kings to an unexpected height of grandeur, and they will become Nebuchadnezzars and Alexanders. This observation is of use in the affairs of the church as well as the state. Therefore Paul forbids a novice to be made a ruler in the church, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. A fool, when he is filled with food, or furnished with riches sufficient to gratify his vanity and supply his extravagant desires — is another burden of the earth. A fool is troublesome at all times — but there is no bearing of him, when his lust of intemperance or greediness is fully satisfied. It is a blemish in David's character that he once broke out into such a violent rage, that he swore to destroy an innocent family — but we must remember that the provocation was given him by a fool when he was filled with food. In ordinary cases David was the meekest of men. For the like reasons, is an odious woman who is married. Women of meek and quiet spirits are a lovely part of the human race — but women of fretful spirits and unbridled passions are odious. And when they are married, it would require all the patience of Job, and the meekness of Moses to bear with them! Before marriage their pride was checked by neglect, and covered with the mantle of prudence — but when they come into their new state of life, they throw off every restraint, and their new situation is a means of increasing their vanity and ill-nature, until neither their neighbors, nor their servants, nor their husbands, can endure them.

If you are wise, when you intend to marry a wife, let her portion be the least part of your concern — but be sure that you know her real temper, and beware of those cheats who are doves in their virgin state — and vultures the week after they are married! A maidservant who displaces her mistress, or obtains her master in marriage, is another plague to all around her, as we may learn from the example of Hagar the Egyptian. Men should never marry their servant maids unless they are furnished with virtuous qualifications, and particularly with modesty and meekness to an unusual degree.

Proverbs 30:24. "Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise."

God is to be admired in the leviathan and behemoth — and he is no less to be admired in the ant and the locust. The formation of these little creatures, and the instincts which God has given them, appear surprising to the wisest of men. They are not furnished with the noble gift of reason — and yet they have a degree of wisdom which may raise a blush in the cheeks of many who boast of the

dignity of their rank in the scale of creatures.

Proverbs 30:25. "Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer." The strength of ants has been admired by wise men — but their wisdom and industry make them strong. For they are a feeble nation, from the make and size of their bodies. Sluggards make inability to do their duty one of their excuses — but let them go to the ants, and learn to be ashamed of their frivolous pretenses. These puny creatures do wonders by their exertions and perseverance; and men know not their own strength more than their weakness, until they have made a fair trial of it. But as to spiritual things, you will say, the Scripture teaches us that we have no strength at all. That is true — but it teaches you at the same time "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Are the ants so strong by the instincts which they receive from their Maker? What will not worm Jacob accomplish, when he goes in the strength of the Lord God? The ants prepare their food in the summer, that they may not starve in the rigors of the winter months. How despicable, compared with these insects, are the rational creatures, who allow the thoughts of an endless duration to be pushed out of their minds by three score and ten years?

Proverbs 30:26. "Coneys are but a feeble folk — yet make they their houses in the rocks."

Perhaps the wise man means some other kind of creatures than those which we call coneys. He tells us that weak as they are, they find means to make habitations for themselves in the rocks. As the ants teach sluggards to provide food for themselves, these animals reprove those who are careless about providing proper houses and means of security from dangers.

Few of us lack due care about houses for accommodating our bodies — but what provision have we made for a dwelling-place to our souls? Do we build upon the sand — or on the everlasting rock? If our place of defense is not the munition of rocks — but some refuge of lies, the coneys are wiser than we, according to their kind. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the coneys — and has God provided no refuge for our souls? God himself is our refuge and our strength, and those who make him their habitation shall be secured from the fear of evil.

Proverbs 30:27. "Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks" The locusts, notwithstanding their weakness as individuals, are strong and terrible by their order and unity. They go forth by bands, and nations tremble, and countries are turned into desolate wildernesses. The prophet Joel speaks of the armies of locusts in the same style which other prophets use when they are speaking of armies of Chaldeans or Persians; and history fully justifies the propriety of his language. The Saracen enemies are compared to locusts, for their number and harmony, and the destructive ravages which they were enabled by these means to commit. Shall the enemies of religion join so harmoniously in the service of the devil? And shall we who have Christ and not Apollyon for our king, betray his glorious cause by breaking our ranks, and violating that beautiful order which he has appointed? When the followers of the Redeemer stand fast in one spirit, and with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, every one in his proper station — then the church is terrible as an army with banners; and the locusts that come out of the bottomless pit cannot prevail against her.

Proverbs 30:28. "A spider can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces." The spider does not say, "There are servants in the palace appointed to keep it clear from every

nuisance — I shall be slain in the window!" She provides herself a dwelling in the houses of the great, as well as in the cottages of the poor, for labor and wisdom conquer every difficulty. But to the sluggish soul, every easy thing is impossible. Does God furnish these despised creatures with wisdom so admirable in their rank of being? We are surely of greater value in his esteem than they are, and he has provided treasures of better wisdom for us. Let us have recourse to him, and he will furnish us with that wisdom which is proper to rational and immortal creatures. Our Lord seems to justify this inference, in the instructions that he draws from the providence of God in clothing the grass of the field, and feeding the birds of the air. The locusts and spiders are hateful and mischievous creatures to men — but they are not for that reason useless. Those creatures that we despise and abhor, are a part of the riches of the Creator. They read lectures to us concerning his wisdom; and if they are well considered, they will instruct us in some articles of our duty.

Proverbs 30:29. "There are three things that are stately in their stride, four that move with stately bearing."

If a heathen will not believe in Christ, he cannot deny a God. For the invisible things of God are clearly seen in the things that he has made, and in those various endowments which he has bestowed on his creatures. As a garden is rendered pleasant to the eye by the rich variety of fruits, and herbs, and flowers, which it contains — so to the eye of the mind, the world is a beautiful scene, containing such a surprising variety of creatures, every one of them possessing qualities peculiar to itself. Agur had spoken of those creatures that are remarkable for their great wisdom in little bodies, and proceeds to mention some creatures that deserve admiration for their courage and spirit, and the dignity that appears in their motions. "O Lord, how manifold are your works, in wisdom have you made them all, the earth is full of your riches."

Proverbs 30:30. "A lion, mighty among beasts, who retreats before nothing" This celebrated animal is full of courage and fire; and no danger can subdue its valor, or force it to reveal any sign of fear. God himself is pleased to use it as an emblem of that majesty and resistless power which he displays in the defense of his injured people. And Christ our king does not disdain to borrow from it one of his glorious titles. Christians are furnished with such strength from their Redeemer, that they are said to be bold as lions; and by the courage of faith the saints have sometimes stopped the mouths of lions, or slain them outright. Wicked men have reason to flee although there is no pursuer — but Christians should learn, in the cause of truth and righteousness, not to turn aside for any adversary, or any suffering. For they shall be more than conquerors through him who loved them.

Proverbs 30:31. "A horse, a he-goat, and a king with his army around him." The word, in the original, properly signifies, some creature that is girt in its loins; some take it to mean a rooster, and others a horse; which last animal has the honor to be celebrated by God himself, in the sublimest strains of poetry, and is used by the prophet Zechariah as an emblem of that conquering strength which God conveys into the hearts of those who faithfully fight his battles against the enemies of religion. "The Lord Almighty has visited his flock, the house of Judah, and has made them as his goodly horse in the battle." They are as weak as sheep in themselves — but furnished with the strength of war horses for maintaining his cause. An he-goat is an animal so remarkable for its strength and stateliness, when it marches at the head of the flock, that the Macedonian power which crushed the strength of the mighty Persian empire, is represented by it in the book of

Daniel. The prophet Jeremiah calls the delivered captives to imitate the he-goat, by setting an example of vigor and courage to one another, in improving the merciful providence of God. Do not wonder at Agur for insisting so long in his little writing, upon the excellencies of the irrational part of the creation. The creation is a volume spread before our eyes, that we may read in it the perfections of the Creator. The Scripture is a commentary upon some parts of creation, which opens our mind to learn instruction from the rest. Great use was made of this volume before the Word of God was written, as you find in the book of Job; and the Almighty was pleased to humble Job for his unguarded complaints, by manifesting his own excellencies in a discourse upon his creatures. A king with his army, is another of those creatures that are stately in bearing. For the God who has given courage and strength to lions, has given majesty to kings, and stamped on them such dignity that their subjects are awed by their appearance. Kings should therefore employ their authority and influence for the service of God; and their subjects owe them reverence as well as obedience; they are ministers of God, and are entitled to honor for the sake of their master and their work, and to obedience both for wrath and for conscience sake.

Proverbs 30:32. "If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil — clap your hand over your mouth!"

Pride is a very bad thing when it goes no farther than the thoughts — but it is still worse when it swells and overflows by the lips. If any proud or injurious thought come into our minds, it ought to be immediately checked and suppressed. To reveal it by our words is to declare our sin as Sodom, to give indulgence to those passions that ought to be mortified, and to add iniquity to iniquity. Besides, if we do not lay our hand upon our mouth, we shall rouse the pride of other men, and kindle up rage and strife that will not be easily allayed; and thus we shall be accountable not only for our own sin, which is heavy enough of itself — but likewise for those iniquities that we occasion in others, by the temptations which we throw in their way.

Proverbs 30:33. "For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood — so stirring up anger produces strife."

Strife is not only provoked — but forced by haughty and spiteful words. For such is our weakness, that we are as easily kindled into anger by the angry words that are directed to us — as one coal is kindled by another coal that is burning. We should be meek when our neighbor is angry; but, alas! we have too little of the spirit of Moses, or rather of Jesus. For Moses himself has been provoked to speak unadvisedly with his lips. As the violent shaking of milk in the churn produces butter, as the twisting of the nose makes blood to spring forth — so when we tease our neighbors, and set their passions into a ferment by bitter and galling words, we are the authors of strife, and kindle up that destructive and devouring fire, which perhaps cannot be quenched until it has done a thousand times more harm than we dreamed off. The command of our passions and tongues is an attainment of vast consequence to our happiness and the welfare of our souls. Many of the wise instructions of Solomon and Agur are designed to recommend this point of wisdom to our regard, and, to assist us in learning it. Our Lord Jesus recommends it to us as one of the marks of a true Christian, and an evidence of our regard to his example. The apostles Paul and James insist very much upon it; and that love which John is forever pressing upon us, will sweeten our tempers effectually into that calmness and meekness which are so absolutely necessary to our happiness and usefulness in the world, and will gradually extinguish those seeds of wrath and contention

which lie in our corrupted natures. The apostle Peter recommends the calmness and meekness which is here enjoined by motives of irresistible force — the example which Christ left us when he was bearing our sin — the pleasure that God takes in meekness, and the happiness which he graciously confers on those who govern their passions, and their tongues, according to his will.

Men of arrogant and outrageous tempers, murmurers and complainers, are condemned by Jude in his short epistle with great severity. The whole Scripture testifies loudly against the contentious and ill-natured.

# 01.31. Proverbs 31

Chapter 31.

Proverbs 31:1-31 Proverbs 31:1. "The sayings of King Lemuel — an oracle his mother taught him"

Women have sometimes been used to write Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Deborah and Lemuel's mother were honored to be the composers, under the direction of God, each of them of a chapter in the Bible; and the prophecy of Lemuel's mother will make every woman who governs her life by it an ornament to her gender. It is the duty of mothers, as well as fathers, to instruct their children. Although Lemuel was a king — yet his mother was directed by God to give him instruction and admonition.

Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, was renowned for the pleasure she took in the education of her children. When a certain lady was one day showing Cornelia her jewels, and desiring a sight of Cornelia's jewels — she told her that her children were her jewels. Certainly the richest diamonds cannot give so much luster to a lady, as the proper discharge of this duty to her children.

Cornelia was an unenlightened heathen — but why should Christian mothers blush in her presence? If we were as great as kings, it would be a scandal to us to despise the instructions and counsels of a mother. King Lemuel remembered, and wrote the prophecy that his mother taught him, and transmits it to posterity. Whoever he was, we have reason to believe that he practiced the instructions which he so much respected. Lemuel shall be forever held in honor for the respect which he showed to his mother, and his mother's name will be renowned for her part in forming her son to virtue, and religion, and public usefulness.

Proverbs 31:2. "O my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows" When this venerable lady was instructing her son, her heart was overflowing with inexpressible tenderness of affection to him. Parents often take a very absurd method of expressing their fondness for their children — but when they gratify every one of their humors, and allow them to live without restraints and admonitions — they do not truly love, but hate their children. He who spares the rod hates his child. The love of parents to their children is best showed by doing their utmost endeavors to make them good Christians, and useful to their generation. For this purpose they ought to dispense their instructions and their reproofs in the language of love, and to let their children see that everything they say to them is dictated by the warmest affection.

"O my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows." This fond mother considered and pondered in her mind what way she should express her tender regard, and she could find no better way of showing it than by teaching him who wisdom which befits his station; for what greater testimony of love can any mother give to the son of her womb? Every mother loves the son of her womb. If she does not, she is not a mother — but a sister to the ostrich, to which God has denied understanding. The love of a mother to the son of her womb is so fervent, that God is pleased to use it as an illustration of his own love to his people. Although the love of a mother bears no proportion to it — yet that is one of the best emblems of it which the world can afford.

Lemuel was the son of her vows, as well as of her womb. Every son of the womb should be a son of the mother's vows and prayers. And the instructions of a parent must be joined with prayers for their success. For mothers may plant, and fathers may water — but it is God who gives the increase. When Monica was shedding tears for her beloved son Augustine, at the time that he was a debauchee, and a heretic — one of her friends told her that the child of so many prayers could not be lost, and perhaps no mother since the days of the Virgin Mary had in the end, greater comfort in a son.

Proverbs 31:3. "Do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings."

Whoredom, as Solomon tells us, is the ruin of any man — but none are in greater danger of being ruined in their bodies and fortunes by this vice than kings, who have too often the misfortune to need a check or a reprover, while the temptations that lead to sensuality are ever surrounding them. David and Solomon involved themselves in great distress by the love of women; and it is well known, that in later times, the kingdom of Spain was totally ruined, and the Saracens introduced into the possession of it, through the unbridled lust of King Roderick.

Proverbs 31:4. "It is not for kings, O Lemuel — not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave strong drink."

Wine, as well as whoredom, takes away the heart when it is drunk to excess — but other men cannot do so much hurt as kings or magistrates when they are drunk.

Proverbs 31:5. "Lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights." When Nadab and Abihu were destroyed by fire from the Lord, for their unhallowed incense, it is probable they were drunk; and therefore a law was made on that occasion that priests should drink no wine when they went in before the Lord, lest they should blunder in any part of the sacred service. The more important any man's work is, he is the more obliged to be temperate in all things. Drunkenness, which is a damning sin in any person, is attended with prodigious aggravations in those men who dispense the mysteries of the gospel, or administer the public affairs of the nation. The most oppressive and execrable laws that Scotland was ever plagued with, were made by a parliament called the drunken parliament. Alexander the Great, when he was drunk, killed one of his best friends, who had, on a former occasion, saved his life in battle; and when Alexander recovered his judgment, he had almost killed himself. His father Philip was less unfortunate. He once forgot the law in his cups, and passed an unrighteous sentence upon a poor widow — but soon recovering his senses, he condemned himself to refund her damages.

Some think that drunkenness is an excuse for the faults that are committed by men under the influence of it. Lemuel's mother, under the influence of the prophetic spirit, was of another mind — and even unenlightened heathen have been sensible how frivolous this excuse is. Zaleucus made a law among the Locrians, that if any person committed a crime when he was drunk, he should be punished for both crimes — for he did not judge that one crime was a proper excuse for another. If men are insane without any fault of their own, they are not accountable for their actions — but a voluntary madness has no excuse for itself, and will be no excuse for anything else. To pervert judgment in any case is not good. To pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted, is such a complication of injustice and inhumanity, that none but a man who is drunk, or is of a disposition

that makes him perpetually like a man in liquor, will be guilty of it. The wise woman knew that her beloved son could never commit this unpardonable iniquity while he was sober.

It is not for ministers, or teachers; it is not for parents, or masters, or mistresses, to drink wine to excess, lest they forget their duty and commit some pernicious error, in the discharge of that trust which lies upon them, and corrupt their inferiors by their example. But is wine useless? Why then did God create the fruit of the vine? It is not useless. Mahomet reproached his Creator, when he prohibited the use of it without restriction. It is useful for the refreshment of any man, when his labors, or the dejection of his mind, or the state of his body requires it. It is peculiarly useful to those who are oppressed with calamity and grief.

Proverbs 31:6-7. "Give strong drink to those who are perishing, and wine to those who are in anguish. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more."

We must not give wine in immoderate quantities to any person, however dejected, for sin is never to be chosen rather than affliction — but wine moderately used is of great use to revive the languishing spirits of the disconsolate; and it may be a piece of as real charity, to bestow this generous liquor upon them, as it is to give bread to the hungry. The Psalmist mentions this among other instances of God’s bounty, that he gives not only bread to strengthen us — but likewise wine to cheer our hearts, and oil to make our faces shine.

Some of the people that were present at the crucifixion of our blessed Lord, gave him wine mixed with myrrh to render his sufferings more tolerable to him — but our Lord, who allows and requires us to bestow cordials on those who are ready to faint under their sorrows — refused them in his own severest sufferings, for he was not disposed to decline the bitterest dregs of that cup of sorrow which was put into his hands by his father. But when his people are made partakers of the sufferings of Christ, he puts the cup of consolation into their hands, and calls them to drink of that generous wine which goes down sweetly, and causes the lips of those who are in the deepest distress to sing. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us," said one who was pressed with affliction above measure, "so our consolation also abounds by Christ." We ought to be followers of Christ in the exercise of compassion to the sorrowful and the distressed. It is devilish to add to the sorrows of the afflicted — but it is Christ-like to wipe away the tears from the eyes of the fatherless and widows, and to deserve the blessings of those who are ready to perish.

Proverbs 31:8-9. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Job was an excellent pattern to all princes. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and a father to the poor; and no doubt he was a mouth also to those who cannot speak for themselves. Such a prince the mother of Lemuel wishes her son to be. She exhorts him to do judgment and justice to his people — but to regard with peculiar tenderness those unfortunate men who were in danger of losing their estates or lives, by reason of accusations brought against them. If they were unable, through ignorance, or awkwardness, or fear, to plead their own cause, she would have him to be their advocate, and to plead everything that truth and equity would allow on their behalf. The appointment of advocates to plead for prisoners at the bar, agrees with this instruction. Those who are appointed to this charitable office should open their mouths, and interest themselves in the cause of their distressed clients, with all the warmth that justice can admit — that none may be

condemned, unless the evidence against them clearly overbalances every argument that can be adduced on their side. It is certain that charity to the poor, and clemency to the accused, must not interfere with the due administration of justice. For a poor man is not to be countenanced in his cause — but there is less danger of erring in this, than in the contrary extreme. It is the business of princes to take care, that, in the administration of justice, the poor may not suffer by their unacquaintedness with law, or their lack of ability to take the benefit of it when they are oppressed, or to defend themselves against their wealthier adversaries. Our Lord Jesus Christ is at once our king and our advocate. He saves the poor and needy, and breaks their oppressors in pieces. He stands at the right hand of the poor and needy, to save them from those who would condemn their souls. Princes, as they have opportunity, should imitate him by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice. The mother of Lemuel having instructed him in the virtues of purity and temperance, justice and mercy — proceeds next to instruct him in the choice of a wife. As a bad wife is one of the worst things in the world — and a good wife one of the best things in the world. Men cannot be too cautious about entering into the relation of marriage, which death only (or what is worse than death) can dissolve. Those who are in public stations have peculiar reason, for their own sakes, and for the sake of their connections, to consider well who those whom they take into such close connection with themselves. Paul gives directions about the wives of deacons; and the instructions about the choice of a virtuous wife are here addressed to a king. Although his instructor was his mother — yet she says nothing about high birth, or wealth, or great alliances. For these things were trifles to her view, compared with virtue. Besides, the spirit of God designed these instructions not merely for kings — but for all who have wives to choose, and for the whole female gender. The last part of this chapter should be learned with great care by all women. The spirit of God was pleased, in the composition of it, to begin every verse with different, letters, according to the order of the alphabet, like the 119th Psalm, which would render it more easy to be retained in the memory.

Proverbs 31:10. "Who can find a virtuous woman? She is worth far more than rubies."

Those who wish to have a good wife, ought to consider that one who deserves this character is not easily to be found; and therefore they ought to be very cautious in their choice, to be well acquainted with the disposition and behavior of those women who are to be their constant companions through life, and to address fervent supplications for the favor of him from whom alone a prudent wife is to be had. But why are virtuous women so rarely to be found? Is the female gender more corrupted by the transgression of their first mother, than her sons? This cannot be supposed.

Women were so ill used in ancient times, that it is not to be wondered at if there were few virtuous women to be found. In our times, when the yoke of marriage is become much lighter on the woman, it may be reasonably supposed that it would be to dishonor to the female gender to be compared with the male, and that the virtues in which they are inferior, are abundantly balanced by those more lovely accomplishments in which they excel.

Men have no reason to reflect that virtue is rarely to be found in women. The imputation is not just, if it is meant to state an odious distinction between the sexes — but if it were, the fault lies as much in men as in women. Virtue is not duly esteemed — but riches and beauty are preferred to it. "Who can find a wife that will bring a large portion?" is the general question. Were the judgment of

the princess by whom this character of a good wife was drawn, to be followed by the generality of men, parents would alter in a great measure their plan in educating their children; and women would endeavor to recommend themselves, not by setting off their beauty to advantage, or giving themselves out for great fortunes — but by the practice of religion and of every praiseworthy virtue. The price of a virtuous woman is far above rubies and diamonds. Although she has no portion but her clothes, she will be preferred by a wise man, to one who is destitute of her qualifications, although she were possessed of all the riches of the east. He is a fool who marries the woman who is dressed in silk and rubies — if he would refuse the same woman in rags.

Proverbs 31:11. "The heart of her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value."

She behaves in such a manner as to be above all suspicion of anything inconsistent with strict virtue.

All Christians ought to walk so inoffensively, that the adversary that wishes to defame them may find no evil thing to say — but wives in a special manner ought, for the sake of their husbands and themselves, to keep at a great distance from everything that might sully their character, because it is easily stained, and not easily cleared. Some husbands will suspect their wives of indiscretions without the least shadow of reason — but such brutes are so rare, that the prophetess takes no notice of them. She takes it for granted, that the husband of the virtuous woman will trust to her fidelity and prudence, when she merits it so well at his hands. To give cause of suspicions, is bad in a woman; to suspect without any cause, is extremely ungrateful in a man.

Confidence in a virtuous wife is a piece of duty to herself, and pleasant to her husband. The harmony of hearts arising from mutual esteem in husband and wife, affords the most delightful pleasure which anything less than religion can give; and when true piety in them both is added, it makes a kind of Heaven upon earth. The heart of the virtuous woman’s husband rejoices not only in his present pleasures — but in his agreeable prospects of future happiness and contentment. He knows that his house is managed with such frugality and prudence that he can entertain no apprehensions of poverty. He is under no temptation to injustice, to make up any waste in his substance. For every part of it is managed to the best advantage. The virtuous woman does good to the soul of her husband as well as to his body. For her behavior is a preservation from those temptations to iniquity, by which others, not blessed with the like happy marriages, have been drawn to sin, and to disgrace, and to a gibbet.

Proverbs 31:12. "She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."

There are some wives who are a constant plague to their husbands, vexing them with their ungodly and perverse behavior, every day and every hour of their life. There are others who do some good to their husbands — but at the same time do them so much evil that they cannot with any propriety be called virtuous wives. They take good care of their substance, and will not spend a penny without necessity — but they irritate their husbands, and eat the very life out of all their comforts, by perpetual contentions, and by fretting at every trifle and every nothing. But the virtuous woman does good and not evil to her husband, and that not only at particular times — but every day.

Some wives are like the days of April; at one time they are serene and pleasant — but at other times they are all tempest and fury, and at another time they are like a continual dripping. The

virtuous wife is as careful to please her husband, by an even and sweet temper — as she is to manage his affairs with discretion. She is the same today, and will be the same tomorrow, that she was yesterday. She is the same twenty or fifty years after marriage, as she was the first month. Neither sickness, nor poverty, nor old age, nor even the errors into which her husband may fall in managing the business of his family, will dampen her love. The more he needs — the more he enjoys her tender sympathy. If he should sometimes, through the frailty of human nature, be so ungrateful as to speak harshly to her — she will bear with him, and forgive him. When he is dead, she will cherish his memory; and when the relation is loosed by the parting stroke, she will still do him good, by showing kindness to his children for his sake.

Proverbs 31:13. "She seeks wool and flax and works with eager hands."

Some women will rather sit idle while they live, than seek wool or flax. If their husbands do not provide them proper materials for their work, they will consider it as a very sufficient excuse for idleness. But the virtuous woman abhors idleness, and loves her duty; and therefore she takes care to provide every necessary material and implement for work, that she may employ her time to the best advantage. It is not enough for a wife to manage the fruits of her husband’s industry with frugality, or to keep her servants at work; the virtuous woman works with her own hands; and it is not a burden, but a pleasure to her to work with her hands. When Abraham’s wise servant sought a wife for his master’s son, he prayed to God to direct him to a woman who would give proof of her virtue, by her industry and politeness. Men and women have different tasks assigned them, and each must employ themselves in their proper work. She is not a virtuous woman who neglects the work of a woman, and intrudes herself into her husband’s affairs. The good wife employs herself with cheerfulness about her wool and flax, and leaves others to mind their own affairs. At the same time, if there is anything necessary for the family which cannot be provided at home, she will take proper care that it shall not be lacking.

Proverbs 31:14. "She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar."

She does not contract a narrow habit, by her close application to labor, nor employ her endeavors to amass a heap of useless treasure. She grudges no expense that may contribute to the happiness of her family — but cheerfully exchanges the fruits of her own labor for those necessities and conveniences that are fetched from distant countries. While slothful wives can scarcely provide necessary clothing for their own families — the virtuous woman provides by her labor and good management, something to sell, that the price may serve for the purchase of other commodities. By the wise management of providence, distant countries are rendered useful to one another, by the supply of their mutual needs. No country enjoys every advantage — but there is no country where industry will not procure both the commodities which the soil affords, and those which must be fetched from afar. The virtuous woman enjoys the fruit of other people’s labor, and the produce of other climates. For divine providence bestows its blessing on her industry, and there is no lack of any good thing endured in her house.

Proverbs 31:15. "She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls."

Slothful women will not rise when day is come — but allow the sun to run a great part of his daily race before they can think of shaking off their slumbers. The virtuous woman often arises before

the dawning of the day, for she loves her duty more than her sleep. But it is to be remembered, that in the country where this inspired woman lived, the days and the nights were almost equal through the whole year, so that her meaning is, the virtuous woman rises before six in the morning. But how is she employed when she is out of bed? David speaks of rising early to praise God; and no doubt the virtuous woman will not neglect her devotions, for she is a woman who fears the Lord — but she does not, under pretense of religion, forget what she owes to her family. She is a good steward in the house of her husband, and takes care that none of her servants lack their necessary portion of food. It is a happy thing to live under her roof; and her maidens are encouraged by her kindness as well as excited by her example, to perform the tasks assigned them with cheerfulness.

Proverbs 31:16. "She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard."

Some of the female gender will consider every trinket that comes in their way, and spend more money than ever they gained by their work, in purchasing every trifle that can minister to their vanity, or gratify a capricious humor — but the virtuous woman employs her money in useful purchases. She will not, however, buy anything without considering it, that she may judge whether it is worth the money demanded for it — but when she has considered, she buys. For she is not of a capricious and inconstant humor, like some whose mind changes more quickly than the wind. What she buys, she improves to advantage. For she has abundance of money — the fruit of her labor and godly management, and with it she plants a vineyard in the field which she has bought, that her family may be well supplied with the conveniences of life in time to come.

Proverbs 31:17. "She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks." As rust gathers on metals that are seldom used — so slothfulness of disposition contracts a rust on the powers of the body and mind. Idle people by degrees realize those excuses for their conduct which were at first mere shams. The virtuous woman is of a very different temper. She does not decline any part of her duty through aversion to toil; and by exerting her strength with a cheerful mind, she improves it. Her labors give her health and vigor, and alacrity for new labors; so that she can with great ease and tranquility go through those businesses which appear impossibilities to other women.

Proverbs 31:18. "She sees that her merchandise is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night."

Notwithstanding her activity, she is never in such a hurry as to do her work in a slight and superficial manner. Her merchandise is known to be good, and brings a ready market and a good price; and her knowledge of this is a sufficient reward of itself for her toils. For when the lazy are perpetually uneasy by their reflections on their own conduct, the consciousness of having done her duty, and the prospect of the advantages arising from it, are a constant source of satisfaction and cheerfulness to the virtuous woman. She does not deny herself of the necessary refreshments of sleep and rest. This would be a piece of foolishness. When the inspired moralist tells us that her lamp does not go out at night — her meaning is, that she never wearies of her labors, nor indulges herself or her maidens in sleep, beyond the call of reason and nature. In this sense Paul speaks of warning people day and night. For no virtuous woman ever labored so diligently for the good of her family, as the great apostle for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

There are some fashionable ladies who keep their candles burning almost the whole night — but they make up for it abundantly, by sleeping away the one half of the day, as if a candle were better than the sun. The virtuous woman rises early in the morning — but she can bear sitting late also, when her business requires it, although she would by no means spend her candles, or her time upon vanities.

Proverbs 31:19. "In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers."

Very good employment for a servant maid — but will any lady spoil her white hands, and consume that time which might be employed so much more agreeably, in the vulgar trade of spinning? Did Lemuel's mother expect that his consort would employ herself in such work? Why not? She was to be a woman as well as a queen; and where is the law that forbids queens to be virtuous women, or to make use of their hands for those purposes for which the Creator designed them?

Alexander the Great, and Augustus Caesar, wore clothes that were made by their own sisters; and our amiable queen is pleased to set a royal example of industry to her subjects. If the female gender must not be idle, although their rank might seem to exempt them from the drudgery of working — then how inexcusable is it in men, who boast superior strength, to trifle away their days without doing anything; especially, considering that their sphere of labor is so much wider, and their opportunities so much greater, of choosing some profession suited to their dispositions. Do they allege that their patrimonies set them above the need of doing anything? This is the same thing with saying that God has been so good to them, that they are under no obligation of serving God, by serving their generation according to the will of God.

Proverbs 31:20. "She opens her arms to the poor, and extends her hands to the needy."

Although she is very careful of her family — yet she does not confine her attention to it. She labors with her hands, working that which is good, that she may have something to give to him who is in need. Some wives are of such a perverse disposition that they have nothing for the poor, and will even grudge if their husbands bestow a little of the fruits of their labor upon them — but virtuous wives do not think that anything is lost which is bestowed in works of charity. They would not wish to encourage idleness, by extending their liberality to those impudent beggars who come to their doors, when they might be earning their livelihood by some useful employment — but they are kind to those whom they know to be really in need, and unable to work, and will bestow, as much, at least, upon them, as some others of their gender bestow upon their own pride and luxury. The husband of the virtuous woman has no reason to find fault with her for her goodness to the poor. For she is serving her family as well as herself by it, and bringing down the blessing of God upon her labors, which could not be successful without it. They were blessed women who had the opportunity to minister unto Christ of their substance; and they enjoy the like happiness who take delight in relieving the distresses of the indigent for Christ's sake. Whatever is done unto the least of his brethren, in his name, he considers as if it were done to himself.

Proverbs 31:21. "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet."

She deserves not the character of a virtuous woman, who is not concerned for the happiness and comfort of those who dwell under her roof. Although a virtuous wife attends, in the first place, to the happiness of her husband, as well as her own, and in the next place, to the welfare of her

children — yet she extends her care to her servants also, and interests herself in their prosperity. But her kind and feeling temper is not the source of vexation, but pleasure. She takes care that every member of her happy family is well fed and well clothed; therefore she is not afraid that any of them will be hurt by the snows and cold of winter. The care of providing clothes for servants does not come so much within the province of those who keep none but hired servants — yet a virtuous woman will still see to their welfare in every article of importance. The scarlet clothes that are here spoken of were not costly and fine ornaments, as they are with us, otherwise it cannot be supposed that all her household would be clothed with them. Some translators make them to signify double garments. Convenience and health are studied by the virtuous woman, far above ornament and fashion.

Proverbs 31:22. "She makes coverings of tapestry; she is clothed in silk and purple."

Although the virtuous woman is liberal to the poor — yet she is not impoverished. Some have been made poor by selfishness and narrowness; millions have been impoverished by pride and profusion — but none have been impoverished, and many have been enriched, by charity. The virtuous woman after reaching forth her hands to the poor, has enough remaining to provide proper and elegant furniture for her house, and a dress for herself suitable to her station.

There is no part of the character of a virtuous woman who will please some ladies so much as this part of it, which seems to allow some scope for finery. And it is not to be denied, that ornaments of a decent kind may very lawfully be used by those who can afford them — but Isaiah and Zephaniah, Paul and Peter, testify against that vanity of dress which is too much coveted by some of the gender. The adorning recommended to women by the apostles, does not consist in gold, and pearls, and costly array — but in modest apparel, humility, sobriety and good works, and a meek and quiet mind. And Lemuel’s mother says nothing inconsistent with this doctrine. If the virtuous woman has coverings of tapestry for her house, she makes them to herself; if she is clothed with silk (or fine linen, as it may be rendered) and purple, she earns it by her labors and godly management. She does not starve her charity by her finery, nor spend upon her dress that which might support a poor family. She does not reckon herself superior to the duties of a wife, nor exempted by wearing silk and purple, from using her spindle and distaff. From all this it appears, that the inspired writer allows the use of costly array to none but those who can afford it in a full consistency with the duties which they owe to their families, to the poor, and to all men.

Proverbs 31:23. "Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land." The character drawn in this passage is that of a virtuous woman, who is in such a station of life that her husband has a right to a seat in the gate, among the elders of the land, who meet in that public place to transact public business, or to decide in causes that are brought before them. The wife of such a man may be allowed to wear silk and purple — but she is as careful to have her husband, as herself, dressed in a manner suitable to their rank. A man who sees him in the gate may easily judge that his wife is a virtuous woman. His clothes are decent, though not gaudy; his looks are cheerful; and the happiness which he enjoys at home appears in his face abroad.

Women are for the most part jealous of their husband’s honor, and it lies in their power to procure them a great deal of respect. For it is a greater honor to have it said that a man has a virtuous wife, than to be admired for riches and titles. Phocion’s wife, when she was asked about her jewels,

said that her husband was her jewel; and a man who is married to a virtuous wife has Solomon's warrant to say that he is possessed of a crown!

Proverbs 31:24. "She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes."

It is astonishing to think what industry will accomplish. We think that the virtuous woman has done great things, when she has provided her house and her family with every convenience: but besides all this, she makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. When other women impoverish their husbands by buying — she enriches her husband by selling those valuable commodities for which there is a constant demand.

It is only modern pride and laziness, which has introduced the idea that it is inconsistent with the dignity of a fine lady to make profit from her own accomplishments. This virtuous woman, although her husband sits among the elders, does not think it a discredit — but an honor to herself, to make linen garments and sashes for sale; and the wise will praise her on account of it.

Proverbs 31:25. "She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come."

"The virtuous woman is clothed with silk and purple;" but she has much nobler ornaments than anything of that sort. She possesses a greatness of soul, an inward vigor and resolution of mind, which sets her above all those little and tormenting fears which keep many of her gender in perpetual uneasiness. The strength of her mind displays itself in her behavior, and gains universal esteem from men; and she wears those ornaments which are of great price in the sight of God himself.

Those ladies that wear gold and jewels, dazzle the eyes and draw the regard of ordinary understandings — but how much brighter are the ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit, of strength and honor, which are the constant dress of the woman of virtue! Those who wear costly array, rejoice for the present, because they think themselves the object of all men's admiration — but they are often preparing future sorrow for themselves by their extravagance, and their neglect of those accomplishments which would gain them respect in old age. The virtuous woman is not only cheerful at present — but she shall rejoice in time to come. It is a pleasure to her to reflect on her past conduct, and when she looks forward, she is not afflicted at the thought of the fading and uncertain nature of all earthly enjoyments. Besides that, she has made all the provision that human wisdom can reach against future contingencies, she can place a quiet confidence in the providence of God, who will not allow the righteous to be moved. She knows that her beauty must wither by old age — but the regard of her husband, and the esteem of others, is founded upon other motives that will never perish. The virtuous woman is one who fears the Lord, and light is sown for such people, and gladness for the upright in heart.

Proverbs 31:26. "She speaks with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness." As a sandy hill is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man. But the virtuous woman plagues neither her husband nor any other man with her talk. She has learned that silence and subjection which the Apostle Paul recommends to wives. She does not lock up her lips in a sullen silence — but when she speaks it is a pleasure to hear her, for she opens her mouth with wisdom.

Besides her other labors already mentioned, she rises in the morning, and finds time to read the Bible, and other instructive books. She meditates and reflects, and receives instruction from what she hears, and prays to her heavenly Father. And so she improves daily in knowledge and prudence; and when she opens her mouth, she says nothing but what is well worthy of being heard. She says nothing that savors of levity, or deceit, nothing that is unseasonable, nothing to gain herself the reputation of wit. All her words are expressions of that wisdom which adorns her mind, and that virtue which warms her heart, and regulates her conduct.

There are some who gain a character for smartness at the expense of their reputation. They will speak the crudest things without provocation, and applaud themselves for it, as an evidence of their wit and boldness. But the virtuous woman abhors the thought of making any person uneasy. And when there is a necessity for reproving, and even then, she will be as gentle as can possibly consist with the efficacy of her admonitions.

Kindness is painted on her countenance, and flows from her tongue. For it possesses the throne of her heart, and gives law to all her words and actions. She is a living explication of that beautiful description of charity which the Spirit of God gives us by the pen of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

Proverbs 31:27. "She watches over the affairs of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness."

She carefully inspects the behavior of her maidens and children. She is not idle when she is not working with her hands — but promoting the welfare of her family, by doing the duty of her place as mistress of the house. Her authority cannot fail of being respected in her family, when she sets such a noble example of diligence before them. She will take care that nothing indecent or offensive stains the honor of her family. When she is served by the labor of her maidens, she will not allow them to neglect the service of God. She will be very careful of the behavior of her children in their tender years, and will not see them trained up in idleness, or indulged in any vanity which may afterwards grow up into a vice. Lying, and evil speaking, and corrupt communication, are banished from every place where her influence extends. Her bread is well earned by her labors — and therefore she eats it with pleasure and appetite, and derives from it health and vigor to her body, and cheerfulness to her mind. The bread of idleness has a very contrary effect; it is eaten without relish, and produces indigestion, and an innumerable train of lingering diseases. He who eats it, sins against God, who commands every man to work at his business with quietness, and to eat his own bread.

Proverbs 31:28-29. "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Were women to consider their own interest and satisfaction — they would all endeavor to be virtuous. Every person counts it a great happiness to enjoy the esteem of those whom he loves — and the virtuous woman finds herself blessed in the tender affection and high esteem of her dear children, and her dearer husband. Her children are constant spectators of her virtue, and experience the sweet fruits of it. They cannot forbear to express their sense of it, by pouring out blessings upon her. A mother deserves the tender regard of her children, although she cannot lay claim to the character of a virtuous woman. If an imperious mother is entitled to respect — then how can children express sufficient regard to one who is the ornament to them, and a happy instrument in training them up to piety and virtue? If

their tongues were silent in her praise — then their dress, their cheerfulness, their good behavior, when they follow her precepts and example, would be a constant eulogy on her virtues. The praises of her husband will be still more delight fill to her ears than those of her children. What earthly happiness can a good wife desire, like the affection and approbation of her husband? And this a virtuous woman can scarcely fail of possessing, for what heart has so much marble in it, as to be able to resist those virtues which every hour appear in his other self? He cannot refrain from bestowing praise on one whom he finds . . .

the sweetener of all his cares,

his faithful adviser in perplexities,

his comforter in every distress,

the instrument of a great part of his earthly felicity,

his best friend,

his unceasing joy, and

his brightest crown. No wonder if the experience of such goodness and happiness makes him eloquent in her praise, and draws commendations from his tongue. He prefers her to every other woman who ever lived upon earth; and he is sincere in doing it, for she ravishes his heart by the beauties of her mind and conduct. Piety will dispose a man to think lowly of himself, in comparison with other men — but highly of his wife, when he compares her with other women.

Proverbs 31:30. "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

Why is not beauty mentioned in the character of the virtuous woman? Is not beauty a bright ornament to her virtue? But there is no mention made of it in this description, because it is a lowly quality in comparison of those which are here enumerated. It is but a flower that fades in a day; and the love produced by it is but a transient passion. When beauty is not sweetened by virtue, the woman who possesses it is but like a swine with a golden jewel in its snout, as Solomon tells us. At the best, beauty cannot secure that love which it raises, for when it becomes familiar to the lover, it palls upon his sight; and sometimes tempts him to curse that enchanting influence which blinded his eyes to more solid virtues. But a woman who fears the Lord, whether she has beauty or not — shall be praised. For true piety is the beauty of the soul, and excels that which lies in complexion and features, as much as Heaven is higher than the earth, or eternity is longer than time. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the most essential part of the virtuous woman’s character. It is this which sanctifies every other part of it, and makes her all glorious within. The pleasant effects of the fear of the Lord spread themselves into every part of her behavior, and cannot but excite the admiration of all beholders. The flowers of poetry have been exhausted in dressing out beauty to the greatest advantage — but this one verse of Scripture is sufficient to give us just notions of its real value. It is indeed a lovely trait when it is joined with piety and humility — but without them it is a snare and a trap. In choosing a wife, fools will follow their imagination — and the wise will act according to reason and the Word of God.

Proverbs 31:31. "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate." Her children praise her, her husband praises her — and let every man join to commend her virtues, and to hold her up to public view, that she may be imitated by all her gender. There are multitudes who never fail to trumpet abroad the faults of their neighbors — but it would be much better to conspire in spreading abroad the virtues of those who are an ornament to human nature, and models for the behavior of all their neighbors. She is entitled to honor; and if no tongue should give it to her, the works of charity and wisdom, which she is constantly practicing, will be a monument to her name. She is praised by all the wise who know her, and she shall have praise of God on the day when the seal shall be set to every character.

# 02.00. Helps to a Devout Life

Helps to a Devout Life; Being a Treatise on Religious Duties by Lawson, George In this three chapter book, Lawson (Scottish Anglican), he presents us with the duties we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ, to God the Father, and to the Holy Ghost.

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Introduction Chapter 1 - Of the Duties we Owe the Lord Jesus Christ Chapter 2 - Of the Duties we Owe to God the Father Chapter 3 - Of the Duties we Owe the Holy Ghost HELPS TO A DEVOUT LIFE BEING A TREATISE ON RELIGIOUS DUTIES. BY THE LATE REV. GEORGE LAWSON, D. D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, SELKIRK.

"I bless Thee, O Heavenly Father, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, for that Thou hast vouchsafed to remember me, a poor creature. I will always bless and glorify Thee, with Thine only-begotten Son, and the Holy Ghost the Comforter, for ever and ever."-THOMAS A KEMPIS

EDINBURGH:

WILLIAM OLIPHANT & CO.

LONDON: HAMILTON, ADAMS, & CO.

1878.

PREFACE.

MOST of Dr. Lawson’s works are now out of print. Of late I have been frequently asked to undertake the republication of the more important of them, and might have been induced to do so, but for another suggestion which commended itself more to my mind. I allude to an oft-repeated request on the part of Brethren in the Ministry, that I should publish from MSS. in my possession a few more of his Commentaries on different books of the Bible. The late Dr. John Brown, of Edinburgh, took a lively interest in this proposal. Shortly before his death, he wrote, urging the publication of a series of expository discourses to which he had listened with delight in the morning of life.

Such a work would certainly sustain its Author’s reputation for learning and sound judgment; but, from its size and character, would necessarily be somewhat expensive, and limited in circulation. For the present, I send forth this little treatise, which is likely to prove useful to a wider circle of readers. It consists of selections from a few of his Lectures on Systematic Theology. These are abridged, and altered in form, but the substance of them remains. In the treatment of his subject it may be noted, that with the sagacity, appositeness of scriptural illustration, and clear statement of truth which distinguish his other writings, there are interwoven such affectionate counsels and tender appeals to the conscience, as evince the Professor’s anxiety to help and guide his Students

in the matter of personal religion. It is hoped this feature of the work may render it specially profitable to the young.

It is designed to be a book for the closet. In this age of engrossing worldliness, such faithful enforcements of Christian duty are much needed, and fitted, through the Divine blessing, to promote that practical godliness, which is at once the outcome and safeguard of a "Devout Life."

JOHN LAWSON.

SELKIRK, 10th October, 1878.

INTRODUCTORY.

" My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; ... then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."-- Proverbs 2:1-2, Proverbs 2:5.

IF we give heed to the instructions of Solomon, we "shall understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path" (ver. 9); but it does not follow that, in seeking information concerning the complete and perfect will of God, we should confine our attention to the book of Proverbs.

God has, indeed, given us a comprehensive statement of duty in that portion of Scripture. Wisdom speaks to us by the lips of the wise king of Israel. The Queen of Sheba, who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear his wisdom, will rise up in the judgment and condemn us if we refuse to receive his words, and keep his commandments. Yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. There are great things which he in vain desired to see and hear,-which have now been clearly revealed to men for the obedience of faith. In addition to what was "said by them of old time," who testified beforehand of the coming of Christ, increased light has been thrown on the plan of salvation, and consequently upon the great motives and principles of human duty, by the writers of the New Testament. "In these last days God hath spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1). He came into the world to accomplish and reveal the Divine will (John 1:18). Had Solomon lived in gospel times he could not have said that there was no "new thing under the sun." The Lord created a new thing on the earth when the "Word was made flesh," and became the "revealer of the Father," the Great Prophet of the Church!

Angels were astonished at the wondrous discoveries of love and wisdom made known to men in the face of Christ Jesus. More particularly, in connection with the person and work of the Lord Jesus, we have been better instructed in regard to the reciprocal relations and respective operations of the three Persons of the Godhead in the economy of grace, and the corresponding obligations resting on the people of God. The truth on this subject was not altogether unknown to the ancient Church. Solomon summons men to listen to the voice of Jesus, as the Eternal "Wisdom of God," "whom he possessed in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." Nor is he silent about the Holy Spirit, and His gracious influence in applying the instructions of Divine wisdom to the soul. But as prophecies are best understood after their accomplishment, so the special agency of each Person of the Trinity in the work of human salvation is most clearly set forth in the account which the New Testament gives of the performance of the mercy promised to the fathers. "Through the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high hath visited us." We

now understand many things stated in the Old Testament much better than the holy men who were employed in committing them to writing.

Whilst we prize our superior privileges, let us improve them by walking in the light of the Lord, and conscientiously performing the duties we owe to each of the Divine Persons, in whose name we have been baptised and received into the fellowship of the visible Church. .

"He hath showed thee, 0 man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

"Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

# 02.01. Of the Duties we Owe the Lord Jesus Christ

Chapter 1 - Of the Duties we Owe the Lord Jesus Christ THE three Persons of the Godhead are equal in power and glory. Each is entitled to supreme love, veneration, and worship; and it is not to be supposed that we dishonour any of the Divine Persons by placing one of them before the others. The Father is the first Person in the Godhead, yet we find Him mentioned second in the well-known apostolic benediction-"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen " (2 Corinthians 13:14). The special office of the Son, the second Person in the Godhead, is set forth in these words-"There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). No man cometh unto the Father but by Him. By Him we believe in God, and are accepted as righteous in His sight. "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. . . . For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2:13, Ephesians 2:18).

It is not, therefore, out of place to begin the consideration of religious duties, by dwelling first and chiefly, on those which we owe to our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

I. - THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."- Hosea 6:3. Who should seek to know the Lord Jesus? All men without exception, whether high or low, rich or poor, young or old. "Doth not wisdom cry? .. . Unto you, 0 men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man" (Proverbs 8:1-4). But "wherefore is a price put into our hands to get wisdom if we have no heart to it?" Have we not precious souls? Are they not lost? Is there any Saviour but Jesus? Can we be saved through Him without knowing Him? "Where there is no vision the people perish." But where vision is neglected and despised, people must perish more miserably than where the means of religious knowledge are not enjoyed. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). Ignorant and uneducated persons should seek to know Christ. The entrance of His word will give them light; "it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalms 119:130). Men of genius and learning should seek the knowledge of Christ, for without it their talents and acquirements will only intensify their misery in the place of woe. Awakened sinners should acquaint themselves with Him who is the only Saviour of the lost, and from whom only they can obtain relief from their wretchedness. Believers, who are already rejoicing in His salvation, should desire to grow in the knowledge of Him whom their souls love; as yet they know nothing as they ought to know, or as they shall know hereafter (1 Corinthians 8:2). Let not the poor imagine that they may warrantably neglect the means of knowing Christ, because most of their time is spent in labouring for their daily bread. They are not on that account to be guilty of preferring" the meat that perisheth to the meat that endureth unto everlasting life!" Let not the rich or noble act as if their dignity raised them above the necessity of becoming acquainted with Him to whom they

owe all temporal blessings. Such, from their greater opportunities of acquiring information, are less excusable than the poor, if "they incline not their eats unto wisdom, and apply their hearts to the noblest kind of understanding!" The young should learn without delay what the Bible tells of Him who said, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." The old come far short of knowing Christ as they ought; and should spend their declining years in the pursuit of that knowledge which is better for them than thousands of gold and silver (Php 3:3). THE ELEMENTS OF THIS KNOWLEDGE.

What should we seek to know concerning Christ? His excellencies are innumerable, and, so far as possible, we should seek to become acquainted with them all. Something may and ought to be known by us of His original and underived glories, and of the love He cherished and expressed for us in the "counsels of peace" before we or the world existed. Then He was by the Father, as one brought up with Him, and was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; and His delights were with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:30-31). We can never expect fully to understand the "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." But even this mystery has not been revealed in vain. We may know so much of the nature and design of our Saviour’s incarnation as shall make us rejoice in His ability and willingness to save all that come unto God by Him, and as shall prepare us for "seeing Him as He is" in the world of glory (John 1:14). The offices to which He has been appointed by the Father, and the gracious relations in which He stands to His people, should be the subjects of earnest study. We should search into the glory that encircles Him, as the High Priest of our profession, "who was once offered to bear the sins of many," and who "ever liveth to make intercession for them;" -as "a Prophet, mighty in deed and word," who, by His Word and Spirit, reveals to men the will of God; -as the King whom God has set on His holy hill of Zion, to subdue His people to Himself, and who "must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." If we have been reconciled to God through His sacrificial death, enlightened by Him in the knowledge of the truth, delivered from the power of Satan, and made His loving, loyal subjects, then we ought to know that He has become our Surety, our Elder Brother, our Shepherd, our Husband, our Head. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. His Church is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. If we love our earthly relations, and seek to be acquainted with everything relating to them, much more should we seek full and accurate knowledge of Him who is "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." There is no Friend like the Lord Jesus! His offices and titles are not empty names, but gracious realities, from which we may derive unfailing consolation, The wonderful things that Christ has done and suffered in accomplishing our salvation, afford materials for frequent and profitable meditation. What He did for the ancient Church from the days of Adam until the time of His appearance in the flesh. What works of power and mercy were wrought by Him while He lived in a state of humiliation on earth. What grace was shown forth, in His sufferings and death, in His resurrection from the dead as the first-fruits of them that slept, in His glorious ascension, and sitting down at the right hand of God. What He has been doing for the Church since He left our world. How He has been overruling the events of Providence for the advancement of His kingdom; and how the history of nations, no less than the history of churches, has been the history of the acts of His gracious administration (Ephesians 1:22). What gifts He has been bestowing upon some of His people for the good of others; and how each of them has been the object of His special solicitude and care. In these things we just behold a little portion of His ways. Happy are they who observe and understand them (Psalms 107:43).

What Christian can call to mind His mighty acts without exclaiming, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Revelation 5:9-10; Revelation 15:3). The honours that have been or shall yet be paid to Jesus should engage our earnest attention. He has been the confidence of His people in every age; loved, trusted, and obeyed by all who looked to Him for the salvation of their souls. He is praised and honoured, not only by the Church which He has redeemed, but by all the angels of God, who are the fellow-servants of them that keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. These glorious, happy beings cannot claim Christ as their own Saviour, but they never cease to honour and praise Him as the Saviour of lost sinners of the human race, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12). When Isaiah saw His glory, and spake of Him, he saw Him encompassed with seraphs, who celebrated the praises of His glorious holiness. When John saw Him in His state of exaltation, he heard the angels sounding forth the praises of His grace, and all the creatures which are in heaven and the earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, heard he saying, "Amen. Blessing, and glory, and honour, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 5:11-14). We see not yet all creatures praising and honouring our glorious King. We see too many of them lifting up unrighteous weapons of rebellion against Him; but the word is gone out of His own mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Him every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear (Isa. x55:23). It cannot but fill our hearts with joy to contemplate those honours that are paid to Christ by believers, by angels, and by all the creatures of God. But our joy must rise still higher when we contemplate the honours conferred upon Him by His eternal Father.

These are the honours which Christ Himself chiefly regards, and in which we ourselves are most deeply interested. They are the sure proofs that our confidence in Him is not misplaced, for God hath raised Him from the dead and given Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God; and the same exceeding greatness of power is manifested in us, which wrought in Christ when God raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but likewise in that which is to come (1 Peter 1:20-21; Ephesians 1:1, Ephesians 1:19-23).

Christians cannot but rejoice to know that Christ hath gone to the Father, and is crowned by Him with glory and honour. Nor will they be transported with less pleasure when they learn what honour is done to our Lord by His own Spirit, who is His agent in the world, and who glorifies Him, by taking the things which are Christ’s and showing them unto us (John 16:14).

It is needful that we should know the position which Christ holds in His own religion. There are some who allow no higher place to Christ in practical Christianity than Moses held in the religion of the Jews. But believers are better taught. To them Christ is "all and in all." He is the object of their faith. He is their hope, their righteousness, their joy, their life, the Rock of their salvation, on whom is all their dependence for time and for eternity. If we give Him only a part where everything is due, we dishonour Christ, and turn His religion into a mere shadow, because, rejecting the animating soul, we hold fast only a lifeless form. What benefit can we derive from the law if we know not Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth? What consolation can we derive from the Gospel if we know not Christ to be the sum and substance of the Gospel? It is the glory of the Gospel that it is the ministration of righteousness and of the Spirit. Now, the

righteousness which it ministers is the righteousness of Christ. The spirit which is ministered by the Gospel is the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 10:6).

Such are some things revealed concerning Christ which are specially worthy of our most serious consideration; as yet it is but little that we can know of His personal and mediatorial glory, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). THE NATURE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE.

Consider what sort of knowledge regarding Christ we should seek to obtain.

There is a knowledge of Christ which is obtained by the simple exercise of our rational powers. There is another kind of knowledge which proceeds from the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. It was of the latter that Christ said to Peter, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." This sort of knowledge excels the former as much as light excels darkness. If we thus know the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall know the certainty of the things wherein we have been instructed by His Word; and while we see the beauty and glory of the truths that relate to Him, we shall feel their power, and live under their influence. "The branch of the Lord" will be beautiful and glorious in our eyes, and all worldly excellencies will appear contemptible, when compared with the brightness of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. A speculative knowledge of Christ is valuable on account of the use that is made of it by the Spirit, who is often pleased to make it really beneficial to our souls, by enabling us to understand the importance, and to see the excellency of what we know. But a knowledge that is merely speculative produces evil rather than good effects. It is at the best like a winter's sun, which gives light without heat. Very frequently it puffs up the soul with a fond and false apprehension of its own wisdom. The Laodiceans had no other kind of knowledge, and they fancied themselves rich and increased with goods, when in reality they were poor and miserable and blind and naked. It was knowledge of a very different character that Paul desired when he wished to know Christ, "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Php 3:10). When men have no other knowledge than that which consists in uninfluential notions, they know nothing as they ought to know. That man truly knows Christ, in the right sense of the term, who is taught by the Spirit to obey Christ; the man who says that he knows Him, and yet refuses to obey Him, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:3-5; Ephesians 4:21-24).

REASONS FOR SEEKING THIS KNOWLEDGE.

Why should we seek to know Christ? Our deep personal interest in Christ makes the knowledge of Him exceedingly valuable. Children are expected to know their own parents, and servants their masters. Much more may it be expected of creatures that they know their Creator and Preserver, who shall also be their Judge. God made us, and all things in the world, by Jesus Christ. He rules us by Him, to whom He hath given power over all creatures. And He hath appointed a day in which He will judge us by Jesus Christ. Can anything be of greater personal consequence than the knowledge of Him who stands towards us in such relations, and to whom we belong by a title so unquestionable? Then we are lost creatures, and must for ever perish without Christ. He is the only Saviour of self-ruined sinners of the human family. His 'blood is the only true atonement. No power but His can break our fetters and bestow on us the glorious liberty of the sons of God. It must therefore be a matter of infinite importance to us to be acquainted with everything that can give us just apprehensions of the character of Jesus, of the efficacy of His death, the love that is in

His heart, and the reliance which it may be safe for us to place on Him. If there were any other Saviour, we might safely be ignorant of Him who is the Author of our religion; but if He be the only hope of the guilty, it is strange infatuation, indeed, to continue willingly ignorant of the glory of His person, of the riches of His grace, of the extent of His saving power, and of the marvellous things which He hath done!

Further, the knowledge of Christ is desirable, for it comprehends all we need to know for our present direction and our eternal happiness. The knowledge of Christ includes the knowledge of God the Father; for he who hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also. It contains in it the knowledge of heaven; for wherein does the happiness of heaven consist, but in seeing Christ, and being like Christ. It embraces also the knowledge of human duty; for Christ is our King and Leader in the ways of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment. If we know Christ, we know everything that is necessary to furnish us for every good work, for we are complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power. If we know Christ, we know the way wherein we should walk, we are acquainted with the springs of all true consolation. It maybe said that we know: all things, for Christ is "all and in all," and in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. But if we know not Christ, we are blind, and cannot see afar off,-we are yet unacquainted with the first principles of true wisdom, and with the most essential requisites of true happiness!

Hence it is that the happy effects of the knowledge of Christ also render it exceedingly desirable.

We cannot believe in an unknown Saviour, and if we know Him as we ought, we cannot but believe in Him (Psalms 9:10; John 6:40). We must be for ever lost if we are not lovers of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 Corinthians 16:22); but we cannot love Him without knowing Him, and if we, know Him we cannot withhold from Him our supreme affection. If we know Christ, it will be impossible for us not to love the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, for Christ is the brightness of His Father’s glory, the express image of His person, in whom He appears to be not only infinitely glorious in Himself, ’but infinitely gracious to us, If we know Christ we shall be like Christ, for "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The revelations which God has been pleased to give us of His Son form powerful motives to diligence in this noblest of all studies.

We could have known nothing concerning Jesus Christ without a Divine revelation. The light of nature reveals nothing regarding Him. But from the beginning, communications about Christ have been given us from on high. God Himself spake of Him in the ears of Adam as that blessed "Seed of the woman who should bruise the head of the old serpent." New discoveries of Jesus were made by the ministries of Moses, of David, of Isaiah, and other holy men, to whom God spake, and whom He furnished with treasures of knowledge, not for themselves only, but for us. Had we no other information about Christ save that which the ancient Church possessed, we should still be quite inexcusable if we did not search the Scriptures daily to know what they testified concerning Him. But our advantages are far superior to those enjoyed under previous dispensations. We have not only the prophets but the apostles for our instructors in the knowledge of Christ. The mystery which was hid from ages and generations is now made manifest to the sons of men. Christ Himself has become our Teacher. From His Father’s bosom He has come to give us the knowledge of His Father, and of Himself. He did not indeed write the books of the New Testament with His own hand; nor does He preach in our streets or churches, as He did in Jerusalem and Galilee. But the

Scriptures were dictated by His Holy Spirit; and the writers of the New Testament were directed to record such of the discourses spoken by Him, in the days of His flesh, as He knew would be most useful to the Church in every age. Now, if this Divine Instructor came from heaven to earth, to give us the knowledge of Himself by words, deeds, and sufferings; if He still speaks to us from heaven,-we, surely, are shutting our eyes against the clearest light, if we refuse to receive the instruction He communicates. Who but those who are in love with folly will refuse to listen? But our understandings are very narrow and corrupt. By nature we are blind,-we are darkness itself. Can the light of the knowledge of the glory of God ever make its way into our minds? We never could have formed any right apprehensions of the mystery of Christ if we had been left entirely to ourselves. But through the mercy of God, the Spirit of counsel and knowledge is promised. We are directed to pray for this Spirit, and to depend upon Him for that spiritual enlightenment which will enable us to understand what the Scriptures reveal regarding our blessed Redeemer. Blessed with such abundant means of information, how blind must we be to our own interest, how insensible to the obligations of duty and gratitude, if we do not study diligently to increase in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ. If God had only given us ministers of the Gospel to explain His truths, their instructions, however valuable, would not have availed to the chasing away of darkness from our souls; but when He has given us such a full and comprehensive revelation of His Son, and 'crowned the gift with the promise of the Holy Spirit to make it effectual, what should hinder us from digging hopefully for the knowledge of Christ as for silver, and searching for it as for hid treasure? THE MEANS OF OBTAINING THIS KNOWLEDGE.

How shall we best attain the knowledge of Christ, and increase in it more and more?

We have already advanced very considerably on the way, if we are animated with a sincere and earnest desire to obtain it. If we regard this wisdom as more precious than rubies, and if all the things we can desire appear to us unworthy to be compared with it; if we esteem the words of God's mouth more than our necessary food, because they bear testimony concerning Christ,-we shall soon be found rejoicing in the knowledge of our blessed Saviour! It is a sign that we already know Him in some measure, when we cannot think ourselves happy without knowing Him better. Our anxiety thus to know Him will make us diligent in the use of means; and the means which God has promised to bless may be used with a joyful confidence of success, "for then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." The desires which His own Spirit has kindled within our souls shall not be disappointed. We must seek out the Book of the Lord and read. The Scriptures are the Word of Christ. They were designed and fitted by the infinite wisdom of God to give the knowledge of Christ unto men. From beginning to end they testify of Him (John 5:39). We must make use of the public ordinances, which Christ has appointed for conveying the knowledge of Himself to our souls (Ephesians 4:11-13). We must wait upon the ministrations of the sanctuary, receive the truths preached, with faith and love, meditate upon them, converse about them, and practise them in our lives (Proverbs 8:34-35; Matthew 28:20).

We ought to edify each other by religious conversation. Christ is present with His people when their converse is such as it ought to be, and makes their pious intercourse the means of mutual communications of light (Luke 24:15, Luke 24:27, Luke 24:31). Frequent meditation on Christ tends to increase our knowledge of Him (Psalms 119:97-99). By holy meditation, we may preach to ourselves more effectually than the most eloquent preacher. While we muse on the truths we already know, they become clearer, and new truths necessarily connected with them, spring up to

our view. Earnest prayer to the Father of lights is absolutely necessary for those who desire to obtain the knowledge of Christ. The Lord alone giveth true wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding, and therefore we ought to cry to Him for wisdom, and to lift up our voice for understanding. The more we actually know of Christ, the more sensible will we become of our remaining ignorance, and of the value of increased knowledge, and thus shall we be led to importunate prayer for further communications of light. What man in David's time was so wise as David himself, and yet how frequently and earnestly did he entreat fresh wisdom from above. In proof of this, we need only turn to Psalms 119:1-176.

Finally, we ought to depend upon Christ, as "made of God unto us wisdom." He is given for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people; for a "light to lighten the Gentiles," that He may be God's salvation unto the ends of the earth. He hath graciously promised His Spirit, to take of His own things and show them unto us. This Spirit knoweth all the deep things of Christ, and in His light we shall see light. He irradiates the minds of believers, and makes their path like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Whilst we seek the knowledge of Christ for ourselves, let us not neglect others. We are bound, according to our ability, to make Him known unto all around us, especially unto those whom Divine Providence has placed under our charge. If the knowledge of Christ is of great value in our eyes, it will be a pleasure to impart it to others. Happy are the men who are really, and not merely in their own estimation, guides of the blind, lights to them that are in darkness. Whilst they water others, they shall themselves also be watered, and whatever success they may have in their labours of love, they will shine at last as the brightness of the firmament, and as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43).

II. - FAITH IN CHRIST.

"These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." - John 20:31.

We ought to believe in Jesus Christ to the saving of our souls.

Faith in Christ is a necessary duty. There is no salvation except in Christ; and without faith in His name, we can obtain none of His precious blessings. "Saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness:" "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." If so, who would not wish above all things to know the character of Him in whom we are called on to believe, - what is meant by believing on Him,-what ground we have for our faith,-and what motives or encouragements we have for looking exclusively to Him for the salvation of our souls? IN WHOM ARE WE TO BELIEVE?

How shall we believe in Him of whom we have not heard? We cannot trust in Christ for salvation unless assured on unimpeachable evidence that He is able and willing to save us. If He were able but not willing to save, His power would be the object of terror, and not of confidence. If not almighty, His willingness to save would be worthless, for only an omnipotent arm could deliver sinners from the ruins of their fallen condition. But blessed be God, from the writings of the prophets and apostles we have the most perfect assurance of the infinite grace and infinite power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Take only the testimony of John, the beloved disciple, who wrote his gospel that we might believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that believing, we might

have life through His name. In its opening sentence he gives such an account of the person of Christ as must convince every unprejudiced reader that our Saviour is the Great God, equal in power and glory with the Father, and therefore "mighty to save."

"In the beginning was the Word." This "Word" was a distinct Person from another Person who is called God. Not differing in essence, for the Word who was in the beginning with God is God. In no respect inferior, for He who lay in the bosom of the Father was the Creator of all things, and "without him was not anything made that was made." If Christ had not been a Divine Person, He could not have been entrusted with the salvation of our souls. Only "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;" "who is God, but the Lord; who is a rock, save our God?"

"The Word was made flesh," and tabernacled among the Jews. Most of them saw no beauty in the incarnate Word that they should desire Him; but the men whose eyes were opened by the grace of God "saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." He was from eternity appointed to be the Saviour of self-ruined sinners. In consequence of this appointment, He took part of our flesh and blood, that He might obey the law, and satisfy all its demands in that nature by which it had been violated. The Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself. For sinful men He lived a holy life, and died an accursed death. Being made perfect through sufferings, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him. Had Jesus continued for ever under the power of death, our faith and our hope had been vain. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and is become the first-fruits of them that slept." God hath not only raised Him from the dead, but all power in heaven and earth has been given unto Him, that He might give eternal life to all that believe on His name.

Such is the account which the Scriptures give of Him in whom we are called to believe. They assure us that He is a Person truly Divine and yet, incarnate,-having assumed human nature that He might do everything needful for our salvation. Further, they assure us that every saving office belongs to Him by His Father’s appointment, and His own voluntary undertaking; that He is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; a light given to the Gentiles, that He might be God’s salvation to the ends of the earth; a King highly exalted, seated on a throne of mercy, that He may dispense in rich abundance spiritual blessings to perishing sinners. In the representations given of the Lord Jesus Christ we find everything fitted to impart perfect confidence in His ability and willingness to save. We behold in Him all Divine excellencies, every saving office, an exhaustless fulness of grace and truth, an everlasting righteousness, and a Complete Salvation, purchased by His precious blood, placed before our view, offered and recommended to our acceptance by the blessed God, the Author of the glorious Gospel. What shall we say to these things? Shall we not say with joy and gratitude, "We will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is our strength and our song, and he also is become our salvation." When we believe in Christ, we give not that glory to another which is due only to God (Psalms 146:3-5). The confidence we place in the Redeemer is not alienated from God. Our justification is through faith in Christ, as Paul shows at great length in his epistle to the Romans; and yet in the same epistle he sometimes speaks of that faith by which we are justified as if it were placed in God the Father-"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9; Romans 4:24). To believe in Christ as an exalted Saviour is to believe in God, who raised Him from the dead.

We cannot come to Christ without coming to God by Him, and we cannot come to God but by Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The name of Christ is frequently represented as the object of our faith. By His name is meant the full representation made of Him in Holy Scripture. We cannot believe the word of truth without believing in Christ. For what is the Gospel, but the revelation of Christ as our Saviour; and what is the faith of the Gospel, but faith in Him whom it so clearly displays to our view (Romans 1:16-17). THE NATURE OF FAITH.

What is that faith which is so necessary for our salvation, and so highly commended in the Bible?

There have been many disputes about the true nature of faith; and yet one would think that the characteristics of this grace must be fully described in a book which was designed by Divine Wisdom to be a light to our feet and a lamp to our path.

If the Scriptures do not clearly explain the way of salvation, how can they be a light to guide our feet in the way that leads to life everlasting? We are not to suppose that some men are saved in one way and some in another. "There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus." There is no other way in which we can receive salvation from Jesus but by faith; and there is only one kind of saving faith. How important, therefore, the question, "What is faith in Jesus Christ?" How dangerous to be mistaken on a point of such vital consequence!

It is, however, a comfortable thought that different men may exercise the same faith in Christ, and obtain the same salvation through His name, who use very different language in describing their faith in Him.

All men do not mean the same thing by the same words. Those who deny something to belong to the nature of faith which others hold to be essential to it, may, in a greater or less degree, practise, under another name, that which they deny to be needful. There are some, for instance, who allege that it forms no part of our faith to assure ourselves of salvation, and yet they may really enjoy personal assurance of salvation by receiving and resting upon Christ. There are others who maintain that coming to Jesus is a distinct exercise of the soul from believing, and yet allow that it is inseparably connected with faith. It is, however, of great importance to have clear, precise, and distinct apprehensions of the true nature of faith, that the exercise of our hearts in believing may not be perplexed and encumbered by mistakes or doubts. Besides, if we err simply in words in regard to this grace, we may lead other men into errors of judgment or practice, by conveying to them our sentiments in language to which they may affix very different ideas from our own.

One thing is certain, our faith, if genuine, must be in exact accordance with the word of the truth of the Gospel. Hence, in Scripture it is called obedience to the Gospel, or the "obedience of faith." If we receive the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater; and if we know what is meant by the belief of a man’s testimony, we may from this form a clear idea of the nature of that grace by which we set to our seal that God is true.

It may be observed, therefore- That Faith must include a full persuasion of the truth of those great doctrines concerning Christ which are revealed in Scripture.

We must believe in our hearts that God hath raised Him from the dead (Romans 14:9). But it does not follow from that expression that no more is necessary to be believed than that single article of

Christian doctrine. The belief of that doctrine includes the ·belief of the whole truth included in our salvation by Christ-His divinity, His incarnation, His substitution, His sufferings, His glory. We accordingly find the same stress laid upon the belief of other parts of the work of Christ that is here laid upon belief in the fact of His resurrection (1 John 5:1, 1 John 1:5; John 8:24).

A. firm, intelligent assent to the doctrines concerning our Lord Jesus Christ is less common than many suppose. Numbers give but a wavering, precarious assent to the capital articles of our religion. They scarcely know what they believe, or why! They were trained up in the persuasion that the Bible is the Word of God, just as the Turks are trained in the belief that the Alcoran is a Divine book.

If they hear no objections made to the truth of Christianity, they continue in the profession of what they believe; and if they be persons of decent behaviour and steady minds, they will not be easily shaken by anything that may be alleged against their faith, although they can give no better reason for the belief that is in them, than the Turk can give for believing that Mahomet was the Apostle of God. But if their tempers are flexible and their judgments unimpressed with reverence for ancient institutions and creeds, very trifling arguments, or even foolish jests, will be apt to shake or overturn the whole fabric of their belief. It is not, however, to be denied that men may be able to describe and defend their creed with strong arguments, and may continue to profess their belief of its truth with unshaken firmness, whilst they are still destitute of the faith of God’s elect. It is certain that the faith which is merely the effect of reason, or of natural principles, cannot be that faith which distinguishes Christians from other men; for it cannot be doubted that there are arguments so conclusive in favour of the doctrine of Christ, that they cannot fail to approve themselves to the judgment of every candid, thoughtful inquirer. The fact that Jesus wrought many miracles cannot well be called in question; and if so, then the doctrine confirmed by them can admit of as little doubt. Men, by the mere force of truth, may be convinced that Jesus Christ really did come from God, and that His religion is Divine, while they themselves continue in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. We meet with not a few illustrations of this sad truth in the Word of God. At one of the passovers which Jesus attended at Jerusalem, we are told that many believed on His name when they saw the miracles which He did; but Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because "He knew all men." These men were surely destitute of saving faith, for all true believers are regarded and treated by Jesus as His friends.

There are others of whom it is said that "they believed in Jesus," and yet we find them continuing under the reigning power of worldly dispositions (John 12:42-43). The faith ascribed to Simon Magus may be taken as another instance of a sort of belief which came short of securing the salvation of the soul (Acts 8:21-23). The assent given to the truths of Christianity by such hypocrites or formalists is something altogether different from that of those whose eyes have been enlightened, and whose hearts have been disposed to believe, by the influence of the Holy Spirit. "It is the will of him that sent me," saith Christ, "that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." That we may believe in Christ to eternal life, it is necessary that we should see Him; and they who really see Him in His beauty and glory, assent to the truth of the Gospel, not merely because it has been confirmed by miracles, and prophecies, and other incontrovertible evidences, but because they see in it so much of the love of God as proves it to be from heaven; just as the marks of His eternal power and Godhead on the face of nature proclaim Him to be the Creator of the material universe. God Himself shines into their minds to give them

the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ. He speaks to their ears and hearts in the Gospel. They receive it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God. The glory and salvation of Christ is manifested to them, not by flesh and blood, but by the Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:17).

Along with this assent there must be a cordial reception of Christ as the gift of God to sinners. Our faith must correspond with the declarations of the Gospel, But the Gospel not merely reveals Christ to the understanding-it sets Him before us as the unspeakable gift of God, to be gratefully received and trusted in.

Jesus preaching to a great multitude of unbelievers said, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." These men had asked Christ to give them such bread from heaven as Moses gave to their fathers in the desert. Jesus tells them that God was much kinder to them than they desired, He had given them bread as much superior to that given to their fathers as the substance is better than the shadow. Every Israelite in the wilderness was permitted to go out of the camp and freely gather and eat the manna; and every hearer of the Gospel has an equal right to receive Christ, and with Him all the blessings of salvation. God in His Word makes to them a free grant of Christ. There are, alas! too many who despise this gift. They will have none of Christ, they do not feel their need of Him, or they are not fully convinced of God’s sincerity in calling them to accept of Christ and His salvation;-but notwithstanding all this, the offer is to them as well as to others, and if they will only arise and come, they shall not be sent empty away. When the manna fell around the camp of Israel there might be some to whom the precious gift was useless, through their inability to partake of it. The sick, for example, whose "soul abhorreth dainty meat," would be unable even to eat of that heavenly bread. Still they had the same right to it as their neighbours. In like manner, all who hear the Gospel have a right given them by God to receive Christ and all His benefits. If they are not nourished and strengthened by the spiritual manna, the reason is to be sought for in themselves. They have no relish for the bread of heaven, or no confidence in the grace and truth of the Giver of it. We cannot receive the precious gift of God if we have no real desire for the blessings of grace. No man can believe in Christ in opposition to his own will. But mere desire is not enough. An avaricious man may be anxious to obtain food, without eating it. A criminal may earnestly desire a free pardon though he has not the slightest hope of receiving it. And so there may be many eager desires for salvation in the heart of one who is still a stranger to saving faith. His desires have not for their object that complete salvation which is revealed in the Gospel, but something which men call by the same name, although God has never promised to give it-a deliverance, not from sin itself, but from the miserable consequences of sin. Sincere desires for deliverance from the present dominion and power of sin are inseparable from true faith, and shall certainly be satisfied (Matthew 5:6). When we receive Christ we appropriate Him as our own. Isaiah directs us to this exercise of faith when he declares, "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength!" There are indeed true believers who cannot use these words as the joyous record of their own experience. Though their faith is genuine, it is feeble and imperfect, and they are often harassed with doubts of their saving interest in Christ. There is flesh as well as spirit, unbelief as well as faith, in real believers, though these remnants of unbelief are a burden to their hearts. Men are sometimes vexed with doubts concerning some of the doctrines of our holy religion, though clinging with all their souls to the grand fundamental truths wrapt up in the method of a sinner’s justification in the sight of God.

They may also stagger at the promises of God through unbelief, although they would not for a thousand worlds let go that confidence which will have a full recompense of reward. There is nothing wished for by them with greater earnestness than to be able to say, "Behold, the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, and he also is become my salvation;"-but as yet the limit of their attainments is just that of the poor man, who could only say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." They have as much of assurance as of faith; but their faith is weak, and therefore their personal assurance of salvation through Christ is disturbed by anxious apprehensions. Christ is greatly displeased with such fears,-but He is pleased with their deep anxiety about salvation, with their fervent desires, and with such faith as they have. The bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench: He will bring forth judgment unto victory. Though expressed in different words and phrases, this will be admitted by all,-that when men come to Christ, and trust in Him, they receive Him; and their assured confidence of being saved by Him is just according to the measure of their faith. Further, it must be admitted that those are dangerously deceived who place a presumptuous confidence in Christ, in room of that humble faith which looks to Him alone as the Saviour of the lost.

We read of many wicked persons in the days of Isaiah and Micah who called themselves of the "Holy City," and stayed themselves upon "the God of Israel, whose name is the Lord of Hosts," but not in truth and in righteousness (Isa. xlvi ii. 1, 2; Micah 3:11). When the ancient Jews apostatised from God, they still hoped that He would save them from their enemies, because they were His peculiar people; because His temple was amongst them; because they were the seed of the patriarchs; because they thought their crimes were no crimes at all, or at least not such as deserved the wrath of God (Jeremiah 2:23-35; Jeremiah 7:4; Isaiah 58:1-3). A similar spirit is manifested now-a-days by those who build their hopes of salvation on the gospel privileges they enjoy, or on their fancied innocence, or their good wishes and resolutions. If they look for eternal life, in some measure, to the free grace of God, they also look for at least a part of it to themselves. They cannot deny that they are sinners, but refuse to believe that sin is so malignant in its nature as to expose men, by a righteous sentence, to everlasting condemnation. Such persons presume upon the mercy of the Lord, and seek safety in what they shall discover to be a "refuge of lies" (Isaiah 28:16-17). So it is with those who in their unscriptural views regard Christ as if He were a Saviour from hell, but not a Saviour from sin; and who put asunder what God has inseparably joined together, -salvation from sin and salvation from wrath. To such men eternal misery is the object of dread, but deliverance from the bondage of corruption is a matter of comparative indifference. They forget that where there is pardon there must also be purity. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," said the angel, "for he shall save his people from their sins;" from their power and defilement, no less than from their guilt and penalty. Our faith must correspond to the characters under which Christ is set before us in the Gospel.

These are all suited to our needs as sinful creatures. The first thing that disquiets an awakened sinner is the consciousness of guilt. The number and heinousness of his sins are vividly impressed on his mind, and he feels that on account of them he has become exposed to God’s righteous displeasure. But when his eyes are opened to see the excellency of Christ as an atonement for sin, he rests on Him, and is emboldened to say, "Iniquities prevail against me; but as for our transgressions thou shall purge them away." Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. For surely Christ was "wounded for our

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Unconverted persons are apt to imagine that it is in their own power to deliver themselves from the dominion of sin whenever they choose to put forth their full strength; and this most of them intend doing when they have had their fill of the pleasures of sin.

Widely different from this are the feelings of the man who has been really roused from spiritual sleep. He feels that he can no more deliver himself from the power of his lusts than he can merit the forgiveness of his iniquities. He groans under the oppression of his spiritual enemies, and feels that deliverance can come to him through Christ alone. On Him therefore he depends for sanctification as well as righteousness, knowing that "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead unto sin should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 7:24-25). The lusts that war in our members are dangerous foes, but we must wrestle likewise with principalities and powers. It is folly to imagine that anyone can triumph over such enemies in his own strength. The true believer trusts for safety and victory to the Captain of his salvation (Ephesians 6:11-12).

We are called to the discharge of many duties, none of which by our own might can we perform in a manner acceptable; but Christ is revealed to our faith as the "Lord our strength," and we are invited to rely on Him for all needful supplies of His Spirit, as well as for the acceptance of all our holy services (Php 4:13). We cannot walk alone in safety through this ensnaring world. But we have a Guide of unerring skill and almighty power in our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God has given for a Witness to the people, for a Leader and Commander to the people. We are to commit ourselves to His guidance, that we may be led by His Word and Spirit to the place where He dwells, and where we hope to be with Him for ever (Ps. 74:24).

Whilst in this world, we need also daily supplies for the present life. For these also we must depend on Christ, to whom all judgment is committed by the Father (Matthew 6:26-34). Here also we may lay our account with constant changes in our condition and relationships; but, through faith, we shall amid them all maintain a peaceful, happy frame of mind; for it will enable us to live under the powers of the world to come, and make us feel that all earthly vicissitudes will turn to the furtherance of our salvation, and that in all things, whether by death or life, Christ will be magnified in us. THE GROUND AND WARRANT OF A SINNER’S FAITH.

It is certainly a point of the highest importance to be assured that we have sufficient ground and authority for believing on Chris. That we are fully justified in assenting to the great truths revealed in Scripture, will be denied by no one who believes the Bible to be true.

Those who make reason the rule of their faith rather than the Word of God, will doubtless find means of explaining away all that is taught us in Scripture regarding the divine and mediatorial glory of our blessed Redeemer. But those who accept the Bible as the revelation of the Divine will, and who study it with unbiassed minds, must admit that these doctrines relating to the person and offices of Christ are set forth with sufficient clearness, and that the Gospel is hid only from those whom the god of this world hath blinded.

Even in Old Testament times the Word of God was a lamp to men’s path, and a light to their feet, but now life and immortality are enlightened by the Gospel, and the "righteousness of God without

the law is manifested," even that righteousness which was formerly "witnessed by the law and the prophets." Different interpretations have indeed been given of some passages of Scripture, but it does not follow that their meaning is uncertain. Let not the infirmities of men be charged against the Word of Christ. In the writings of Paul there are some things dark and "hard to be understood," but he himself assures us that he uses great plainness of speech in setting forth those truths which are of eternal importance to the souls of men (2 Corinthians 4:2-6). It would be a most unjust reflection upon a book given as the rule of our faith to allege that it leaves us at a loss to know whether our Saviour is really God, or simply a created being; whether we are indebted to Him for our entire salvation, or only for a part of it; and what is the nature and design of those offices and relations which as our Saviour He sustains. But the "law of the Lord is perfect," and in its revelation of Christ it affords firm footing for our faith. Our fathers hoped in Him, and they were saved; and no one who places implicit confidence in Jesus shall be disappointed. We are assured that whosoever believeth in Him shall not be confounded (Romans 10:13; Isaiah 28:16). When the Bible says that whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed, it is plain that according to the rule of His Word all men are warranted to believe in Christ. If a house had stood firm from the beginning of the world, and if we were assured that it would remain immovable till the consummation of all things, we would not hesitate to say that it had a good foundation. If all men, whatever be their tempers, capacities, characters, and circumstances, are warranted to believe in Christ for salvation, it is evident that their warrant for doing so cannot consist in anything which distinguishes one man from another; and therefore men of exceptionally good dispositions must not imagine that their right to come to Christ depends on their moral virtues or amiable behaviour. If it did, they would be more welcome to Christ and the enjoyment of His blessings than other men whose dispositions were the reverse of theirs. But that this is not the case appears abundantly plain from the Word of God. "Go," said Christ to His disciples, "and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." And "him that cometh unto me," says our gracious Saviour, "I will in no wise cast out."

There are many who take it for granted that a deep sense of sin and misery is necessary for authorising men to believe in Jesus. It is admitted that no man will seek salvation through Christ until deeply impressed with a sense of his wretchedness through sin; but this feeling of need does not constitute his warrant to come to Christ. A man will not avail himself of the physician’s skill until he feels that he is sick or suffering; but it is not his apprehension of disease or danger that gives him a right to the physician’s care. A man will not think of soliciting a pardon from his prince until he finds himself condemned; but the knowledge of his perilous condition by no means entitles him to pardon. In like manner, no man will truly believe in Jesus until he is thoroughly convinced of his sin and misery; but it is not that conviction that warrants him to look to Christ for salvation. The ground of faith lies not within us, but without us, in the Gospel. Not in the frames and feelings of our own hearts, but in the finished work of Christ as set forth in the Word of truth. To all men without exception Wisdom calls, and her voice is to the sons of men, saying, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine which I have mingled" (Proverbs 8:4; Proverbs 9:5).

"Come unto me," says our Lord, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." From these words some have inferred that none but those who are heavy laden with a sense of their iniquities are warranted to apply to Christ for salvation. On the supposition that such persons were referred to by our Saviour, it does not follow that they only are authorised to come to Him for

rest. All the seed of Israel are called on to fear God (Psalms 22:23), but we are not to conclude that to fear God is the exclusive duty of the house of Israel (Jeremiah 10:7). That highly-favoured people were under peculiar obligations to fear God, but all nations are bound to have regard to the will of their Creator and Judge, and make Him their fear and their dread. So likewise, persons feeling the weight of their sins are in a position which supplies peculiar motives for their coming to Christ, but He came to call sinners in general to repentance, and if so, they are all entitled to believe in Jesus, for He is the only way to the Father, and it is only through Him that men can turn from sin unto holiness. But there is no good reason for restricting the word "heavy laden" to those burdened with a sense of sin. All men in their natural condition labour and are heavy laden; the most senseless sinners are those who are most heavily laden with iniquity (Isaiah 1:3, 4). "All things are full of labour, man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." All who unsuccessfully are seeking rest are invited by Jesus to come and find it in Himself. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Who are they that thirst? All who seek for happiness but cannot find it, because they seek it in those things which never gave happiness to, any man on earth.(Isaiah 55:2). It is certain that none but those who feel their absolute need of Christ will seek salvation in Him; but if they are taught that a deep sense of their need of Christ is necessary to give them a right to Him, they will be under strong temptation to neglect the exercise of believing in Christ from day to day, and from year to year, that if possible they may establish a better right to believe in His name. And as they will never think that their sense of the evil of sin is what it ought to be, they may continue through life in a state of painful suspense as to whether or not they are warranted in placing their dependence upon Christ for salvation. But when men are fully persuaded that whatever be their state and character they are authorised and invited to come to Jesus for rest and happiness, one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of the most important of all duties will be removed. That all sinners are called by the Gospel to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, is made very plain by the discourse of our Saviour recorded in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel. It was addressed to a class of men who were for the most part strangers to the true nature of Christ’s kingdom, and who were much more interested in the comforts of the present life than in the things pertaining to life everlasting, and yet all of them, without exception, were invited to come and eat of that spiritual bread which was typified by the manna. They waited upon His ministry not because He spake as never man spake, but because they did eat of His miraculous bread, and were filled. They expressed an earnest desire that Jesus would feed them in the same way as their fathers had been fed in the wilderness. But He tells them that He had been commissioned by His Father to give them, not the meat which perished in the using, and which when eaten could not hinder them from perishing, but the true bread, which nourished up to everlasting life. "My Father," said He, "giveth you the true bread from heaven." He gave it as really to these earthly-minded Jews, as the manna had been given to their fathers. They might forfeit the benefit of the donation, as the greater part of them actually did, by refusing to receive or to eat that bread, but their refusal did not affect the reality of the gift, or the sincerity of the Giver. It is evident that the people in general had this grant made to them as the ground of their faith. No exception is made by our Lord of any one in the crowd, although He upbraided them for their worldliness and unbelief. He expressly declares that none should be disappointed who would accept His gift. "He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger; he that believeth on Me shall never thirst; and him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." By such language He plainly intimates that the gift of that spiritual manna of which He spake was

equally free and extensive as that which was rained from heaven in the days of old. To induce all who heard Him to accept and improve His generous offer of such rich spiritual provision, our Saviour adds, "Verily, verily, I say up-to you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Not only those who are deeply sensible of their sins, but the careless, and lukewarm, and self-righteous, are authoritatively called to repentance as well as to faith in Christ. "I came," says Jesus, "not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance;" that is, those who really were sinners, whether they felt themselves to be so or not. This is the true meaning of the expression, for God calleth all men everywhere to repent. The haughty Pharisees were solemnly summoned to repent and believe by John the Baptist, and Jesus was much displeased because they refused His invitations both to repentance and faith in Himself (Matthew 3:7; Matthew 21:28-32). The members of the Church at Laodicea were extremely careless and self-conceited, yet we find that they also were earnestly exhorted to repent and believe in Christ (Revelation 3:14-20). If all sinners were not under an obligation to believe in Christ, they might indeed be condemned for other sins, but not for their unbelief; and their rejection of the Gift of God could not be charged against them as their greatest sin, as we are assured shall be the case with the finally impenitent (John 3:16, John 3:20, John 3:36 ; Mark 16:15-16; Hebrews 2:3; 1 John 5:10-11).

God not only reveals Christ as the Saviour of the world, and authorises all men to come to Him for salvation, but He uses means, which, by influencing the heart and conscience, are designed to induce compliance with His gracious proposals. He commands us to believe in Jesus-"This is his commandment; that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23). The same authority that bids us observe the Sabbath of the Lord and speak the truth to our neighbour lays upon us the binding obligation of believing in Christ. But because love has a more constraining influence than authority, God kindly condescends to argue and expostulate, and even beseech men to be reconciled to Himself. What heart can resist the tender eloquence of Divine love? None, surely, but that which is harder than adamant! Was it possible for Philemon to resist the touching importunities of Paul, when be might have been bold to enjoin him, but for love’s sake rather besought him, to show mercy to Onesimus? If either the authority or entreaties of Paul would have sufficed to obtain compassion for the indiscreet servant, will neither the sovereign authority nor marvellous loving-kindness of the Lord induce men to have mercy on their own souls? But whatever the reception given to the Saviour, it is certain God would not woo men so lovingly, and employ so many means to draw them to Christ, unless they had an undoubted right to come to Him for the salvation of their souls. "He that boasteth himself of a false gift, is like clouds and wind without rain." Far be it from us to ascribe such conduct to that God in all whose testimonies is eternal righteousness (Psalms 119:144).

It is true God hath not chosen all men to salvation, but we have no more right on that account to conclude that He is insincere in calling upon all men to believe, than we have for thinking that He is insincere in calling upon them to observe all the precepts of His law, because He has not given to all men a disposition to obey every commandment.

It is certain that He requires everyone of us to walk blamelessly in every part of life, and to yield a perfect obedience to His commandments; and yet it is no less certain that without His sanctifying grace we are utterly unable to yield such obedience. Hence the propriety of the prayer, "Lord, give what thou commandest, and then command what thou wilt." For every instance of obedience to

the Divine commands, we owe praise to Him who in His secret counsels determined to bestow upon us that grace without which we would have followed the direction of our own corrupt hearts; but, on the other hand, when we wilfully act in opposition to the rule of duty, it would be blasphemy to say that God never sincerely enjoined upon us those duties we have neglected to perform. Let us apply this reasoning to the doctrines of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility in the matter of salvation. We must not decry His "decrees" any more than His "laws;" but remember that our rule of duty is not the secret but revealed will of God, and that it is impiety to place the one in direct opposition to the other.

It may appear difficult to conceive how a universal offer of salvation can be founded upon an expiation which, in the secret purposes of God, was to be limited in its application. But why, it may be asked, does God sometimes seem to make promises which He knows will not be accomplished? When He redeemed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, He promised to conduct them to Canaan. "I will bring you up," He said, "unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites" (Exodus 3:8, 17). Though this promise was not literally fulfilled in the case of those who heard it, still God’s purpose was not broken when the greater part of that guilty nation fell in the wilderness. God is wise to know what lies far beyond the limits of human knowledge; He sees a thousand connections and dependencies among things which no created wisdom can trace; and He sees the true relationship and perfect consistency of truths which, to our contracted minds, appear quite antagonistic.

Instead of regarding any of the doctrines of His Word as opposed to the rule of our duty, let us adore that wisdom which glories in ordaining and accomplishing unsearchable things without number. It is an illustrious instance of God’s wisdom, that upon a particular expiation He has founded a general invitation to partake of it; and that He has made the general offer of it the means of savingly applying that particular atonement, without either extending it beyond the limits set in His secret counsels, or leaving the least reason of complaint to any to whom the revelation of His grace is ineffectual. "No man," says our Lord, "can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him: all that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." The proper question for a sinner, therefore, is not whether or not I am one of those given by the Father to the Son; but whether or not I am one of those to whom a crucified Saviour is presented in the Gospel as the object of their hope and confidence. Let us take the true method appointed by God, for making our election sure, by taking the Word of God as the rule of our faith and practice. Knowing that we have a right to believe on Jesus, let us exercise this right by unreservedly entrusting Him with our salvation, and we shall know assuredly our election of God, and our redemption by Christ. The same ground of faith on which sinners are invited to build their hopes remains for them after they have believed. It is true a work of grace is begun in their souls, and shall be carried on to perfection; but the ground of their faith still lies without them, in the Word of grace. They have new encouragements to faith which they are bound diligently to improve; but there is a great difference between marks of faith, or encouragements to faith, and the grounds of faith. Paul ceased not to regard the revelations of Divine grace in the Gospel to the chief of sinners as the ground of his hope, although he by no means neglected to take comfort from the marks of grace which he felt within himself, as undoubted evidences that his hope would not leave him ashamed (1 Timothy 1:15).

If we were to make anything in ourselves the ground of faith, we should find no solid rest for our souls. The work of grace is always imperfect. It is sometimes in such a languishing state that it can scarcely be discovered; and the best of believers are occasionally surrounded by so many temptations, harassed by so many evils, and conscious of so many imperfections, that they are incapable of discerning the operations of the sanctifying Spirit within them. But the Word of God is an immutable foundation. To say that our faith is founded on the Word of Divine revelation, is to say that it is founded upon unvarying faithfulness, upon untainted holiness, upon almighty power. The Word of God cannot deceive us, for it is the Word of Him who cannot lie, and who being of purer eyes than to behold evil, cannot possibly impose upon His creatures. The heavens and the earth shall pass away, but we are sure that the Word of God shall never pass away. Having, then, this Word as the ground of our confidence, we may trust and not be afraid.

Although it would be wicked as well as unreasonable to cherish any doubt of the truth of God's Word, still, that we might have the more abundant encouragement to believe in Jesus, He has confirmed it by His oath. Abraham could entertain no doubt of the truth of that which had been confirmed by the oath of God. We naturally imagine that if we had been in his place we could have had no suspicion of the fulfilment of a promise which had received confirmation far beyond what it seemed to need. But the Apostle Paul tells us that the oath was sworn to Abraham, not only for the consolation of the patriarch, but of all who flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them (Hebrews 6:16-17). God's Word cannot possibly require confirmation; why then is there also His oath? Just that every shadow of excuse for unbelief might be cut off. How shameful to disbelieve the Lord, when, if we may so speak, He descends below Himself, and, as if He were a fallible creature, strengthens His word of promise by a solemn oath, that thereby He may dispel our doubts and fears. In ancient times, for the establishment of His people's faith, God was sometimes pleased to confirm His word by visible signs (Genesis 15:17; Isaiah 38:22). No signs seem needful now, after the wondrous demonstration which God has given of His love in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:32). Still, in His goodness, He is pleased to allow us the signs of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, that we may never call in question the truth of His Word, or the excellency of that grace which it displays.

Thus we see what sure ground is laid for our faith. Sinners have all possible assurances of their free access to Christ, of His sufficiency and willingness to save, of the absolute certainty of everything connected with their salvation. Those who already through grace believe in Jesus, have rich and strong encouragements to cleave to Him with full purpose of heart. They have the witness in themselves. The Word of God has been tried by them, and by blessed experience they have found that it is no vain thing to trust in the Lord. Although the foundation of their confidence is not firmer than before, yet they have obtained new lights for ascertaining its stability. They have felt the sweet influence of the Word of God in pacifying conscience, sanctifying the soul, fortifying against temptation, and sustaining amid the varied troubles of the present life. Having through the mercy of God obtained such personal, experimental conviction of the truth of God's Word, they ought to increase in faith day by day, and, like Abraham of old, give glory to God by trusting Him implicitly under every possible discouragement.

If our faith bore anything like a just proportion to the stability of its foundation, we might well say with the Psalmist: "In God is my salvation, my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round

about. Thou, 0 Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of my head."

MOTIVES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS TO FAITH IN CHRIST.

First.-It is certain that we absolutely need a salvation that can only be obtained through Faith in Jesus Christ.

How shall man be just with God, how shall he be pure with his Maker? Can we redeem ourselves from the sin and misery of our fallen condition? Can the discoveries of philosophers point out any method of deliverance? We are without strength, and philosophy gives no relief; for the world by wisdom knew not God. The law itself, instead of relieving, condemns us. The law is indeed every way worthy of its Divine Giver, but it was never designed to give life to men dead in trespasses and sins; on the contrary, the law meeting with our corrupt nature, rather strengthens than destroys our corruptions. Sin, at least, taking occasion by the commandment, deceives, and thereby slays us. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, even that righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all, them that believe. We must therefore seek that righteousness and salvation by exercising faith in Christ, or perish for ever.

If a pardon can be obtained by a condemned criminal only by applying to the sovereign, he must have recourse to royal clemency, or lay aside all hope of escaping the fatal stroke. Benhadad, king of Syria, found himself in a desperate condition. Only one faint ray of hope was left to him. It had been reported that the kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings. He sends, therefore, to implore the mercy of Ahab; because he must either be indebted for life to that deeply-injured prince, or perish. His appeal was not in vain. The king of Israel suffered him not only to live but to reign.

We have infinitely greater encouragement to trust in the mercy of Christ, and we are under infinitely stronger necessity of having recourse to Him for our salvation.

Second.-The knowledge of God’s love and faithfulness should encourage us to believe in Jesus.

We have already spoken of the gift which God has made of Christ, and of eternal life in Him, to every hearer of the Gospel. Would it not have been strange conduct on the part of the children of Israel if they had refused to accept God’s grant to them of the land of Canaan? Were they not worthy of severe punishment for objecting to go up and take possession of it? (Num. xiv.) Would not the good name of Jephthah have been sullied had he yielded to the unjust claims of the king of the Ammonites, who pretended a right to recover part of that good land from Israel. But Jephthah had a spirit too noble to part with anything that God had given to His people. "Wilt not thou possess," he said, "that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess?" And shall not we possess that which the Lord our God giveth us to possess? The Lord not only sets before us the gift of righteousness-of life-of Christ Himself-but invites, reasons, commands, yea, beseeches us to accept His precious Gift. Shall our Divine Creator manifest such solicitude in our happiness, and our response be, "Thy gifts be unto another"? Absalom supposed his servants bound to expose themselves to the just resentment of Joab when he commanded them to set fire to his fields,-"Have not I commanded you," he said; as if he thought the commandment of a king’s son warranted the commission of any crime, however atrocious. But we are certain that the express

command of God is amply sufficient to answer every objection that may start up in the mind against believing in Christ. If He had only said, "Do this," we would have been bound instantly to do it; but when He enforces His injunction by so many touching considerations, we show inexcusable stiffness of spirit in prolonging our disobedience from day to day. The promises of rest, and peace, and life to all that believe in Jesus are "exceeding great and precious." To live on in unbelief is to pour contempt upon a God of grace, freely promising the choicest blessings He can bestow upon His creatures. All His promises are "yea and amen" in Christ. Although they originate in the sovereign love of God, the mediation of Jesus is the channel through which they flow. To reject them, therefore, is not only to despise the favour of our Heavenly Father, but to trample under foot the blood of His Son our Saviour. In connection with these promises, God has employed all the wisdom and eloquence of heaven to remove excuses, and to enforce those arguments which, by their own native energy, ought to induce every hearer of the Gospel to believe in Christ to the saving of his soul.

How shall men escape if they neglect the salvation procured at so great a cost, or impugn the truth of those gracious words which afford so cheering an illustration of the Divine faithfulness?

Third.-The records of Christ’s administration afford powerful encouragements to the exercise of faith in His name.

Think of the life and character of many sinners who have been saved. Not a few of the vilest and guiltiest of the human family-as we learn from the unerring oracles of truth-have been washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Why have such instances of the grace of God, and the efficacy of faith, been recorded in Holy Writ?

Paul informs us in the case of Abraham-"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him (for righteousness); but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:23-24). Paul makes a like observation in regard to the design of God, in his own conversion (1 Timothy 1:17). Let us read with attention not only the writings of the apostles, but those of Old Testament prophets and historians, and we shall find faith recommended as one of the noblest graces of the Christian life. Paul deduces strong arguments and encouragements to believe in Christ, not only from the history of Abraham, but that of all the elders who obtained a good report. They obtained it, he tells us, by faith. And surely of all kinds of faith, that is the most precious by which we commit our immortal souls to Christ for salvation. Is that faith justly commended by which, in the days of old, men quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, stopped the mouths of lions? Still more excellent is that faith by which we receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness; by which we take hold of the strength of Christ, and walk calmly onwards to celestial blessedness; by which, whilst warring a good warfare, we stand firm against all our spiritual enemies, and become more than conquerors through Him that loved us!

Many are discouraged from believing in Christ from an overwhelming sense of guilt. But when viewed in the light of the Gospel, even such painful consciousness supplies a motive to faith. If sin is always hateful to God, and if our iniquities are exceedingly great and heinous, we have the greater need of that deliverance which is only to be found in Christ; and we have abundant assurance that all who believe in Him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not

be justified by the law of Moses, and that where sin abounded grace did much more abound (Isaiah 1:18; Isaiah 55:7; 1 Timothy 1:14).

"Who ever perished," said Eliphaz, "being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" The question implied a grievous mistake in the sense in which it was asked. But we may confidently inquire of those who are weighed down by a sense of their sinfulness, "What humble believer ever perished? what man was ever cut off who placed his entire dependence on Christ for salvation?" Before such a calamity could happen eternal truth must fail, the inspired writers be found false witnesses for Christ, yea, the word and promise of the immutable Jehovah must be broken (Psalms 36:5-6).

Fourth.-The representations made in Scripture of the sin and danger of unbelief should stimulate to the exercise of faith. That unbelief was extremely offensive to our blessed Saviour is no less evident than that He took pleasure in those who honoured Him with their confidence. When He commended the faith of the centurion, He did so in terms that showed His dissatisfaction with the weak and imperfect faith at that time prevailing in the land-"Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." In other places we find Him ascribing the unbelief of the Jews to its true cause, and describing the severe punishment due to a sin by which He was so much dishonoured-"If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

Although He tenderly loved His disciples, and was pleased with the sincerity of their faith, yet we often find Him sharply reproving them for its weakness. When He promised that His Spirit should accompany the ministrations of His disciples, he told them that when He was come He would reprove the world of sin, because they did not believe in Him, a proof of the prominent place which Christ assigned to unbelief in the catalogue of human sins. Frequently, too, in the course of His personal ministry did He inculcate that awakening truth which He commanded His apostles to preach, that all who believed should be saved, and that all who refused to believe should be condemned.

We cannot wonder that a sin so displeasing to God should be uniformly set forth in denunciatory terms. By unbelief men counteract the gracious designs of God for the salvation of sinners; they treat the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing, as if shed in vain. They oppose the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to make them partakers, through faith, of that redemption which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Thus rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, and pouring contempt on all His revealed perfections which would have been glorified in their salvation, what can be more just than that they should reap the fruit of their own ways, and be filled', with their own devices?

God made a grant of the land of Canaan to the children of Israel, but Moses tells us that they could not enter in because of unbelief. They distrusted God's promise of help, and refused to go up against the sons of Anak. "With whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" This, we learn from Paul, is designed for our warning, that we fall not after the same example of unbelief. Glad tidings have been brought to us of a promised rest. From us, as from the Jews, faith is required for our entering, in. To us, as to them, unbelief will prove fatal! But all that came out of Egypt did not die in the desert. Joshua and Caleb,

through faith, followed the Lord fully. Let us be wise, and choose rather to follow the example of these two men, than walk in the way of the unbelieving multitude (Ps. x105:6-11; Heb. iii. iv.) In addition to what is said of unbelief, all that is written in Scripture concerning the evil and danger of any sin, affords powerful motives to faith. If sin be so bad in its own nature, and so dangerous to the sinner, necessity is laid upon us to use the only possible means of deliverance from its power. If a man were pursued by a fierce enemy seeking his life, the instinctive law of self-preservation would urge him to escape to a place of safety. This is our danger-every sin exposes us to the wrath and curse of God. Security and protection are only to be found in Christ, by faith. Not a single sin can be pardoned save through Christ; and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin.

What, then, though conscience accuseth us of innumerable transgressions, the wisdom which is from above will teach us, for this very reason, to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, breathing the prayer, "For thy name's sake, 0 Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."

How fearful is the condition of those who continue in unbelief. They are still in a state of sin and misery. They are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, by adding daily to their iniquities. Condemned already,-unless their state is changed before the judgment of the great day, their eternal portion shall be with those angels who kept not their first habitation. But, unlike them, these malignant spirits never rejected a salvation, revealed and urged upon their acceptance. As the angels in heaven are unable to sing that charming note in the song of the redeemed from among men, " Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood,"-so devils will not be condemned for neglecting the great salvation which at the first was spoken by the Lord Himself, and was afterwards confirmed by them that heard Him.

Fifth.-Every argument that can enforce any duty of the Christian life, enforces also the duty of believing on the Son of God; for, apart from this, it is impossible to perform any duty in a manner acceptable to God.

What profit is there in a servant who performs no part of his work in a manner advantageous or pleasing to his master? Such an one will receive no thanks, and might as well spare his labour! Equally profitless shall be our religious services if performed in a way displeasing to God. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. "We labour," says the Apostle Paul, "that whether present or absent we may be accepted of Him." Without such a prospect of acceptance, his hands would have been palsied in the good work of the Lord. And there cannot be a comfortable persuasion of Divine acceptance without faith in Christ, for we come unto God by Him (Hebrews 7:25). Through Him we believe in God (1 Peter 1:21). We offer our spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God, only by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Besides," we are not sufficient to do anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God," and it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell in Christ for us. Since we can do nothing spiritually good without Christ, we must by faith carry on a constant intercourse with Him, receiving out of His fulness and grace for grace, that we may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works (John 15:1-5; Colossians 2:6-7). No duty is more universally binding than that of prayer. The true disciple delights in the exercises of devotion; he would not neglect them for a single day; much less can he neglect the duty of believing in Christ, in whose name alone we can acceptably present our requests, and for whose sake we expect an answer. Unless offered in faith, our prayers are worthless; it is only when asked for believingly that

the blessing is obtained (John 14:14; James 1:6). It would be easy to show that faith in Christ is equally necessary for our profitable meditation on spiritual subjects, for our sorrowing for sin after a godly sort, for our praising God with the melody of the heart, for our waiting with advantage on Divine ordinances; and, therefore, when urged by conscience to the performance of any other duty, we should feel that this duty comes first, and that God will be glorified by our intelligent faith in Christ (Romans 4:18-19; 1 John 5:10).

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

First.-Some men call in question the value of faith. Being ignorant of their inherent weakness and depravity, they suppose they have no need to rely on Christ alone for salvation, as their own righteousness and good resolutions must, to a certain extent at least, screen them from the wrath of God. The Epistle to the Galatians supplies abundant answers to this objection. It teaches us that to look in any degree to the law for justification is to renounce all hope of salvation through Christ; because if righteousness can come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain (Galatians 2:20-21). In order to be fully convinced of the necessity of faith in Christ, we ought often and seriously to consider the terrible majesty, the unspotted holiness, the immutable righteousness of God,-the price required for the satisfaction of Divine justice in the redemption of sinners,-the hateful character of sin, -the worthlessness of our best services, and the utter insufficiency of all of them put together to compensate for the least of our iniquities,-the indignity done to Christ by those who would divide the glory of salvation between Him and themselves,-the complete opposition stated in Scripture between the law of faith and the law of works, and the place assigned to human holiness in the covenant of grace. That we are not justified by the works of the law is manifest, for the just shall live by faith; but the law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them. What, then, remains for us but to seek life in the way wherein Paul and the ancient believers sought it (Galatians 2:15-20; Php 3:8-11; Acts 15:10).

Second.-Some men, being deeply convinced of sin, are tempted to say, "There is no succour for us in Christ; our sins are so exceptionally heinous as to place us beyond the hope of forgiveness. The Bible furnishes a satisfactory answer to this objection. It reminds us that the blood of Christ is the blood of the Son of God, that the design of God in the scheme of human redemption is to show forth the exceeding riches of His grace; that His mercy abounds far above the greatest offences of men; that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; that many of the Gospel invitations are addressed to the worst of sinners, and every possible assurance is given that their application to Christ shall not be rejected; that as a matter of fact many notoriously wicked men have been forgiven, and made monuments of mercy, for the encouragement of similar transgressors to believe on Christ for everlasting life.

Third.-Others say, that being anxious to obtain salvation, they have tried, but tried in vain, to believe in Christ, and commit their eternal interests into His hands. They have little or no experience of the victories of faith or the joys of religion, and therefore they conclude that their trust in Christ is a delusion, and that all future attempts to believe will issue in like disappointment. This objection may be urged by a dejected believer, or by one who, while thinking he believes, is deceiving himself, and therefore it is very needful that persons whose minds are perplexed by it, should impartially’ examine themselves by the standard of God’s Word, whether or not they are in the faith. On the one hand, we must not conclude that we are real believers because we have felt

some motions of the heart towards Christ. The stony-ground hearers believed the Word for a time, but brought forth no fruit to perfection. On the other hand, men must not suppose that they are in a state of unbelief because there is a law in their members warring against the law of their minds, or because they have not yet tasted all those holy pleasures which other men have obtained through faith.

If, as the result of self-scrutiny, we discover that we are not true believers, it is high time to make ourselves acquainted with the real nature of faith, and pray God that we may henceforth be preserved from error on a point so exceedingly important. If we find that amid much remaining corruption there is some good thing in us toward the Lord God of Israel, let us call to mind the firm foundation on which faith rests, and implore that grace which alone can relieve our perplexities and enable us anew to place all our dependence on Christ for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Fourth.-Erroneous views of the doctrine of Divine sovereignty have given rise to a specious objection. It is sometimes asked, How can we be expected to believe in Christ when we are so often told that Divine grace is absolutely necessary to enable us to do so?

It must be acknowledged that no man can come unto Christ by faith unless it be given him by God. But it admits of as little doubt that when God says to men, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead," He is so far from mocking their misery, that He appears in the full glory of His grace, manifesting His marvellous love to perishing sinners. His ways are not as man’s ways, nor His thoughts as man’s thoughts; neither are His calls and invitations like those which men address to each other. No sane man would think of commanding the sick to be well, or the dead to come forth out of their graves; but why should we compare feeble mortals with the mighty God? Let us rather compare God with Himself, and form our judgment of one part of His conduct by what we know of another. When our Divine Saviour dwelt on earth He often commanded the diseased and infirm to be made whole. Did they think that He mocked them when He bade them stretch forth the withered arm, or arise from the bed of weakness and walk? Nay; they had faith in His power and goodness, and, filled with grateful joy, they found health and vigour in the very act of obedience. Sometimes, too, Jesus spake to the dead, and life at once returned to the inanimate frame. What Christ did upon the bodies of men was just a visible illustration of the effectual working of His power upon their souls. "The hour cometh," He says, "and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God," and they that hear shall live.

We know that the Spirit of God works upon whom and in what manner, at what time and by what means, He pleases. The unregenerate man can neither convert himself nor prepare himself for conversion, but he can remove himself to a greater distance from it by the indulgence of vicious inclinations, or by the voluntary surrender of his faculties to a spirit of sloth or despondency. We place ourselves in the way where the Divine Spirit is accustomed to come, and where we are most likely to feel His gracious influence, when in the closet or the sanctuary we meditate on God’s Word, and seek diligently to improve the means of grace. The Spirit works in us both to will and to do. We deceive ourselves if we suppose that the will is in us, whilst we make no attempts to do; and if He works in us really to will, He will also work in us to do, of His good pleasure. This we know-it is no vain thing, but our life, to respond to His gracious call, and bring our hearts under the sanctifying influence of the truth. The four lepers of Samaria, who were ready to perish with

hunger, went out to the camp of the Syrians. It seemed extremely unlikely that these cruel enemies of Israel would suffer the famished men to live. But what could they do? They were sure to die if they continued in the city; they could but die if the Syrians refused to show them mercy. They took, therefore, the wisest course, though it seemed a desperate step, when they said one to another, "Why sit we here until we die? Let us go unto the host of the Syrians." How much more should those who are called by the Gospel to believe strive to enter in at the strait gate. Let them consider what must be their doom if they obtain not that salvation which is in Christ. If they are not found in Him they must perish; for there is no other sacrifice for sin. If their efforts to lay hold on eternal life, through faith in His name, are unsuccessful, they can but perish! But, blessed be God, such a catastrophe can never happen. "None perish that him trust." His words are, "Him that cometh unto me. I will in no wise cast out."

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS.

First. -Let us labour to be well acquainted with the true nature of saving faith, that we may not substitute a dangerous counterfeit for that grace so essential to the Christian life, and so powerfully commended in the Word of God. For this end, let us look carefully into the real import of the word, and the testimony on which it is built; for our faith must correspond with the truths we believe. It is a firm persuasion of the truth of the doctrine concerning Christ revealed in Scripture, resting on God’s faithfulness to His promise, and the sincerity of that grant which is made to us of eternal life in Christ (Hebrews 11:1-3).

It will be proper also to consider the import of those figurative expressions by which faith is frequently set forth in Holy Scripture. It is represented as the soul’s "coming to Christ" (Matthew 11:28); as " receiving" Christ (Colossians 2:6); "building" upon Christ (Ephesians 2:20); "putting on" Christ (Galatians 3:17); laying hold of Christ (Hebrews 6:18); eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:55); looking to Christ (Hebrews 12:2); a committing of the soul to Christ (2 Timothy 1:12). Some of these images have called forth the sarcasm of graceless writers, but they are full of light and sweetness to "those who have senses exercised to discern good and evil.

It will likewise be profitable to study the account given us of the faith of those holy men who lived in former times. If we have the same spirit of faith, we shall, to a certain extent resemble, though we may not equal, them in that noble attainment (Romans 4:23-25 ; Heb. xi.) As the tree is known by its fruits, a knowledge of their practical influence will enable us, in some measure, to distinguish the spurious faith of the formalist from that genuine faith which animates the soul with love to God, and manifests its power in the fruits of holiness (Galatians 5:6).

Secondly.-Let us inquire if personally we have become partaken of the precious faith of God’s elect.

Inseparably connected, not only with our everlasting welfare, but with every part of Christian practice, the doctrine of faith ought never to be considered without application to ourselves. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates" (2 Corinthians 13:5). There are many who lose much of the comfort of faith, because they cannot tell whether or no they are really believing in Jesus. There are some who deceive themselves by mistaking a false, dead faith for that true, living faith which is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. Let us ask, therefore, if Jesus

Christ be the object of our faith, and if it be exercised about Him in a way suited to His gracious character, as an Almighty Saviour sent by His Father to save us, not only from the penalty, but the power of sin. To believe in Him only as a Saviour from the fearful consequences of sin is to mistake His character and work as grossly as was done by those carnal Jews, who would have gladly received Him on their own terms to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and feed them with miraculous supplies of bread; but who went away and walked no more with Him, when He asked from them a faith corresponding to those spiritual designs of His mission which He unfolded in their hearing (John vi.) Have we any of the marks of faith? If really believers we shall have the "witness" in ourselves (1 John 5:10). We shall be sanctified in part, and through our fellowship with Christ shall bring forth some of those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory of God. The Apostle James devotes a part of his epistle to an exposure of the inconsistency of those who lay claim to the possession of faith, when they can produce no good works in proof of its genuineness and power. The Apostle John also frequently insists on the necessity of faith manifesting itself by godly works.

We are not to imagine that we are destitute of faith because we are not yet completely sanctified. When we are perfectly holy faith will be at an end. But there will always be an amount of holiness corresponding to the measure of our faith. In obeying the truth through the Spirit we purify our souls unto an unfeigned love of God and the brethren, and ought to abound more and more in the fruits of love, that the grace bestowed on us may become more apparent. By adding to our faith virtue, and all the other graces of the Spirit, we become neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so an abundant entrance into His everlasting kingdom shall be ministered unto us (1 Peter 1:22; 2 Peter 1:8).

Third.-If we have not yet believed in Christ, it is high time for us to flee from the wrath to come.

Today, if we will hear the voice of God, we must lay hold on eternal life. "Now is the accepted time," and we know not how long it may continue. This night our souls may be required of us, and there is no work nor device in the grave. Just dissuaded from self-murder, the Philippian jailor seemed as incapable as most men of doing anything truly good; yet he believed in Christ, and at once tasted the joys of salvation. The murderers of our Lord were in a very bad way when Peter and the other apostles preached to them the glad tidings of salvation through Him, whom a few weeks before, they had treated as a malefactor; and yet they believed and received the gift of the Holy Ghost. David sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob, that he would not go into the tabernacle of His house, nor rest in his bed, nor give sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids, till he had found a house for the Lord! Did he account the finding of a habitation for the Lord a matter of so much moment that it admitted of no delay? How great must be our infatuation if, through sloth or selfishness, we postpone for a single night or hour the duty of finding for Jesus a dwelling in our hearts. He stands at the door and knocks. Let us remember how short and uncertain human life is, and not for a single instant shut Him from our souls through unbelief. No doubt our evil hearts will offer great opposition to this needful duty of believing; but let us bear in mind, we are not called to perform it by any strength inherent in ourselves. Abraham and other believers in ancient times experienced similar difficulties, both in the beginning and progress of their faith; but they judged Him faithful who had promised. The grace of God is as rich and free as in the days of old, and He still delights in glorifying it (Ephesians 2:6-8). Think of the irreparable loss already sustained by millions of the human family because they refused to believe in Jesus, or

because they trifled away their precious hours in perplexing doubts or half-formed resolutions. Think of the mercy and power of our compassionate Redeemer, and of the commission He received of the Father in favour of miserable sinners, and let us build all our confidence on that foundation which God hath laid in Zion-"It is a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste."

Fourth.-" Let us hold fast our faith in Christ, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:5),

Trials of faith are necessary and useful; and God, who manages all things for the best interests of His people, will take care that they shall not be wanting (James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6). No one need expect to live long without having his faith severely tried and assaulted. Satan is an irreconcilable enemy of faith, for he knows it to be destructive to the interests of his kingdom in the world. When he fought to have Simon that he might sift him as wheat, it was his intention if possible to destroy his faith. The faith of the good man could not have endured the trial had not Jesus prayed for him that it might not fail. The world is unfavourable to faith,-worldly prosperity and adversity being equally unfriendly to it. Pleasant things are too apt to draw away our thoughts and desires from the Rock of our salvation. Disagreeable events often tend to shake our confidence in Him who hath promised that no evil shall happen to the just. The flesh is a foe of faith. The corruptions within us: which war against the soul, the carnal appetites and inclinations which wound the conscience, all tend to weaken that faith by which we stand. The maintenance of our faith amid so many trials and assaults depends, not upon our own powers, but upon the grace of our Divine Redeemer; but to receive from Him needful supplies of strength we must be diligent in the use of those means which His wisdom has prescribed. He told Peter that He had prayed for him that his faith might not fail; but He at the same time directed him and the other disciples "to watch and pray that they might not enter into temptation." With a view of maintaining a vigorous faith we ought to cultivate just apprehensions of the administration of Divine Providence. Job’s friends were good and wise men, but the unscriptural doctrine they taught in regard to the providence of God would have staggered the faith even of that holy man, if his own views had not been exceptionally steady and clear. The providence of God often seems to run counter to His promises, but the steadfast believer knows that when" clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Psalms 92:2.)

Experience is confirmatory of faith. It is therefore useful for believers to retain in their minds what God has done for them in former times (Deuteronomy 8:3). They may also get great benefit by considering the experiences of saints who continued steadfast in the faith amidst greater trials and discouragements than their own (Ps. xxvii.)

We ought frequently to call to remembrance the promises which have been given for the security of our faith, as well as the inviolable faithfulness of the promiser (Hebrews 10:23). That our faith may be firm, we should accustom ourselves to look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18). The false glitter or earthly objects is apt to draw away our hearts from a better world. Just notions of the vanity of those things which the world admires will preserve us from many vain and unworthy thoughts which cannot be cherished without impairing our faith. We could never, for example, have supposed that God had forgotten His promises to His people when we see them destitute, afflicted, and

tormented, if we had not formed too high conceptions of the value of those temporal blessings which are often granted to the worthless, and withheld from the best of men. With all other means, we can only maintain our faith unmoved by fervent and persevering prayer to God for His preserving grace. We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. If we trust to ourselves, we shall certainly fall before the tempter; but if we trust in Christ for the establishment of our faith, we shall rise and stand upright amid a thousand enemies and dangers (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Fifth.-We should endeavour to grow in faith, as well as in every other Christian grace.

Though our faith were vigorous as that of Abraham, it would still be capable of increase. But the majority of Christians have too much reason to acknowledge that their faith falls far short of that of the eminent men who obtained a good report in ancient times. It is very improbable that ours shall ever equal the faith of Abraham or David or Paul, still it is our duty to aspire after such faith. Nor shall our efforts be altogether in vain in the Lord,-for although we never attain to their measure of grace, yet the more earnestly we follow their example, we shall enjoy in richer abundance the consolations of faith and the joys of God’s salvation. That we may be convinced of the necessity of growing in this grace, we should be duly alive to the present weakness of our faith. Of this we have many sad proofs. For example, how apt are we to sink in the day of adversity, and to listen willingly to the voice of unbelief, or of Satan, whispering that there is no succour for us-even in God. How often do we reveal the alienation of our hearts from the faith of the Gospel by the easy admission of sentiments and feelings inconsistent with the glory of Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour. This was one of the special infirmities of the churches of Galatia, and is still a snare even to real believers. How often do we feel strangely disinclined to the more difficult duties of religion, as if there were no strength in Christ to enable us to perform them. How often do slight dangers appal and dispose us despondingly to say, "We shall certainly perish one day by the hands of our enemies;" though we have Christ’s own assurance, that His sheep shall never perish, and that no power in earth or hell shall be able to pluck them out of His hand! How often, too, do we feel our souls dragged down to earth by the cares of life, the deceitfulness of riches, and all those varied desires, anxieties, and fears which agitate the minds of men who know not God. It is true some of these symptoms of a feeble faith appear in the experience of vigorous believers,-still, even in their case, they are evidences of temporary weakness, and should call forth the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith."

All the directions given for the establishment of faith might be repeated for the strengthening of it. But the following hints may suffice. That we may grow in faith, let us labour to increase in the knowledge of Christ. Our souls are invigorated by the clear and intelligent contemplation of His character, and of those important truths in which His character is displayed. We must see the Son that we may believe in Him; and the clearer our vision, the deeper shall be our conviction of the sin and folly of unbelief. The truths of the Gospel are the nourishment of faith, and that we may abound in it more and more, we must study and appropriate all the promises and encouragements given us in the Word of God (Psalms 119:98-99). The institutions of Divine grace are designed for the strengthening of faith, and must be improved for this end. God hath given to the Church pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, till we all come, in the unity of the faith, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

Sixth.-We must endeavour to live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave Himself for us. In this world Christians walk by faith, and not by sight; in the next world they shall walk by sight, and not by faith. "The just shall live by his faith," said Habakkuk. Paul makes great use of this statement of the prophet; he proves from it, in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians; that we must seek justification by faith without the works of the law; and in his epistle to the Hebrews he proves that if we would endure unto the end, we must encounter all the trials of life in the spirit of faith (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

How can the Christian live except by faith? Whilst in this world we are absent from the Lord, and yet the Lord is our life and our strength and our salvation. By faith we rejoice in an unseen Saviour. By faith He dwells in our hearts. By faith we receive out of His fulness. By faith in Christ we do everything, in a manner at once acceptable to God and useful to ourselves. We are to live by faith upon Christ as our righteousness, and to derive from His atonement, intercession, and grace all those joys and consolations which arise from pardon of sin and reconciliation with God.

We are to live by faith in Christ for our sanctification. He died not only to deliver us from the condemnation due to our sins, but also from the power of iniquity; and therefore, when engaged in spiritual conflicts with the world, the devil, and the flesh, we must draw strength and courage from the cross of Christ. There the victory has been already gained for us, in the person of our Redeemer. He has already subdued all our iniquities. He has finished transgressions and made an end of sin. Our sin was condemned in His flesh, and it is at present under an irreversible sentence of destruction. N or are we left to execute the sentence as we are able; He who once died to subvert the foundations of the empire of sin, still lives and reigns to accomplish the designs of His death.

We ought to live by faith in Christ for the communication of heavenly influence to nourish and improve all our spiritual graces. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. In these holy qualities we are called to abound to the honour of our profession, to the comfort of our own souls, and to the glory of God. But how shall we abound in them? All hope of success in the use of the appointed means lies in Christ our life. It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, and out of His fulness we receive grace for grace. Of every grace that was in Christ, the ancient believers received a portion according to this measure; and He is still the channel through which God conveys grace into the hearts of men; for by Him the whole body of Christians, being knit together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord Jesus! when he is weak then is he strong. How wonderful were the exploits which Paul achieved by the strength of Christ (Romans 15:19). We are not called to such arduous work, yet the meanest Christian is called to services -of great moment to himself, and of no small importance to the Church of Christ; but he is called to no service without correspondent promises of help from Christ. Whatever we do, therefore, in word or deed, let it be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. We must pray in His name,-we must render thanks to God through Him, and for His sake must expect the acceptance of everything we do in the service of the Lord. To suppose that God will be pleased with anything we do on any other ground than that of Christ’s mediation would be no less presumptuous than it would have been for an ancient

Israelite to have presented to God his own sacrifices, instead of putting them into the hands of the priests who were consecrated to bear the iniquity of holy things (1 Peter 2:5).

We ought to live by faith in Christ, amidst the conflicts and trials of life. We are called to fight the Lord's battles against the devil and the world, as well as against the corruptions of our own hearts; and as David went forth against Goliath in the name of the living God, we must be strong in the Lord Jesus and in the power of His might, that we may stand firm against all the powers of darkness seeking our overthrow (Ephesians 6:12). The prince of this world is already judged. We are to fight against him as a foe already effectually subdued by our great Leader, and in the assured hope that the God of peace will bruise him under our feet shortly. Paul, buffeted by Satan, prayed to Christ, and trusting in Him, out of weakness he was made strong (2 Corinthians 12:9). The world also is a dangerous enemy. We are too easily frightened from duty by its frowns, or seduced by its smiles, or corrupted by its ensnaring example. But Christ gave Himself for us, to deliver us from this present evil world. In His life and death we see how little regard Jesus paid either to the great or evil things of the present life. The contemplation of His glory will change us into the same image. Who had greater reason than the Apostle Paul to complain of a hard conflict with the world,-but he lived by faith of the Son of God, and could say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom I am crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto me." Hence the world had no terrors for him. He was not afraid to go to Jerusalem, the dwelling-place of his most malignant adversaries, he was not afraid to go to Rome and appear before Caesar,-he was not afraid to advance alone into any of the great centres of population, though warned beforehand that in every city bonds and afflictions awaited him. He trusted in the Lord, and knew that he would be delivered from every evil work, and preserved safe unto God's heavenly kingdom.

Amongst the sorest afflictions of Christians are those which are embittered by a consciousness of guilt and shortcoming. It is a sign of great hardness of heart not to be overcome with grief when God testifies His displeasure against us; but even at such times we must not cast away our confidence in a merciful Redeemer, who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. David out of the depths cried unto God; he confessed that if the Lord should mark iniquity, neither he nor any of the human race could stand; but he reflected that that there was forgiveness with God, and so he waited for the Lord, and exhorted every Israelite to hope in the Lord, because with Him there is mercy, and with Him there is plenteous redemption.

Spiritual distress occasioned by a sense of guilt, or the prevalence of sin, or the force of sore temptation, is sometimes almost insupportable. Where, in such a case, is our help to be found? Only in Him who Himself suffered, being tempted, and is ever able to succour them that are tempted. David was greatly cast down through guilt resting on his conscience, but he was well assured that the application of atoning blood, typified by that of the legal sacrifices, would make him whiter than the snow, and would make the bones which sin had broken to rejoice. The one oblation of Christ for ever perfects all them that are sanctified. Resting on His finished work, Jesus becomes their Advocate, their Prince, their Shepherd, their Guide to the land of uprightness. He will heal all their diseases. He will bind up their painful wounds. He will make them as if they had never sinned, and will take occasion from their very unworthiness and wretchedness to display the riches of His grace (1 John 1:7-9; 1 John 2:1; Psalms 86:5-6).

We ought to live by faith in Christ amid public calamities befalling the nation or church to which we belong. We are assured that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords; that He has been made Head over all things to the Church, which is His body; and that He knows how to make the most disastrous events subservient to His gracious purposes. We ought, therefore, while deploring the evils of our times, to rejoice in the administration of Christ, and to believe that, through His wise and gracious management, light shall spring out of darkness, and the wrath of man be made to praise Him (Luke 21:28). When the Church of God was carried captive to Babylon, the hearts of her pious members sank almost into despair. They wept when they remembered Zion, and hung their harps upon the willows; but what was the counsel given them by the prophet Habakkuk in view of that calamitous event? "The just," said he, "shall live by his faith." And Paul repeats the sentiment to the believing Hebrews, in the prospect of the crushing judgments that were soon to come upon their nation and country (Hebrews 10:1-39)

Even in death we ought to live by faith in Christ, as the atoning High Priest by whose sacrifice we are delivered from sin, which is the sting of death; and as the Prince of Life, who has in His hands the keys of death and the invisible world; who opens, and no man shuts; who sends His angels to conduct the souls of His people to the place where He dwells; and who, by His glorious power, shall raise them up at the last day, and cause them to sit for ever with Himself upon His throne. By faith in our dying moments, survivors may be greatly benefited through the testimony thus borne to the power of the Gospel; and we shall have the pleasing consciousness of having improved the very latest opportunity of glorifying God amongst the inhabitants of a world which, though so full of His goodness, is very empty of His praise (John 11:15, John 11:26; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Blessed and holy are those who live from day to day by the faith of the Son of God. They are happy in life and in death. They are strong and able to do exploits. No enemy shall ever prevail against them. No disaster shall ever overthrow them. For them to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Seventh.-Let us demomstrate the genuineness of our faith by "being fruitful in every good work."

If we really believe in Christ, and hope for His salvation, we ought to rejoice greatly in the Lord, and manifest our happiness by contentment with our condition in life, by cheerfulness under worldly reverses, by a disposition on all occasions to praise the Lord, who hath already blessed us, and from whose favour we hope to receive blessings that shall make us equal to the angels in heaven. "Why art thou, being the king’s son, sad from day to day?" said Jonadab to Ammon. That prince might have answered: "Why should not the king’s son be sad when he feels the bitterness of adversity, and the tyranny of wicked passions as acutely as other men?" But believers are, in many respects, superior to their fellow-men. They are, indeed, exposed with their brethren of the human family to the varied evils of life, and frequently to a greater share of them than their neighbours; but they have this inner source of satisfaction, that in the end they shall obtain the salvation which is in Christ, with eternal glory. And they know that all the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them. Why, then, should their souls be cast down, or why should they be disquieted within them? Should they not still hope in God, in the full confidence that they shall yet praise Him as the health of their countenance and their God? Can they forget that their present troubles, instead of obstructing the completion of their hopes, are just tending to the furtherance of their salvation, through the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ? The soul is infinitely more precious than the body, and there is greater reason for joy

than sorrow in the most painful of these trials, which are really working together for one's spiritual advantage. At the very time, therefore, when they are in heaviness through manifold temptations, Christians have reason to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Believing in Jesus, let us testify the strength of our faith by showing a noble superiority to the present world, and living as citizens of heaven. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Can we place our happiness in any earthly object when we know that we have an inalienable title to that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading? Can we believe that Jesus would purchase heaven for us by His precious blood, and yet suffer us to want any accommodation that is really needful by the way? Who gave Himself, what gift will He deny?

If we believe in Christ, we ought to hate sin, and flee from every form of temptation. None have such clear views of the evil of sin as believers. They know at what cost their redemption from it has been secured, and they know that they have been redeemed that they may serve God in right-eousness and holiness continually. How can they who know and believe that they are dead to sin, by their fellowship with Christ, live any longer therein? (Zechariah 12:10). If we believe in Christ for salvation, we ought to walk as He also walked (1 John 2:6). Let us be followers of God as dear children, walking in all lowliness and meekness and long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us (Titus 3:3-8).

Renouncing our own works, and sensible that we must be accepted before God, on the ground of a better righteousness than our own, we ought to act as pardoned criminals, who, but for the interposition of infinite mercy, must have been for ever associated with devils, amid the horrors of their infernal prison-house (Ephesians 2:8-9). Forgiven much, we should love much. Deeply impressed with a sense of the danger we have escaped, we should be earnestly active in seeking to bring others to share in our happy deliverance. Are we animated by the spirit of faith? Then it will be our heart's desire and prayer that the number of our fellow-believers be multiplied a thousand-fold! This was the disposition of the apostles-that which they saw and heard they declared, that others also might have fellowship with them. This was the disposition of the holy forerunner of our Lord. When his disciples envied for his sake the popularity of Jesus, alleging that all men were following him, John just expressed regret that so few believed in him-"What he hath seen and heard he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony" (John 3:32). With similar zeal let us endeavour to bring those under our care, and all others whom our influence may reach, to a saving acquaintance with Christ, by instructing them in those blessed truths which are the seed and nourishment of faith (Psalms 78:1-8). By abounding in those holy works which are the proper fruits of faith, our example may prove the means of winning relations and neighbours to the knowledge and service of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:15; 1 Peter 3:1-2).

Let us show all due respect to those holy institutions which are so often blessed by God for the conversion of sinners. Let us strive to maintain them in their purity, and extend their influence throughout all the world. We are greatly indebted to those good men who in early times preached the Gospel in this land, and introduced the ordinances of religion. How ungrateful shall we be to God, and to our ancestors, if the means of faith, through our indolence or neglect, should be transmitted less purely to our posterity (Exodus 20:24). Let it be our earnest desire not only to hold fast, but to hold forth, the truth; especially let us be active, in defending and disseminating those cardinal doctrines bearing on the person and offices of Christ, the way of salvation through faith in

His name, and the right which all sinners have to come to Him for salvation. In the Epistle to the Galatians we find how zealous Paul was in propagating these truths, and with what fervour of spirit he warned men against the seductions of false teachers, who, by subverting the Gospel of Christ, subverted also the souls of men. All the apostles were animated by the same sacred fervour (Acts xv.) Let us work and pray like them. God giveth the increase. That His Word may have free course amongst ourselves and throughout the world; that Christ may be glorified and sinners saved,-let this be our supplication, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations" (Psalms 67:1-2).

We have spoken largely of the knowledge of Christ, and of faith in His name. There are many other duties we owe Him, concerning which the Scripture furnishes us with abundant materials of discourse. It will be necessary in this place to say something of the chief of them. It is true that those who know and trust Him will never think they can do enough to please Him. But we ought to search the Scriptures that we may know what instances of our regard He expects and will accept at our hands (John 15:14; Romans 6:1-23) III. - LOVE TO CHRIST.

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."-1 Corinthians 16:22.

"He is altogether lovely." Christ loved us when we were altogether unlovely and vile. The love of God, like Himself, is underived and independent, but we cannot love unless there are amiable qualities to attract our esteem. In our Saviour there are such transcendent excellencies that the moment they are seen by faith we are constrained to exclaim, "How great is His goodness, how great is His beauty." The divine nature of Christ is the ground of our love; His person, as God-man, is the object of it. As a man, grace and truth shone forth in every part of His character, and there was in Him everything fitted to endear Him to our hearts. His love to righteousness and hatred of iniquity, the depth of His compassion and forbearance, His zeal for the Father’s glory were so wonderful, that those must be blind indeed who see not in . His person and work a beauty and excellency fitted to fill the soul with gratitude, love, and praise.

Christ puts a high value upon our love.

What can this love be to Him who inhabits the praises of eternity? Yet, as if our hearts were worthy of His acceptance, He asks and accepts of them as a most precious oblation. "0 daughter, hearken and consider, forget also thy father’s house and thine own people, so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse, how much better is thy love than wine, and the smell of thine ointments than all spices."

If our love were worth anything to Christ, what merit could we claim from it? Is it not richly deserved? has He not bought it with a price of inconceivable value? Yet, as if He had done nothing to constrain us to love Him, He is pleased to express satisfaction with every token of our regard, and would reckon Himself unrighteous if He should forget any of our labours of love, or ministrations to the meanest of His people. Those who do the will of His father in heaven are His mothers, His sisters and brothers, and a cup of cold water given in His name shall in no wise lose its reward.

If our love, in all its workings and fruits, is so well-pleasing to Christ, why should He not have it all? Why should we pervert the warm affections of our souls, by suffering them to run waste upon vanities and lies? Let Him, who so well deserves it, who has done and endured so much to gain it,

who sets so high a price upon it-be its great object. Let us love Him above all earthly enjoyments, above all relatives and friends. The chief place in our hearts is due to Christ, our love to Him must be pure and entire. Saith Christ, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Jas. iv.4; Ps. x55:10).

IV. - PRAISE TO CHHIST.

"Prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised."- Psalms 72:15.

"Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people." -Romans 15:11.

If we praise God who created us, we ought also to render thanks to Christ, by whom we have been redeemed, and through whose grace existence has been made not a curse to us, but the basis of the richest blessings (John 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18). If we praise God for the wonderful things He has done to us and our fathers, ought we not to render thanks also to Him through whom God’s works of goodness and mercy are accomplished? He was the Angel of Jehovah’s presence, who saved His ancient people. He is God’s salvation to the ends of the earth; and into His hands is all judgment committed, that men might honour the Son even as they honour the Father (John 5:23). The reasons for rendering thanks to Christ are so powerful, that if we should be silent in His praise, the very stones might cry out, and upbraid our ingratitude (Luke 19:40). The angels in heaven are represented as joining with the living creatures and the elders and the vast company of the redeemed in adoring praise of the "Lamb that was slain" (Revelation 5:9-12).

We hope to form part of that glorious assembly. Already we are admitted to such fellowship with the worshippers in the upper sanctuary as our present state will admit of (Hebrews 12:23), and therefore we ought, as far as our present weakness will allow, to join in their work. Blessed are they who dwell with Christ in His Father’s house; they are ever praising Him. But those also are blessed who are travelling in the way that leads to it. They are already in heavenly places in Christ, and have constant reason to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into marvellous light. Each one, conscious of this blessed change in his condition, cannot surely refrain from saying with the beloved disciple, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

John in vision saw not only saints and angels, but all creatures in heaven and earth, and under the earth, ascribing praise to Christ; and we find Isaiah calling upon the mountains and vales, the forests and all their trees, and heaven with all its hosts, to celebrate the praises of Him who hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel. If inanimate objects had tongues they would certainly use them in praising Him by whom they were made, and by whom the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and made to share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Why should men who, above all creatures, are interested in Christ, and who, through His redeeming work, have been favoured with such fresh views of their Creator’s glory, be less forward to praise Him? Surely the wisdom, the power, the righteousness, the faithfulness, the wondrous love of their Divine Redeemer, supply the saints with an exhaustless theme of praise. Every office He executes, every suffering He endured, every gracious work He has performed, every promise, He has given, every assurance of His love, every triumph of His grace, demands most grateful thanksgiving. That we may praise Him as we ought it is necessary for us to know

Him. If we have clear apprehensions of His character and work, we shall not be able to restrain our lips from uttering His praise. But we should earnestly seek to know Him better, that we may praise Him with greater intelligence and delight, and our thanksgivings be less unworthy of their glorious subject.

If our hearts are properly impressed with a sense of the glory of our Redeemer, and the priceless value of the benefits which come to us through His atonement, we shall not confine our praises to the sanctuary,-the voice of rejoicing and salvation will be heard in our dwellings. And in converse with our friends, we shall take pleasure in expressing our love and gratitude by commending our Redeemer, and spreading abroad the savour of His name. The Song of Solomon represents the' spouse as seizing every opportunity of setting forth the grace and beauty of Him whom her soul loved (Malachi 3:16-17).

V. - INVOCATION OF CHRIST.

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."-Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13.

Prayer is a duty which we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as to the Father. Christians are described by Paul as persons who "call upon the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:2); and we find all the apostles, in their epistles, supplicating for the churches or believers to whom they wrote, grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is not only the Mediator, by whom we draw near to God, but a Divine Person equal with the Father, the giver as well as the purchaser of all saving blessings. He is the object of our faith, and how shall we not call on Him in whom we believe? We have indeed no authority from scriptural precept or example to pray that He would be pleased to perform His work of intercession on our behalf, nor is there any occasion for such petitions. Let us, by a genuine faith, commit our souls to His care, and we may be assured that He will be faithful to His trust. But we are authorised to seek from Him those precious blessings, and we are sure that He is more ready to bestow than we are to ask them,-only we must leave to Himself the time and the way of answering our requests. Paul besought the Lord thrice that the messenger of Satan might be made to depart; yet his trial was continued, and the Lord did better things for him than he asked. (2 Corinthians 12:9). The. divinity of Christ makes Him the proper object of our worship; but we are encouraged to seek and expect spiritual blessings, because He is man as well as God, and because He is our Redeemer. He died for us, and what gifts will He deny us? He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He was Himself a petitioner when He was upon earth. It is worthy of remark, that Stephen, in his dying moments, presented the same request to Christ which Christ, when expiring on the cross, presented to His Father. "Lord Jesus," said the proto-martyr, "receive my spirit." Jesus knows the heart of a petitioner, and when we both present our requests to Him as God, and by Him as Mediator, with what confidence may we expect an answer in peace.

VI. - OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST.

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."-John 13:17.

Obedience to Christ is a duty imposed upon us by the authority of His Father. God hath made Him both Lord and Christ, and calls upon all who hear the Word, not only to receive the blessings of salvation, but to yield obedience to Him as their Lord. To give flattering words, and yet live in open

violation of His laws, would be to act the part of Judas, who betrayed the Son of Man with a kiss. We must love our neighbour, not merely in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth; how much more ought we by our deeds to testify the sincerity of our love to our blessed Saviour. "If ye love me," He says, "keep my commandments." These commandments may be divided into two classes-those which the law of nature enjoins, and those which are laid upon us by the revealed will of God. We are to testify our love and subjection to Christ by our obedience to both of these. The laws arising from our natural relation to God and to one another contain their recommendation in themselves, for they are all holy and just and good. Apart from Christ's advent and sacrifice, so binding are our obligations to obey them, that the least violation entails a just sentence of condemnation. But obedience is no less due to the positive institutions of Christ than to those laws which nature itself teaches us to obey. He is our Lord, and it is but reasonable that He should assert His own authority by laws and ordinances resting on His sovereign will. A positive law was given to our first parents, that by obedience to it they might manifest their regard to the will of God. In like manner Christ, our Redeemer, has instituted ordinances in His Church, by the observance of which we can testify our regard to Him as our Lord. Were we to behave virtuously towards our fellowmen, whilst living in the neglect of the duties which are peculiar to Christianity, we might with propriety be called "virtuous heathen," but it would be a profanation of the worthy name by which they are called to rank us among " Christians." A servant honours his master, a subject obeys his prince; if Christ is our Master and King, His appointments must be observed, His work must be done. He calls us friends rather than servants, but for this very reason we ought to serve Him faithfully, cheerfully, with all our heart, without intermission, and without end. Apart from the authority on which they rest, other reasons commend, to us the institutions of Christ. His wisdom and grace may be seen in them. They are fitted to exert a most beneficial influence on our hearts and lives. They are the means of carrying on intercourse with heaven, and with Him whose death or life, or royal authority, are clearly represented to us in every gospel ordinance. To render to Christ the obedience demanded we must acquaint ourselves with His laws and institutions. By the study of the Scriptures, and by prayer, we may easily come to know what the will of the Lord is. He has commanded nothing in vain; and it is dangerous to break, or teach other men to break, even the least of His commandments (Matthew 5:19; Psalms 119:6). That we may yield faithful service to Christ we must renounce every other lord, and break off from all sin; for what concord hath Christ with Belial? We must not attempt to serve both God and Mammon--yea, our own will must be renounced, in so far as it is opposed to the will of Christ.

We have earthly superiors, but we must obey them only in the Lord; and when we act thus, we yield obedience to the Lord Himself.

Jesus, our Judge and Lawgiver and King, is likewise our strength and sufficiency. This makes His yoke easy and His burden light. He is a kind Master, who promises to strengthen for duty, support under opposition, and compensate for all the losses and sufferings endured in His service. What loyal subjects should we be were we assured that the sovereign would give a kind testimony of regard for every act of cheerful obedience! But what is a smile or a gift from the greatest earthly prince, compared with the gracious approval of our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ? "If any man," says He, "serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

Doubtless self-denial must be exercised in our obedience to Christ. But why should it be deemed a hardship to deny ourselves for the sake of Him who pleased not Himself, who lived a life of sorrow, and died an accursed death for our salvation? Neither should it be forgotten that we do not really lose what is given up for His sake. It shall be compensated, "receiving an hundredfold now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30).

VII. - IMITATION OF CHRIST.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."- 1 Peter 2:21.

We are to testify our faith and love to Christ by walking as He walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. There are too many princes who behave like the ancient Jewish doctors, who laid heavy burdens upon men’s shoulders, but would not themselves touch them with one of their fingers. Jesus, on the contrary, though Himself the Lawgiver, yielded implicit obedience to the laws which He has enjoined on us. Of His own free will Christ was made under the law, and His obedience to its most self-denying precepts was complete and perfect, lacking nothing. What saint on earth could ever say, I have no sin? But our Lord was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. We may err greatly by walking, without caution, in the steps of Abraham, or Moses, or David, but the life of Christ was a "living law," no less perfect, and every way fitted to recommend the "written law" to our regard and practice. " Be ye holy," says God, "as I am holy."

There, is, however, one great difference between that holiness which is the glory of the Divine nature and the holiness required from us. God is the Lawgiver, and we are the creatures to whom the law is given. God’s holiness, therefore, could not consist in obedience, as ours must do. But Jesus Christ showed forth all the beauties of holiness in an obedience rendered to the law in our own nature. Further, there is a glory in Divine holiness too dazzling for our eyes to look upon. Unless seen in Him who is the image of the invisible God, we should feel amazed and terrified with the sight of God’s awful holiness. But that holiness is familiarised and endeared to us in the person of the Man Jesus Christ. Nor should the perfection of His obedience discourage; it assures us that we cannot possibly go wrong in imitating Him. The eminent saints of whom we read in Scripture never hoped to attain absolute perfection in the present life; but keeping their eyes fixed on our Redeemer, and endeavouring to trace His steps, they reached higher degrees of holiness than they could otherwise have done. Such a man was the Apostle Paul, who, though the humblest of men, could exhort the churches to be followers of himself, even as he was of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 11:1). The Lord fulfilleth the desires of them that fear Him; by faith in His name, we shall receive out of His fulness, and grace for grace-grace corresponding to that grace which is in Christ Himself. Let us, then, aim at that moral purity which Christ exemplified; though following at a great distance, our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Whilst with open face, as in a glass, we behold the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. That we may rightly follow the example of Christ, we must distinguish between those parts of His conduct in which He exercised powers, or performed works peculiar to Himself as our Redeemer, and those in which He manifested regard to that law which is the rule of our conduct. We dare not lay claim to the glory of Christ’s miraculous works or mediatorial offices. It is vain to pretend to observe a fast of forty days, to rule the winds and waves, to heal diseases, or disclose the secrets of the human heart, in imitation of our Saviour. Equally

vain would it be to seek to rival Him in His saving work; but, as Christ died for the Church, we ought also to be ready, if called on, to lay down our lives for the brethren; as He did everything pertaining to His high office, we ought also to do all that lies in our power to save souls from eternal death. Jesus could not repent of sin, because He knew no sin; but He set us an example in His hatred of sin, in His grief for sins not His own, and in His uniform obedience to His Father amidst all the temptations with which He was surrounded.

Although Christ appeared in the form of a servant, yet princes may learn from Him how they ought to govern their subjects. Whilst exhibiting that condescension, meekness, forbearance, and wisdom which should beautify the character of those who are placed in high stations, He never forgot what was due to Himself, and amidst all the familiarities to which He admitted His disciples, He maintained the dignity and authority which belonged to Him as the Master and King of the Church. Besides, princes are taught to rule by the virtues and glories which shine forth in every part of His administration (Psalms 72:1-20)

Although our Lord did not form those family connexions that are common in the world, yet heads of families may learn from His example how they are to behave as becometh Christians. Let masters act towards their servants as Christ did towards His disciples; let husbands love their wives even as Christ loved the Church; let children obey their parents as the child Jesus was subject to His. That we may be furnished with that prudence and those dispositions which are necessary for the successful imitation of Christ, we must daily pray for the illuminating and sanctifying influences of His Spirit. It is also needful that we he well acquainted with those precious records that give us the history of His life and death. Among other valuable purposes served by the four different accounts given us of "the things that Jesus began both to do and to teach," this is not the least, that, by their attentive perusal, such an impression of facts and instructions is left upon the mind as is not easily effaced. With the histories of the evangelists in our hands, we can never be at a loss to know the character of thought, speech, and conduct by which, in different circumstances and situations, we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. A superficial thinker may imagine that the circumstances of Christ’s life were so unlike those in which we are often placed, that on many occasions we can obtain no suitable direction from His example. No doubt much spiritual prudence is necessary in making the example of our Lord useful to us, but, when we cannot see His footsteps, we may, at least, discern the spirit by which He acted. He always preferred the glory of His Father to His own ease, or any other consideration whatever. He always preferred men’s spiritual to their temporal interests-their real advantage to their wishes. In all circumstances He acted according to the will of God, and His heart was constantly intent upon that great work which He came into the world to accomplish. We follow the example of Christ whilst we live under the governing influence of such principles. If the mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, we shall find it pleasant to follow Him whithersoever He goeth. Were He to lead us to our rest through seas of blood, through furnaces seven times heated, ought we not cheerfully to follow Him who drank out the bitterest dregs of the cup of misery, that we might be furnished with those joys of salvation that turn the waters of Marah into wine. How much more should we follow Him through ways which, though hard, rugged, and thorny to flesh and blood, are all paths of pleasantness and peace. What man suffered more, or did more, for Christ than Paul, but he could thank God for making him always to triumph in Christ. In nothing was he ashamed, and he was not deceived in his earnest expectation that, whether in death or in life, Christ would be magnified in him. "For him

to live was Christ, and to die was gain."

Let us also set the Lord always before us, and though oftentimes in heaviness through manifold temptations, through His Spirit imparted, we shall endure unto the end. In due season we shall reap if we faint not. For it is a faithful saying, if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

# 02.02. Of the Duties we Owe to God the Father

Chapter 2 - Of the Duties we Owe to God the Father NO man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. The glory of the Father shines forth in the doctrine, in the person, in the work of Christ. When He gives us the light of His glory, it is in the face of Jesus Christ. If we have not seen the glory of the Father in the Son, the Gospel is hid from us, and we are still in darkness. But if we have seen the glory of God in the face of Christ, our hearts will be filled with wonder and love; and we will ascribe salvation unto our God, who sitteth upon the throne, as well as to the Lamb.

Although we know that we can make no adequate requital for His love, we will be desirous of showing forth our gratitude by all the methods prescribed in His Holy Word. When we ascribe glory to God the Father for our redemption by His Son, and our sanctification by His Spirit, we are far from excluding any of the Divine Persons from an equal share in our gratitude. The Father, in the counsels of grace, sustained the majesty of that Godhead which belongs equally to each of the Divine Persons. On this account the name of God is sometimes appropriated to the First Person, although we are sure that by an equal right it belongs to the Son and the Holy Ghost. As the Godhead which belongs to each Person in the Trinity was glorified in our redemption by Christ, so in the purpose and contrivance of our redemption by the Father, the Son and Spirit appear equally glorious with Himself.

If we do not honour the Son even as we honour the Father, and if we do not honour the Spirit even as we honour the Father and the Son, we forget the essential unity of the Godhead, the equality of the Divine Persons, their reciprocal relations, their inseparable conjunction, their common right to the homage and service of all who are baptised in their name. The Scripture tells us that all spiritual blessings originate in an eternal purpose which was formed by God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and that all that has been, or shall be, done by our Saviour in securing the blessings of salvation is the result of that merciful appointment (Ephesians 1:3-4;. Ephesians 3:9-11; Romans 8:28-31). The question now to be considered is, What shall we render to the Lord for His eternal thoughts of mercy towards guilty men; and for His gracious agency, through His Son and Spirit, in accomplishing His intentions? That we may render unto God our grateful homage for what He has purposed, and for what He has accomplished, we might to know and believe the love of God towards us.

I. - KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF OF HIS LOVE

"We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."- 1 John 4:16.

What was the grand design of God in contriving the plan of human redemption, and raising up for us a horn of salvation? His purpose, saith Paul, was "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus."

Nothing can be more groundless than the notion which some have entertained, that we have more reason to confide in the love of Christ than in the love of the Father, as if the Father's love to us depended on the mediation of our Redeemer. It is, indeed, certain that all the blessed effects of God's love come to us through Christ, but it is no less certain that Jesus did not pray for the Father's love, nor purchase it by His sufferings. On the contrary, Christ became our Surety and the High Priest of our profession, because God, who loved us, called Him to undertake and execute on our behalf all that was necessary to our eternal peace. In every part of our salvation the glory of the Father's love is displayed to the admiring eyes of the believer. When human pride can discern nothing that is amiable, but much that is repulsive, the humble faith of the Christian beholds a "love that passeth knowledge." In His predestination of some sinners to life, whilst others are passed by, the Almighty is represented by men of corrupt minds as a capricious tyrant, dooming multitudes to perdition whom He might with as good reason have appointed to salvation. But this very circumstance is, to humble believers, a clear and unequivocal demonstration of the freeness and sovereignty of the love of God. They know and are assured that there is no unrighteousness with Him, and that He can visit none with His wrath but such as well deserve it. When at the same time they are assured that many are chosen to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ, they infer on sure grounds that nothing but the sovereignty of grace could make the distinction, and that all the praise of salvation is due to God Himself, for it is He only that makes one man to differ from another. What can be plainer than this, that God cannot treat sinners worse than they deserve. It is therefore no less plain, if the doctrine of election be true, that He treats many of them infinitely better than they deserve, and that the reasons of that goodwill by which they are distinguished are to be found entirely within Himself.

Those who will not believe the doctrine of personal unconditional election deny to God the glory of the absolute freeness of His grace. Something in the creatures chosen to life appears to them to have been the cause of God's special love. But when we know and believe that Divine mercy made the distinction, we ascribe all that praise to God which others would share betwixt Him and His creatures. "Not unto us, 0 Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory!" are words which in their full sense cannot be used but by those who believe that the happy partakers of His salvation were "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." If God made a distinction between one man and another, because He foresaw that the one would improve His grace better than the other, we might indeed ascribe to Him the glory of exact righteousness, and of a high degree of goodness; but if He determined to communicate saving grace to some rather than others, simply because it pleased Him to make that distinction, then all who partake of His love have reason to say with adoring gratitude, "He hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

Since sovereign grace appears illustrious in the free bestowal of eternal life upon multitudes who are not by nature more worthy of it than those who perish in their sins, so also the whole purpose and contrivance of the scheme of mercy must be attributed to the same glorious cause. God could be under no obligation to save one of the human race more than all the children of Adam, for they were all in the same lost and ruined condition. Neither could He be under any obligation to save fallen men rather than the angels who kept not their first estate, and are doomed to hopeless perdition for a single sin. What, then, but sovereign love could form an eternal purpose of salvation

for sinners of the human family? What but infinite grace could foreordain the incarnation of the Son of God, and His obedience and death in room of the guilty? He had no need of the love or service of His fallen creatures. He foresaw what enmity against His unspotted purity and His Divine authority would possess their hearts. Yet in His love and pity His wisdom planned their salvation, and He entered into covenant with His beloved Son to accomplish it. Sacrifice and offering God did not desire, but it was His eternal will that we should be sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. The delight of the Father, no less than that of the Son, was from eternity with the sons of men; and therefore when Adam sinned, God said, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." Salvation was revealed and communicated to the guilty progenitors of our race; and the Son of God executed His Father's pleasure in the recovery of myriads from their fallen condition, long before He actually came into the world to make His soul an offering for sin. The fulness of the time being come, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons." He "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Was it possible that He who is Himself love could give a more amazing proof of His mercy? He not only gave His Son to suffer for our sins, but His own hand inflicted those awful sufferings which none but an incarnate God could endure. He was not merely delivered up to be insulted, smitten, and crucified by wicked men, "it pleased the Lord also to bruise him, and put him to grief." Such was God's love to His guilty creatures that for a season He even hid His face from His own beloved and holy Son. No wonder that the sun was covered with thick darkness when the Creator of the universe shrouded the Son of His love with so dark a cloud in the day of His anger.

Christ compares His love to His people to the Father's love to Himself. The comparison is so wonderful that we find it difficult to recognise its propriety. Still it is fully justified by this most amazing of all transactions. To stand in doubt of the love of God when He Himself declares it, is inexcusable; but to call it in question when attested by the blood of His own Son, is beyond measure criminal. The love of God appears not only in the incarnation, sufferings, and death, but also in the resurrection and glory of our Redeemer. As He died for our offences, He was raised again for our justification, and received up into glory, that our faith and hope might be in God. If God's love to Israel was the reason why Solomon was made king, that He might execute judgment and justice among that highly-favoured people, how much more ought we to magnify that love which advanced our Lord to the throne of His glory, that He might sway a sceptre of mercy over the human race, and fully accomplish the salvation of His people! Nor is the love of the Father less evident in the office and operation of the Holy Spirit. God knew that no human being, without the effectual working of the Spirit, would be led to avail himself of the redemption devised by the Father and accomplished by the Son. Such is our natural blindness that we cannot understand the necessity or value of Christ's salvation. Such is our pride and stubbornness of spirit that we will rather perish than come to Christ for life, unless our eyes are opened, and our hearts of stone softened and made hearts of flesh. But God in His great mercy sends His good Spirit to enlighten our dark minds, and subdue our rebellious wills to a hearty compliance with His plan of mercy. If we admire that love which sent the Son of God in the likeness of sinful flesh that He might be made a curse for us, we have no less reason to be astonished at the display of love seen in the gift of the Holy Ghost, that He may dwell in hearts defiled by that abominable thing which God hates, and by sanctifying them wholly, make men meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. In the

persons and work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit we behold the love of the Father in its freeness and sovereignty, eternity, immutability, and incomprehensible excellency!

Nothing can be more unscriptural than to entertain ideas derogatory to the love of the Father, through our grateful admiration of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That we are not indebted to Christ for the love of the Father is manifest from the fact that we have the brightest proof of that love in the accomplishment of the Father's purpose, in the incarnation and death of His Son. God does not love us because Christ died for us, but Christ died for us because God is love. He is not merely a God of love, but He is love itself; and hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.

God would have been eternally and immutably worthy of the supreme love of all rational creatures though He had never purposed to save a single sinner or pardon any sin; but He could not, in that case, be the object of delight to those who could expect nothing from Him but fiery indignation.

Some will, perhaps, say that if they were assured of their own election they would believe in the love of God, and join with the apostle in blessing Him who had already "blessed them with all spiritual blessings in Christ, according as He hath chosen them in Him before the foundation of the world."

But, as matters stand, they profess to be unable to take any comfortable view of the Divine nature, since, for aught they know, God may be to them a "consuming fire."

Let us beware of perplexing ourselves about matters which, being too high for us, lie beyond our comprehension. Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong unto us, that we may observe to do according to all the words of God's law.

It is true we are deeply interested in the question, whether we belong to the happy number of God's elect or not, and it is a point on which we may obtain complete satisfaction to our minds if we only take God's way of obtaining it. The revelation of God in His Word is the rule and foundation of our faith. Let us receive Christ as our own Saviour by believing in His name, and through faith we shall assure ourselves of God's special love. When we believingly commit the salvation of our souls into the hands of Christ, we can have no reason to doubt our election by God; because faith in Christ is always the fruit of electing and unalterable love. Of certain among the Gentiles it is said, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

If we felt the love of God in our bosoms, say some, we would believe the love of God towards us. But how can we hope to feel our hearts inflamed with love towards God before we believe His love to us? "We love him because he first loved us." His love to us must go before our love to Him; it must he known and believed in, that we may feel constrained to love Him in return. We must first plant the tree before we gather its precious fruits. Realising the great love wherewith He hath loved us, we shall be led to love Him with all our hearts. Such love is the fulfilling of the law, and it always brings with it peace and joy, and the other comforts of religion.

Let us, then, banish all unworthy jealousies of that grace which so wonderfully solicits our hearts by unfolding all its matchless beauties in the face of our Redeemer. Can anything be more trying than to find that our friendship is suspected by those to whom we have given the most expressive and engaging proofs of its sincerity? Can anything be more displeasing to God than to have His

love called in question by those who know that He has sealed His testimony to it in the blood of His Son? The first complaint He makes against Israel in the last book of the Old Testament is, that they ungratefully called His love in question. "I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" (Malachi 1:2). May not this complaint be made with greater reason against Christians who refuse the witness of His own Son, who lay in His bosom from eternity, and came from heaven to. earth, and expired on the cross, to demonstrate the love of His Father, and procure for us all its delightful effects?

"What iniquity have your fathers found in me?" said God to His ancient people. "Have I been to Israel a barren wilderness or a land of darkness?" He was greatly displeased when His people behaved towards Him as if He had shown them no favour. Will He be less displeased now with those who give no heed to the word of reconciliation, which in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son? We may meet with hard providences in this evil world, but let us not measure God's love or hatred by His present dispensations. Shall we imagine that God is displeased with us because He does not satisfy all the inordinate cravings of our hearts? "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things."

If He does not give us everything that the heart desires, it is just because He knows we are better without it. Unless you know of something more precious than His own Son, you can mention nothing which God would refuse if He saw it to be really beneficial for you. After all that He has done, after all that His Son has suffered, after all that His Spirit has undertaken to accomplish, do you still require the gifts of health or wealth to clear your minds from doubts of the truth of what God says when He assures you that "He is Love?"

II. - CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."- Jeremiah 17:7.

Assurance of the love of God the Father manifested in Christ Jesus, ought to be attended with a firm confidence in God under all those gracious characters which He has been pleased to assume. The sum of the Gospel is this: that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. We ought, therefore, to regard God as a God of peace, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and depend on His kindness and goodwill to us.

Whilst we were in a state of enmity we had good reason to be afraid of Him, but being reconciled by the death of His Son, we may rejoicingly say, "Lord, we will praise thee, for though thou wast angry with us, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst us. The Lord Jehovah is our strength and our song, and he also is become our salvation." The house of Heber the Kenite was at peace with Jabin the oppressor of Israel, and stood in no fear of that cruel tyrant while the rest of the Israelites were groaning beneath his thraldom. Believers in Christ are at peace with God, and have therefore no cause to tremble under apprehensions of that vengeance which hangs over the ungodly.

Contrariwise, they ought to bless the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby gave full assurance that the work of reconciliation was fully effected. In view of the completeness of that work, they may rest assured that the very God of peace will sanctify them wholly, and that their souls, bodies, and spirits shall be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to God in the highest heavens, because there is peace

and goodwill towards men! What may we not expect from Him who is pacified towards us for all that we have done?

Surely we need not distress ourselves with anxious thoughts, even about those objects in which we are most deeply interested. God is at peace with us, and no enemy shall be able to do us hurt. Let us implicitly confide in Him, and commit all our concerns into His hand, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. The designs of His grace shall be fully accomplished, and believers shall at last be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. The Lord is the God that justifieth the ungodly. This is His name for ever, and by this name it is His will to be trusted and glorified. It was known to Abraham and to the believers who lived before Abraham, but the full glory of it is now published to the world by the word of the Gospel, in which the righteousness of God by faith is revealed to faith (Romans 3:23-26). When we believe in Christ we believe in the grace and faithfulness of the Father, who raised up Jesus from the dead, and hath set Him forth to be the propitiation for sins, through faith in His blood. By our faith we do not give greater glory to the Son than to the Father. It is the will of the Father that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father who hath sent Him, and it is no less the will of the Son that all men should honour the love of the Father in our justification, even as they honour His own grace in laying down His life for us (Romans 8:30-32; John 6:44).

God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, by that everlasting covenant which was made between the Father and the Son. This covenant is "all our salvation," and it is no less glorious to the Father and the Son than salutary to us (Ps. lxxxix.) By our instalment in this covenant, He who is the God and Father of Christ becomes our God and Father in Christ, and authorises us to claim all the blessings of the covenant in the name of Him who is the head of it, and who perfectly fulfilled its conditions (Psalms 89:49).

We ought, therefore, to trust in God as our God by an inviolable covenant, which has been already confirmed in Christ. If He were our God in the same way in which He was related to Adam in innocency, He might soon cease to be our God, and become a dreaded enemy. But in Christ He is our God by a relation that cannot possibly be dissolved; and with full assurance of faith we may say, "This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." His righteousness shall be an immutable security against the loss of His favour. He must prove unfaithful to His blessed Son and to Himself before anything can separate us from His love, or deprive us of the glorious blessings of His covenant (Isaiah 54:7-10; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

God is our Father, because He is Christ’s Father. We are not only His children, but our adoption is founded on His relationship to our Head and Husband. If we are betrothed to Christ, His Father is our Father, and the love wherewith He loves His Son is cherished towards us. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Behold what encouragement we have to confide in God, and what sure grounds we have for expecting from Him blessings as superior to those bestowed by earthly parents upon their children as God is greater and more gracious than men.

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." As a father will not give a stone to his son asking bread, far less a scorpion when he asks from him a fish, so the Lord will give nothing that is bad, but everything that is good, to His children, and they may safely, at all

times, confide in His love. Doubtless they shall meet with many trials in life, but these are just the corrections of a wise Father, who values the happiness of His children above their ease. They are all proofs of paternal love, for "what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" Since God is our Father in virtue of our relationship to Christ, we may confidently expect from Him all the blessings connected with the present life which are really needful for us (Matthew 6:26-32; Matthew 7:7-11). A very small heritage of worldly good things coming from the love of our Heavenly Father is better than all the riches that can be possessed by those who have their portion only in this present world. We may be assured, too, that we shall not be suffered to want those spiritual blessings purchased by Christ,-we shall be fed with the children's bread, and satisfied with the fatness of our Father's house. Still all we enjoy here is as nothing in comparison with what we are taught to expect in another world. "If we are sons, then we are heirs, -heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." Being justified by the grace of God, we are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life, and nothing can deprive us of our title, or exclude us from the possession. How wonderful that God should put such sinners as we are amongst His children, and give us a sure right to His pleasant land!

Since it has pleased Him to give us a name and a place in His holy family, surely it is base ingratitude to stand in doubt of our enjoying the promised inheritance. We are indeed quite unfit to enter the region of spotless purity, but we are bound daily to give thanks unto the Father, who through the Spirit of holiness makes us meet for the joys and exercises of heaven, and who takes effectual care that nothing shall defeat His kind intentions towards us (1 Peter 1:3-5).

III. - LOVE TO GOD.

"Hear, 0 Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."- Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

We are bound to love Him supremely who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

If we know and believe in God's love to us, we shall find it impossible to withhold from Him our hearts. He would be entitled to our supreme affection even though Christ had never been sent to die for us. The law binds us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts; and that law, which is just and holy, cannot demand from us a love exceeding Jehovah's righteous claims. Angels loved Him to the utmost extent of their capacity before they were informed of His gracious designs towards the human family, and our apostacy did not render Him less worthy of love. But how infinitely amiable does He now appear when we see Him in Christ not only a God of love, but Love itself. If we do not give Him all our hearts, even fallen angels might upbraid our ingratitude, for such love was never manifested towards their nobler race! His love to us was absolutely undeserved, we had done nothing to merit His favour, we possessed no qualities fitted to attract His regard; on the contrary, we were covered over with those pollutions which have rendered multitudes of creatures the objects of His eternal displeasure. What would have been our condition if we had been left like devils to sink into irretrievable perdition! How can we ever pay that debt of gratitude we have incurred to Him who withheld not from us His Son, His only Son, whom He loved! Our love can be no recompense for His love. God needs it not. It cannot make Him more blessed than He was before He had called our world into existence. Yet He sets a high value upon our affection. After all that He has done for us, this is the sum of what He requires in return, -that we love Him with all our

hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves. Let us enthrone Him in our hearts, and love Him better than ourselves, and above every other object. In a spirit of true devotedness, let it be the business of our lives to testify our thankfulness to Him who has sought by such amazing methods to gain possession of our hearts. Shall we grudge anything to Him who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us? Shall any waters be allowed to quench the affection kindled by redeeming love? Were our hearts ten thousand times larger than the heart of Solomon, they could not contain all the love which is due to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is love due to God merely because He has loved us. We must love Him because in His own nature He is perfectly holy and righteous. When we were strangers to Christ we could not love infinite holiness, for however lovely in itself, it is always a source of terror to guilty creatures. But now the holiness that formerly seemed to frown, smiles upon us with a lustre not less pleasant than splendid. Though God is still of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, yet He looks upon sinners with a merciful eye; and because He is the holy, holy Jehovah, He will perfect our sanctification, that we may be fitted for intimate communion with Him in the world of bliss.

God’s justice, too, is very terrible to the workers of iniquity; even saints must stand in awe of this "holy, righteous Lord God." But fear must not lessen our love. We are to serve the Lord with fear, and at the same time "rejoice with trembling." Though we derived no personal benefits from God, He would still be worthy of the whole love of our hearts. He deserves it on His own account, independently of all that we have received, or can receive, at His gracious hands. But apart from the intrinsic beauty of all the Divine perfections, we .find that each of them is engaged, through Christ Jesus, to promote our best interests.

Because God is infinitely holy, He will perform all the promises made to His dear Son on our behalf. He hath sworn by His holiness that He will not lie unto David. Because He is infinitely just, He will punish all His enemies, and will bestow on His people all the blessings purchased for them by the precious blood of His Son. He will not be unrighteous to forget any of the works of faith or labours of love we may do in His name, far less will He forget any of the work accomplished by the Lord Jesus, or any of the sufferings endured by Him for our salvation (Isa. x51:6-8). That we may abound in love to God, let us daily meditate on His glorious attributes, and His great love towards us in Christ Jesus our Lord. The more we think on these things the more shall we be led to lament the coldness of our own hearts, and to pray for a richer communication of spiritual blessings to our souls, and that we may prove less ungrateful to Him whom we have such infinite reason to prefer above our chief joy (Psalms 40:5-6; 1 John 4:17-19).

IV. - FEAR OF GOD.

"Who shall not fear thee, 0 Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy."- Revelation 15:4. The fear of God must be joined with love. Perfect love casteth out that fear which hath torment in it. But there is a very different kind of fear which sweetly harmoniseth with love, and is powerfully enforced by every view which the Gospel gives of the agency of the Father, as well as of the Son and Spirit, in our redemption.

What can be more certain than the irreconcilable aversion of the Most High God to sin in all its different forms. The whole plan of salvation is such as to convince every thoughtful mind that He is indeed of purer eyes than to behold evil or look upon iniquity; that He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; that He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and had in reverence

of all them that are round about Him. "Fear him," saith our Saviour, "who hath power to kill both soul and body, and cast them into hell fire." If God is to be feared because He can inflict such awful punishment upon creatures, how much greater fear will seem to be due unto Him when we consider how He bruised His own Son, and put Him to grief!

"If ye call on the Father who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Remember the words of our Lord when He was led forth to crucifixion: "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If the holy and beloved Son of God was not spared when He undertook to be the Surety of the guilty, what unpardoned sinner can escape the damnation of hell? The justice of God is inflexible. His righteousness is like the great mountains. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but no transgression or disobedience shall go unpunished (1 Peter 1:24, 25). The faith and hope of the Christian give no encouragement to presumptuous boldness in drawing near to God, or to indifference about sin. On the contrary, their practical influence is to fill us with a holy dread of the Divine Majesty, and a sincere desire to avoid even the appearance of evil. There is forgiveness with God that He may be feared; for it is only to be obtained through Him "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins." If we could have obtained pardon without such a satisfaction having been made for sin, we might not unreasonably have supposed that God was not irreconcilably opposed to iniquity; but "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other" in Christ Jesus. When we look to Him whom we have pierced, and feel that we are criminals who could not be rescued from the hands of justice but by His atoning work, we cannot but mourn sincerely, and acknowledge that it was indeed an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord, and live without His fear. We are now, through the grace of our Redeemer, secured against the fatal effects of our apostacy. But shall a sense of personal safety tempt us to regard sin lightly? God forbid. For this very reason, because "receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." He is found to be a consuming fire in the misery of the lost; but still more does He appear to be a consuming fire in the salvation of His own people. They are not, indeed, doomed with the wicked to dwell amid "everlasting burnings," but that devouring fire which was due to their iniquities scathed the soul of their Divine Surety. He stood in the breach, and endured what they must have inevitably suffered had not One taken their place who was able to give full satisfaction to the justice of God. The seraphs that surround the throne of God in heaven cover their faces with their wings, although they never provoked the displeasure of their Divine Creator: "Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly," or at least with natural fallibility and comparative imperfection. With what veneration and awe ought He to be approached or contemplated by the children of Adam, the transgressors of His covenant!

If after all that God has done to show forth the awful glories of His holiness in the person and work of Christ, we do not fear that glorious and fearful name, "the Lord our God," it is painfully apparent that we neither know God, nor Christ, nor ourselves; that we have no part nor lot in His salvation; and that we are blind to the brightest discoveries which have been, or can be, made of that terrible majesty with which the Almighty clothes Himself as with a garment (1 Peter 1:17-18).

V. - PRAYER TO GOD.

"Ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."- Jeremiah 29:12-13.

We ought to draw near to God, with holy boldness, through the help of the Spirit, and in the name of our Redeemer, to solicit all those blessings which, as sinful dying creatures, we need.

Under the law, none but priests were allowed to offer sacrifices unto God. Ordinary worshippers, desiring to offer sacrifices of righteousness, could only present them by the hands of the ministers of the sanctuary. We have no priest but Christ; He is not only the great, but the only High Priest of our profession. We ourselves are a spiritual priesthood, but our sacrifices can be accepted of God only through Jesus Christ. However unworthy we and our best services may be, still we are sure that our approaches to God, in the name of His dear Son, are well pleasing to Him, and that every request presented in faith through this Mediator will be granted. Seeing, then, that we have "a great High Priest which is passed into the heavens (or through the heavens), Jesus, the Son of God, let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Under the Levitical dispensation none but the high priest was allowed to approach the mercy-seat, and that only on one day each year. Neither David nor Samuel were permitted to set their feet within the holy place. But the way to the Holiest of all is now made manifest by the blood of Jesus; and if we do not improve our privilege, we despise our own mercies. And why should we be afraid? He who sits upon the throne is our Father, and we dare not call in question His love. Christ tells us that He had no need to pray for the Father’s love to His disciples, because the Father of Himself loved them. He directs us, in our addresses to the Hearer of prayer, to say, "Our Father which art in heaven;" and some of His instructions to petitioners at the court of heaven are founded on the principle that there is infinitely more of love and pity in the heart of our Heavenly Father than in that of any parent upon earth (Matthew 7:7, Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:1-13).

We are indeed very guilty, and have good reason to confess that our iniquities have separated between us and God, and that our sins have hid His face from us; still, we have free access to the Father, through Christ our "Daysman." The blood of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin;" and He who died for us is our Intercessor before the throne. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Worthless and vile as we are, Jesus deserves the richest blessings, and when we believingly present our supplications in His name, we have the strongest assurance that we shall not meet with a refusal (John 14:13-14).

It is true we know not what to pray for as we ought; and our hearts are too cold and indifferent about spiritual things to suffer us to pour forth our requests to God with that fervour of spirit which becomes men pleading for the life of their souls. But through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. We are also directed to pray in the Holy Ghost. His help is promised. By His gracious influence we shall be taught and enabled to pray in an acceptable manner for things agreeable to the will of God. "He who searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." "He is the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, Abba, Father." "And like as a father pitieth his children," crying to him for bread or protection, "so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

What rich encouragement is thus given us to come to God in prayer in the name of Christ, through the Spirit. How inexcusable the unbelief that rejects the testimony of each Person of the blessed Trinity. All these Divine Persons are pledged by their respective offices in the plan of grace to secure the success of our devotions. We have not only a merciful Father, disposed to hear and answer our prayers, but an Intercessor to plead for us, and another Divine Being who enables us to present our requests aright. What shall we say to these things? "0 thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

We will come to Him in the name of His own Son, who hath opened up the way by His precious blood, and now liveth to make intercession for us. We will come under the influence of His own Spirit, who is sent into our hearts to fill us with that holy boldness, that fervour of desire, that spirituality of disposition, which God requires in His petitioners.

We are fools if we suffer any day to pass over our heads without improving our precious privilege of free access to God. Every day we need new supplies of Divine mercy. Were we left to ourselves for a single hour, we should fall into such sins as would embitter the whole future of our lives. David in one unhappy moment brought such miseries upon himself and family and people as occasioned grief and pain until the day of his death. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall, and cleave with full purpose of heart to Him "who alone is able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." But there are special seasons when we stand in peculiar and pressing need of rich supplies of grace. In the hour of sickness or temptation or distress of conscience,-when persecuted for righteousness' sake, or suffering from the loss of friends, or the reproach and ill-usage of our fellow-men,-at the approach of death, or in the presence of some overwhelming perplexity,-at such times we are in danger of fainting, even of sinking into utter despondency; but "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Trust in the Lord at all times. Ye people, pour out your hearts before him. God is a refuge for us. In six troubles he shall deliver us, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch us."

Christ must have lost His interest at the Father's throne if those petitions which are presented in His name be disregarded (Php 4:6-7; Hebrews 7:25).

VI. - DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD.

"One shall say, I am the Lord's l and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."- ISA. x54:5.

We ought to devote ourselves to the Lord, as a God reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. As God hath chosen us to salvation in Christ Jesus, we ought to be to Him for "a name and a praise;" "Thine they were," saith our Lord, "and thou gavest them me." But when He gave them to Christ, He did not give them away from Himself. "All mine," says Christ, "are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." When God chose Israel to Himself for His peculiar treasure, to impress them with a sense of the value of the distinction, He reminds them that all the earth belonged to Him. As universal Lord, He might have chosen any other nation He pleased; and being equally the Lord of all worlds, He might have selected angels instead of men, to be the monuments of His sovereign mercy. But having chosen us, and that when we deserved to be rejected for ever, how

can we refuse to yield ourselves entirely to Him, that we may be to the praise of His glory? "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." A wonderful price indeed at which we were valued! Let us not, therefore, account ourselves our own, but glorify God with our bodies and with our spirits, which are His. With this view Christ died, that we might be redeemed and sanctified to God. "For their sakes," said He, "I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth." "Thou wast slain," say the ransomed of the Lord, "and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Do we not frustrate the grace of God and His Son when we live to ourselves rather than to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us? God sends forth the Spirit into our hearts to take possession of us as His temples,-shall we alienate our souls or· bodies from Him? God forbid. This would be to repeat the profanity of ancient times, when idols were introduced into the sanctuary, and received that worship which was due only to the Lord of heaven and earth.

If God has chosen and redeemed us, and promised His Spirit to purify us to Himself, surely we ought not to shrink from giving ourselves to the Lord, and coming under the most sacred engagements to be His servants. It is true we have good reason to be afraid of that innate spirit of selfishness which is continually tempting us to prefer our own gratification to the glory and service of God. We cannot by our own strength subdue this corrupt spirit, but the electing, redeeming, sanctifying mercy of God secures to us those communications of grace which will preserve us from that which, insinuating itself under the pretence of self-love, is the worst of all plagues. They love themselves best and most truly who love God better than themselves, for we never can be happy until we cease to be the slaves of self, and become the Lord’s freedmen. When He inclines our hearts unto His testimonies and not to covetousness, we shall find it very easy and pleasant to deny ourselves, and submit unreservedly to His will. Happy they who, released from the fetters that kept them in bondage to themselves, are now enjoying the sweets of that service which is perfect freedom. Having presented our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service, let us beware of ever recalling the gift. We are not at liberty to act towards the Most High as if He were a fellow-creature. When we have bestowed a gift upon a friend, it is deemed ungenerous to ask it back. God is infinitely greater than men, and the greater, therefore, the insult in claiming for ourselves what we had freely devoted to His service. Can a man rob God and prosper? No part of our possessions is more precious in His eyes than ourselves. Our hearts are infinitely more valuable than thousands of gold and silver.

Having consecrated ourselves to the Lord, we must cleave to Him, and serve Him while we have any being. Our thoughts, our affections, the members of our bodies, our time, all that we have, and all that we are, must be His, and His only. We must willingly spend and be spent for His glory. We must live like persons devoted to His fear. Our chief happiness must consist in furthering the interests of His kingdom. If it be His will that we suffer for His sake or from His hand, we must not think that we are treated with severity. He would not through sickness or other causes keep us in a state of inactivity did He not know that He would be glorified thereby. "They also serve who only stand and wait" (Psalms 16:2; Psalms 116:16-17).

VII. - JOY IN GOD.

"Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King,"- Psalms 149:2.

We ought to rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the reconciliation.

"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

.What joy can equal that of those who find in these words the record of their own experience? Why may not all believers in Christ confidently make use of such language? They are justified by faith, and have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. They are the objects of a love that knows no limits. The Lord rejoices over them with joy. He rests in his love; he joys over them with singing. And why should not they also rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the Holy One of Israel?

Let them recall their former condition that, in the contrast between the past and present, they may feel the joy of that blessed change. By nature they were the children of wrath, even as others. They were exposed to the fierceness of that displeasure already displayed towards fallen angels. But now they have passed from death unto life. Instead of being angry, God takes pleasure in them. Coming to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, they have come to God, the Judge of all, and the sentence pronounced on them is of peace, not of evil. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? "Who is he that will harm them when God is on their side? "If God be for them, who can be against them?" They would still be poor indeed, though put in possession of heaven and earth, without an interest in God. But all things are theirs, and He who made and preserves all things is theirs also. The God whose glory is above earth and sky is the portion of their inheritance, and of their cup He maintaineth their lot. This God is their God for ever and ever; He will be their guide even unto death.

Joy is the duty and privilege of the saints. Who would not rejoice if he were exalted to the throne of a mighty empire? A man might be thought to have better grounds of joy had he the certain assurance of living a thousand years twice told in the possession of everything held dear on earth. And yet, what would all this avail to one whose soul is so constituted that nothing earthly can give it solid happiness. A "perpetuity of bliss" is bliss indeed to an immortal soul, and a perpetuity of bliss is the portion of him, and of him alone, who can say that the Lord is his God. "I will rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garment of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy." These were some of the sweet songs of ancient believers. They are recorded in Holy Scripture, that they may be sung by believers in Christ whilst the world stands. By such songs, in the house of their pilgrimage night is turned into day, and the spirit cheered amid the valleys of humiliation and death. Blessed is the man whose heart is tuned to such music; yea, blessed are all they whose God is the Lord. They are blessed beyond their own comprehension, they are blessed beyond the comprehension of angels. They ought to feel and acknowledge their blessedness, that they may glorify Him who is its author, its object, its eternal fountain (1 Chronicles 16:35-36).

If we had all the riches and pleasures of Croesus, or Nebuchadnezzar, the very thought of the precarious tenure by which we held them would damp our joy, and perhaps turn it into misery. We know not how soon we shall lose everything but the memory of a past happiness. But the man whose hope the Lord is, can look calmly into the future, and say, My heart and my flesh shall fail me, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. Time, which is everyday stealing

away some part of the happiness of other men, is every hour bringing nearer and nearer the perfection of his felicity. The period is rapidly approaching when Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. The meaning of this passage may be disputed by divines, but every Christian knows that its import must be full of glory to God and to His Son Jesus Christ, and of abiding consolation to all the redeemed of the Lord. A state of blessedness in the immediate enjoyment of God is before them. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor thought conceived what it is. This much we know, that nothing on earth can give half the pleasure in possession, which the glory to be revealed gives in hope and foretaste. The electing love of God, the redeeming love of Jesus, the sanctifying grace of the Spirit will in the future state have their full and complete influence upon the redeemed. Who can imagine the glory of that kingdom which was prepared for its inhabitants before the foundation of the world, by the everlasting love of God! Who can understand the riches of the glory of Christ's inheritance in the saints, the fulness of the joy of the Lord on which all His people enter! What nobler exercise can now engage our heart or tongue than thanksgiving and praises to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Amid all the trials of earth we have reason greatly to rejoice in such a blessed hope; and we cannot but rejoice if our faith is firm, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The glory redounding to God through our salvation is a consideration that increases our joy. If not utterly selfish, we must be filled with gladness at the thought that thousands and millions of our fellow-beings will share with us the joys that are at God's right hand. Most of all shall we rejoice when, in their felicity and our own, we see God glorified through the complete accomplishment of His plans of redeeming mercy. The Lord shall rejoice in all His works, but chiefly in His works of grace. The glory of the Lord shall continue for ever. Eternity itself will not exhaust the praise of any of His works, least of all of that glorious work to which we are indebted for our redemption from the worst of evils, and our enjoyment of the best of blessings. "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; again we say, Rejoice." "Rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." "Bless the Lord at all times; shew forth His salvation from day to day; Glory ye in his holy name." "Let the heart of every one rejoice that seeks the Lord."

# 02.03. Of the Duties we Owe the Holy Ghost

Chapter 3 - Of the Duties we Owe the Holy Ghost

SAITH Job, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." If we are really Christians, the Spirit of God has made us "new creatures." We are baptised in the name of the Holy Ghost, as well as in that of the Father and the Son, and to be ignorant of the grace of the Spirit, or careless about the duties we owe Him, is no less inexcusable than to be insensible of our obligations to Him "who loved us and gave Himself for us."

I. - BELIEF OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE CONCERNING THE SPIRIT.

"Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."- 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

We are commanded to hold fast the doctrine which we have been taught. And the doctrine concerning the Person, Attributes, and Work of the Holy Spirit is not less interesting and important than the truths relating to the other Persons of the Godhead. Our salvation stands as closely connected with the communion of the Holy Ghost as with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. The very first commandment of the law requires us to know and acknowledge the only true God as God and our God, and to worship and glorify Him accordingly. But who is this only true God? The Bible gives ample information on this point. It is a light to our feet, to preserve us from vice, error, and idolatry. But it would be an extremely dim light, yea, little better than an ignis fatuus, if we could not learn from it with certainty whether or not the Spirit of God is really divine, and a distinct Person in the Godhead.

Opposite opinions on this subject have prevailed amongst those who call themselves Christians, but we are not on this account to suppose that the Holy Scriptures have not made known in sufficiently plain terms who that God is whom we are bound to worship and trust. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Let God’s Word be acknowledged as a rule of faith, worthy of its Divine Author, although the wisest of the sons of men should be accounted foolish and blind. Whatever views may be put forth regarding the work and the Person of the Spirit, by any set of men however learned, this must be admitted by all who allow the Bible to be the Word of God, that its authoritative statements are to be preferred to a thousand ingenious arguments. It is not human reasoning, but Scripture testimony that must decide in regard to any truth on which holy practice and everlasting salvation depend. Nothing can be more certain, than that the Spirit of God is frequently represented in Scripture as a Person-as a Divine Person-as a Divine Person to whom we are indebted for the possession of all those benefits which were purchased for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. If this is the testimony of God concerning His own Spirit, why should we be troubled or shaken in mind by the various notions which speculative men have entertained concerning Him.

There were different opinions about Jesus in the days of His flesh. Some of these were thought at the time to be very honourable to Him, although they came far short of ascribing to Him that authority and dignity which He justly claimed. Some men took Him for Elijah, others for Jeremiah,

others for John the Baptist; and others were disposed to welcome Him as the religious teacher, infinitely superior to all these, who, according to ancient prophecy, should make his appearance in the latter ages! Still, none gave to Christ that honour which was His due,-none received Him in His true and proper character save those who believed that He was the Messiah promised unto the fathers, the Saviour of the world, the Son of the Blessed! The men of highest reputation for learning in the nation of Israel had still lower ideas of Jesus. They declared Him to be a blasphemous impostor, and deceiver of the people. But were the men who studied and understood the Scriptures to become doubtful of the true character of Jesus simply because none of the princes or philosophers of that age knew Him? They were bound to yield an unreserved submission of understanding to His Word. "If ye believe not," said Jesus, "that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." As we were received into the Church in the name of the Holy Spirit, as well as in the name of the Son of God, we must give an equally firm assent to the doctrine of Scripture regarding Him. We must depend as much upon the Spirit for the application of redemption as upon the merits of Christ for the purchase of it. But how can we intelligently look for all that life and strength and light from the Holy Spirit which are absolutely needful, if we are uncertain what and who He is? The great objection to the distinct personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost is founded on the impossibility of conceiving of more Persons than one in one Godhead. But this difficulty is met by those conclusive arguments which prove the divinity of the Son of God. If He is God, He must be a distinct Person from the Father; and if so, there must be more Persons than one in the Godhead; and it is not more incredible that there should be three than two Divine Persons. That we may be rooted and grounded in that article of our creed which asserts the personality and Divine glory of the Holy Ghost, we should search the Scriptures with a care proportioned to the tendency which men have shown to obscure what is said of the perfections of that Divine Being. Let us treasure up in our minds the testimony of Scripture in regard to His offices and the worship to be rendered to Him, that we may be able to silence gainsayers, calling in question those truths which are most certainly believed among us. The Bible was written by holy men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and certainly He gave no direction to these penmen to write a single word derogatory of Himself,-which would have been the case had they been taught to use expressions, leading men to suppose that a person who is not truly the supreme God is entitled to the honour and worship which belong to none but the Most High. "Behold, God is great, and we know him not;" but He knows Himself, and when He is pleased to reveal Himself, we are bound to believe what He says. Let us, then, receive and rejoice in all those discoveries He has been pleased to give of His own nature, of His mode of subsistence, of His manner of working, of everything that relates either to Himself or His creatures.

"The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way." And the meek will daily pray that they may be led into all truth; preserved from the errors of false teachers, and from the corrupt reasonings of their own deceitful hearts. From the Spirit Himself we must receive that spiritual understanding which will enable us to form just conceptions of His character and work. Having obtained such scriptural views, let us hold them fast, confessing them with the mouth, and with all proper weapons exposing the misrepresentations of those who would rob us of our faith and hope,-yea, even of our God. The doctrine relating to the Holy Spirit is, undoubtedly, a vital article of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. We ought to contend for it earnestly, and hold it forth before the world in an intelligent and steadfast profession. On this subject, as on others, we must beware of adding to, or taking from, the teaching of Holy Scripture. There are not a few in

whose creed appropriate prominence is given to the personal distinction and glory of the Spirit of God, but an inferior place to His special work in the application of the redemption purchased by Christ. As it is dangerous to join any other righteousness with the righteousness of Christ, it is no less so to claim for human goodness or endeavour any of that honour which belongs exclusively to the good Spirit by whom we hope to be conducted to the land of uprightness.

God does everything for His own glory, and it is impiety to lay claim to any part of it. The kings of Babylon exposed themselves to the severe displeasure of God when they "sacrificed to their own net, and burned incense to their own drag," claiming to themselves the credit of those victories which He had won for them. Herod Agrippa was eaten up of worms because "he gave not God the glory." Jehovah is jealous of His holy name, and will not allow another to receive the praise due to His own gracious operations. His richest revenue of glory comes from His works of grace. Let us beware of obscuring that glory by partial representations of the character or mutual relations of the Three Persons of the Godhead, without whose combined agency the work of human redemption must have been left for ever unfinished.

II. - APPREHENSION OF THE NECESSITY OF HIS OFFICE AND WORK.

"Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."- Romans 8:9.

It is no less certain that we must perish for ever without the renewing, sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, than that we must have been for ever lost had not Christ been set forth to be a propitiation for our sins. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ only by the effectual application of it to us by His Holy Spirit. We cannot believe in Christ until impressed with a sense of the infinite value of His salvation,-this is brought home to us through a vivid consciousness of personal guilt and danger. But when we fully realise that we are by nature lost and helpless, we shall see that the enlightening, purifying influences of the Spirit are as needful as the expiatory work of our blessed Saviour. That we may prize aright the gift of the Holy Spirit, we ought to understand the nature of the office committed to Him; and the circumstances in our own condition which render His gracious operations absolutely necessary. We are by nature in a state of darkness, and it is only by the "illumination" of the Holy Spirit that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ can be conveyed to our minds. No eye hath seen, no ear hath heard, no heart hath conceived the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. God hath revealed them in His Word, by His Spirit, who searcheth all things,-yea, the deep things of God. The same Spirit who causes the light to shine, imparts the power of vision that we may see and know the things that belong to our peace. We are dead in trespasses and sins; to us is that word of grace addressed-"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." But we cannot respond to that call, nor obtain the fulfilment of the accompanying promise, until quickened by the Spirit, who is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and without the sanctifying influence of the Spirit no man can be holy.

Sin is naturally our delight. Until renewed in the spirit of our mind, we deem it impossible to enjoy happiness apart from the gratification of sinful inclinations. Even after the process of purification is commenced, such is our weakness, such the power of remaining corruption, such the strength of surrounding temptations, that it will be marred or altogether undone unless He who began the

good work carry it on to the day of the Lord Jesus. A knowledge of our corrupt propensities reveals to us the value of the promise of the Spirit, as the Spirit of sanctification, through whose influence alone we can mortify the deeds of the body and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. God promises the gift of His Spirit; but "for this," He says, "will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him; but how shall they ask Him with any fervency of desire unless convinced that His agency is absolutely necessary for the life of their souls (Ezekiel 36:25-27). The Spirit is promised as a comforter as well as a sanctifier. The name Comforter fails to bring out the full meaning of the corresponding word in the original; yet it expresses a part-of it, and gives prominence to that view of His office specially suited to the circumstances of the disciples, when their hearts were filled with sorrow at the prospect of Christ's departure from them. Christians are often too feebly impressed with the importance of this view of the work of the Spirit of grace. Consolation does not appear so needful as sanctification. Sure of obtaining heaven at last, there are some who undervalue the foretastes of heavenly felicity to be enjoyed on earth. It is to be feared that such persons regard heaven more as a refuge from the evils and sorrows of the present life than as a scene of worship and holy fellowship. If we really long for those pleasures which arise from the full enjoyment of God in another world, we shall, even here, be solicitous not only for the communication of sanctifying grace, but for the assurance of His loving-kindness and for the joys of His salvation. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, and enable us to rejoice in Christ Jesus. No abiding persuasion of our happiness and safety can be obtained unless the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. The accusations of Satan and of our own hearts cannot be silenced at the bar of conscience, unless the Comforter give evidence in our favour. It is the Spirit that seals us unto the day of redemption, by stamping His own image upon our souls, shining upon His own work, and shielding us from the attempts of enemies to cast us down from our excellency. The Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, and if we are filled with joy unspeakable at the prospect of entering the purchased possession, we are indebted for it to the love of the Spirit. The consolations of the Spirit are no less necessary than pleasant. They are needed to strengthen us for discharging duty, overcoming temptation, and enduring the trials of life. There is within us a body of sin, what can support us amidst the conflict occasioned by the working of this indwelling evil principle? If we excuse ourselves, saying that we cannot hinder it, that it is to be found in all our fellow-men, and that we cannot expect its complete destruction here, our views are very different from those of the holy Apostle Paul, or the Psalmist David. Does the commonness of anything alter its real nature? Is God under any obligation to pardon the sinful race of Adam, or to dispense with the punishment it has incurred, because all men without exception are conceived in iniquity and born in sin? We deceive ourselves if we imagine that our souls can prosper while we continue unaffected with the corruptions of our own hearts and careless about those comforts which God hath provided for spirits broken with a sense of sin. These consolations are dispensed only by the Holy Ghost. It is under His influence that we are enabled to mourn over the principle of evil within us, saying, "0 wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It is under the same influence that we are enabled to praise God in the prospect of deliverance, and the assurances of pardon and peace (Romans 7:19-25). The necessity of the consolations of the Spirit for animating to the performance of duty is no less evident. "The way of the, Lord is strength to the upright," but not without those gracious influences which render the hardest services pleasant. To serve God aright, we must do so with cheerfulness; for if our hearts

be not engaged in the work, it will be a perpetual burden-neither profitable to ourselves nor acceptable to God. "The joy of the Lord is our strength," and under its influence we shall find "that the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths peace." But we need the strengthening no less than the comforting influences of the Spirit. He must work in us "both to will and to do." We shall not be disposed to do, unless He works in us to will. We shall not be able to do what we would, unless He works in us to do. Whatever we do in word or in deed must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. On Him we must depend for help as well as for acceptance. But all the help that Christ gives is conveyed to the soul by His blessed Spirit. Through Christ we all have access by one Spirit unto the Father. We are commanded to pray in Christ's name, but we know not what we should pray for as we ought, and must therefore depend upon that Spirit who helpeth our infirmities and maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. The same dependence must be placed on Him in every other service required of us, if we would walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. We cannot, therefore, set too high a value upon the work of the Holy Ghost. The soul of man is not more necessary for his body than the influence and operation of the Spirit for our souls. He is the animating soul of that life which we live unto God. He is our light, our comfort, our strength, the applier of Christ's salvation. Nor can we forget that it is an important part of the office of the Spirit to confer those spiritual gifts which, though not necessarily connected with the salvation of their possessor, are absolutely necessary for the successful administration of the ordinances and means of grace, by which sinners are converted and saints edified. Whence did Paul obtain those splendid endowments which made him so successful in spreading the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world? What he was-he was by the grace of God; what he did- he did by the grace of God! In his first epistle to the Corinthians he shows with much minuteness of detail that all those gifts by which we may be serviceable to the Church are communicated by the Holy Spirit, who divideth to every man severally as he will (1 Cor. xii.) As the temple of Zerubbabel was built not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, so the Christian Church has been reared, and the building still goes on under the fostering care of the same Spirit. He separates men for the work to which He calls them. He furnishes them with all needed qualifications. He enables and disposes them to improve their spiritual endowments for the benefit of others. Their successful exercise is the fruit of His influence on the souls of men. In every point of view the work of the Spirit is infinitely important. All His operations are acts of almighty power; only a Divine Being could undertake and accomplish them. Until we are made partakers of the Holy Ghost we can have no part in Christ, nor any solid comfort in the profession of His religion. If we knew the gift of God, our hearts would cry out above all things for the Spirit. He would be deemed more precious than life, and all those honours, riches, and pleasures which are supposed to give value to human life.

III. - PRAYER FOR THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT.

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto: your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."- Luke 11:13.

If we desire the fellowship of the Spirit, and realise the true value of His work and offices, we shall certainly lift up our hearts in prayer to God, and earnestly plead with Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has authorised, and Christ has given all possible encouragement, in the presentation of such a petition (Ezek. xxxvi; Luke 11:13). Earthly parents are willing to gratify the reasonable requests of their children, but the most devoted human affection dimly shadows forth the infinite

loving-kindness of our Heavenly Father. The best of men compared with Him are evil.

God’s readiness to give the Holy Spirit should stimulate to prayer even those who have as yet no reason to conclude that they have been placed among His children. He calls such to the exercise of faith in Christ, and to confidence in Himself as the God and Father of all who believe in His Son. He directs the worldly-minded Jews to say: "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth? " The woman of Samaria, with whom our Saviour conversed at Jacob’s well, was doubtless a great sinner, and yet Jesus directed her to pray for the Spirit of grace-"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The evangelist tells us what he meant by these words-"He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John 7:39). It may, indeed, be plausibly objected to this doctrine, that without spiritual influence men cannot pray to God in an acceptable manner; why, then, should they be asked to pray for the Spirit until certain that they have the Spirit? Let not proud mortals call in question the wisdom of God’s commands, or the duty of endeavouring to comply with them. Was there ever a more rebellious set of men than the ancient Israelites that came out of Egypt? Yet when they were commanded to "go forward" when the sea was before them, they did not pause and say, "Why should we go forward? Better to die by the swords of the Egyptians than amid the devouring waters." Stubborn as they generally were, they complied with the Divine command, and had no reason to regret their obedience. The man whom our Lord commanded to stretch out a withered arm did so without hesitation, and his inability was not felt. Happy would it be for all men if they could be induced to make the Word of God, and not the reasonings of their own minds, the rule of their conduct.

Sinners when brought to serious consideration are not at first sensible of their own utter inability to convert themselves. They generally make many attempts to forsake their sins and amend their lives before becoming thoroughly convinced that there is no hope for them in themselves. But this discovery, instead of leading them to despair, should drive them to the only true refuge of lost sinners. The salvation of our souls is impossible with men, but not with God. It is His glory to show the strength of His arm in cases when creatures can do nothing. Jeremiah describes what should be the conduct of anxious sinners in the case of repenting Ephraim. God heard him bemoaning himself thus-"Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." Does Ephraim then say, there is no hope? There was indeed no hope for himself, in himself, but what he could not do, he knew could easily be done by God. "Turn thou me," he said, "and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God." This prayer was speedily heard, and Ephraim becomes God’s dear son, his pleasant child; God earnestly remembers him, His bowels are troubled for him, and He will surely have mercy upon him. Manasseh was a singularly wicked prince: he made the streets of Jerusalem to run with the blood of God’s witnesses; yet he prayed, and the Lord was entreated of, and pardoned him. We do not read that Simon Magus prayed, as Peter advised him to do. But that sorcerer is no fit example for men seeking the salvation of their souls.

Let the unconverted be impressed with a sense of their need of the gracious almighty influences of the Holy Spirit, and present their humble supplications to the Lord. While they are yet speaking, He may hear and answer them. Who can tell but that even now He may be secretly inclining them to

compliance with the directions of His word, that He may begin and carryon the work of grace in their souls. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Those who have already received the Spirit are enabled by Him to continue instant in prayer. The Spirit of grace is a spirit of supplication, a spirit of adoption, making us cry, Abba, Father; and what better use can we make of His influence than to pray for larger communications of it. He to whom this living water is given will thirst no more for the pleasures of sin; but as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so will he thirst for new supplies of the grace which includes in it everything truly good. The promises of Scripture encourage us to pray for the Spirit. When Christ came into the world, He renewed the promise of the Spirit already published by the ancient prophets. When He was about to die, He comforted His disciples by the assurance that He would send the Comforter unto them; and He did not fail to put them in mind of the same promise after He had risen from the dead. Let all, then, be encouraged to pour forth their desires and supplications before God for the effusion of His Spirit. He was promised to the disciples, but not to them only. He was to come and convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. He was promised to the apostles, but not simply for their personal benefit, but to fit them for preaching that Word which was to be the ministration of the Spirit of life to the dead. When we pray for the Spirit, it should be with importunity, it is insulting to the Hearer of prayer to ask such a priceless blessing with feelings of indifference or formality. We ought also to present this request with a due sense of our own unworthiness. The gift of the Spirit to dwell in polluted hearts is as wonderful an illustration of the riches of Divine grace, as the gift of the Son of God to be "made sin for us, who knew no sin." Nothing but inexcusable pride can suggest the thought that holy resolutions or honest attempts at reformation can confer a title to the most inestimable blessing which sovereign mercy can bestow. At the same time we ought to present our supplications with a firm persuasion that God will not deny our requests for His own name’s sake. When God promised by Ezekiel to put His Spirit within disobedient professors, to cause them to walk in His statutes, He adds this humbling consideration-"Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, 0 house of Israel" (Ezekiel 36:25-32). But he calls upon the house of Israel at the same time to inquire, and to expect the accomplishment of the promise (Ezekiel 36:37).

Having prayed for the Spirit, we must look and wait for an answer. The Church waited long for the coming of the Messiah, who at length appeared in the world at the time appointed by Divine wisdom; and one great end of His appearing was that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith; for this end also He ascended on high, that He might send down the Spirit. Let the knowledge of all this confirm our hope of those communications without which we can obtain no benefit from what Christ has already done or is now doing in our behalf. But whilst we pray and wait for spiritual influence, let us beware of provoking God to deny us His grace. If we have been enabled to pray earnestly and sincerely for the Spirit, we may feel assured that He has been already exerting His influence, and will certainly fulfil the desires which He has excited; but if we indulge our carnal inclinations whilst imploring His sanctifying grace, it is too evident that we are insincere in our requests. It is true that no man can begin the work of sanctification within himself, but must continue under the dominion of sin until the Spirit takes possession of his heart. But sinners can make themselves more unholy than they are-just as, through the common operations

of the Spirit even before conversion, they may refuse to gratify many of the desires of sin. He that stole may restrain his hands from stealing, the swearer may refrain his tongue from oaths, the man who rolled sin as a sweet morsel in his thoughts may turn his mind in some measure to the consideration of the things that belong to his eternal peace. The sinner who prays for holiness, but makes no effort to stem the current of iniquity within him, is a dissembler. He is not only destitute of the Spirit, but destitute of that serious concern about salvation which the Spirit generally excites, when about to enlighten men in the knowledge of truth. Our praying to God in the name of the Son, for the Spirit, might have been discussed under former heads, as part of the duty which we owe both to the Father and to His Son Jesus Christ, from whom we are to expect the gift of His Spirit. But it must be remembered that each Person of the Godhead glorifies each of the other Divine Persons. The Father and the Son glorify the Spirit in sending Him, and the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son in coming and doing those works for which they send Him. By praying the Father that we may give us the Spirit through the Son, we render unto the Holy Ghost such glory as pertains to His special office in the work of our salvation. We acknowledge that we are no less dependent upon His grace than upon that of the Father and the Son, and that without Him we cannot even cherish a good thought in our hearts.

IV. - DEPENDENCE ON HIS PROMISED HELP.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."- Zechariah 4:6.

Here there are two errors to be avoided. First, Let us beware of placing our dependence upon ourselves. Self-conceit naturally tempts to self-dependence. Men are apt to trust in themselves that they are righteous, when not impressed with a sense of their natural inability for doing anything that is well-pleasing to God. Second, Beware of that despondency which is so often occasioned by deep personal convictions of weakness and depravity. How often have we to complain of languor in our religious services,-our affections are dull and spiritless, and a thousand distracting thoughts push themselves into our minds. Grieved and perplexed, we are at such times ready to say, "Why should we attempt to wait upon the Lord? We are quite unfit for communion with Him, all our efforts to keep the heart steadfast in duty issue only in shame and disappointment." In such a state of mind let us reflect that it is part of the office of the Holy Spirit to "strengthen with might in the inner man," and to sanctify "our whole spirit and soul and body." If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. If spiritual vigour come by the exertion of our own unaided powers, then the Spirit is promised in vain, and He has undertaken an office which, being superfluous, can bring Him no glory! A moment’s reflection will show that the grace of the Spirit, to help our infirmities, is no less needful than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to purchase our salvation. We know that the Son of God came and died as it was written of Him in the volume of the book. And the Spirit is no less willing to fulfil His part in the economy of grace by fitting us for every good work. The Three Persons of the Godhead show forth the equality of the glory of their grace and power in the work of human redemption. The special agency of each is indispensably necessary for the completion of the glorious plan. That we may be able, without self-dependence on the one hand, or unnecessary fears on the other, to undertake the performance of the duties which God requires of us, we ought to make ourselves well acquainted with the mission of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of that help which He engages to afford in the service of God. Until we know in some degree what we may expect in the way of Divine help, presumption or despondency will spoil our offering; but the more we are acquainted with the grace

and the office of the Spirit, we shall advance the more cheerfully and successfully in the path of duty. Prayer is one of those exercises to which Christians are daily called. Their necessities require it. God enjoins it. But how shall we pray in a proper manner? How shall we obtain that deep reverence of the Divine Majesty, that firm confidence in God’s mercy, and those fervent desires for spiritual blessings without which our prayers are but a dead form? We are not only defective, but entirely destitute of every requisite qualification for acceptable prayer. How, then, shall we come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the High God? We dare not restrain prayer before Him, but are forbidden to approach without reverence and godly fear, without faith and love and holy desire. What, then, are we to do? We must pray, says the Apostle Jude, "in the Holy Ghost." We are not to desist from drawing near till we feel the Spirit inflaming our souls with love, but depending on His promised aid, we must come with boldness to the throne of grace, in the humble expectation that our spiritual sacrifices will be accepted, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and recommended by the powerful intercession of Christ. The command to pray in the Holy Ghost contains a promise in its bosom. He who never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain, would not have enjoined us thus to pray if we had not good reason to count upon His help. We do not expect from Him any new revelation, but we may warrantably look for illuminating power, which shall enable us to discern the value of those blessings promised in the Bible, and to form just conceptions of our own necessities. We cannot hope for such transporting views of God as the saints in heaven enjoy, but we may reasonably expect that we shall be animated with such apprehensions of the glory of God and of the excellency of His grace, as shall make us pour forth our desires before Him in the joyful confidence of being heard. "I will pour out," says God, "upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication." "We know not," says an apostle, "what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

We must not neglect such preparation for the service of God in prayer, or any other duty as becomes rational creatures, who know that they have to do with a Being who cannot be mocked. By preparatory meditation, by the study of the Word of God and of our own hearts, and by the consideration of God’s dealings with us and others, we should furnish ourselves with some knowledge of the things for which we ought to make request unto God. Diligence and humility are equally essential to success. Expectations of the help of the Spirit, whilst slothfully neglecting the rules which He has given in His Word, are presumptuous; and it is no less presumptuous to depend on our preparations, as if we had a sufficiency in ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God; but for this very reason we must endeavour to stand perfect and complete in all His holy will. As we must not neglect prayer, because we have not felt the Spirit moving us to pray, so we must not discontinue the practice of this duty because we cannot say that we have been conscious of His influence in performing it. We may easily be mistaken on this point. It is often extremely difficult to distinguish between the ordinary operations of the Spirit of grace and the natural workings of the mind. They are, therefore, best judged of by their tendency and effects. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there and nowhere else is liberty. If we worship God with that reverence and love and hope and joy, which reason itself tells us should be mingled with our devotions, we may be assured that the Spirit of God is operating powerfully within us, His presence being indicated by these fruits of the Spirit. What we have said of the duty of prayer is to

be applied to other religious services, all of which are to be performed in the exercise of those graces implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God. The great rule of gospel worship is laid down in these words: "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." As we cannot worship God acceptably but in the name of Christ, so neither can we worship Him aright except through the help of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:6). Amongst other reasons why we ought to value the ordinances of religion, this is one of the strongest, that God is accustomed through them to communicate His Spirit unto men. Hence the word of grace is called, the ministration of the Spirit, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We cannot obtain health by running away from the physician. Those who are sensual, not having the Spirit, ought to attend with all diligence upon the public administration of the Word, in the humble hope that while hearing, He who first caused it to be written, and now causes it to be preached, may make it the instrument of spiritual quickening to their souls. In the Acts of the Apostles we are informed that Paul was sent forth to minister the Gospel unto men, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The work which the Spirit only can perform is thus ascribed to Paul, just because His spiritual influences accompany the preaching of the Gospel, and are received by the hearing of faith. But the efficacy of the word of life is not confined to the sanctuary. The word is nigh unto us, even in our mouths and in our hearts. The Spirit may be received through the Word, in the use which we make of it in the exercises of the closet and of the family. These private duties are prescribed by God as well as those which have reference to the institutions of the Church. We must perform them all in the exercise of those holy graces which are the fruits of the Spirit. Thus only shall we find them useful for our improvement in holiness and our more abundant consolation. Blessed is the man whose strength is in God, and in whose heart are the ways of His tabernacle. Such persons shall go from strength unto strength, and everyone of them shall appear at last before God. The duties of Divine worship do not make up the sum of our religion. Love to men is no less requisite than love to God, and this, like the other, must be manifested by its fruits. But how shall we perform any duty which we owe to our fellow-Christians without spiritual help? All our services to our neighbours must be animated by charity. Should we give our goods to feed the poor, should we give our bodies to be burned, and yet be found destitute of charity, it profiteth us nothing. There is a natural as well as a spiritual love. The former is, indeed, amiable and pleasant when compared with that grossly selfish disposition which is so prevalent in the world, and it is to be feared that not a few professors of religion are satisfied with this kind of love, as if it were all that God required in that great commandment which regulates our duty to our neighbour. But we have not so learned Christ. Nothing can be truly well-pleasing to God which is not the work of His Spirit within us. Hence Christian love is called, love in the Spirit (Colossians 1:8). The Spirit given to Christians is called a Spirit of love, and the love of the Spirit spoken of by Paul (Romans 15:30) appears to me to signify that love to one another which is wrought by the Spirit in the heart of believers. Love is the great and animating principle of the communion of saints. "Let all things," says Paul, "be done in charity. But let us not be satisfied with any love which is not wrought in us by the Spirit. That humanity, which is a very beautiful trait of character when it is properly regulated, may greatly mislead when it is left to operate according to the dictates of human wisdom. The children of Israel might lay claim to humanity when they spared the nations of Canaan, and it is not at all improbable that they were impelled by this amiable principle to neglect obedience to the Divine command. But the love of the Spirit always operates according to the rules of His Word. Phinehas acted under the impulse of this love when he slew a prince of the

Simeonites and a Moabitish lady in the act of wickedness. There was true love to Israel expressed by Samuel when he killed Agag with the sword, just as Saul's pretended humanity to the same prince was the outcome of enmity to God's people, whose best interests were sacrificed to his own selfish purposes. Peter really loved his brethren of Judea in the Holy Ghost, but his complaisance to them at Antioch was no proof of it. Paul's heart burned with a purer love to Jewish as well as Gentile Christians, and to Peter himself when he rebuked that apostle to the face, because he was to be blamed. It is therefore necessary for us to depend on the Holy Spirit for constant supplies of grace for the acceptable discharge of duty towards our fellow-christians and all men. If left to ourselves, love would speedily disappear and give place to mutual coldness and contentions. In the love of the Spirit, ministers must preach, elders must rule, deacons must serve tables, and Christians must comfort, instruct, reprove, and edify one another. How beautiful and attractive would Christian societies become if pervaded with a spirit of love, and all their mutual services rendered in humble dependence on those promises which are our encouragement for the performance of every duty we owe to God or man! There are many offices of love which we owe to our relatives, to our neighbours, and to the world around us. The love which animates in such relationships must be excited and kept in action by the Divine Spirit. More of the religion of Jesus consists in service to others than is commonly supposed. Let every man in is own station and circumstances show the power of the Gospel of Christ. But that Gospel will never exercise its due influence upon our conduct, except by the power of the Spirit of Christ. Love, gentleness, meekness, faith, temperance, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness,-these precious virtues must spread themselves through every part of our life and character. But all these virtues, if they are Christian graces, are fruits of the Spirit. Now if we live in the Spirit, we must also walk in the Spirit, by practising those graces of which He is the author and finisher, and by habitual dependence upon Him for producing and maintaining those lovely tempers by which we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

V. - DILIGENT IMPROVEMENT 0F HIS FAVOURS.

"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."- 1 Corinthians 12:7.

There are gifts bestowed upon men by the Holy Spirit for the service of the Church and the good of the world; and He also confers graces of a saving nature for the personal benefit of those who receive them. The Spirit manifests His sovereignty in the distribution of these gifts and graces, and it should be ours thankfully to acknowledge His goodness, and use what He gives for the purposes contemplated in their bestowal. The Christians at Corinth were enriched with extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but many of them, forgetting from whom and for what end they were given, grossly abused them, to the prejudice of the Church and to the dishonour of their Divine Author. For this Paul sharply reproved them (1 Cor. xii.) We live not in an age of miracles, but we have no reason to complain if we are blessed with those better things that accompany salvation. If we have also received gifts which ay be made profitable to others, they should be diligently cultivated by the use of all proper means. This is a duty especially incumbent on ministers of the Gospel, and on those who have the office of the holy ministry in view. Even in the apostolic age; when supernatural endowments were so common, they were not to be made a pretext for sloth. "Till I come," says Paul to Timothy, "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all" (1

Timothy 4:13-15). It is sinful indolently to hide our talents in a napkin, but it is still more sinful to pervert them to purposes injurious to the interests of religion. It was said of a great man of a former generation that God had bestowed upon him great talents, and the devil had taught him how to use them. Woe to those men who turn the favours of God into engines of mischief to mankind, and destruction to themselves! Let us beware of such misapplication of our talents, that God may not lose the fruit of His goodness, and that there may be no ground for the reproach that the servants of Satan display greater zeal in their master's work than the servants of God. "Blessed is the man whom the Lord when he comes shall find so doing. He shall make him ruler over all that he hath." "The slothful servant shall be cast into outer darkness." Think not that ministers alone are called upon to employ their gifts to the advantage of the Church. All the members of the natural body are mutually helpful. The eye is the light of the whole body, its office is useful and honourable. But-shall the finger or the foot say, 'Because we are not eyes, we may take our rest; the body has no service to expect from us.' The lips, not only of good ministers, but of righteous persons in every rank of life, feed many. There are, indeed, eminent Christians on whom the Spirit of God has bestowed a very moderate portion of the gifts fitted to profit others. But to whomsoever little is given, of him little shall be required. Usefulness is not dependent on natural genius. A minister or church member whose talents, though below mediocrity, have been improved with diligence and humility, is a far more useful member of society than the man of brilliant parts, who, trusting to himself, is apt to become intolerant and self-willed. Great talents have often been a great plague to the Church, and men of moderate endowments have often been the happy instruments of making many wise.

It has been already observed that we must distinguish between the use of the gifts of the Spirit, and the exercise of His saving graces. The former are designed for the profit of others, and the latter, next to the glory of God, for our own benefit. But we cannot expect the Divine blessing in the use of our gifts if we are careless about the prosperity of our own souls. Besides, it is necessary, if even for the benefit of others, to mingle the exercise of the graces of the Spirit with the use of our gifts. Those are most likely to have their labours crowned with success who maintain a lively faith, a fervent charity, and a prayerful intercourse with Heaven. The history of the Church abounds in melancholy instances of the heresies, schisms, and mischiefs of every kind produced by unsanctified gifts, or by the remains of corruption in men, otherwise distinguished for holiness.

Although in our ordinary modes of speech we distinguish between the gifts and the graces of the Spirit, yet they both come under the common appellation of grace, in the language of the Holy Ghost. They are the effects of God's undeserved favour, and gratitude should powerfully constrain us to use them according to the will and for the glory of the Giver. To everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ, and as was said to His ancient disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give." We have not received for ourselves only. The steward of a great house would be faithless to his trust, if he should appropriate to himself his master's goods. He would be worthy of punishment were he to suffer the children to pine away through the scanty supply of that bread committed to his care, to be dispensed to them in proper season. We must be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Great is the kindness of the good Spirit. He not only bestows on us those favours that are necessary for our own happiness, but enables us to be public benefactors. We have bread enough and to spare. Faithfully improving the talents and opportunities we have received, we know not to what extent we may be the happy almoners of His

goodness by ministering the spirit of faith and love and of a sound mind to neighbours and friends. Think of the way in which the Apostle Paul employed the noble gifts that had been bestowed on him. He was deeply impressed with a sense of that grace which had so greatly enriched him. He acknowledged that by the grace of God he was what he was, and the grace bestowed upon him was not in vain. He went everywhere bearing aloft the lamp of the Gospel, and diffusing the light of salvation amongst the nations that were dwelling in darkness. Nothing could damp his ardour, nothing could intimidate his soul. So fierce was the opposition he encountered, it almost seemed as if all the devils in hell had put forth their united efforts against him, for he could protest by the rejoicing of Christians in Christ Jesus that "he died daily." But His love cast out all fear. If the devil had offered him the kingdoms of this world and their glory, on condition of slumbering on his throne, and leaving the work and the afflictions of the Gospel to others, his answer would have been ready. The reproach of Christ and His sufferings for the Gentiles were incomparably more glorious in his estimation than all the material splendour which can dazzle the eye or charm the imagination of men. Having the high honour of being put in trust with a ministry of unspeakable importance to his fellowmen, he cared not what he suffered, if he might finish his course with joy, and at the tribunal of Christ meet with men, women, and children who had been converted or edified by his labours. It would be of great service to ministers frequently to read and ponder the sublime thoughts of Paul on this subject (Ephesians 3:1, Ephesians 3:10). Our sphere of usefulness is far from being so extensive as his, and we cannot lay claim to such eminent accomplishments; but we are no less bound to improve the talents we have, and fill up our days with profitable work. At the judgment-seat we shall not be asked to account for what has been given to others, but for what has been put in our own trust. The man who had received one talent was punished because he had not used it for the interest of his Lord. If he had made it two talents, it would have been said to him as well as to the man who had made five talents ten, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

VI. - COMPLIANCE WITH HIS MOTIONS.

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." - Romans 8:14.

Here it is needful carefully to distinguish between mere mental emotion and the influences of the Holy Spirit. "Beloved," says the Apostle John, "believe not every spirit, for many false prophets are gone out into the world." As false prophets were often themselves deceived, so in an age when there are few pretenders to inspiration, powerful impulses may be felt in the soul, and may assume the appearance of suggestions from the Spirit of God when they are only the reveries of a heated imagination, or the delusive wiles of the prince of darkness, who can still transform himself into an angel of light. Of this, alas! we have many painful proofs in the history of the Church, not only in primitive times, but since the Reformation, and in our own day. We ought, therefore, to examine by the Word of God every strong inclination which we feel in our hearts, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. It is His province to lead us into all truth, to incline our hearts to the love of God and of men, and to teach us effectively that "wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Those inward desires which are not consistent with such gracious designs cannot be from the Spirit of God. Nothing can be more dishonouring to a virtuous man than to accuse him of counsels and actions that tend to the subversion of justice and the disturbance of society; and so, to ascribe to the Spirit

such suggestions as tend to the overthrow of morality or the injury of religion, is to reproach that Divine Being who is the author of all the goodness in the world. But when we feel powerfully drawn to comply with the will of God as revealed in His Word, we have no reason to suspect from whence the impulse comes. All tendencies towards goodness in the minds even of unregenerate persons are from the Spirit; His common operations go before, and prepare the way for His saving work on the souls of men. By the Spirit, Christ preached unto the sinners of the old world in the days of Noah. But they were stubborn and disobedient, and therefore the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." By continued opposition to His operations in our hearts, we are in danger of falling into the condition of the Israelites of old, "who rebelled against God, and vexed his Holy Spirit, wherefore he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them." As some men extinguish the clamours of conscience by plunging into sensuality or worldly business, there are others who silence the voice of the Spirit within them by short-lived fits of devotion, or attention to mere forms of duty. The devil will be well satisfied if he can so easily quiet the commotions of a heart meditating escape from his tyranny. If a man in spiritual anxiety rests satisfied with empty wishes like Balaam, or a superficial appearance of goodness, he complies not with the desires of the Spirit of Truth, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto men; but with the desires of spirits of darkness, whose constant aim is to draw sinners away from Christ and holiness. The devil cares little what men put in the room of Christ, but the Spirit of God will not suffer anyone who follows His guidance to rest anywhere, except in Him who is the only Saviour from sin and wrath.

Believers have the Spirit dwelling within them, and ought at all times to yield to His motions, walking onward in the path of duty, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left. But there are seasons in which they partake of His influence in more than ordinary measure, when He sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts, and gives them fresh, cheering discoveries of the grace of their Redeemer. At such times their souls make them like the chariots of Amminadib. The most self-denying duties appear pleasant: they run without weariness, and walk without fainting in the ways of the Lord. Such opportunities for abounding in the work of the Lord should not be neglected. David would by no means suffer them to pass unimproved. When he heard the Lord saying, "Seek ye my face," his heart replied, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." When he found his soul elevated by the majesty of the Lord, he said, "My heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise." Such exhortations are not unnecessary. The flesh so lusteth against the Spirit in believers that even a Peter and a Paul were under the necessity of watching diligently against the allurements of sin, for they felt a law in their members warring against the law of their mind. Paul even tells us that he needed a thorn in the flesh to prevent the misimprovement of an extraordinary favour. At other times the people of God may feel powerfully drawn to the performance of loving services to their fellow-men. Paul was called a madman for encountering so many deaths for the benefit of others, but, "Whether we be beside ourselves," says he, "it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause, for the love of Christ constraineth us." It was beneath the influence of good impressions on the hearts of the princes of' Israel that they contributed so liberally to the building of the temple at Jerusalem, and David did not suffer the opportunity to escape of exhorting the people always to retain as high a regard for the glory of God and the welfare of Israel. Moses displayed no less joy when he found that the Israelites had been stirred up by the influence of the Spirit to give their gold and silver in such abundance for the erection of a sanctuary where the Lord might dwell in the midst of His people. When conscience smites us, for some sin committed, or some duty omitted,

or carelessly performed, the inward workings of grief and shame and the desires after reformation we experience may be viewed as the suggestions of the Holy Spirit awakening us to repentance. To dispel our fears we ought not therefore to fly to business or pleasure, but to the mercy-seat. We ought prayerfully to consider our ways, to remember from whence we are fallen, to repent and do our first works.

It is a good maxim in common life, to defer nothing till to-morrow which can be done to-day. Nowhere has this maxim more need to be observed than in the sphere of religion. The wind, indeed, "bloweth where it listeth." The mariner cannot hold it in his fists, or let it forth at his pleasure, But God teaches him discretion in the management of his business, and he seizes the proper time for entering upon his voyage. If he should loiter and procrastinate when the favourable breeze is blowing, he may be obliged to remain in port till he finds it is too late to set out. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light, but the children of light may learn from the children of this world to be wise and to be ashamed of their own folly.

Christians! call to mind how long you refused compliance with the Spirit’s call; may not your own former folly teach you wisdom? If you did evil in your days of darkness, do not repeat such conduct now that you have become the children of light. Such behaviour will certainly be attended with peculiar aggravation. Do not, therefore, grieve the Holy Spirit by acting like the children of night and of darkness, when, through His grace, you have been made children of the light and of the day.

VII. - SHUNNING TO GRIEVE THE SPIRIT.

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."- Ephesians 4:30.

It is certain that the Spirit of God cannot be grieved in the ordinary sense of the expression. But the word has been chosen by Infinite Wisdom to express an important truth. Nothing can impress our minds with a deeper sense of the malignity of sin than to represent it as a grief to the Spirit of promise. Who does not shudder at the thought of grieving that blessed Person to whom we are indebted not only for our natural, but for our spiritual and eternal life? When we commit those sins by which He is said to be grieved, our guilt is not the less, because the expression must be understood in a figurative sense. We do those things that would grieve Him, if grief could make an impression upon a Divine Being. If He is not actually grieved, the reason is in Himself, not in us. We do what we can to interrupt the blessedness of the ever-blessed God, the fountain of all the blessedness that is found among the children of men. God is represented by Jeremiah as saying, "Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate." By another of His servants He tells us that "he is pressed under the iniquities of his people, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, or look upon iniquity.

Displeasing to God wherever witnessed, sin is doubly offensive when seen in those in whom He condescends to dwell as in a temple. The Lord was in ancient times exceedingly displeased with the profanation of His sanctuary. His wrath broke forth like a devouring flame against the two sons of Aaron, who offered incense with unhallowed fire in the Holy Place. A great king of Judah was suddenly struck with leprosy because he presumed to profane the temple by an unhallowed approach to God. These instances of Divine displeasure are instructive to us. "If any man," says

Paul, "defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." In another passage, he tells those Christians who did not possess their vessels in sanctification and honour, that they had forgotten the glorious relation in which they stood towards God as the temples of His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:4).

All sin committed by Christians grieves the Spirit of God, for it is His office to cleanse them from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. Still, it can scarcely be said that believers grieve the Spirit by those infirmities which are the natural and unavoidable results of the "body of death" within them, and whose presence and power they bitterly lament. Paul had no reason to think that he had grieved the Spirit, in the sense of his own exhortation, when he could say, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. So then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Romans 7:19). But Peter had good reason to know that the Spirit was grieved, when in a moment of weakness he wilfully denied his Master. Some of those sins by which the Spirit is specially grieved may be learned from the passage in which the injunction occurs. We grieve the Spirit of God by rash anger, for He is a Spirit of love and meekness and gentleness. We grieve Him if chargeable with dishonesty, than which nothing can bring a greater reproach upon our Christian profession. We grieve Him by unruly passions, malicious words, and all kinds of corrupt communication; for it is part of His gracious work to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, that we may be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake bath forgiven us (Ephesians 4:27-32). He is the Spirit of holiness, and how much He is grieved with all impurities of the flesh, the Apostle Paul shows in 2 Corinthians 6:1-18. As it is the office of the Spirit to comfort as well as to sanctify, He must be grieved when His consolations appear small in our eyes. Since these are more than sufficient to compensate for the loss of all the joys which flesh and sense can give, to think lightly of them is to treat their Author with contempt. If there be any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the Spirit, or any truth in the promise, that he who endures hardship for Christ’s sake shall be recompensed a hundredfold,-let us not grieve the Spirit by bereaving ourselves of His comforting influence, though it be with a view of preserving our fortunes or even our lives.

Some are guilty of despising the consolations of the Spirit, though in the advancement of their secular interests they neither deny the truth nor violate the laws of righteousness. They are so eager in worldly pursuits, and cold-hearted towards the pleasures of religion, they plunge so deeply into the enjoyments and affairs of the present life, that they have no time or inclination to meditate upon the love of God, and those precious discoveries of truth and goodness by which the Holy Spirit carries on His comforting work. It is His office to raise our souls above the world, to inspire us with sublime views, and fix our hearts upon those grand objects which are despised by earthly-minded men. He cannot but be grieved, therefore, when the people of God obstinately cleave to the dust, and refuse to rejoice in His consolations. Have we not reason likewise to add, that the Comforter is grieved when good men reject His consolations, and give themselves up to immoderate grief. It is not the will of God that His people should spend their days in unavailing sorrow. He is kind and gracious, and takes pleasure in their happiness. He hath stored His Word with precious comforts. He hath sent His Spirit to apply them to the souls of His servants. If they harden themselves in sorrow, they refuse His precious gifts; by their complaints, they dishonour Him before the world, and obstruct the sanctifying as well as the comforting work of the Spirit; for" the joy of the Lord is our strength."

Grieve not, therefore, the Holy Spirit of promise by counteracting His operations. Should He discontinue His kind influences and leave you to yourselves, how wretched shall be your condition! Remember David’s mournful complaints, and his sorrowing prayers (Ps. 32:51). Remember the sad case of Solomon, when the Lord was displeased with him for his manifold offences, after he had appeared unto him twice. Remember the tears of Peter. Consider the love manifested by the Spirit to yourselves, in being willing to make your souls and even your bodies His dwelling-place. Think of the guilt and injury incurred by grieving and provoking Him to depart from you; you will lose your comfort, your love, your spiritual health and vigour, you may be compelled to complain of the terrors of the Lord; and for days or months or years you may be made to go mourning without the sun; above all, you cannot tell how fatally you may be suffered to fall, thereby dishonouring your Christian profession, grieving the hearts of the godly, and giving occasion for triumph to the enemies of the cross of Christ. On the other hand, those who readily comply with the dictates and motions of the Holy Spirit enjoy a peace which passeth all understanding. They walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. They enjoy a rich anointing of the oil of gladness, which makes their face to shine, and strangers to godliness are sometimes gained to Christ by the attractive influence of their Christian graces.

VIII. - PROMOTING HIS DESIGNS.

"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; ... he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."- John 16:8, John 16:13-14. The great purpose for which the Spirit is promised and given, is the manifestation of the glory of Christ, in the advancement of His kingdom through the conversion of sinners, and the building up of saints in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation. For this end, the Spirit bestows His gifts, consolations, and graces upon the children of men. Everything done in opposition to these designs must be offensive, and everything done in a proper way for their accomplishment must be well-pleasing in His sight." Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit," said Stephen to his persecutors. "As your fathers did, so also do ye." The Jews imagined that they only resisted men like themselves, when they opposed the ministrations of the ancient prophets, but in reality they resisted the Holy Ghost, who spake by their lips, and wrote by their pens, those precious truths through which He carries on His gracious designs in the world. To resist the Holy Spirit must be extremely wicked. The murder of Stephen would have been an atrocious action if he had been only an innocent man unjustly put to death by an unruly mob. But the malignity of the crime consisted in the opposition and indignity done to the Spirit of God. Stephen was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. The doctrine he taught was the ministration of the Spirit, the miracles he wrought were the seals of the Spirit, the words he spake were in "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." When he was cruelly stoned to death, his, murderers did despite to "the Spirit of grace."

It is sad to think that professing Christians have too often imitated the unbelieving Jews in resisting the Holy Ghost, by oppressing and persecuting their fellow-men, for no other reason than their fidelity to Christ, and their zeal in furthering His gracious purposes. The Spirit employs men as His instruments, and what is done to them is in effect done to Himself. In the absence of violent persecution, His work is often hindered by a spirit of strife and controversy prevailing among Christians. When the apostle had reckoned up the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), he adds

this important injunction, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." The gifts of the Spirit are bestowed in varying measure, but they are all vouchsafed for the same great purpose. Instead, therefore, of despising some, and envying others, we ought to unite in glorifying God for His goodness to the Church and to the world-as manifested in these diversified operations. Did Moses envy those to whom God had given His Spirit, as well as to himself? Did he not rebuke Joshua when, in his mistaken zeal for himself, he was led to envy others. None of his brethren in the apostleship envied Paul because he was enabled to "labour more abundantly than they all." On the contrary, when they saw the grace bestowed on one who had been a bitter enemy of their Lord, they gladly gave him the right hand of fellowship. For his part, Paul rejoiced in the gifts bestowed on his fellow-labourers. He encouraged and strengthened those who were far inferior to, himself, and did all that lay in his power to promote the success of their labours in the churches. His conduct in this respect is well worthy of our imitation. How much evil might have been prevented, how much good might have been done, if those ministers who desired to be found faithful to Christ had always been as zealous in promoting one another’s usefulness as they have often been in destroying it. Paul rejoiced greatly that Christ was preached, even when the preachers wanted to bring his own name into disrepute. Like him, let us detest the mean and selfish spirit which would obstruct the usefulness of any man whose heart is bent upon advancing the honour of Christ, and promoting the spiritual welfare of his fellow-men.

Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that there is no infringement of the rule of charity in our vigorous opposition of all error. Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached even by those men who preached Him out of strife and contention, supposing they would add affliction to his bonds. But he was far from rejoicing that Christ was preached (if He could be said to be preached at all) by the men who joined the works of the law with the righteousness of Christ as the ground of our hope. In his estimation, these men preached another Gospel, which yet was not another, but a subversion of the Gospel of Christ. He wished that these men were cut off from the Church as her troublers-the Achans in the commonwealth of the spiritual Israel! Our duty to the Spirit, as well as to our Lord Jesus Christ, demands zeal for the truth and purity of the Gospel, as well as unflinching opposition to every form of false teaching, which would privily bring in damnable heresies (2 Peter 2:1; Gal. iii.) It is the office of the Spirit to enlighten men in the knowledge of Christ, and of the way of salvation; and we co-operate with Him in His work when we hold forth the word of life, pure and unadulterated, to the world, and contend earnestly for the purity of the faith.

Whatever friendship we cherish for those persons who promulgate unscriptural doctrines, truth claims a warmer attachment, and we must oppose to the uttermost every sentiment that may prove dangerous to the souls of men, or that may become the seed of other errors still worse than itself. At the same time, we ought to maintain and promote the interests of truth and holiness in a spirit of love and meekness and goodwill to all (1 Peter 2:1). The Spirit of God needs no help from us in doing His work,-He can perform it as well without instruments as with them; but He honours us in employing the gifts and graces with which He has enriched our souls, and in furnishing us with opportunities of being useful to one another, and thus binding fast those cords of love by which life is rendered sweet and pleasant. The happiness of heaven itself will be increased by the recollection of our mutual beneficence.

IX. - MOTIVES TO THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR DUTIES TO THE SPIRIT.

"I beseech you, . . .for the love of the Spirit."- Romans 15:30. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh."- Acts 2:17.

There are many considerations fitted to impress our minds with a sense of our obligation to attend to the duties which we owe to the Spirit.

First.-The divinity of His Person.

He is God and not man. To trifle with our fellow-men is rude,-to neglect the duties we owe them is a violation of the social bond; but if a man sin against a Divine Person, who can comprehend the exceeding sinfulness of the action!

Second.-The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God.

If we owe any regard to Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, let us show it by our reverence of the Eternal Spirit, through whom He offered up Himself, a spotless sacrifice to God. If we think with gratitude of the everlasting love of the Father, who saves and calls us with a holy calling, let us give a cordial and affectionate reception to that Spirit, by whom He applies to our souls the benefits prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

Third.-We live udder the New Testament dispensation of the grace of God, udder which it was promised that the Spirit should be liberally communicated to the sons of men. This promise published by the ancient prophets, was frequently repeated by the Lord, and specially dwelt upon, in the discourse which He addressed to His disciples, for their consolation, before He suffered. By the rich effusion of the Spirit in the first days of the Gospel, we have obtained a clearer revelation of the grace of God than was enjoyed by the saints under the Old Testament. According to the genius of the present dispensation, we are admitted to more intimate fellowship with God, and can use greater boldness in our approaches to the throne of mercy. To the grace of the Spirit we are indebted for these distinguishing privileges. The Old Testament believers called Him the "free Spirit," and the "good Spirit;" but we rejoice in Him as the "Spirit of Grace." Our ingratitude admits of no excuse, if we do not keep at a great distance from everything that may grieve or offend Him.

Fourth.-Our own interest should induce us to give the Holy Spirit the honour which is His due.

We depend on Him for the life and happiness of our souls. In our unconverted state it was owing to His restraining influence that we did not plunge into all manner of wickedness; and if we have now any good thing in us toward the Lord God of Israel, we are indebted for it to the blessed Spirit. He who has begun the good work must carry it on till it is perfected. Of ourselves, we can do nothing but what is evil, but if we are led by Him, we shall go from strength to strength, and at last appear in Zion before God. Men value the particular kind of happiness which suits their taste. Worldly men place their happiness in the things of the present life, and they will not rashly cast them away. Christians place their happiness in enjoying and resembling God; surely, therefore, it is fitting that they show a due regard to that blessed Spirit who alone can shed abroad the love of God in their hearts, and beautify them with His image.

Fifth.-We are baptised in the name of the Spirit as well as in that of the Father and of the Son. By this seal of the covenant we are brought into special relationship with God. We should often reflect upon our baptism-that we may neither forget what to expect from each Person of the Godhead, nor what solemn engagements we are under to render to them the honour and worship which they

justly claim. A human covenant is esteemed so sacred that no man disannulleth or addeth thereto. How inexcusable are those who wilfully disregard their covenant engagements with the most high God.

Sixth. -Our own prayers lay on us a solemn obligation to commit ourselves to the guidance of the good Spirit. A regard to the command of Jesus will lead us often to pray for the Spirit. And why do we pray for Him, but that we may be enlightened, guided, sanctified, comforted, and prepared for the inheritance of the saints in light; and not, surely, that we may insult, despise, and rebel against Him. If we pray for the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit, that our prayers may not be turned into sin. We pray for the Spirit when we pray for any spiritual blessing. They are all given by His hand, and every petition for them is a bond laid upon us to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

Seventh.-Sins against the Spirit are represented by our Lord as very dangerous.

One of them is declared by Him to be unpardonable. We have reason to bless God that every sin against the Spirit is not as fatal to the souls of men as blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This unpardonable iniquity cannot be committed by any man who bas received the Spirit as a sanctifier. But from the malignity of that most pernicious of all transgressions, we may reasonably infer that every sin against the Spirit must be exceedingly offensive to each of the three Divine Persons. To the Spirit Himself, whose grace and condescension is despised. To the Father and to the Son, whose agent He is in applying the blessings of salvation to the children of men.

It may be added, that other sins may lead to blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Those in whom He dwells, as in a temple, cannot, indeed, fall into this iniquity, because the Spirit Himself is their powerful preserver. But shall they venture to the brink of this awful sin by grieving or resisting Him, knowing He will effectually keep them from falling over the precipice? This would be to sin because grace abounds,-to turn the grace of the Spirit into lasciviousness. Besides, they may be left to fall into very grievous transgressions, as a punishment for their rashness, and thus stain themselves with spots very unlike the spots of God’s children. Are you still strangers to the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit? Cry mightily to God, that He may be given to you as a spirit of light and love, of power, and of a sound mind. Let the Word of the truth of the Gospel be daily in your hands; let it be fixed in your memories; let it be the theme of prayerful meditation. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit. While you read, ere ever you are aware, you may be made to see wondrous things out of God’s law, to taste its heavenly sweetness, to feel its divine power. The Spirit of God has effectually convinced, enlightened, and converted thousands of sinners whilst they were attending to the Word written, or the Word preached. Wait for Him, therefore, in the use of appointed means; and while waiting, guard against everything in thought, speech, or behaviour likely to quench His gracious influences. Have you already received the Spirit? Keep alive upon your minds a sense of the duty which you owe Him. Think of the many proofs He has given of His infinite grace and condescension. Consider how wicked and dangerous it is to grieve Him, and how dependent you are on His help and protection. Blessed is the man whose strength is in God. "He that soweth to the spirit reapeth life everlasting." If we be led by the Spirit, then we are the sons of God; and if sons, "then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

# S. GOD'S AGENCY IN WAR!

GOD'S AGENCY IN WAR!

By George Lawson, 1811

(edited by Arthur Pink, 1941)

Does God punish nations for their wickedness under the Christian dispensation as He did during Old Testament times? If He did not we should have to discontinue the use of many of the Psalms in the praise of God. David often speaks of the righteousness of God's judgment against the nations, and if it were a glorious expression of the Divine justice in the days of old to punish guilty nations, why is it to be thought that He is now weary of exhibiting such specimens of the excellency of His administration? It is still true that the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment and that His holiness will be sanctified in righteousness. The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ had not been long established in the world before a wrath came upon Judah to the uttermost, because that people had killed Jesus the Savior, and slain the Prophets and Apostles whom He sent unto them (Matthew 22:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:16).

The book of the Revelation gives us a concise view of the series of Divine administration in the world under seven seals, seven vials, and seven trumpets—and it is plain that the calamities predicted under each were judgments to be inflicted upon the peoples for their iniquities. Under the fifth seal we find a complaint presented before God by the souls of those who were slain for His Word and for the testimony of Jesus. Under the sixth seal we find a prediction of tremendous revolutions announced against their persecutors. Under the trumpets awful judgments were inflicted on the nations for sins that are expressly named. After the sounding of the sixth trumpet it is said that the men which were not killed by these plagues, "yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, the idols of gold and silver," etc. (Revelation 9:20-21). When the third vial was poured out and the fountain of water became blood, John heard a voice saying, "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments" (Revelation 16:7). So, too, mystical Babylon is to b destroyed because she is "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." But it may be objected: Is it not inconsistent with that humility which becomes such short-sighted creatures as we are to ascribe the particular transgressions which have kindled the Divine displeasure against those nations which are ruined by the agents of His providence? It would certainly be inconsistent with that reverence which we owe to God and that charity we owe to our fellow creatures to assign reasons for their calamities, when we are not authorized by the Word of God to do it. But the Scriptures plainly tell us what those offenses are which ordinarily bring down the displeasure of God on guilty nations, and they require us to give Him the glory due unto His works by observing and acknowledging His righteousness. Wise men who contemplate the works of nature inquire why the great Creator has given to various creatures different powers, propensities, and instincts. But how would they understand the wisdom and goodness of their Maker if they should, through an affected humility, disclaim all knowledge of His intentions in dispensing His gifts so variously? And how can we make that improvement of the works of the

King of nations if we shut our eyes against that light by which we might judge of the reasons of His conduct?

The Scriptures tell us what those crimes were for which God spread desolation and misery over many countries in ancient times. If we knew that the same or the like crimes abounded in those countries which have recently been the theater of the judgments of Heaven, ought we not to be impressed with a new sense of that holiness which appears in the ways of the Lord and to learn righteousness when His judgments are on the earth? Our Lord censured those who thought that the men on whom the tower of Siloam fell were greater sinners than others in Jerusalem. And we, too, would deserve severe censure if we should pretend to judge of the degree of criminality chargeable on any nation from the calamities which have befallen it. Those are not always the most wicked nations that are first or that are most awfully punished. The Chaldeans were the worst of the heathens, and yet they were the ministers of Divine Providence in the punishment of all the surrounding nations (Ezekiel 7:1-27; Jeremiah 25:1-38).

The Sovereign Ruler of the earth gives no account of His matters, and we can claim no right to call Him to account. He has reasons worthy of Himself for His conduct when He extends His patience to some people or nations to a greater degree than He does to others less wicked. But while we give Him the glory of His sovereignty, we ought not to hide our eyes from the plain proofs which He is pleased to give us of His hatred of sin. The old lying Prophet who deceived the man of God of Judah and tempted him to eat bread when God had forbidden him to was undoubtedly a greater sinner than the Prophet whom he deceived, yet the patience of God to that offender should not hinder us from admiring His wisdom and justice in punishing a good Prophet for his disobedience.

Many nations have been in our day (1810) brought very low. Several thrones have been subverted (by Napoleon). It is our duty to hear the voice of God in such tremendous dispensations calling upon us to learn righteousness from His judgments which are abroad in the earth. But how can we learn righteousness from them if we affect to be ignorant of a truth so often taught in the Bible—that fat lands are turned into barrenness and countries covered with desolation for the iniquities of those who dwell in them (Psalms 107:1-43; Amos 9:1-15). Far be from us to infer from the miseries of any nations the sins for which they are punished. This would be to imitate the reprobated conduct of Job’s friends, who judged him to be a hypocrite and atheist because he suffered the most grievous afflictions from the Providence of God. But when we know that nations have greatly sinned against God, and that they have greatly suffered, we may justly infer that their sins were the cause of their sufferings. God’s ways, like Himself, change not.

The New Testament Prophet speaks of vials full of the last Judgment to be poured out upon the Beast and his worshipers. When those vials are poured forth, praise is given to God by those who had escaped from infection: “great and marvelous are Your works Lord God Almighty: just and true are Your ways, You King of saints, Who would not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name, for You only are holy for Your judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:3-4). Are we not taught in those words that the ground of God’s quarrel with the Popish nations, when they shall be visited with His judgments, is to be made so manifest as to afford just cause for praise! Some may object, If by the worshipers of the Beast are meant Romanists, they cannot deserve grievous judgments for holding fast a religion which they had been taught by their fathers and which they sincerely believe is well-pleasing to God. Answer: the Israelites who revolted under Jeroboam believed the

worship of idols was acceptable to the Lord, yet the error of their judgment did not shelter them from His vengeance.

The perversion of religion in Israel was accompanied by many other vices which were so many causes of God's wrath against them. And are not the errors of Popery equally inimical to good morals? It is a pernicious deceit to suppose it is of no great consequence what men believe if their morals are good. Our faith ought to be pure as well as our morals, and corruptions in faith never fail to have an immoral tendency. Woe be unto us, who abhor the errors of Popish nations, and yet are perhaps as bad in many respects as they are, and in some respects worse. Our sins are greatly aggravated by the superior advantages that we enjoy. We have been wonderfully preserved from threatened judgments—let us not be high-minded, but fear. God does what He pleases but His justice as well as His mercy endures forever.

There are other reasons beside the punishing of guilty nations for which God makes use of His battle-axe and weapons of war, in the destructive work for which they are fitted. By the revolutions accomplished in the world He gives striking manifestations to mankind of the vanity and instability of all earthly things, and of the infinite difference between those glories of the world which so much dazzle the eyes of beholders, and the glory of His own eternal throne. We walk too much by sight, and not by faith. When we see men elevated to uncommon heights of power we almost think they are immortal. When we behold cities enriched by commerce or the spoils of enemies, surrounded with strong fortifications and defended by mighty armies, we almost think they are eternal cities, as Babylon and Rome were once thought to be by their inhabitants, and perhaps by their enemies, too. When a kingdom has stood long in its strength we are ready to dream that such kingdoms are everlasting.

Thus we are tempted to give those honors to men and sublunary things which are due only to Him who lives forever and ever. By the fall of mighty kingdoms and the subversion of thrones, we are made not only to see but feel the folly of trusting in princes, of bestowing excessive admiration on earthly grandeur, and of looking more at things seen and temporal than those which are eternal. When the day of the Lord is upon the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Bashan and the ships of Tarshith, His intention is that the things which are great and high in the eyes of short-sighted men may be brought low, that the Lord alone may be exalted. Thus when the Prophet predicted the destruction of the glorious city of Tyre—the London of those days—he assigned this reason for God's awful purpose against that city: "The LORD of hosts has purposed it to stain the pride of all glory to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth" (Isaiah 23:9).

We ought certainly to mourn when God punishes guilty nations for the misery of our fellow creatures and for the indications which He gives us of His displeasure against them. But if we believe the world is governed by the providence of Him who sees what is past and to come at one glance, we ought not to confine our views of the works of God to their present appearance but to remember that what He is now doing tends to something else, which in His time He will show who is the blessed and only Potentate, and that in His whole administration He keeps in view ends worthy of His wisdom and grace. Generations may indeed pass away one after another before those glorious results appear to men which are well known beforehand to the all-seeing Eye. We ought to satisfy ourselves with the well-grounded assurance that all the glorious things which are spoken of the City of our God shall be fulfilled, that not one good thing said or her shall fail. He will

bring light out of darkness and life out of death.

Perhaps we are too dim-sighted to see how those revolutions which bring so much misery and desolation can contribute to the good of mankind in their remoter consequences. We can however see how the prosperity of nations only too often tends to the increase of vice by giving opportunities to men to gratify their lusts. In such cases sore calamities are necessary for checking the progress of wickedness and forcing them, if they will not be virtuous, to set at least some bounds to their vices. History shows how the power of kings has often been employed to obstruct the progress of the Gospel, and therefore the destruction of their powers makes a way for the free course of the Lord's Word. Former revolutions have been made instrumental in the diffusion of the knowledge of Christ in ways that no human sagacity could have foreseen or conjectured. When the mystery of God is finished we shall see more clearly how He has brought a clean thing out of an unclean.

Another thing taught by our text (Jeremiah 51:20) is that when God is pleased to bring about awful revolutions in kingdoms He ordinarily makes use of men for His instruments. By so doing He shows forth His glory as the universal Lord, who rules not only in the raging of the sea but in the tumults of the people. It is His glory to make use of wicked dispositions and the unholy works of the worst of men for the accomplishment of His purpose. He makes the wrath and pride of man to praise Him. The robber, the murderer, the destroyer of nations are His servants. While they are, to the utmost of their power, doing the work of His great enemy, yet they are accomplishing His holy counsels. It is very wonderful in our eyes that the will of God should be fulfilled even by His greatest enemies: thereby He magnifies His righteousness as the Governor of the world, not suffering wickedness either in individuals or nations to pass unpunished. But what is most astonishing in this view of the Divine Providence is that even God's works of grace are carried on, not only in defiance of all the opposition that is made to them, but by means of the worst actions of wicked men and devils. Nebuchadnezzar, by the revolutions which he accomplished in many countries, prepared the way for the diffusion of the Gospel when it should be preached to the Gentiles. He scattered the Jews, the only nation that knew the true God, many of whom never returned to their own land. Thereby the Gentiles in many lands had some seeds of true religion scattered among them, which were to bring forth an abundant increase in days to come. It might easily be shown that all the great revolutions of the past contributed their part to the happy success of the Gospel in later times, and we have no reason to doubt that the present shaking of nations will have like consequences, although we cannot name the time or the manner in which the Lord will finish His "strange work" in righteousness and mercy.

The variety of God's works is no inconsiderable part of their glory. David praises Him in strains of rapture for the endless variety of His works of nature. He is no less worthy of praise for the wonderful variety of His works in the moral government of the world. It will at least be clearly seen that both when He is pleased to destroy nations by His own immediate agency (as at the Flood) or by employing human instruments, He acts in a manner most conducive to the fulfillment of His purposes. If He had punished all those guilty nations that had made themselves obnoxious to His justice by fire from Heaven, the history of mankind must have been completely different from what it is, and many works had been left undone which are the objects of high praise in the Psalms and in the prophetical writings of the Old and New Testaments.

Let us now draw some practical reflections from our text.

1. We learn one great advantage to be derived from history. When we survey the works of nature we lose the chief part of the pleasure and advantage which we might derive from the view if we forget they are the works of God. Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun, but this pleasure is greatly heightened and turned to devotion when we hear the voice of the heavens declaring the glory of God and the firmament showing His handiwork. So, too, we deprive ourselves of the richest advantage which history affords if we do not remember that the events which it records are the wondrous works of Him who is perfect in wisdom.

We are rightly saddened when we read of the fall of mighty empires and the carnage which has often been spread by the sword of the warrior. But we should remember that the sword of war is the sword of the Lord: that He musters the hosts of battle—that when mighty conquerors go forth they are the instruments of His Providence for accomplishing those overturnings which for wise ends He determined before any of us were born. With the same disposition we should read or hear the accounts which we receive daily of those events which are now happening in the world. Let us not forget that all men and their actions are under the superintendence of One who never errs. “I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7). If we hear of awful events we ought to admire that Providence which will bring order out of confusion and make darkness light to those who love Him.

There were heretics of old who confessed that all rational creatures were made by God but vile and noxious ones were made by the Devil. You are perhaps amazed that such foolish notions should enter the minds of men, but is it not equally unreasonable to suppose that the Providence of God is active only in the good and not in the wicked actions of men, that our blessings come from Him, but our calamities proceed from no higher course than some principle of evil? It is exceedingly dishonoring of God to suppose than any sin can be committed without His permission or any calamity befall men or nations that was not appointed for them in His eternal purpose.

2. Give unto God the glory of the solemn dispensations of His Providence towards sinful nations. In Psalms 50:1-23, Psalms 105:1-45, Psalms 106:1-48, Psalms 135:1-21 we find praise is given to God for His judgments upon guilty people which shows that there is a Divine excellency in such works, which excellency we are to gladly acknowledge. The entire book of Ecclesiastes is devoted unto an exposure of the vanities and vexations which cleave to every earthly enjoyment. In the Lamentations God’s people are taught to consider their distresses as a chastisement from the Almighty. Behold the desolations which He has wrought in the earth, and know that He is a just God as well as a Savior. Though slow to anger, He is great in power and will not at all acquit the wicked. When you see the desolation He has wrought in the earth be still and know that He is God. He will be exalted among the nations.

While we give Him glory as the God to whom vengeance belongs, let us not forget that mercy which He remembers in the midst of wrath. There is mercy to mankind even in those terrible calamities which bear hardest on our spirits when worse evils are prevented thereby and when we have reason to believe that good will result from them. The casting away of the Jews has brought salvation unto the Gentiles (Romans 11:11). What would have been the consequence if God had suffered wicked nations to walk age after age in their own ways without sending some of His terrible judgments to check the progress of sin? The world would scarcely have been habitable

through that excessive wickedness which would have overspread the nations. If men are not generally reformed by the judgments of God, they are at least incapacitated to be so wicked as they might otherwise be. What would be the state of any nation if there were no magistrates to punish crime? And what would the world become if the King of nations suffered their wickedness always to remain unpunished? Admire, then, the wisdom of Him who brings good out of evil.

3. The glory of the Divine sovereignty ought likewise to be acknowledged in the destruction of kingdoms and desolation of countries. If God should be pleased to inflict His tremendous judgments upon all sinning nations, the sons of men would soon be utterly consumed. He destroys some while He spares others, and who shall ask Him why He bears with nations more guilty than those whom He destroys and inflicts His vengeance upon those whose wickedness admitted of some excuse? His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out when He suffers some to live, become old and wax mighty in power, while others less wicked perish in youth. Instead of questioning His absolute sovereignty over the nations, admire His patience to us.

4. We ought to give glory to our Savior as well as to the Father who has committed all judgment to Him. God has given Him power to destroy as well as to save. The destruction of Jerusalem was one of the great days of the Son of man, in which His glory appeared in the destruction of His enemies as well as in the salvation of His followers. Then was fulfilled, in part, what our Lord foretold in the presence of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:64). The God of Zion lives, the King of Zion reigns over the nations: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King, and give praise to His name for His great and terrible acts even though they perceive not His intention. He did all things well when He was on earth. He does all things well in Heaven.

5. We ought to take warning from the destruction of kingdoms by Divine judgments. Some tell us the ways of God are so incomprehensible to us that it is not consistent with the modesty and humility of such short-sighted creatures as we are to presume to give an account of His awful dispensations. He does what pleases Him and gives not account of any of His matters, and although we ought to believe He does always what is right, yet the special grounds on which this judgment ought to be formed are often so high above us that we must leave them to the secrets of God. True, we cannot penetrate the depths of any of the Divine counsels, yet much is said in Scripture about the grounds of God’s displeasure against those nations whom He destroys, and Christian humility does not require us to regard those passages as sealed. Israel sinned greatly in the desert because they understood not the wonders of the Lord in Egypt, nor remembered the multitude of His mercies.

Our Lord, we are told, warns us in Luke 13:1-2 against presumptuous intrusions into the secrets of God’s counsel. True, He warns against the supposition that those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices were greater sinners than others, yet in the very next verse Christ declared the miserable fate of those men was a warning to all His hearers to repent, lest they, too, perish. We should learn from His words there not to reckon ourselves better men or our nation a less guilty one than those which have lately been spoiled of their independence, merely because we have not suffered like judgments, and we should also learn that the Lord’s voice in these judgments calls loudly to us, that we, too, may justly fear as great, or greater miseries, unless we repent.

But if their fate was a warning to others of the danger of impenitency, then sin must have been the cause of their miseries. It is not the execution of innocent men but of criminals that warns

spectators not to violate the laws of their country. Charity does not require us to be blind to the faults of other men or nations. If we do not believe anything to the disadvantage either of nations or of individuals when we have clear evidence of its truth, all history would be useless, for its pages are filled with accounts of human wickedness. When we know that all ranks of a nation are chargeable with the very iniquities which Scripture declares bring the wrath of God upon a people, ought we not to fear lest the same crimes among ourselves, if repentance prevail not, will bring the same ruin upon our own heads?

We may readily discover (especially from the book of Jeremiah) what were the charges which Good's Prophets brought against the people of Israel and Judah. And it cannot be denied that many of the same sins are prevalent among ourselves and that we have persisted in them in opposition to many warnings of the Word and Providence of God. Can it be denied that our iniquities have been highly aggravated by the greatness and clearness of our light by great and signal mercies, by solemn engagements to cleave unto the Lord? When God speaks to us by His Word can we be so impious as to turn a deaf ear to Him? When He confirms the solemn declarations of His Word by many awful works of His Providence, what excuse is left us if we are still disobedient to His voice? [Shall it also be said of Great Britain "I gave her space to repent, and she repented not?"— A.W.P.]

Is not a loud cry heard from every part of the Continent, that God is greatly displeased with the sins of the nations? What is Napoleon that he should be able to do so great things? The iniquities of the nations have put the sword into his hand and strengthened his arm. God is sore displeased with the contempt of His Gospel and Sabbaths, with the degeneracy of the Christian churches, with the wickedness of men of every rank, and has given commission to that terrible minister of His Providence to cut off and destroy nations not a few. Flee sin as from the face of a serpent. If all the serpents of the dust were commissioned to destroy us, they could not do us half the mischief that we have procured by our sins.

6. Use the means prescribed for averting from our land the dreadful calamities that have come upon other countries. But what can we do? Have we counsel or strength for war against an enemy flush with conquest, and conducted to new victories by commanders renowned for their courage and skill? Yet if you were called to expose your life for your king and country, such considerations ought not to deter you from a plain duty. If God be our Helper, we need not fear what man can do against us. But if that man is unworthy of the benefits which he derives from the government of his country, who would refuse to expose his life for its defense when Divine Providence calls him to do it? How much less does he deserve to share in these blessings who is so far from bearing his part in its defense that he adds, by his obstinacy in sin, to the causes of its danger, and perhaps of its ruin?

Our defense is in God, and He who provokes our Defender to depart from us is as really an enemy to his country as he who is chargeable with treason against the king. Although we should not increase the anger of the Lord by cursing and lying and other iniquities which bring down His wrath upon guilty nations, yet if we do not contribute our endeavor, in our places, to that reformation of conduct by which our judgments might be averted, we are but cold friends to our country. Yes, by neglecting what God requires of us as means of preventing judgments, we act the part of public enemies. They lie unto the Lord who pray to Him for the safety and success of our fleets and

armies and yet do not sincerely desire and earnestly endeavor to have those evils removed which, if God governs the nations, are the most formidable obstacles to their success. Turn you to Him from whom we have all deeply revolted; warn and exhort all on whom you can have influence to turn from the evil of their ways. Thus did the king and people of Nineveh: and they were spared.

7. Seek safety to yourselves in the evil day if it should come upon others. We cannot certainly say what will be the end of these wonders that are now taking place in the world. Who knows whether Britain will be able at all times to make an effectual resistance to the conqueror of the Continent? But we know that there is a kingdom which cannot be moved, and that all the faithful subjects of its King shall enjoy full security under His government. When God, by His Prophets, foretells the most tremendous events that shall ever come upon the world, He gives full assurance to His people that although He make a full end of the other nations, He will not make a full end of them.

Take the yoke of Christ upon you and learn of Him, and you shall not only be safe in the evil day but you shall look down with pity upon these oppressors that waste and destroy the nations of the world. We cannot certainly say that you shall be exempted from all share in these evils that go about from nation to nation. It may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. But if you should fall by the hand of violence, angels will be sent down from Heaven to receive your souls and to conduct them to the abodes of bliss, where no tyrant that wears a diadem, no ruffian that carries a sword can reach you—where you shall share with Christ in those glories which the Father gave Him.

When Habakkuk heard of the awful works which God was about to do in the land, his belly trembled, his lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into his bones (Habakkuk 3:16), yet he comforted himself with the well-grounded hope that he would rest in the day of evil and find everlasting solace and joy in the God of His salvation. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and He will make me to walk upon mine high places" (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

The overthrow of thrones and the desolation of kingdoms are terrible events: but we know of events far more awful for guilty men. The earth and its works shall be burned up: the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. In that day all the oppressors of the earth, if they died impenitent, shall receive the full recompense of all the indignities they did to God—of all the slaughter and devastation of which they were the guilty instrument. But all who were found faithful to God in evil times shall then also receive full reward of all that they did for the service of God and the benefit of men. If those who would not give a share of their bread to the hungry and of their drink to the thirsty shall have their part in the Lake of Fire with the devil and his angels, what chosen woes shall be the portion of the destroyers of their fellow-men? If every cup of cold water given to a disciple shall in no wise lose its reward, how rich will be the reward of those who exerted their utmost endeavors to convert sinners from the errors of their ways and to save guilty nations from destruction?!

sermon index

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