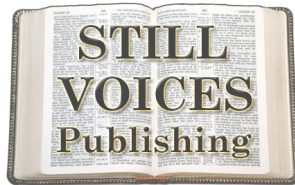

KING SOLOMON'S ADVICE

for the world

By Walter L. Porter, Ph.D.



Searcy, Arkansas

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Introduction

The origin of Solomon's wisdom

Soon after Solomon inherited the throne of Israel, about three thousand years ago, God spoke to him in a dream. Israel had entered into its most prosperous era, and Solomon was troubled about his ability to lead that great nation. It was then that God said to him in a dream, **“Ask what I shall give thee”** (First Kings 3:5).

Solomon asked not for power, wealth, or such things. Instead, he asked for a mind capable of making good decisions to help him rule his people. God was pleased with this response, and he granted his request. Furthermore, he gave him what he had not ask—wealth, power, honor—because, you see, Solomon asked for wisdom, which happens to be the key to all prosperity and success.

Solomon's wealth, power, honor, and glory were certainly very great, but he is best known for his wisdom. Indeed, his very name has been synonymous with that word ever since he lived. (You can read the record of Solomon's life primarily in First Kings 1-11, First Chronicles 28-29, and Second Chronicles 1-9.)

The Bible says about his wisdom,

And God gave Solomon exceedingly much wisdom and understanding, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the sons of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men: than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame was in all the nations round about.

And he spoke three thousand proverbs [only about 600 of which are preserved in the Bible], **and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes** [which means knowledge of natural science]. **And there came of all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom** (First Kings 4:29-34).

However, what the Holy Spirit chose to preserve from Solomon's writing contains lasting truth, words to help every generation know how to become wise. Here is what the record says about his teachings:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the words of understanding, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness and justice and equity, to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion, that the wise man may hear, and increase in learning, and that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsels, to understand a proverb, and a figure, the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (Proverbs 1:1-6).

And further, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge. Yea, he pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly—words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies. They have been given from one shepherd (Ecclesiastes 12:9-11).

Solomon's three books

Solomon's legacy consists of three books in the Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Many believe he also wrote Psalm 127.

Solomon recorded information and advice about many things in his three books. Ecclesiastes primarily contains his conclusions about the nature of this world. The first third of Proverbs has been called its introduction because the focus there is upon proclaiming the importance of wisdom and the dangers of folly. Most of the remaining part of the book contains approximately six hundred proverbs about various aspects of life. There is apparently no particular order to that listing. The last part of the book contains the advice of Agur and Lemuel that Solomon included in his book of Proverbs.

Song of Solomon presents a dialogue between Solomon and his wife. There is some disparity between its theme—one man, one

wife—and the fact that he ended with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Although Solomon is addressed as king in that beautiful book, it probably tells the story of his first marriage, in his youth, during a time when his heart was close to God, long before his many foreign wives led his heart astray.

There have been many fine commentaries written about those three books. My chief goal in writing this one has been to help show that the wisdom God gave Solomon, which is preserved in those books, is relevant for life in any generation.

My topical analysis of his wisdom

I have chosen a type of topical analysis to organize the textual material for the purpose of clarifying many of its lessons. As in Nave's Topical Bible,¹ verses, parts of verses, and series of verses are quoted as often as they were seen relevant to each topic; although no attempt was made to include every possible topic.

The handling of topics, however, is quite unlike that of Nave's digest. After compiling various topics, I then compared, subdivided, and integrated them in an effort to uncover their latent patterns and interrelationships, while also drawing attention to the harmony of its knowledge.

My analysis begins with the book of Ecclesiastes, presenting what Solomon discovered about the nature of the world and our existence in it. There the story is told about how he both experimented with his own life, and observed the lives of others, in his search for the way to happiness. He also tried to understand the nature and meaning of the world with its mysterious mix of good and evil. All that he found deeply troubled him, yet he remained convinced that God rules the world with great wisdom and purpose.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three explain Solomon's meaning of wisdom using material taken primarily from the first third of Proverbs, but also from Ecclesiastes. His concept of wisdom is complex. According to Solomon, wisdom in its broadest sense includes the whole of God's plan for creation. Included in that material are his words about the importance of wisdom for man-

1. Orville J. Nave, *Nave's Topical Bible: A Digest of the Holy Scriptures* (Nashville: The Southwestern Company, 1921).

kind and its relevance to our personal freedom, responsibility, and destiny.

The next four chapters present what Solomon said about the four most often mentioned personalities: the wise, the righteous, fools, and the wicked.

Chapter Four contains his advice about how to become wise. It begins with what is involved in discipline and the development of a love for knowledge. It includes an analysis of the basic qualities that are characteristic of all wise men.

Chapter Five explains the relationship between wisdom and righteousness, and presents the special qualities of righteous men.

Chapter Six describes the meaning of folly with its basic processes. It also reveals the characteristics of various kinds of fools and the penalties they receive.

Chapter Seven is about the wicked. This type of man mixes folly with his wisdom to create a perverted mentality. Unlike a simple fool, he is the man who lives a devious life of hypocrisy. From Solomon's various descriptions a composite is also formulated about this type of man to reveal his basic nature. He also mentioned in considerable detail what can be expected from that manner of life.

The remaining five chapters contain Solomon's advice about some of the common aspects of our lives: controlling our feelings, using our language, managing our finances, developing marriage and family relationships, and finally, advice about friends, neighbors, and society in general.

Chapter Eight gives Solomon's advice about such emotions as anger, envy, and pride. It also deals with the problem of regulating our various appetites.

Chapter Nine tells about the power of language for good and evil, and how best to use it.

Chapter Ten is about work and money. It contains Solomon's advice about how best to manage our business and occupation. It includes information about the care and maintenance of our possessions. It also contains what he said about the rich and the poor: what they are like, how they relate to each other, and a discussion of those factors responsible for poverty and wealth.

Chapter Eleven is about marriage and family. It is primarily based

upon the Song of Solomon which is treated as a model marriage demonstrating how best to succeed in promoting that most beautiful and intimate human relationship. It also contains Solomon's advice about the relationship between parents and children.

The last chapter presents Solomon's advice about living with our friends and neighbors in the most peaceful and constructive way. Also included there is advice for and about rulers and high officials together with information about those qualities that best promote the national health. The book concludes with a brief epilogue showing something of the relationship of Jesus with the wisdom of Solomon.

The words of Solomon found in those three books of the Bible are rich with useful information and helpful advice which is as relevant for these times as it was during his day. However, much of the text is difficult for modern man to interpret and understand. Therefore, I have sought to clarify both its major meaning and its current relevance by means of this type of analysis.

I also wish to point out that in some instances I have emphasized certain topics more than he did. I have taken this liberty because of the particular mentality I have perceived in today's world. There are some popular ideas so far afield from his teaching that I thought more needed to be said.

Learning from him

Dear reader, if you truly want wisdom, then first trust your Creator by reading the words he has provided for us in his holy book. Then work diligently to understand and apply them, keeping in mind what James said:

And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all generously and not reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by wind and tossed about. For that man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James. 1:5-8).

If you want to gain the most from the wisdom of Solomon, you cannot merely read his words, whether from this book or in the Bible directly. You must *study them*, by reading and rereading,

and by spending time thinking about what the words say. If you have a good memory, I highly recommend memorizing the entire book of Proverbs.

Wise words are powerful tools and weapons for our intellect. They are tools enabling us to reason more skillfully, be more persuasive, provide aid and comfort for others, and be productive in countless ways. They are powerful weapons to help us resist temptations, combat and expose deceit, and defeat evil in countless ways.

The more you make wise words a part of your life, the more you will be able to succeed in your endeavors. Therefore, I say to you again, do not merely read the wise words of Solomon, study them until they become a part of your intellect. Spend time with them the way a bodybuilder does with his exercise equipment. The effect on your mind will be just as apparent.

“Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, alone wise, to God is honor and glory into the ages of the ages. Truly” (1Ti. 1:17).

NOTE: All scripture quotations are from *A Conservative Version*. And I use gender relevant words in their historic meaning.

Chapter 1

What to Expect From Life

Solomon's test

Solomon not only sought for and created proverbs of practical advice, but he also delved deeply into philosophy. Most of his philosophical writing is found in the book of Ecclesiastes. In that book he tells how he sought answers to the great questions of life, those such as: What is good and evil? What is the meaning and purpose of our existence? What is the nature of the world? Solomon tells below how he was qualified to begin such a quest:

I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven (Ecclesiastes 1:12-13).

I communed with my own heart, saying, Lo, I have gotten for me great wisdom above all who were before me in Jerusalem. Yea, my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly (Ecclesiastes 1:16-17).

Searching for happiness

Solomon told how he experimented with his own life. He tried every kind of pleasure: the best food and drink, the best music and entertainment, the finest material goods. He had a thousand wives and concubines, and many servants. He took on great challenges, and he tried to improve everything around him. Solomon said he pursued happiness in many different ways to discover how best to live:

I said in my heart, Come now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure. ... I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine (my heart yet guiding *me* with wisdom), and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life.

I made for me great works. I built for me houses. I planted for me vineyards. I made for me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit. I made for me pools of water, to water from there the forest where trees were reared. I bought men-servants and maid-servants, and had servants born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all who were before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for me silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got for me men-singers and women-singers, and the luxuries of the sons of men, *and* a wife and wives.

So I was great, and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I kept not from them. I did not withhold my heart from any joy. For my heart rejoiced because of all my labor, and this was my portion from all my labor (Ecclesiastes 2:1, 3-10).

Solomon pursued happiness with as much zest, gusto, and vigor as any man. Certainly if any man was ever both wise enough and wealthy enough to succeed, it was Solomon. The Bible states that Solomon's glory—his wisdom, knowledge, riches, wealth, and honor—was unexcelled. Indeed, after Solomon asked God for wisdom and knowledge to lead Israel, God said to him, “... **wisdom and knowledge are granted to thee. And I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had who have been before thee, neither shall any after thee have the like**” (2Ch. 1:12).

Bitter disappointment

As king of Israel during its most prosperous time, Solomon had great personal resources for the pursuit of happiness. Yet he failed. He discovered that neither pleasure, nor possessions, nor anything else would bring lasting happiness:

I said of laughter, It is mad, and of mirth, What does it do? (Ecclesiastes 2:2).

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do, and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

He pursued happiness but found frustration, disappointment, and emptiness. Ironically, his great quest for the way to happiness led him to hate life. Here is what he concluded:

Then I said in my heart, As it happens to the fool, so it will happen even to me, and why then was I more wise? Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance forever, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. And how the wise man dies even as the fool!

So I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous to me. For all is vanity and a striving after wind. And I hated all my labor in which I labored under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who shall be after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have rule over all my labor in which I have labored, and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

Therefore I turned about to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labor in which I had labored under the sun. For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skillfulness, yet he shall leave it to a man who has not labored in it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

For what has a man of all his labor, and of the striving of his heart in which he labors under the sun? For all his days are *but* sorrows, and his travail is grief, yea, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:15-23).

The vanity of the world

Solomon's failure to find lasting happiness in life was not a personal one. He failed because of the very nature of life itself. Alas!

Vanity, Solomon discovered, is the nature of this world: **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2). He said, **“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered”** (Ecclesiastes 1:14-15).

Ours is a divided cosmos at war with itself. It is a world of order and disorder in continuous conflict, and there is no sure defense against its evils. Its best promises are only good probabilities. There are no absolute guarantees; all of its rules have exceptions.

His many examples

Solomon gave many examples to illustrate the vanity of life; examples of sorrows from without and within; of the failure of riches, wisdom, even righteousness; of its pervasive injustice, evil, and folly. He saw hopeless oppressions:

Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And, behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter. And on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter. Therefore I praised the dead who have long been dead more than the living who are yet alive. Yea, better than them both is him who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3).

He saw self-imposed oppression:

Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun. There is one man who is alone, and he has not a second, yea, he has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end of all his labor, nor are his eyes satisfied with riches. For whom then, *he says*, do I labor, and deprive my soul of good? This also is vanity, yea, it is a great travail” (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8).

He saw the failure of riches:

There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches *were* kept by the owner of it to his hurt. And those

riches perish in a bad venture. And if he has begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he that he labored for the wind? All his days also he eats in gloom, and he is greatly troubled, and has depression and anger (Ecclesiastes 5:13-17).

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy upon men: A man to whom God gives riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but an alien eats it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

If a man begets a hundred sons, and lives many years so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not filled with good, and moreover he has no burial, I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For it comes in vanity, and departs in darkness, and the name of it is covered with darkness. Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it, this *one* has rest rather than the other. Yea, though he lives a thousand years twice told, and yet enjoys no good, do not all go to one place? (Ecclesiastes 6:1-6).

In this vain world he even saw the failure of righteousness:

And moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there (Ecclesiastes 3:16).

All this I have seen in my days of vanity. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs *his life* in his evildoing (Ecclesiastes 7:15).

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked, again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 8:14).

He saw that the inevitable climax of every life is death. No matter how rich or poor, wise or foolish, good or bad, happy or miserable we may have been, death is the ultimate conclusion of all our efforts. And that itself disposes men to live selfish, desperate lives:

All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous man and to the wicked man, to the good man, and to the clean man, and to the unclean man, to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice, as is the good man, so is the sinner, *and* he who swears, as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event to all. Yea also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead (Ecclesiastes 9:2-3).

Solomon saw injustice everywhere in this sinful world:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happens to them all. For man also does not know his time. As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time when it falls suddenly upon them (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12).

He saw the power of wisdom despised:

I have also seen wisdom under the sun this way, and it seemed great to me: There was a little city, and few men within it. And there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man. And he by his wisdom delivered the city, yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then I said, Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard (Ecclesiastes 9:13-16).

He even saw the spectacle of folly exalted to power: "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as it were an error which proceeds from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and

rulers walking like servants upon the earth” (Ecclesiastes 10:5-7).

Solomon found that the very best life in this material realm (under the sun) has many sorrows. It is a great tribulation, and we are hopelessly incapable of ever achieving permanent contentment and fulfillment. The whole of our mental being, like the waves of the sea tossed about, is ever filled with conflicting thoughts of different kinds and intensities from which there is no escape even in sleep. And we can no more achieve lasting inner peace than the waters of the oceans can remain still:

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth is heaviness (Proverbs 14:13).

All things are full of weariness, man cannot utter it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (Ecclesiastes 1:8).

It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith (Ecclesiastes 1:13).

My own observations

I too have seen the same kind of evils today. Pleasure and escape from pain are brief fleeting experiences that this modern generation desperately tries to prolong with drugs and entertainment. The more pleasure we get, the harder it is to keep, and those who get too much degenerate and risk an early death. Most of us suffer to pay many fold more than we get back in pleasure. We enter the world crying in protest, and we leave it surrounded by tears. Pain and discomfort is the normal experience. We simply learn to suppress or ignore the feelings most of the time.

I have heard some men describe the great euphoria they experienced under the influence of some pain suppressing drug. It is easy to see how a man can quickly become addicted to such things. Nevertheless, trying to run away from our normal feelings is a path that inevitably leads to degradation and death. It is a general rule that suffering strengthens, whereas pleasure weakens. A modern proverb of athletes says, “No pain, no gain.” It is through “blood,

toil, sweat and tears”¹ that we grow strong and succeed, whereas relaxation and play deplete resources.

There are countless evils that assail us as we live, evils from nature and evils from our fellow man. Injustice and frustration abound, and the innocent suffer as do the guilty. No time of life seems better than any other. Youth has strength and abundant energy, but lacks the money, power, and talent which the elderly have. Yet the elderly are cursed with worn-out bodies. And for the great majority of people the years in between are filled with too many burdens and responsibilities to remain at ease and play.

The beauty, strength, and glory of our youthful maturity lasts for only a fraction of our lives, a score, more or less, out of the three-score and ten that we live. The more we live and learn, the more disillusioned we tend to become. A vice of the young is naïveté; a vice of the old is cynicism. Whenever we think we have succeeded in life, that we “have it made,” that we “have arrived,” then we must struggle to keep it. All our benefits—money, knowledge, beauty, strength, power, popularity—are slippery things that keep us busy just hanging on to them. And, of course, at the end everything is lost. A false proverb of this adulterous generation says, “He who dies with the most, wins.” The truth is, he who dies with the most, loses the most.

It is a cruel system. The species may survive, but the individual never does. The individual is the perpetual and ultimate victim in this vain world. Life thrives on death, and death thrives on life. Eat-and-be-eaten is the nature of life in this world. It is a dog-eat-dog existence filled with competitive striving. Survival of the fittest is the siren song of evolutionists, but the individual never survives; each one ultimately succumbs.

Long ago I heard an interesting story from a young man who gained the audience of a wealthy man whom he hoped would give him money. The young man said he met the rich man in his penthouse apartment in New York City. The man was confined to a wheelchair and cared for by his servants. He had only a few months to live. The man gave him no money, instead he com-

1. Winston Churchill

plained to him about the vanity of life. He was very bitter. He said he had spent most of his life fighting tooth and claw to acquire wealth, but now he was an invalid and about to die. He said life was a treacherous monster that mocks us.

Dear reader, neither God nor his word are treacherous. Had the man earlier studied the Bible he would have learned of the vanity of life before he set his hope on the wind.

Universal and timeless vanity

Solomon said, **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2). And he found that every generation must face the same hopeless vanity, because it is the nature of the system, and the system never changes. It is a fixed order:

One generation goes, and another generation comes, but the earth abides forever. The sun also arises, and the sun goes down and hastens to its place where it arises. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north. It turns around continually in its course, and the wind returns again to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place from where the rivers come, there they go again (Ecclesiastes 1:4-7).

Change, it seems, is deceptive. Details and individuals always change, but the pattern remains. I am not the same today that I was yesterday. The chemicals that compose my body are ever changing. Everything is always new and different, if we only look at individual things. But the system never changes. It is a fixed order. The laws of nature are established, and the world operates with or without this individual or that. The system cycles up and down, around and around, with or without you and me.

Those who have utopian ideas that its nature will change are much deluded. And each generation, it seems, believes that its evils are worse than those of the past. We as individuals come and go, and do not live long enough to see the tiresome sameness of it all. For Solomon said,

There is no remembrance of the former *things*, nor shall there be any remembrance of the latter that are to come, among those who shall come after (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

Say thou not, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou do not inquire wisely concerning this (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

It is an incurably imperfect and vain cosmos. Remember, Solomon said, **“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered”** (Ecclesiastes 1:14-15). Considered in itself life on earth, he said, is a senseless exercise in futility, a conclusion he found to be inescapable. Throughout the world in every age life overall is filled with unhappy, frustrating experiences. Those who claim otherwise are either lying or they have deluded themselves.

Moreover, no man can escape death, nor can he beat the system no matter how he may live. For Solomon said, **“There is no man who has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, nor has he power over the day of death. And there is no discharge in war. Neither shall wickedness deliver him who is given to it”** (Ecclesiastes 8:8).

Solomon expressed his conclusion about our earthly existence in the opening words of the book of Ecclesiastes: **“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man from all his labor in which he labors under the sun?”** (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3).

The wisdom of Solomon teaches about the hopelessness of life here on earth. That is one reason why the greater wisdom of Jesus is called the good news (gospel). Jesus said, **“In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33). True hope is for a better life—an eternal life—in a better world in another realm where peace and justice reign because God’s will is done.

There is some happiness in life

Although Solomon was deeply disappointed by what he discovered about life, he still concluded that life is better than death. And indeed, in spite of all our suffering, almost everybody chooses life over death. He said,

Because to him who is joined with all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, nor have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. As well their love, as their hatred and their envy, has perished long ago, nor have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:4-6).

Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. Yea, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity (Ecclesiastes 11:7-8).

Furthermore, God has given us compensations—joys to ease our sorrows. He has made the simple, common experiences of life the most reliable sources of happiness: the pleasure of our food and drink, satisfaction in our labors, enjoyment with the material goods that enrich our lives, the comforts of a wife. All of these things have God's approval, if they are not abused:

There is nothing better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, without him? (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25).

I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to do good as long as they live. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor. *It* is the gift of God (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

Therefore I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works, for that is his portion (Ecclesiastes 3:22).

Behold, that which I have seen to be good and to be fitting is *for a man* to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor in which he labors under the sun all the days of his life which God has given him, for this is his portion. Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answers *him* in the joy of his heart (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).

Then I commended joy, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be cheerful. For that shall abide with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God has given him under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8:15).

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God has already accepted thy works. Let thy garments be always white, and let not thy head lack oil. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou love all the days of thy life of vanity, which he has given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity. For that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor in which thou labor under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9).

It is right, Solomon said, to partake of life and its activities, remembering that true survival comes from obedience to Jehovah: **“It is good that thou should take hold of this, yea, also from that withdraw not thy hand. For he who fears God shall come forth from them all” (Ecclesiastes 7:18).** However, he also advised accepting our lot, and avoiding lust or excessive ambition, for the gains of this life are vanity. He said, **“For what advantage has the wise man more than the fool? What has the poor man, who knows how to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire. This also is vanity and a striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 6:8-9).**

Searching to understand the world

Solomon went beyond the pursuit of happiness. He also sought the explanation and meaning of life. He tried to understand the world and find the reasons for its vanity and injustice. Yet in this effort

he also failed. The world is just too massive, too complicated, too deep and mysterious for anybody to understand no matter how wise he may become. He said,

Since there are many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 6:11-12).

All this I have proved in wisdom. I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me. That which is, is far off and exceedingly deep. Who can find it out? (Ecclesiastes 7:23-24).

Behold, I have found this, says the Preacher, *laying* one thing to another, to find out the account, which my soul still seeks, but I have not found (Ecclesiastes 7:27-28).

When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for also there is he who sees sleep with his eyes neither day nor night), then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. Because however much a man labors to seek it out, yet he shall not find it. Yea moreover, though a wise man thinks to know it, yet he shall not be able to find it. (Ecclesiastes 8:16-17).

Solomon did discover that God created mankind to be a noble creature, but many have corrupted themselves. He said, **“Behold, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many contrivances” (Ecclesiastes 7:29).** Moreover, Solomon found that God knows precisely what he is doing with the world. For he has his own lofty reasons for whatever happens, and he has deliberately limited our power to comprehend:

I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men to be employed therewith. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also he has set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11).

I know that, whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it. And God has done it that men should fear before him (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Consider the work of God. For who can make that straight, which he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider. Yea, God has made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything after him (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14).

As thou know not what is the way of the wind, *nor* how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child, even so thou know not the work of God who does all (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

The reason for the world's vanity

There is actually an underlying logic and purpose in the apparent disorder and senselessness of life. And every stage in the cycle of life—whether for building or destroying, joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain—serves God's grand purpose. Solomon said,

Jehovah has made everything for its own end, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4).

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to kill, and a time to heal, a time to break down, and a time to build up, a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance, a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together, a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to seek, and a time to lose, a time to keep, and a time to cast away, a time to tear, and a time to sew, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak, a time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous man and the wicked man, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God. No man understands, either love or hatred. All is before them (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

Solomon revealed the incurable vanity of the world, but the New Testament writers were those who explained why it is that way. For example, Paul told the Roman Christians,

For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself will also be freed from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation is groaning and travailing together until now. And not only so, but also ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit. And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:20-23).

Peter also wrote about these things, and he described how this vain world was going to end. He said the world in its present form is going to be dissolved by fervent heat, and replaced with a new heavens and a new earth, one without sin and evil:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, during which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, being intensely hot, will be disintegrated, and the earth and the works in it will be destroyed by fire. Therefore, all these things being disintegrated, what kind ought ye to be in holy actions and pieties, anticipating and hastening the coming of the day of God, by which the heavens, being made fiery hot, will be disintegrated, and the elements dissolve, being intensely hot? But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells (2Pe. 3:10-13).

After describing the end of our world Peter said, **“Therefore, beloved, anticipating these things, be diligent to be found by**

him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2Pe. 3:14). That was a plea Jesus often made. Be ready, dear reader!

Final judgment

Every man needs to be ready, because we are all going to be judged. Hence, we need to keep the future in mind as we live our lives. There is a modern song (lovely but melancholy) that tells the tale of a young man who chased pleasure until old age caught up with him and payment became due. It is an old theme. Solomon warned the young to look ahead to the judgment, and not forget that death catches up with us all. And with that plea he gave a beautiful and poetic description of old age:

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes. But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).

Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them, before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the street, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low, yea, they shall be afraid of height, and terrors *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail, because man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets, before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the

earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8).

This is the end of the matter, all has been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Chapter 2

The Meaning and Purpose of Wisdom

God's master plans

Solomon said that God used wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to create our world: **“Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew”** (Proverbs 3:19-20). Indeed, Solomon said that wisdom was brought forth even before the creation:

Jehovah possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was, when there were no depths. I was brought forth when there were no fountains abounding with water, before the mountains were settled, before the hills. I was brought forth while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there. When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when the fountains of the deep became strong, when he gave to the sea its bound that the waters should not transgress his commandment, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was by him, a master workman. And I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in his habitable earth. And my delight was with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:22-31).

From those words we can see clearly that God did not create on impulse; he planned beforehand what he was going to create. And wise men do likewise. They begin with an idea, a conception of something they want to create. Then they go through the design phase. The final part of the design phase is the development of plans that describe specifically what is to be constructed. Engineers make things like blueprints which specify the exact details of a project. Construction workers then use those instructions, the

blueprints or plans, to guide them in the assembly of whatever it is they are building.

That seems to be similar what God did. He must have first conceived the idea of creating our world. Then he formulated plans for its construction, plans which Solomon called wisdom. For remember, Solomon said, **“Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth”** (Proverbs 3:19), and also, **“Jehovah possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was”** (Proverbs 8:22-23). And apparently he used the wisdom he brought forth to guide him in the creation. For remember, Solomon said, **“... when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I [wisdom] was by him, a master workman”** (Proverbs 8:29-30). That scripture says God kept wisdom by him during the creation, and that is how men build things. They keep their plans (either in thought or in some visual medium) by them as they work.

Wisdom, understanding, and knowledge

Now regarding the difference between wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. Knowledge consists of facts and information, while understanding relates and integrates knowledge to give it meaning. A man can have knowledge of something without understanding, but not vice versa.

Solomon said, **“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established, and by knowledge the chambers are filled with all precious and pleasant riches”** (Proverbs 24:3-4). Perhaps those words also contain a metaphorical meaning. Perhaps knowledge refers to the elements of intellect—the facts and pieces of information that compose it, equivalent to the bricks, boards, and furniture of the building. Understanding could refer to the relationships that hold the elements together. It gives meaning and comprehension to information, equivalent to the mortar, nails, and other fasteners of the building. Wisdom seems to be the composite, which provides the overall organization and integration to the various lower levels of knowledge and understanding. Wisdom is perhaps the highest level of understanding,

and the gestalt of intellect. For Solomon wrote, **“I [wisdom] am understanding”** (Proverbs 8:14), and, **“Wisdom is the principal thing. Get wisdom, yea, with all thy getting get understanding”** (Proverbs 4:7).

Wisdom in nature

That this world and everything in it was designed is quite obvious to all whose eyes have not been blinded. Indeed, there is a growing movement in modern science to study design in nature. Moreover, it developed beyond the creation science movement, because discovery of the evidence keeps growing, and it could not remain ignored. Only the most hardened evolutionists are opposing this movement. You can find much literature about it by doing a simple search in the internet using words like design or intelligent design. Paul prophesied about the refusal of some men to acknowledge the Creator when he said,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what is knowable of God is apparent in them, for God made it known to them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things made, both his eternal power and divinity, for them to be without excuse. Because, although knowing God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were they thankful, but became vain in their reasonings and their heart was darkened without understanding (Romans 1:18-21).

The theory of evolution has blinded the eyes of most of the people in the world these days. Yet two of the world’s greatest scientists did not doubt that creative intelligence and ingenious design are apparent in nature. In 1686 when Isaac Newton wrote about the newly discovered solar system, he said,

This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being. ... We know him only by his most wise and excellent contrivances of things, and final causes; we admire him for his perfections; but we reverence and adore him

on account of his dominion: for we adore him as his servants; and a God without dominion, providence, and final causes, is nothing else but Fate and Nature. Blind metaphysical necessity, which is certainly the same always and everywhere, could produce no variety of things. All that diversity of natural things which we find suited to different times and places could arise from nothing but the ideas and will of a Being necessarily existing. But, by way of allegory, God is said to see, to speak, to laugh, to love, to hate, to desire, to give, to receive, to rejoice, to be angry, to fight, to frame, to work, to build; for all our notions of God are taken from the ways of mankind by a certain similitude, which, though not perfect, has some likeness, however. And this much concerning God; to discourse of whom from the appearances of things, does certainly belong to natural philosophy [Science was called natural philosophy during Newton's time].¹

And in 1934 Albert Einstein spoke of his “rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.”²

Newton was a devout Christian, but Einstein was a Jew who denied the personal God of the Bible. Einstein's god was nature itself. Such a belief is called pantheism. A man can be a genius about some things, but a fool about others.

Perhaps the most obvious evidence of design in nature is the creation of biological life forms. All contain Jehovah's design instructions within their bodies. Biologists tell us those instructions involve a molecular code within the chromosomes of each cell. Those chromosomes are detailed chemical “blueprints” directing the molecular assembly of the biological system we call an organism. Each one of the many trillions of living cells in a human body contains the equivalent of a vast library full of information, all necessary to construct our body.

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1. Isaac Newton “Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 34 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952), pp. 369-371.
 2. Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, based on the speech “Mein Weltbild,” trans. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Bonanza Books, 1964), p. 40.

In multi-celled organisms the instructions direct not only the internal activity of each member cell, but also the cooperative functioning of all the cells together to produce the entire working system. Those instructions also contain provisions for defense against various diseases and repair of possible injury. Normal growth and healthy life demand careful adherence to those instructions. Deviations and violations caused by accident and/or disease result in various kinds of deformities and deficiencies. If the violations are severe enough, the organism cannot survive.

By way of analogy the word of God could be called the chromosomes of our spirit, for Moses said, **“... man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Jehovah”** (Deuteronomy 8:3). For healthy spiritual growth and development each man must have within his mind knowledge of the will of God for us, which knowledge is primarily found in the Holy Bible. As the chromosomes of the body guide its biological development and survival, so also does knowledge of the word of God enable our spirit to develop and survive, even for eternity.

Regarding the biological knowledge of the chromosomes, scientists still find that knowledge far beyond our understanding. Confessing that, Lewis Thomas (a contemporary medical scientist) wrote humbly,

If I were informed tomorrow that I was in direct communication with my liver, and could now take over, I would become deeply depressed. I'd sooner be told, forty thousand feet over Denver, that the 747 jet in which I had a coach seat was now mine to operate as I pleased; at least I would have the hope of bailing out, if I could find a parachute and discover quickly how to open a door. Nothing would save me and my liver, if I were in charge. For I am, to face the facts squarely, considerably less intelligent than my liver.¹

In some organisms the genetic instructions also govern virtually all of their overt behavior as well. Consider the lowly ant. Admiring the complexity of their society, Thomas said, “They do every-

1. Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell* (New York: Viking Press, 1974). p. 66.

thing but watch television.”¹ I would add, and they do not even have to go to school. They are born with their knowledge and their skills. It is genetically endowed by God and marvelously effective, judged by the simple standards of survival and population size, which greatly outnumbers all of mankind. Solomon too admired the genetic wisdom reflected in the ant. For he said, **“Go to the ant, thou sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise. Which, having no chief, overseer, or ruler, provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest”** (Proverbs 6:6-8).

It is a paradox that those organisms with the greatest intellectual potential are born less wise. And man with the greatest brain of all is born least endowed with knowledge and skill. Those animals most capable of learning, paradoxically, possess the least amount of genetic wisdom to govern their behavior. For example, rodents and birds employ more skill in building nests than do monkeys and apes whose hands and brain give them greater potential.

Nevertheless, our lack of instinct is a benefit, for God said there is power in weakness (see 2Co. 12:9). You see, together with our superior intellect and language ability, our lack of instinct enables us to have creative potential. It makes us free to learn, which, in turn, enables us to live according to the demands of whatever age in the progress of civilization we find ourselves. Indeed, human progress would not be possible without this freedom from built-in or pre-programmed knowledge. God created man in his image, and through our creative use of wisdom civilization is a dynamic system, ever developing, in contrast to the biological wisdom that is fixed and static.

Wisdom in history

When men build something they rarely if ever specify its exact use during its lifetime, especially if it is multifunctional. Consider an ordinary personal computer. In most cases it is impossible for a computer designer and manufacturer to foretell which applications will be used by it, much less every action taken by each application. Such computers are designed to have great flexibility of use.

1. Thomas, p. 12.

For example, how could they possibly know the exact wording and style of each of the thousands of documents that might be created on one? The best they can do is know what kind of applications could be used, and what kind of documents could be produced. And even then they cannot foretell its use with future applications.

Computers can be designed to anticipate every possibility, but only when choices are very limited. Supercomputers that are designed to defeat world champion chess players do some of that. However, in chess there are too many possibilities for even supercomputers that are currently available. So they use a combination of analyzing millions of possibilities per second, together with certain strategies, to decide on the best move. If a computer were powerful enough, it could analyze all of the possibilities, and choose the best move each time. It would therefore never lose.

In a way God appears to have done something like that before he created our world. He specified beforehand in his design plans everything that could possibly happen, within the bounds he imposed. Paul mentioned those bounds when he spoke to the men of Athens. Speaking about God, he said, **“And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy”** (Acts 17:26).

Hence, within the limits that God imposed upon this material world, all things that are possible were anticipated by God even before the creation. In other words, every potential history of the world, from its formless beginning (see Gen. 1:1-2) to its fiery climax (see 2Pe. 3:10), was foreknown by God from the beginning. Isaac Newton appears to have believed something like that, for he wrote, “[God] knows all things that are or can be done.”¹ Paul implied this same view of history, for he wrote, **“Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, for us to be holy and unblemished before him in love”** (Eph. 1:4). How could God have chosen us before the creation if he had not already included us in his master plans, the wisdom (see Pro. 3:19) that he used to create the world?

1. Newton, p. 370.

Solomon said several things that imply this view of history: that Jehovah foreknew everything that could happen. He said, **“That which has been is that which shall be, and that which has been done is that which shall be done. And there is no new thing under the sun. Is there a thing of which it may be said, See, this is new? It has been long ago, in the ages which were before us”** (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).

That passage is certainly a riddle, but I will explain how I believe it refers to the view of history I just described. Now, every man can see that there are new things happening constantly. However, for God there is “no new thing under the sun,” because all things that are possible were in his mind before he made it, “long ago, in the ages which were before us.” God first “made” them in his mind, hence, “that which has been is that which shall be.” Which means that only “that which has been” conceived in God’s mind before the creation “is that which shall be.” Because nothing can be or can happen that he had not foreseen.

In another place Solomon said the same thing, but added a new thought: **“That which is, has been long ago, and that which is to be, has long ago been. And God seeks again that which has passed away”** (Ecclesiastes 3:15). And elsewhere he said, **“Whatever has been, the name of it was given long ago, and it is know what man is”** (Ecclesiastes 6:10). The statement that God seeks again that which has passed away is another riddle. But I understand it to mean “that which has passed away” is what God had first formulated in his mind. By “passed away” must mean chronologically. That is, the time when God formulated his plans for the world was in the past. And by “seeks again” means he seeks to manifest his design plans, to turn his ideas, his purposes, his will into reality.

Now, certainly Jehovah foresaw evil, because the Bible says God has knowledge of good and evil (see Gen. 3:22). And he made evil potentially possible. He did so for his own lofty and noble reasons. One of which was to defeat evil completely and forever. Another was to give us the potential to become sons of God. However, this is not the place to elaborate about those things. What God seeks again is the good that he made potentially possible. Other Scrip-

tures also allude to this view of history. For example, the psalmist said,

For thou formed my inward parts. Thou covered me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are thy works, and that my soul knows right well. My frame was not hidden from thee, when I was made in secret, curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes saw my unformed substance, and in thy book they were all written, *even* the days that were ordained, when as yet there was none of them (Psalm 139:13-16).

Notice he said that his unformed substance was written in God's book, "even the days that were ordained, when as yet there was none of them." And what book was that? I believe it was God's "master blueprint" of the world that Solomon called wisdom. Nevertheless, he said his days were ordained even before he came into being, when God saw his unformed substance.

In the book of Isaiah we find these words: **"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure"** (Isaiah 46:9-10). Notice he said, "... declaring the end from the beginning." In other words, even from their beginning God can declare the end of "things that are not yet done." He also said his counsel would stand. Yet we know that God's will is widely violated in this sinful world. What he must mean is that whether men obey him or not, he has predetermined the outcome. Thus his counsel shall stand in obedience or disobedience. Hence, there is predestination, but such as to accommodate for our free will—a flexible predestination, which I will attempt to clarify under the last heading of this chapter: "Destiny and Freedom."

Another example of this view of history is when Jehovah first spoke to Jeremiah. He told Jeremiah he knew him even before he was formed into a human being. He said, **"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou came forth out of the womb I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations"** (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah was in the plans of God, for

him to be a prophet to the nations, even before he was conceived in the womb.

There is another example in the book of Daniel. When an agent from heaven appeared to Daniel, he revealed to him things of the future, which, he said, were written in “the writing of truth.” The scripture says, **“I have come now to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days, for the vision is yet for many days. ... I will tell thee that which is inscribed in the writing of truth. ... And now I will show thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings”** (Dan. 10:14, 21, 11:2). Apparently in that scripture God’s “master blueprint,” which Solomon called wisdom, was called “the writing of truth.” For there was information about the future in it.

In another scripture, Jesus, quoting from “the wisdom of God,” foretold the destruction of that generation of Jews. He said, **“Because of this also the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles. And some of them they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets that was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation”** (Luke 11:49-50).

Hence, Jesus said the wisdom of God contains knowledge of future events. It appears, then, that information about all the past and all the future are contained in those magnificent divine plans created before the world began, which Solomon and Jesus called the wisdom of God, and the heavenly agent called the writing of truth.

God’s ultimate control

Not only does God have knowledge of all things possible, but the Bible teaches that he is, always has been, and always will be the ultimate ruler of everything. Although it is amazing in our eyes, Jehovah’s control is absolute and fully comprehensive, from the greatest to the smallest of things. For example, Solomon told of God’s control over the rulers of the nations: **“The king’s heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses. He turns it wherever he will”** (Proverbs 21:1).

Of course, that does not mean every decision by a ruler is good and right. For Jehovah sometimes uses rulers to punish nations by causing or allowing them to make foolish and harmful decisions. That was the case, for example, of Rehoboam son of Solomon. After Solomon died and he was on the throne he spoke foolishly to the people, which caused Israel to be divided (see 1Ki. 12). It was brought about by God in order to punish them because of their idolatry.

Another of Solomon's proverbs says that Jehovah decides the outcome of every battle: **"The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but victory is from Jehovah"** (Proverbs 21:31). Jehovah even controls those things we perceive as merely random and accidental. He said, **"The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah"** (Proverbs 16:33). That means the results of everything that we think is by chance, is not by chance at all. It is determined by God; yea, it has been predetermined. There is no such thing as luck; God is behind it all. The scriptures below affirm that Jehovah's sovereignty is absolute, for nothing is outside his realm of control:

Unless Jehovah builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless Jehovah guards the city, the watchman wake but in vain (Psalm 127:1).

Jehovah has made everything for its own end, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4).

There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Jehovah (Proverbs 21:30).

There are many other Bible references on this point. For example, David the king spoke of God's providence when he praised him, saying,

Thine, O Jehovah, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on the earth *is thine*. Thine is the kingdom, O Jehovah, and thou are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou rule over all. And in thy hand is power and might. And in thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength to all (1Ch. 29:11-12).

And Jehovah told Moses the law-giver, **“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal. And there is none that can deliver out of my hand”** (Deuteronomy 32:39). The prophet Amos also taught the same thing when he asked the following rhetorical questions:

Shall two walk together unless they have agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no net is set for him? Shall a snare spring up from the ground, and have taken nothing at all? Shall the trumpet [of alarm] be blown in a city, and the people not be afraid? (Amos 3:3-6).

Amos spoke of cause-and-effect relationships that naturally occur, such as what happens when lions roar, traps spring, and alarms sound. Then he asked, **“Shall evil befall a city, and Jehovah has not done it?”** (Amos 3:6). His implication was that it is just as natural to conclude that when evil befalls a city, Jehovah caused it.

Jehovah does bring both good and evil upon men. However, you should know that there are shades of meaning for the word evil. God cannot do wrong, but he can and does do evil, in the sense of causing harm, not sin. Hence, whether evil befalls an individual, a city, or a nation, either Jehovah caused it directly, or he allowed it to happen. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is one example (see Gen. 18-19). The book of Job is another, and the Old Testament describes many others.

Jesus our Savior also spoke of Jehovah’s providence when he encouraged us, saying, **“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered”** (Mat. 10:29-30). God is so completely involved in the workings of this world, that he keeps a continuous record of even the number of hairs of our head. Will there ever be a computer that can do such a thing, even for a single one of us?

The idea that God created the world, but now simply watches what happens, is false. For not one little bird can fall to the ground without his active involvement. How much more things that concern us, his offspring (see Acts 17:29). People often question the good-

ness of God when bad things happen, especially when it happens to good people or innocent children. It is an ignorant and foolish thing to do, for the apostle Paul said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). When bad things happen to those who love God, it all somehow works for good, although we usually lack the vision to see it. Remember the terrible crucifixion of that perfectly good and innocent man, Jesus Christ. The bad that happened to him, resulted in salvation for mankind—for those who accept him.

Dear reader, always trust God, whether in sorrow or joy, for he will never fail you. Paul said to his brothers in Thessalonica: **“And may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, blamelessly at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calls you, who also will do it”** (1Th. 5:23-24).

Jehovah is perfect in all things, including the faithfulness of his promises. His promises are faithful because he has ultimate control of all things, including each one of us. For Solomon said,

The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah (Proverbs 16:1).

A man’s heart devises his way, but Jehovah directs his steps (Proverbs 16:9).

There are many devices in a man’s heart, but the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand (Proverbs 19:21).

A man’s goings are of Jehovah, how then can man understand his way? (Proverbs 20:24).

Of course, as with rulers, that does not mean all we do is good and right. For Jehovah has given us freedom to choose many things about our lives. It means he always makes the final decision about whatever we do, whether to allow it or not. That is clearly shown in the book of Job. That book describes how Satan first needed permission from God before he could oppress Job.

Predestination and free will

The Bible teaches a form of predestination. Therefore, many religious men claim that disproves free will. They argue that God cannot know exactly what the future will be unless he knows how we are going to live. And he cannot know that as long as we are free to chose. Therefore, they deny our free will.

In the secular world predestination is called determinism because they exclude God, and it also denies free will. Many scientists have such profound faith in the laws of nature that they are led to believe in complete determinism. They say that all things are determined by laws of nature, and nothing can be independent of them, including our minds. For example, the psychologist B.F. Skinner said that our free will was a delusion. He argued the laws of nature govern everything, and hence rule out any possibility of free will. Sigmund Freud believed the same thing.

Nevertheless, there are many passages in the Bible that support the existence of our free will. However, they do not contradict its teachings about predestination, because the kind of predestination taught in the Bible is a flexible predestination, a kind that allows for a degree of free will. That means God has given us some freedom of choice, but he has predetermined the consequences of every choice.

Jehovah knows everything that *can* happen, and their consequences, but he does not know everything that *will* happen. You see, in order to preserve our potential for sonship God has restrained his powers in some ways. For example, Jehovah hates evil, and he has the power to abolish it completely. However, he cannot do so as long as we have the power to sin, and he cannot prevent us from sinning as long as we have free will. And we cannot become sons of God without having free will. The fact is, God is tolerating evil so that we can have the opportunity to become sons of God.

God cannot make us both free and sinless. He cannot make us free and not free at the same time. God can do anything, but he cannot do that which is contradictory. To claim otherwise is illogical. Of course, there are times when God restricts and overrules our free-

dom. For the Bible tells of many times when God manipulated men in order to achieve certain goals.

Remember, God did not create the world on impulse. He planned it out carefully beforehand. Solomon said he created wisdom first, before he created anything in the world. And in his great “master blueprint” of the world, he included everything that could possibly happen: all potential events and their consequences. Hence, whatever occurs God knows the outcome.

Remember, however, that does not mean that whatever can happen will happen. For example, I could have easily written vulgar words in this book, but I chose against such things. God has given each of us a certain amount of power to act, and a certain amount of freedom to use that power.

Since our freedom of will is always limited within certain boundaries, then perhaps, while Jehovah was formulating the exact details of his divine plans, provision for the expression of that freedom was made by reserving certain options.

Our if-then options

Although I am not a computer expert, what I have learned suggests that a computer may serve as a good example. Most computer programs have predetermined outcomes in the sense that whatever can happen is programmed within the system. But, of course, not every possibility becomes a reality. There are such things as if-then commands. Hence the program is free to vary, but only within specified limits. And no matter how it varies, the results are predetermined. Some 3,000 years ago, Moses told the descendants of Israel,

And it shall come to pass, *if* thou shalt hearken diligently to the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, [*then*] Jehovah thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth But it shall come to pass, *if* thou wilt not hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this

day, that [then] all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee (Deuteronomy 28:1,15; italics mine).

And after Solomon consecrated the temple that he built, Jehovah appeared to him in the night and said he had heard his prayer. God said he would bless Solomon and the people, but it would be contingent upon how they lived. What he said (much abridged) was **“if my people [do right], then I will hear from heaven, and [will bless them]. And as for thee, if thou wilt [do right], then I will [bless thee]”** (2Ch. 7:14-18; italics mine). Then Jehovah said, **“But if ye turn away, and [do wrong], then I will pluck them up by the roots out of my land”** (2Ch. 7:19-20; italics mine).

Now, since we all have a degree of freedom to live in various ways, then we all have the potential to become various kinds of persons, to a small degree in our flesh (fat, thin, muscular), but to a much larger degree in our minds and our actions. We can live right or live wrong; we can love God or not. We have that freedom to choose, because God has not predetermined all of our behavior.

What God has predestined, however, are all the consequences of our behavior. For every man who chooses to love God and obey him has been predestined for salvation. Remember, Paul said, **“[God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world”** (Eph. 1:4). We have that absolute guarantee of salvation, contingent upon our conformity with the *kind* of man that God predestined for salvation. And the choice is ours, because Paul said, **“For there is no partiality with God”** (Romans 2:11).

The predestination of types

Using myself as an example, God foresaw the many potential lives that I could have lived, and those that were within the realm of his righteousness he predestined would lead to my salvation. I could have married a different woman, or lived in different places, or worked with different people, or acquired different things. But in themselves, such variables are irrelevant to our salvation. God has given us much freedom, and his way of salvation is not so narrow that we cannot live different lives.

I believe that is the meaning of the following words of Paul:

For no man can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. And if any man builds upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become manifest. For the day will make it known, because it is revealed by fire. And the fire will test each man's work of what kind it is. If any man's work that he built on will remain, he will receive benefit. If any man's work will be burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but so as through fire (First Corinthians 3:11-15).

There is only one foundation upon which to build our lives, and that is trust and obedience in Jesus Christ. We are, however, otherwise free to build upon that foundation with **“gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw.”** The word fire in the above scripture is no doubt also used figuratively, and refers to the many tribulations we all experience. Christians vary in the amount of education and wealth they acquire, as well as a host of other material things. If we succeed in our worldly endeavors, then we “receive benefit.” However, if our work fails, or is “burned,” then we will suffer loss, but we will still be saved as long as we remain upon the foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

I will use another illustration. The Bible clearly teaches that the good news of Christ is the only way of salvation. And, in a manner of speaking, the good news of Christ can be compared to telling a man how to get from one place to another; for example, how to drive from Los Angeles to Houston. There are many roads he could take, some being quicker and more efficient than others, but all would eventually get him there. However, there are many more roads that he could take that would never get him there. Since Interstate Highway 10 links the two cities, you could even tell the man that he would be predestined to arrive at Houston if he continued to drive east on I-10. Of course, the same is true of alternate routes.

And so it is with our salvation. God predestined the *kind* of man who could become a son of God through Jesus Christ. It is our choice to become that kind of man or not, to take that way of life or not. And the teachings of the good news of Christ that are contained in the New Testament tell us how to become that kind of

man, how to live that way of life. And one marvelous thing, is that God has given all of us that potential. The choice is ours, and we will be judged by our decision (see Rev. 20:12). And if we choose to become the kind of man that God requires, then he will give us salvation (because it is impossible to save ourselves). For the holy scriptures teach that he predestined it to be that way.

And I rejoice in that hope. For I have chosen to live my life in accordance with the kind that God has predestined for salvation. Although I say with shame that I have sometimes deviated from the right way, stumbling and sinning. Nevertheless, I have chosen to become a righteous man, and not a sinful man. For every kind of man that I could have become was foreseen by God even before I was born, yea, even before the world began. Whatever then becomes a reality in this world does not surprise God. The potential for it all was foreseen by him from the beginning, and so is the destiny of whatever happens.

Judged by our free will

Therefore, we are all going to be judged by our free will, by the choices we make in this life, which is the main lesson of Jesus' parable of the talents. He said to his disciples,

Watch therefore, because ye know not the day nor the hour in which the son of man comes. For, like a man going on a journey, he called his own bondmen, and delivered to them the things possessed by him. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his personal ability, and straightaway he journeyed. And having departed, the man who received the five talents worked with them, and made five other talents. And likewise also the man of the two gained two others. But having departed, the man who received the one dug in the ground, and hid his lord's silver.

Now after a long time the lord of those bondmen comes, and takes up accounting with them. And having come, the man who received the five talents brought five other talents, saying, Lord, thou delivered five talents to me, lo, I have gained five other talents besides them. And his lord

said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman. Thou were faithful over a few things, I will appoint thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And also having come, the man who received the two talents said, Lord, thou delivered two talents to me, lo, I have gained two other talents besides them. His lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman. Thou were faithful over a few things, I will appoint thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

And the man who received the one talent also having come, said, Lord, I knew thee that thou are a hard man, reaping where thou did not sow, and gathering from where thou did not scatter. And after being afraid, having gone, I hid thy talent in the ground. Lo, thou have thine own. But having answered, his lord said to him, Thou evil and lazy bondman, thou knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather from where I did not scatter. Thou ought therefore to have placed my silver with the bankers, and having come I would have received back my own with interest.

Take ye therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every man who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast ye the unprofitable bondman into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Mat. 25:13-30).

We are all going to be judged by how we have used the resources and freedom that God has given us. And since we are going to be judged by how we have lived, then Jehovah is keeping a record of our lives. Moreover, he proves us from time to time in order to determine the quality of our spirit. Remember, we are made in his image, with an independent spirit. Therefore, he must test us and prove us to see how we are developing our spirit, for that is something we alone can do. After subjecting Abraham to a severe test, of which he was successful, God said to him, **“For now I know that thou fear God, since thou have not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me”** (Genesis 22:12). Since Abraham was made in

God's image, having an independent spirit with free will, God had to test him to know how faithful he would be.

Now God has within his mind the knowledge of both good and evil, but being perfect he can do no wrong. We, on the other hand, although made in his image, must struggle with right and wrong, good and evil, as between two competing forces within us. And our success or failure in overcoming the temptation to commit sin reveals to Jehovah the quality of our spirit. Solomon spoke about how God tries and examines us, when he said,

For the ways of man are before the eyes of Jehovah, and he makes level all his paths (Proverbs 5:21).

The eyes of Jehovah are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3).

Sheol and Abaddon are before Jehovah. How much more then the hearts of the sons of men! (Proverbs 15:11).

All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but Jehovah weighs the spirits (Proverbs 16:2).

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but Jehovah tries the hearts (Proverbs 17:3).

The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, searching all his innermost parts (Proverbs 20:27).

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Jehovah weighs the hearts (Proverbs 21:2).

Therefore, let every man remember Solomon's conclusion about life in this world: **"This is the end of the matter, all has been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether good or evil"** (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Chapter 3

The Sources and Benefits of Wisdom

The necessity of wisdom

Remember, Solomon said that God created the world by wisdom. And it is by wisdom that we, his offspring, also create. For it is not possible to create anything good without wisdom. Matter and energy of any kind must be used with wisdom before they can become beneficial. The growth and development of living things always comes from the genetic wisdom. And the growth and development of civilization always comes from the application of human wisdom.

In fact everything in this world tends to disorder without the application of wisdom. That natural degenerative process is called entropy. It was discovered by European scientists in the nineteenth century. Indeed, scientists claim that the overall degeneration of the world is irreversible.

That means that even with all our efforts at development, we always create more disorder than order. For example, the loss of order in the molecules of the materials used to build a house exceeds the overall order of the house. And so it is with everything that grows and develops in this world; it consumes more order than it creates.

Paul wrote about that characteristic of nature almost two thousand years ago. Remember, he said, **“For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself will also be freed from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God”** (Romans 8:20-21).

Some unbelievers have speculated that in the far distant future the entire universe will degenerate into a homogeneous mass like it was at the beginning, **“without form and void”** (Genesis 1:2). However, the Bible teaches that God is going to destroy its exist-

ing nature by fire (to transform it) long before that would happen (see 2Pe. 3:12).

In the meantime God expects us to use what he has given us to **“Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth, and have power over it”** (Genesis 1:28). He has provided for us the raw materials we need, and when used with wisdom they enable us to grow and develop.

Consider petroleum. It is a great resource for productivity, yet it is very destructive if not carefully contained, refined, and channeled wisely. Electricity is likewise a wonderful resource for productivity. Yet it too is very destructive unless carefully processed, restrained, and directed wisely.

The soil of the earth does not become food for us on its own. It is by the ingenious God-created biochemical machines we call vegetation that our food is produced. And I know of no man-made machine that can produce food for us. Perhaps sometime in the future there may be, because we are made in the image of God.

Without wisdom the matter and energy of the earth are useless. Therefore, Solomon said, **“Wisdom is the principal thing. Get wisdom, yea, with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote thee. She will bring thee to honor when thou embrace her”** (Proverbs 4:7-8).

Notice Solomon spoke of wisdom as if it were a woman. Remember, I compared Jehovah’s wisdom for the world with a blueprint that he used in the creation. Perhaps God’s divine plan of the world is of such intricate and elegant beauty, and of such order and detailed organization, that is why the Spirit of God, through Solomon, personified wisdom as a living thing—a grand lady.

The availability of wisdom

God’s wisdom for the world is available for us, because Solomon said,

Wisdom cries aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the broad places. She cries in the chief place of concourse, at the entrance of the gates, in the city. She utters her words. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And scoff-

ers delight them in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Turn back at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you. I will make my words known to you (Proverbs 1:20-23).

Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding put forth her voice? On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she stands. Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, she cries aloud. To you, O men, I call. And my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand prudence, and, ye fools, be of an understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak excellent things. And the opening of my lips shall be right things (Proverbs 8:1-6).

Where to find wisdom

Solomon said that wisdom cries aloud in the busy places of civilization. But how does she cry aloud, and how can we hear her? Whenever we go to busy places we see and hear many things. That it is one way wisdom cries aloud. And when she cries out she urges men, especially the ignorant, to learn from her.

Remember, wisdom is composed of knowledge and understanding. Perhaps she speaks by a strong inner voice within our thoughts, urging us to listen and learn. For the experiences we see and hear in busy places help motivate us to acquire knowledge and understanding.

Is it not bewildering to find yourself in a busy place, and not know what is happening? It is like being in a strange place in the dark. It produces feelings of helplessness, which normally motivate a man to want illumination. For the light of knowledge and understanding give strength and comfort.

Being content with ignorance, to hate light and love the emptiness of darkness, is a disease of the mind. And it is a disease of the mind to scoff and belittle truth. Men who so afflict themselves reap many sorrows. Therefore, heed the pleas of wisdom, and seek knowledge and understanding.

And Solomon said that God's wisdom for the world is readily available:

Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn out her seven pillars. She has killed her beasts. She has mingled her wine. She has also furnished her table. She has sent forth her maidens.

She cries out upon the highest places of the city: He who is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who is void of understanding, she says to him, Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake ye simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of understanding (Proverbs 9:1-6).

A man can gain knowledge and understanding without formal education, although that is not the most efficient way. Indeed, it is possible to learn from any experience. However, you must be receptive; you must open your mind and seek to learn. You must feed upon the good things that wisdom has prepared. Remember, wisdom said she had furnished her table with bread and wine.

The experiences we have, whether in books and schools, or in ordinary living, provide food for our minds. And when we feed upon the good part then our minds develop healthy knowledge and understanding. For there is much mental garbage and poison in this vain world.

Yet how can we determine that kind of wisdom is what Solomon meant? Perhaps a little history of modern science will help. The Bible teaches that Jehovah, unlike pagan gods, is a God of law and order. And so a few hundred years ago some men of Europe, having been taught about Jehovah, began to search for his laws of nature. Thus, modern science was born.

The idea that there are laws of nature is a Biblical concept, which those pioneering men accepted and sought. And ever since, men of science spend their time searching for those laws of nature. Perhaps the “bread and wine” of God’s wisdom for the world include the laws of nature that give us knowledge and understanding. Hence, by carefully observing things in the world, scientists have “fed” upon the “bread and wine” of the “furnished table” of Jehovah’s wisdom.

Regarding God himself, he is a spiritual being who resides in a different world. Nevertheless, we can learn something about him even from this world. For example, the Bible says,

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork (Psalm 19:1).

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things made, both his eternal power and divinity (Romans 1:20).

Seeing God's deity in nature is not done with the naked eye; it is perceived with the mind, much as we perceive otherwise invisible natural phenomena. For example, the ever-present force of gravity is something every school child knows about. Yet it remained unrecognized until three centuries ago. When that force was finally revealed by Newton, its discovery was heralded as a milestone in the history of science. Also no man can see magnetism, yet everybody knows it exists because we can see its effects.

In the same way, Jehovah's wisdom for the world is not readily apparent with our eyes. And God has his own lofty reasons why he does not make himself and his wisdom easily known. Solomon mentions one: **"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter"** (Proverbs 25:2). Jehovah has concealed wisdom in the elements—the laws of nature—and it is an advantage for rulers to encourage research.

Solomon said that wisdom cries aloud to motivate us. However, actually acquiring knowledge and understanding is often slow and laborious, coming only by **"the sweat of thy face"** (Genesis 3:19). Such is the case with mankind collectively, and so it is with each of us individually. Life involves a struggle to know what are the right and good things. Yet in the process, we can develop a better appreciation for the magnificent wisdom of God.

Philosophers, scholars, and scientists have debated and tested many ways to aid in the search for knowledge and understanding. They have developed many ingenious ways to unravel the mysteries of this world, and to uncover the latent knowledge we need to live and progress in it. Much has already been revealed. Over the centuries mankind has been accumulating a vast reservoir of

knowledge which is contained either in records of various kinds or in the minds of knowledgeable men.

Wisdom from fathers and mothers

Sources of knowledge and understanding can be found whenever and wherever there are opportunities to learn. And when we are young our parents are the major source of both our physical and our mental nurturing. Therefore, Solomon repeatedly urged children to appreciate the value of parental wisdom, and take advantage of that excellent resource:

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother (Proverbs 1:8).

My son ... lay up my commandments with thee (Proverbs 2:1).

My son, do not forget my law, but let thy heart keep my commandments (Proverbs 3:1).

Hear, ye sons, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine. Forsake ye not my law. For I was a son to my father, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. And he taught me, and said to me, Let thy heart retain my words. Keep my commandments, and live (Proverbs 4:1-4).

Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings (Proverbs 4:10).

My son, attend to my words. Incline thine ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes. Keep them in the midst of thy heart (Proverbs 4:20-21).

My son, attend to my wisdom. Incline thine ear to my understanding (Proverbs 5:1).

My son, keep the commandment of thy father, and do not forsake the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thy heart. Tie them about thy neck (Proverbs 6:20-21).

My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments and live, and my law as the apple of thine eye (Proverbs 7:1-2).

Now therefore, ye sons, hearken to me, and attend to the words of my mouth (Proverbs 7:24).

Hearken to thy father who begot thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old (Proverbs 23:22).

My son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes delight in my ways (Proverbs 23:26).

Of course, Jehovah God is the Father of us all, and the ultimate source of all our nurturing. Solomon said, **“For Jehovah gives wisdom. Out of his mouth is knowledge and understanding. He lays up sound wisdom for the upright, a shield to those who walk in integrity”** (Proverbs 2:6-7).

Being selective

The collective reservoir of human knowledge is now very large, and there is no way for any individual to grasp it all. Hence, we must be selective. Perhaps struggling to understand too much is like eating too much; it weighs a man down, and interferes with his overall functioning.

Also, perhaps becoming overly wise makes a man’s mind too foreign to his friends and neighbors, thus provoking alienation. Perhaps that is what Solomon meant when he said not to show thyself too wise: **“Be not over-righteous, nor show thyself too wise. Why should thou destroy thyself?”** (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

A more serious problem, however, is that our library of human knowledge is a jungle of conflict like the world around us. Too often truth and error are mixed up as a dim thicket. Virtually every area of human endeavor not only contains knowledge generally recognized (which may or may not be true), but there is also much in dispute.

Therefore, attempting to accept human knowledge indiscriminately is naïve and childish; it is like going out and eating whatever you can put in your mouth. Much of what goes for knowledge

is garbage at best and poison at worst. Consequently, we must use prudence and caution, accepting only wise counsel and verified knowledge, seeking to develop correct understanding.

Solomon advised looking for authentic truths and sound wisdom. It can be seen wherever you find knowledge of “excellent things,” knowledge of “right things,” information about the “ways of righteousness” and the “paths of justice.” Jehovah’s wisdom for the world is about things noble, constructive, and beneficial. It contributes to the uplifting and advancement of mankind:

Hear, for I [wisdom] will speak excellent things. And the opening of my lips shall be right things (Proverbs 8:6).

I, wisdom, have made prudence my dwelling, and find out knowledge *and* discretion (Proverbs 8:12).

Counsel is mine [wisdom], and sound knowledge. I am understanding, I have might (Proverbs 8:14).

I [wisdom] walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, that I may cause those who love me to inherit substance, and that I may fill their treasures (Proverbs 8:20-21).

It can be seen, for example, in the knowledge men use to build and manufacture successfully. Notice how they create all the precious goods of human enterprise, and you will see they cannot do it without wisdom. Remember, Solomon said, **“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established, and by knowledge the chambers are filled with all precious and pleasant riches”** (Proverbs 24:3-4).

Jehovah’s wisdom can also be seen at work in the behavior of successful leaders and authorities. Whenever possible associate with wise men, and learn from them. Notice how they attend to their affairs, and reach their decisions. It is their use of wisdom that gives them power to succeed:

By me [wisdom] kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me rulers rule, and ranking men, *even* all the judges of the earth (Proverbs 8:15-16).

Walk with wise men, and thou shall be wise. But the companion of fools shall smart for it (Proverbs 13:20).

There is another problem with human knowledge that should be recognized. The world is dynamic, in the sense that the specifics of it are ever changing, and our knowledge changes with it. Much (perhaps even most) of human knowledge is relevant only to a particular place and/or time.

It could even be said that like the things of nature, some of it exists for a time and then perishes. Some knowledge survives only briefly (like much of the advice about the stock market); other knowledge may remain true and relevant for years; and some is, of course, timeless. The word of God is eternal, for Peter said, “... **the word of the Lord endures into the age**” (1Pe. 1:25).

Rejecting evil

No less important is a rejection of evil of all forms. Wickedness is anathema to the wisdom of Jehovah. Solomon said that you will find nothing proud, arrogant, rebellious, or perverse in truth. We can learn a lesson from the body. As a civilized man is attracted to the pleasing odor of good food, so he is repelled by the stench of garbage. For wisdom said,

For my mouth shall utter truth. And wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness. There is nothing crooked or perverse in them (Proverbs 8:7-8).

The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil. Pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, do I hate (Proverbs 8:13).

Happily, once seen, truth becomes clear and delightful:

They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge (Proverbs 8:9).

A man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

As we have seen, because of the problem of false knowledge and erroneous understanding, it is vital that we acquire the ability to

discriminate the good from the bad; what is true from what is false; the helpful from the harmful. Indeed, this skill is what Solomon specifically requested from Jehovah when he first spoke to him—the ability to judge rightly. He prayed, **“Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil”** (First Kings 3:9).

Wisdom in God’s book

Solomon wrote much more than has been recorded in the Bible:

And God gave Solomon exceedingly much wisdom and understanding, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the sons of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men: than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame was in all the nations round about.

And he spoke three thousand proverbs [only about 600 of which are preserved in the Bible], and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes [which means knowledge of natural science]. And there came of all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom (First Kings 4:29-34).

What the Holy Spirit chose to preserve from Solomon’s writing contains lasting truth, words to help every generation know how to become wise:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the words of understanding, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness and justice and equity, to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion, that the wise man may hear, and increase in learning, and that the man of understanding may attain to sound coun-

sels, to understand a proverb, and a figure, the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (Proverbs 1:1-6).

Have I not written to thee excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make thee know the certainty of the words of truth, that thou may carry back words of truth to those who send thee? (Proverbs 22:20-21).

And further, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge. Yea, he pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly—words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies. They have been given from one shepherd (Ecclesiastes 12:9-11).

The Bible—the word of God—is unexcelled in the quality of its wisdom. Throughout its pages we can find knowledge that is always true and ever relevant. Its wisdom may be applied to every culture in every age. Indeed, it must be applied. Remember, the Bible says, **“... man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Jehovah”** (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Within the Bible we find Jehovah’s standards for us to use in judging right and wrong. It also explains the meaning and purpose of our existence. It contains both direct instructions on how to live, and many examples or illustrations of ways of living, both good and evil, with their corresponding consequences. It is our great common tutor from our great common Father.

Moreover, it alone contains the key to understand how we should live to prepare for true life—eternal life. Paul wrote, **“Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for instruction, for reproof, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, so that the man of God may be qualified, having been completed for every good work”** (Second Timothy 3:16-17).

The author of the book of Hebrews said there is no other source of knowledge about the human mind that penetrates deeper than the Bible: **“For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper,**

above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

The world is constantly generating new ideas and opinions. They come and they go, but the truths of the Bible are always relevant. All lasting knowledge and sound wisdom ultimately originate with the Lord, the one Shepherd. Knowledge of him and his Holy Word should be the superstructure of our minds by which all other knowledge is integrated. Therefore, dear reader, use discretion and seek for it:

Every word of God is tried. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him (Proverbs 30:5).

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies. They have been given from one shepherd. And furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:11-12).

The many benefits of wisdom

As the knowledge of the world continues to increase, adding to the collective wisdom of mankind, we are able to tap deeper into the vast cosmic wisdom of Jehovah, and become increasingly able to share in his infinite creative power. As our individual wisdom grows, we will be able to live more successfully, achieve more, advance higher, and make a greater contribution to the progress of the world.

The gifts of wisdom cannot be surpassed because it is by wisdom that all good things are possible. By wisdom comes life and health, happiness, grace and honor, material prosperity, power and strength, confidence and security, and best of all, Jehovah’s favor. Indeed, Solomon said,

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding. For the gain of it is better than the gain of silver, and the profit of it than fine gold. She is more pre-

cious than rubies, and none of the things thou can desire are to be compared to her.

Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold upon her. And happy is everyone who retains her (Proverbs 3:13-18).

Who is as the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

Many times over Solomon listed her benefits; for to love wisdom is to love yourself: **"He who gets wisdom loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding shall find good"** (Proverbs 19:8). The following are samples of the many scriptures from Solomon that describe the benefits of wisdom.

Wisdom brings life—a long, healthy, happy one:

For length of days, and years of life, and peace, they will add to thee (Proverbs 3:2).

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding (Proverbs 3:13).

Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of thy life shall be many (Proverbs 4:10).

For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh (Proverbs 4:22).

Understanding is a well-spring of life to him who has it (Proverbs 16:22).

Wisdom brings material prosperity:

I [wisdom] walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, that I may cause those who love me to inherit substance, and that I may fill their treasuries (Proverbs 8:20-21).

A servant who deals wisely shall have rule over a son who causes shame, and shall have part in the inheritance among the brothers (Proverbs 17:2).

Indeed, wisdom is better than riches:

Receive my [wisdom's] instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (Proverbs 8:10-11).

Riches and honor are with me [wisdom], durable wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver (Proverbs 8:18-19).

How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver (Proverbs 16:16).

Wisdom gives strength and power:

By me [wisdom] kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me rulers rule, and ranking men, *even* all the judges of the earth (Proverbs 8:15-16).

A wise man is strong, yea, a man of knowledge increases might. For by wise guidance thou shalt make thy war, and in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 24:5-6).

Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city (Ecclesiastes 7:19).

Wisdom is better than weapons of war (Ecclesiastes 9:18).

Wisdom brings us favor and honor:

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. For they shall be a garland of grace to thy head, and chains about thy neck (Proverbs 1:8-9).

Let not kindness and truth forsake thee. Bind them about thy neck, write them upon the tablet of thy heart, so thou shalt find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man (Proverbs 3:4).

The wise shall inherit glory (Proverbs 3:35).

Wisdom brings security:

For wisdom shall enter into thy heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant to thy soul, discretion shall watch over thee, understanding shall keep thee, to deliver thee from the way of evil, from the men who speak perverse things (Proverbs 2:10-12).

Keep sound wisdom and discretion, so they shall be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then thou shall walk in thy way securely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou lay down, thou shall not be afraid. Yea, thou shall lay down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, nor of the desolation of the wicked, when it comes. For Jehovah will be thy confidence, and will keep thy foot from being taken (Proverbs 3:21-26).

My wife, sitting in our home, with the flick of her tender fingers and the turn of her lovely hand, she can summon forth the beautiful music of a great orchestra. Indeed, she has her pick of many great musicians. With other small movements, she can talk with our friends and relatives who live hundreds, even thousands of miles away. She can do all of this without leaving her seat. In our home she can experience the sights and sounds of a mountain climbing expedition. She can watch what happens inside a living body.

Before I lost most of my hearing I could also do those things. Years ago, in the comfort of my living room, I watched as the first man set foot upon the moon. I heard him speak his first words there. With my good vision I can look back in time and see the German army conquer most of Europe, then later suffer defeat. I can travel in comfort for hours, at twice the speed a horse can gallop, to whatever region of the country I desire. For a modest fee, I can travel in comfort and ease to almost any country in the world in a day or less.

All these things are common everyday occurrences in modern times. But what if I could somehow travel back in time to men of long ago, and told them all that we can now do? The list of wonders readily available to modern man is so great and so incredible that they would certainly have declared me mad. Yet, only a lunatic would deny them now.

Why were men of former times unable to do these things? The laws of nature have not changed. The raw-materials of the earth were there. The potential for all these wonders has always existed. They were lying latent in the earth beneath their feet. But they lacked the key to unlock this latency. They lacked knowledge. Only after knowledge was discovered could these things become reality. And who knows what other wonders await us lying latent in the ground beneath our feet?

Nevertheless, remember that Solomon said in spite of its great power, wisdom cannot give complete freedom from sorrow and frustration, because this is an imperfect world. Indeed, the wiser we become, the more we will learn of the evils and sorrows here. As Solomon said, **“For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow”** (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

Moreover, unless it is used with love, wisdom cannot benefit us. Paul said a man could have all wisdom, and still be nothing: **“And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing”** (First Corinthians 13:2).

Spiritual wisdom

The Bible teaches that our natural body is merely a housing for our enduring self, which is spiritual. Our earthly body is sometimes compared with clothes we wear or a house we dwell in. After the body perishes those who are faithful disciples of Christ will be given a new body, like new clothes, to house our spirit. For Paul said,

For we know that if the earthly house of our tent were destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For also in this we groan, longing to clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven, if indeed also having put it on we will not be found naked. For also those who are in the tent groan, being burdened, not in that we want to undress, but to clothe ourselves, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by life (Second Corinthians 5:1-4).

Knowledge of such things is a part of what the Bible refers to as spiritual wisdom, which consists of knowledge and understanding about our spiritual existence.

The ultimate source of spiritual wisdom on earth is the Holy Bible. All other claims are false, because the Bible alone is the word of God. The Bible tells us why we exist and what will happen after we die. It tells us about God our Creator, his relationship with us, and how he wants us to live.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul spoke at length about how that wisdom contrasts with the wisdom of the world, when he said,

For the message of the cross is of course foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is a power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will frustrate the understanding of those of understanding. Where is a wise man? Where is a scholar? Where is a researcher of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. And because Jews demand a sign and Greeks search for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, truly to Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness.

But to them, to the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men.

For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent. But God chose the foolish things of the world, so that he might humiliate the wise, and God chose the weak things of the world, so that he might humiliate the powerful. And God chose the common things of the world, and the disdained things, and the things that are not, so that he might make useless the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God.

But ye are his, in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, just as it is written, He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

And I, brothers, when I came to you, came not in eminence of speech or of wisdom proclaiming the testimony of God to you. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, even this crucified man.

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of spirit and of power, so that your faith would not be in wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

But we speak wisdom among the fully developed, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who come to nothing. But we speak a wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age have known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, What an eye has not seen, and an ear has not heard, and have not arisen in a heart of a man, are things that God prepared for those who love him.

But God disclosed it to us through his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of the man, except the spirit of the man in him? And so nobody knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

But we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in things learned from mankind, in words of wisdom, but in things learned from the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.

Now the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to understand because they are evaluated spiritu-

ally. But truly the spiritual man evaluates all things, but he himself is evaluated by none. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he will stand with him? But we have the mind of Christ (First Corinthians 1:18-2:16).

No amount of worldly wisdom can show us how to escape the consequences of our sins after we die—the punishment of existence in hell. Only faith in Jesus Christ, and acceptance of the spiritual wisdom that is found in the Bible, can do that. Dear reader, seek and apply spiritual wisdom above all others, lest you too be bitterly disappointed in the end.

Chapter 4

Becoming Wise

Becoming wise is a crucial part of everybody's life, for no man can survive independently without some knowledge. Wisdom is like money but is much more important. Money can be gained with wisdom, but without wisdom money is quickly lost. Remember, Solomon said, **"Wisdom is the principal thing. Get wisdom, yea, with all thy getting get understanding"** (Proverbs 4:7).

In the Bible the word heart is synonymous with the mind, although sometimes it refers to the innermost part of it. And Solomon admonished us to take great care of our heart, when he said, **"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life"** (Proverbs 4:23). Therefore, seek to become wise because out of the heart are the issues of life.

The foundation and the beginning

Having analyzed all that Solomon wrote, I discovered the foundation of a wise mind seems to consist of a simple attitude: hating evil and a loving good. That basic mind-set both motivates and predisposes a man to develop wisdom, wholesome wisdom, not the corrupt kind that James said was earthly, world-soul, demonic (see James 3:15).

That right state of mind was characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ. For God said of him, **"Thou have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Because of this, God, thy God, anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions"** (Hebrews 1:9). And no man can please God and become wise without that same attitude toward good and evil.

Now according to Solomon, the first step in becoming wise is to fear God. For he said, **"The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding"** (Proverbs 9:10). And the meaning of fear of Jehovah includes hating evil. For the wisdom of God said, **"The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil. Pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, do I hate"** (Proverbs 8:13). The wise man Job also

said, **“Behold, the fear of Jehovah, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding”** (Job 28:28). Hence, the first step in becoming wise is hating evil.

Intellect and emotion

A modern myth says that intellect contrasts with emotion. The truth is, they work together to develop and maintain wisdom. A love of righteousness and a hatred of lawlessness are feelings necessary to motivate a man to become wise. They energize the effort needed to reject folly, and acquire knowledge and understanding. Without such an attitude within a man (child or adult), efforts to make him wise are futile. And since we are not born with that attitude, it must be cultivated.

Paul said we are born with an innate sense of right and wrong (see Romans 2:15), which helps point the way to wisdom, although it takes a while to develop. Nevertheless, we are also born with an innate wildness. Hence, discipline is always required early in life to cultivate the self-control necessary to counter that natural wildness. And developing feelings of rejection toward wildness and lawlessness—hatred of evil—is part of successful discipline.

Discipline

We all come into this world full of life and energy but without wisdom. Yet the infant’s mind is not actually empty. Perhaps it is better called primitive, somewhat like the earth at its beginning—without form and undeveloped—although not entirely. Consequently, babies are helpless and dependent. They do not know how to communicate their needs, so they just cry. They cannot coordinate their bodies, so they just wiggle about and make messes.

Now there is a natural joy and pleasure in being alive—doing things and experiencing things. Being unwise, however, as babies develop they try everything they can, good and bad. And being full of energy, they possess potential for harm, both to themselves and to other things. Hence, we must impose restrictions upon them.

Gasoline is a valuable commodity providing a major source of the energy that drives our economy. But raw gasoline is very danger-

ous. Only when placed in a strong container, and carefully meted out a little at a time can it be used for constructive purposes. So it is with life in the raw, this unchecked pride of life within us.

All energy, including the energy of life, must be carefully restrained and channeled constructively. Therefore, inhibition and self-control are fundamental qualities of the wise. The well-known effect of intoxicating liquors is to both dull the intellect and release the inhibitions. A drunk man is a dangerous fool because he possesses the power of an adult with the mind of a child. The alcohol does not generate the dangerous behavior; it simply releases it. Only when a man is sober can recognition and remorse emerge.

Therefore, one of the first things a child must learn is to hate and reject evil, for we are all born with foolish and lawless minds. Indeed, Solomon said, **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him”** (Proverbs 22:15). And so we must be disciplined forcefully early in our lives.

The necessity of punishment

God has endowed our bodies with the ability to experience pain, which is a blessing. Those rare cases of men born without the sense of pain almost always die early in their lives. Their bodies become abused because their minds cannot sense damage happening to them. It is from the experience of pain that we first learn to avoid doing harmful things. When we stub our toe we learn to be careful how we walk. When we are punished for pouring milk on the floor we learn to avoid it.

We learn to hate evil by experiencing the consequences of it. That is the major purpose of punishment. It creates in us a healthy fear for whatever produces bad consequences. Effective punishment produces discomfort, whether physical or mental. If wrong actions result in sorrow, wrong actions will be feared. For example, knives cut, and the careless use of knives causes pain. In a sense we can say the laws of nature “punish” us when we use knives carelessly. Therefore, it is wise to learn to abhor and shun the careless use of knives. Likewise with everything else, from guns to cars to atomic energy.

Carelessness with electricity usually results in a painful shock, if not death. Thankfully, however, it is not necessary to become shocked to develop such fear. Everything does not need to be conditioned directly. As we mature we learn to generalize, to learn indirectly or vicariously, and from advice and instruction. But that comes only after aversive conditioning has been developed. Which means after we have had some unpleasant experiences with bad things, things that cause pain, reinforced by the judicious application of punishment.

Many people do not realize that our adult repugnance of body excrement is a conditioned response and not an innate one. For infants are commonly attracted to theirs, and will often play with it if they have the opportunity. Therefore, a major goal of discipline is to create a generalized aversion for bad things—hatred of evil. Such an aversion develops from fear of the harmful consequences of evil behavior.

Recognizing the harm produced by wrongdoing encourages internalized control—self-discipline. This orientation of mind is necessary for wisdom to begin. Developing a healthy respect for the consequences of doing wrong serves to bottle-up and to restrain behavior. It captures and contains the raw energy of a free life. It creates self-control by purifying and cleansing us of our natural wildness. And it encourages humility, which softens the heart, making it more receptive for education.

This purging of impulsiveness is like plowing a field to make it suitable for growing good crops. It is like refining ore in a furnace to purify the raw materials so they can be shaped into useful products. It is like the pain of surgery that cuts out the diseased tissue. Punishment is designed to correct; its purpose is to improve and make a man better. To correct someone is an act of kindness, and an expression of love. Therefore, Jehovah's wisdom includes correcting faults:

The ear that hearkens to the reproof of life shall abide among the wise. ... he who hearkens to reproof gets understanding (Proverbs 15:31, 32).

Smite a scoffer, and a simple man will learn prudence. And reprove him who has understanding, and he will understand knowledge (Proverbs 19:25).

Stripes that wound cleanse away evil, and strokes, the innermost parts (Proverbs 20:30).

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are profuse (Proverbs 27:6).

Correction almost always involves some initial pain or discomfort. Even gentle forms of correction such as criticism or reproof hurt at the time, but after the necessary improvement occurs, the feeling is made better. If I am going about ignorantly committing some offense, perhaps in the way I look, a friend would inform me to help correct it. Then we could all relax and enjoy life more. On the other hand, an enemy, laughing behind my back, would flatter me on my fine appearance.

Failure to administer just punishment deprives both the individual and society of important information. It keeps individuals blind or indifferent to the harmful consequences of what is done, and so both retards maturity in children and interferes with responsible behavior at any age. Punishment is designed to correct error, to make right what is wrong. Its goal is healing.

It is, in fact, a form of communication, a feedback mechanism, a control device to steer the offender back on the right path, a message regarding the value of actions to inform both the offender as well as all others who can learn by observing. Here is one example of just punishment from the Law of Moses:

If an unrighteous witness rises up against any man to testify against him of wrong-doing, then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before Jehovah, before the priests and the judges that shall be in those days, and the judges shall make diligent inquiry. And, behold, if the witness is a false witness, and has testified falsely against his brother, then ye shall do to him, as he had thought to do to his brother. So shall thou put away the evil from the midst of thee. And those who remain shall hear,

and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil in the midst of thee (deuteronomy 19:16-20).

Just punishment properly administered is a great deterrent. Effective methods of prevention not only help protect innocent victims, but they also discourage weak souls who might otherwise be tempted. Capital punishment justly applied is one of those methods. History has proven time and again that without it, evil multiplies and more innocent lives perish.

And so the chastening of punishments are designed to discourage evil, and encourage wisdom and righteousness. And Jehovah would have us wise and righteous. Hence, by man and by nature God disciplines us: **“My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah, nor be weary of his reproof. For whom Jehovah loves he reproves, and he whips every son whom he receives”** (Proverbs 3:11-12).

Attempting to train a child without the use of any form of correction is like trying to build a house with string instead of hammers and saws. It may reduce noise during the process, but the underlying weakness of the structure makes it much more vulnerable to collapse under stress. I am convinced that most of the growing number of horrors committed both by men and women these days is a direct result of the lack of proper discipline applied to them when they were children. Never having “tantrumness” driven out of them as children, they lose control and throw adult tantrums, which are much more violent and catastrophic.

One valuable side effect of corporal punishment is that it not only conditions the child against misbehavior, but it strengthens him emotionally to endure pain. Research has shown that animals reared with little pain and stress become hyper-emotional and ineffective when later faced with stressful problems. The modern folly of outlawing punishment in childhood is breeding violence-prone cowards.

Those who truly love children will not stop driving the foolishness out of them, any more than they would stop removing the soil from their bodies. Notice below how many times Solomon urged using a rod to beat the folly out of a child. Be assured, this does not mean whipping or beating that causes bodily injury, aside from perhaps

a few temporary bruises or stripes. Should sporting events and other playground activities be outlawed because they may result in a few temporary bruises or stripes? Remember, modern athletes have a proverb that says, “No pain, no gain.” And so it is with child rearing, as Solomon taught:

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him promptly (Proverbs 13:24).

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying (Proverbs 19:18).

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, *but* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15).

Withhold not correction from the child, *for* if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from Sheol (Proverbs 23:13-14).

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causes shame to his mother (Proverbs 29:15).

Correct thy son, and he will give thee rest, yea, he will give delight to thy soul (Proverbs 29:17).

Alas, the enemies of God have gained such control throughout the world that beating a child with a rod (or anything else) is now a serious crime in many places, including my own beloved America. It was not always so. In my short lifetime I have seen the majority of my countrymen abandon God and his will, and sink into sinfulness.

Forsaking corporal punishment is one of the many ways sinners have rebelled against God’s righteousness. Indeed, a man can now even have his children taken away from him permanently if he follows God’s will this way as commanded in the Holy Bible. These and other such wicked things make me fear that if my countrymen do not repent, they too may soon come under this curse that God uttered against the ancient Israelites, as told by the prophet Isaiah:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in

their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe to those who are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink, who justify the wicked for rewards, and take away the justice of the righteous man from him! Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust, because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 5:20-24).

Of course, punishment or correction takes many forms besides corporal punishment, and its proper use depends upon a variety of circumstances. Solomon said that physical force is necessary for children, animals, and fools. They need a stronger message:

... a fool goes to the correction of the stocks (Proverbs 7:22).

... a rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding (Proverbs 10:13).

Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and stripes for the back of fools (Proverbs 19:29).

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools (Proverbs 26:3).

Even though the application of strong pain may not move the stiff neck of some stubborn individuals, nevertheless, the demonstration can benefit others. That is another good reason for its application, especially in public. Solomon said,

Smite a scoffer, and a simple man will learn prudence (Proverbs 19:25).

When a scoffer is punished, a simple man is made wise (Proverbs 21:11).

Contrary to frequently employed propaganda otherwise, neither observing nor experiencing the just application of punishment encourages violence. On the contrary, it generates healthy fear and restraint. However, Solomon also said that gentle forms of correction are all that are needed for the wise:

A rebuke enters deeper into him who has understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool (Proverbs 17:10).

... reprove him who has understanding, and he will understand knowledge (Proverbs 19:25).

Unjust punishment is always wrong. The research studies that I know about, which supposedly show the harmfulness of punishment, have always involved methods employing punishment unjustly. For Solomon said, **“Also to punish a righteous man is not good, nor to smite nobles for uprightness”** (Proverbs 17:26).

Wise application of punishment is the most powerful thing available to restrain evil, both within the individual and within a community. Withholding punishment is like permitting the weeds to grow in a garden, or tolerating rust in a machine, or allowing an infection to remain in the body. Rightly used, it can be an act of mercy and kindness to the point of saving lives.

Hypocrisy about punishment

Dear reader, I will reveal something to you that our modern pagan news media has kept well-concealed. Although psychologists were among the leaders of the anti-punishment movement that began about a century ago, many of them now freely admit the value and effectiveness of punishment, including corporal punishment.

Some even use electric shock. I am not speaking of the electroconvulsive shock treatment (which they call therapy) that is used by psychiatrists. That is a severe technique which traumatizes the brain. Having condemned corporal punishment the psychiatric profession now commonly employs that much more brutal method to treat some behavior disorders, claiming it is more scientific and sophisticated. It is a deceitful and cruel substitute for using the rod that Solomon advised. It is deceitful because it is in fact punishment, and it is cruel because it causes permanent injury to the brain. Much of their drug treatment is another disguised way to suppress mal-behavior without recourse to punishment, which they have demonized.

The use of electricity I am referring to is simply harmless but painful electric shock (like the sting of static electricity) merely to administer punishment, not to traumatize the brain. The professionals would without doubt join the pagan majority of our country in condemning hysterically its use by parents. Yet in the name of “therapy” they use it freely. Those hypocrites use it because administering pain is an effective way to manage behavior, as Solomon and every other wise man has known.

The fact is, some modern psychologists even use it on little babies. For example, they have successfully “treated” (i.e., punished) infants with electric shock to cure them of chronic ruminative vomiting (a life-threatening habit) when all other forms of treatment failed. Electric shock has also been used, paradoxically, for “treatment” to cure self-mutilation in children.

Some such children, for example, bite their fingers off, pull out their fingernails with their teeth, poke out their eyes, chew their shoulders down to the bone. Before discovering the effectiveness of corporal punishment, those children were kept in full body restraints, often for years at a time—a cruel form of prolonged bondage.

Solomon recognized the paradox three thousand years ago, when he said, **“Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from Sheol”** (Proverbs 23:13-14). Substitute electric shock for the rod in those words, and you will have one form of modern psychotherapy.

The example of Helen Keller

The story of Helen Keller is a marvelous example of how an undisciplined life that had been ruled by selfishness and tantrums was later saved by the administration of discipline and education. She became blind and deaf at the age of nineteen months. After which her parents so spoiled her, because of misguided feelings of compassion, that she became completely unruly and never learned to talk. In desperation they hired a young teacher for her. Her teacher, Anne Sullivan, imposed strict discipline upon her, and encouraged her to learn. As a result her life was transformed. After she

matured she even enrolled in Radcliffe college and graduated cum laude in 1904. Her life was so remarkable that she is listed in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

I quote at length from Helen's autobiography¹ because her case illustrates so well the truth of Solomon's teachings about discipline. The following words were taken from letters (reproduced in Helen's book) written by Anne Sullivan about her first work with Helen:

I had a battle royal with Helen this morning. Although I try very hard not to force issues, I find it very difficult to avoid them.

Helen's table manners are appalling. She puts her hands in our plates and helps herself, and when the dishes are passed, she grabs them and takes out whatever she wants. This morning I would not let her put her hand in my plate. She persisted, and a contest of wills followed. Naturally the family was much disturbed, and left the room. I locked the dining-room door, and proceeded to eat my breakfast, though the food almost choked me. Helen was lying on the floor, kicking and screaming and trying to pull my chair from under me. She kept this up for half an hour, then she got up to see what I was doing. I let her see that I was eating, but did not let her put her hand in the plate. She pinched me, and I slapped her every time she did it. Then she went all round the table to see who was there, and finding no one but me, she seemed bewildered. After a few minutes she came back to her place and began to eat her breakfast with her fingers. I gave her a spoon, which she threw on the floor. I forced her out of the chair and made her pick it up. Finally I succeeded in getting her back in her chair again, and held the spoon in her hand, compelling her to take up the food with it and put it in her mouth. In a few minutes she yielded and finished her breakfast peaceably. Then we had another tussle over folding her napkin. When she had finished, she threw it on the floor and ran toward the door. Finding it locked, she began to kick and scream all over again. It was another hour before I succeeded in getting her napkin folded. Then I let her out into

1. Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1902).

the warm sunshine and went up to my room and threw myself on the bed exhausted. I had a good cry and felt better. I suppose I shall have many such battles with the little woman before she learns the only two essential things I can teach her, obedience and love. ...

Since I wrote you, Helen and I have gone to live all by ourselves in a little garden-house about a quarter of a mile from her home, only a short distance from Ivy Green, the Keller homestead. I very soon made up my mind that I could do nothing with Helen in the midst of the family, who have always allowed her to do exactly as she pleased. She has tyrannized over everybody, her mother, her father, the servants, the little darkies who play with her, and nobody had ever seriously disputed her will, except occasionally her brother James, until I came; and like all tyrants she holds tenaciously to her divine right to do as she pleases. If she ever failed to get what she wanted, it was because of her inability to make the vassals of her household understand what it was. Every thwarted desire was the signal for a passionate outburst, and as she grew older and stronger, these tempests became more violent. As I began to teach her, I was beset by many difficulties. She wouldn't yield a point without contesting it to the bitter end. I couldn't coax her or compromise with her. To get her to do the simplest thing, such as combing her hair or washing her hands or buttoning her boots, it was necessary to use force, and, of course, a distressing scene followed. The family naturally felt inclined to interfere, especially her father, who cannot bear to see her cry. So they were all willing to give in for the sake of peace. Besides, her past experiences and associations were all against me. I saw clearly that it was useless to try to teach her language or anything else until she learned to obey me. I have thought about it a great deal, and the more I think, the more certain I am that obedience is the gateway through which knowledge, yes, and love, too, enter the mind of the child. As I wrote you, I meant to go slowly at first. I had an idea that I could win the love and confidence of my little pupil by the same means that I should use if she could see and hear. But I soon found that I was cut off from all the usual approaches to the child's heart. She accepted everything I did for her as a matter of course, and

refused to be caressed, and there was no way of appealing to her affection or sympathy or childish love of approbation. She would or she wouldn't, and there was an end of it. ...

I had a good, frank talk with Mrs. Keller, and explained to her how difficult it was going to be to do anything with Helen under the existing circumstances. I told her that in my opinion the child ought to be separated from the family for a few weeks at least that she must learn to depend on and obey me before I could make any headway. After a long time Mrs. Keller said that she would think the matter over and see what Captain Keller thought of sending Helen away with me. Captain Keller fell in with the scheme most readily and suggested that the little garden-house at the "old place" be got ready for us. ...

The little house is a genuine bit of paradise. It consists of one large square room with a great fireplace, a spacious bay window, and a small room where our servant, a little negro boy, sleeps. There is a piazza in front, covered with vines that grow so luxuriantly that you have to part them to see the garden beyond. Our meals are brought from the house, and we usually eat on the piazza. The little negro boy takes care of the fire when we need one; so I can give my whole attention to Helen.

She was greatly excited at first, and kicked and screamed herself into a sort of stupor; but when supper was brought she ate heartily and seemed brighter, although she refused to let me touch her. She devoted herself to her dolls the first evening, and when it was bedtime she undressed very quietly; but when she felt me get into bed with her, she jumped out on the other side, and nothing that I could do would induce her to get in again. But I was afraid she would take cold, and I insisted that she must go to bed. We had a terrific tussle, I can tell you. The struggle lasted for nearly two hours. I never saw such strength and endurance in a child. But fortunately for us both, I am a little stronger, and quite as obstinate when I set out. I finally succeeded in getting her on the bed and covered her up, and she lay curled up as near the edge of the bed as possible.

The next morning she was very docile, but evidently homesick. She kept going to the door, as if she expected some one, and

every now and then she would touch her cheek, which is her sign for her mother, and shake her head sadly. She played with her dolls more than usual, and would have nothing to do with me. It is amusing and pathetic to see Helen with her dolls. I don't think she has any special tenderness for them. I have never seen her caress them; but she dresses and undresses them many times during the day and handles them exactly as she has seen [by touch] her mother and the nurse handle her baby sister. ...

You will be glad to hear that my experiment is working out finely. I have not had any trouble at all with Helen, either yesterday or today. She has learned three new words, and when I give her the objects, the names of which she has learned, she spells them unhesitatingly; but she seems glad when the lesson is over. ...

My heart is singing for joy this morning. A miracle has happened! The light of understanding has shone upon my little pupil's mind, and behold, all things are changed! The wild little creature of two weeks ago has been transformed into a gentle child. She is sitting by me as I write, her face serene and happy, crocheting a long red chain of Scotch wool. She learned the stitch this week, and is very proud of the achievement. When she succeeded in making a chain that would reach across the room, she patted herself on the arm and put the first work of her hands lovingly against her cheek. She lets me kiss her now, and when she is in a particularly gentle mood, she will sit in my lap for a minute or two; but she does not return my caresses. The great step—the step that counts—has been taken. The little savage has learned her first lesson in obedience, and finds the yoke easy. It now remains my pleasant task to direct and mould the beautiful intelligence that is beginning to stir in the child-soul. ...

Helen and I came home yesterday. I am sorry they wouldn't let us stay another week; but I think I have made the most I could of the opportunities that were mine the past two weeks, and I don't expect that I shall have any serious trouble with Helen in the future. The back of the greatest obstacle in the path of progress is broken. I think "no" and "yes," conveyed by a shake or

a nod of my head [Helen communicated by touch], have become facts as apparent to her as hot and cold or as the difference between pain and pleasure. And I don't intend that the lesson she has learned at the cost of so much pain and trouble shall be unlearned. I shall stand between her and the over-indulgence of her parents. I have told Captain and Mrs. Keller that they must not interfere with me in any way. I have done my best to make them see the terrible injustice to Helen of allowing her to have her way in everything, and I have pointed out that the processes of teaching the child that everything cannot be as he wills it, are apt to be painful both to him and to his teacher. They have promised to let me have a free hand and help me as much as possible. The improvement they cannot help seeing in their child has given them more confidence in me. Of course, it is hard for them. I realize that it hurts to see their afflicted little child punished and made to do things against her will.¹

Anne Sullivan would have most definitely been imprisoned for committing child abuse if she had lived these days and had practiced the same form of discipline, for she freely employed corporal punishment. However, Solomon approved, when he said,

Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6).

Withhold not correction from the child, *for* if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from Sheol (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Now consider Helen's remembrance of their early experiences together:

The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrast between the two lives which it connects. ... I guessed vaguely from my mother's signs and from the hurrying to and fro in the house that something unusual was about to happen, so I went to the door and waited on the steps. ... I did not know what the future held of marvel or surprise for me. Anger and bitterness

1. Keller, p. 307-313.

had preyed upon me continually for weeks and a deep languor had succeeded this passionate struggle. Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding line, and had no way to knowing how near the harbour was. “Light! Give me light!” was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour. I felt approaching footsteps. I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother. Someone took it, and I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and more than all things else, to love me.¹

The contrast in their memories of the same things could not be more striking. Anne was an adult who remembered those first painful weeks of battle, but Helen was a young child, and she only remembered the wonderful results—her education. Solomon predicted what would happen in the case of Helen Keller, for he said, **“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causes shame to his mother”** (Proverbs 29:15). Anne remembered what a wild adversary Helen was, but Helen only remembered how much Anne loved her. And so it was as Solomon said, **“He who rebukes a man shall afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue”** (Proverbs 28:23).

If Helen Keller had not been subjected to the kind of strict discipline her teacher Anne Sullivan gave her, I have no doubt she would have never learned language, and would have spent most of her life living like an animal in an institution. Of course, her case was very unusual, but it illustrates quite well the power of punishment administered with a spirit of love.

One final comment about discipline. Certain kinds of self-restraint and discipline involve only a form of pseudo-wisdom. Developing an irrational obedience to some legalistic system does not produce the kind of self-control necessary to combat evil. An example, perhaps, is the asceticism of some athletic and military training regi-

1. Keller, p. 5-6.

mens. Paul alluded to that when he warned against a legalistic approach to religion:

If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why do ye submit to rules, as though living in the world? Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch (which are all things for consumption by use), according to the commandments and teachings of men? Which having, are indeed a matter of wisdom in will-worship, and self-mortification, and austerity of the body—not in any value against indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23).

Love of learning

Solomon most emphasized cultivating a love of learning, for it is by learning that our wisdom develops. And most of our learning does not come naturally, it must be cultivated with effort. Therefore, if we would be wise, and consequently capable of productive living, we must set our hearts to learn. Unlike the growth of our arms and legs, teeth and hair, it will not happen automatically. We must orient our will to achieve knowledge and understanding—wisdom. It is a personal responsibility. No man can make me wise without my cooperation.

Indeed, there is a natural disinclination to learn useful knowledge, and to develop good understanding, because it requires effort and hard work. The casual trivia that we experience and remember in our routine living rarely contributes to the development of wisdom. Such things are perhaps like “junk” foods, which may be enjoyable but do not provide much nutrition. Paul wrote of certain foolish sinners who were **“ever learning, and never able to come to knowledge of truth”** (2Ti. 3:7).

Therefore, Solomon repeatedly urged the reader (“my son” “ye children”) to cultivate the desire for knowledge and understanding. Love wisdom because she is **“the principal thing,”** the means by which the Lord gives us good things. The following list of scriptures from the Proverbs are only a few examples:

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother (Proverbs 1:8).

Hear, ye sons, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine. Forsake ye not my law. For I was a son to my father, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. And he taught me, and said to me, Let thy heart retain my words. Keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding. Do not forget, nor decline from the words of my mouth (Proverbs 4:1-5).

Take firm hold of instruction. Do not let her go. Keep her, for she is thy life (Proverbs 4:13).

My son, attend to my wisdom. Incline thine ear to my understanding, that thou may preserve discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge (Proverbs 5:1-2).

Now therefore, ye sons, hearken to me. For blessed are those who keep my [wisdom] ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and do not refuse it. Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors (Proverbs 8:32-34).

Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart to my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee, if they be established together upon thy lips. That thy trust may be in Jehovah, I have made *them* known to thee this day, even to thee (Proverbs 22:17-19).

Apply thy heart to instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge (Proverbs 23:12).

Buy the truth, and do not sell it, *yea*, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding (Proverbs 23:23).

As we gain wisdom, we should take great care to preserve it. Against his own advice Solomon allowed himself to be led astray from God in his later years (see First Kings 11):

My son, do not forget my law, but let thy heart keep my commandments (Proverbs 3:1).

My son, keep the commandment of thy father, and do not forsake the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thy heart. Tie them about thy neck (Proverbs 6:20-21).

My son, keep my words, And lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments and live, and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers. Write them upon the tablet of thy heart. Say to wisdom, Thou are my sister, and call understanding *thy* kinswoman (Proverbs 7:1-4).

Solomon emphasized the necessity of exercising our will because becoming wise involves an if-then, cause-and-effect relationship: from voluntary effort to wisdom. He said,

My son, *if* thou will receive my words, and lay up my commandments with thee, so as to incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding, yea, *if* thou cry after discernment, and lift up thy voice for understanding, *if* thou seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures, *then* thou shall understand the fear of Jehovah, and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:1-5; italics mine).

The qualities of wise men

Added to the basic orientation of the mind presented above are certain other qualities of mind common to all wise men. These qualities, together with the foundation attitude, appear to comprise what psychologists call the General Factor of intelligence. Examining all that Solomon said about the wise reveals the following general traits.

1. Their hatred of evil makes them cautious:

... the prudent man looks well to his going. A wise man fears, and departs from evil (Proverbs 14:15-16).

A prudent man sees the evil, and hides himself (Proverbs 22:3).

2. The wise know the dangers of even a momentary careless deed or word: **“Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to**

send forth an evil odor, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (Ecclesiastes 10:1).

3. The desire of the wise not to err contributes to emotional control:

He who is slow to anger is of great understanding (Proverbs 14:29).

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife (Proverbs 20:3).

... a wise man keeps it [his anger] back and calms it (Proverbs 29:11).

4. The wise value knowledge and use it to live successfully:

Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee. Give opportunity to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser. Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning (Proverbs 9:8-9).

Wise men lay up knowledge (Proverbs 10:14).

... he who is wise hearkens to counsel (Proverbs 12:15).

A wise son *hears* his father’s instruction (Proverbs 13:1).

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge (Proverbs 15:14).

5. As a man’s wisdom increases, he becomes even more able to learn, and he increasingly enjoys the process:

It is as sport to a fool to do mischief, and so is wisdom to a man of understanding (Proverbs 10:23).

... knowledge is easy to him who has understanding (Proverbs 14:6).

6. Their words reflect their mentality—controlled, knowledgeable, and effective:

... he who refrains his lips does wisely (Proverbs 10:19).

... the lips of the wise shall preserve them (Proverbs 14:3).

The lips of the wise disperse knowledge (Proverbs 15:7).

The heart of the wise instructs his mouth, and adds learning to his lips (Proverbs 16:23).

A summary description of wise men

The overall pattern looks like this: Wise men hate evil. They have no appreciation for senselessness. They look with distaste upon things that are wasteful and destructive. For example, physicians who work in hospital emergency wards loathe drunken driving because they continually face the misery it causes.

Modern surgeons seem to be fanatics about cleanliness, refusing even to touch the patient with their bare hands during a surgical operation. Some have even gone so far as to totally enclose each patient in a huge plastic balloon containing purified air. Fanaticism? But O how successful these modern wise men have been! It was not always so. Read the fine book, *None of These Diseases*, by S. I. McMillen¹ to see how long and how vigorously the medical profession resisted the ancient Bible teachings about the importance of cleanliness in controlling disease.

Manufacturers of those expensive earth satellites work with the same “fanaticism” toward cleanliness; likewise the manufacturers of computer chips. Scientists look with contempt upon careless research because it produces false, misleading information. Mechanics hate to work on poorly designed, filthy, or abused machinery. Teachers lament when they must face a classroom of wild, rebellious students.

A wise man is patient; he controls his emotions. If a quarrel erupts nearby, he does not allow himself to become a part of it. Also he quietly ignores an insult. Certainly he will remember and learn from such an experience, but he will not be provoked into a meaningless fight, choosing instead to hold back his anger and use his intellect to seek peace and reconciliation.

1. S. I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1967).

Notice, for example, how great national leaders successfully field the challenges and criticisms hurled against them. Wise men neither cause trouble nor look for it. When they see potential danger, they prepare ways to avoid or escape from it. Hence, they pay attention to warnings. If instructions specify certain things to avoid, they prudently attend to the advice. If laws impose restrictions, they obey the laws.

No matter how lofty their station in life may be, wise men are humble and eager to learn. They accept correction and try to change when proven wrong. Having discovered the power and beauty of truth, they listen to good counsel and receive teaching and education. They are especially careful to respect the advice and recommendations of experts and authorities. Indeed, they seek out many advisers, and toil in the process of finding information and knowledge. They invest their time, money, and labor in the quest of learning. They enroll in courses of study and acquire libraries.

As they continually accumulate their knowledge, they both increase their ability to learn, and increase the pleasure they have in acquiring it. Indeed, education and learning become a form of recreation for them.

Notice how successful, progressive nations and private companies promote activities to discover wiser ways to improve their efforts. They hire experts and invest in research. And as they make new discoveries, they carefully guard their knowledge, knowing that it enables them to survive and compete.

The wise understand the true difference between right and wrong, good and evil. They know the real meaning of justice and fair-play. They do not judge by appearances only, but they also see with depth. They have insight and foresight, enabling them to perceive both the underlying dynamics of things while accurately anticipating results and consequences. Therefore, they show good judgment and make correct decisions.

Wise men are able to successfully perceive ahead because they have faith in the ultimate value of wisdom, even though for the moment it may seem to be ineffective or, perhaps, may even appear to be an obstacle. Nevertheless, the wise know that in the

end, Jehovah's truth (whether in nature or in scripture) is always victorious. And so the wise are law-abiding, heedful of both natural law and social law (unless the laws of men violate God's righteousness).

They can see far enough ahead to know the benefits of right living. The penalties for violations are too costly, and penalties are inevitable, because Solomon said, **"Behold, a righteous man shall be recompensed in the earth, how much more the wicked man and the sinner!"** (Proverbs 11:31). Some man (a scientist, a sportsman, a businessman) may be tempted to cheat to gain fame and/or fortune, but a wise man recognizes that time catches up with the guilty, and the humiliation and loss of credibility far outweigh the brief benefits.

The wise are especially noted by their skill with words. First, they show self-control and restraint in their use of language. Realizing the power of words, they speak with great caution. When they do speak, what they say is true and relevant. Moreover, their words are both dignified and astute. What they say is ennobling and uplifting, bringing aid and comfort to others. Their wisdom and skill with words bring them security, honor, prosperity, and power.

Physical strength is no match for a well-developed mind. Men have long mastered the most powerful beasts. Countries that develop the national intellect have long towered over those that promote only physical prowess. There is no strength like wisdom and there are no great men like the wise.

Remember, however, the potency of wisdom is only realized when applied for good works. Therefore, hearken to these words of James: **"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show from his good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom"** (James 3:13).

Growing in wisdom

Growing in wisdom is a lifelong process. Indeed, it is our duty to continue increasing our desire for truth, developing our self-control, and adding to our knowledge and understanding. Several

times in the Bible a man's life and his mind are compared to the growth of a tree or the construction of a house. In those words we can see the fundamental process involved in pious mental development. For example, in the first Psalm we find these words:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of Jehovah, and on his law he meditates day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither. And whatever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:1-3).

Growing in wisdom is a process involving a continuous interaction of the intellect with perception. Intellect comes from seeing, and seeing comes from intellect; the two work together. The sense organs of the body are channels through which information is sent for the mind to build our cognitive structure. Through use of the eyes and the ears (primarily) we have access to knowledge. But eyes and ears only transmit the elements of information. Understanding and wisdom are created in the mind.

Helen Keller had neither working eyes nor ears, yet she acquired a college degree and became an accomplished speaker. Two people can view the same thing but may "see" something entirely different. Perceiving involves understanding, and this is done in the mind from the information provided by the eyes. We use our eyes and ears together with the knowledge and understanding within our hearts to perceive the world around us. Far more important than healthy eyes and ears in determining what we see and hear is the nature of our minds.

The author of the book of Hebrews spoke of the necessity of training ourselves to perceive wisely. He compared knowledge with food when he said, **"But solid food is for mature men, those having their sensibilities trained through practice for the discernment of both good and evil"** (Hebrews 5:14).

Prejudiced minds or hardened hearts can make perception impossible. When Jehovah God began to give up on his people, ancient Israel, he told the prophet Isaiah, **"Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not**

perceive. **Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed**" (Isaiah 6:9-10). God wanted those corrupt people to have their eyes blinded and their ears deafened so they would suffer the punishment they deserved.

When the Bible mentions the eye, it often refers to, or includes, the eye of the mind—that part of the heart that enables us to understand. Jesus referred to the broader meaning of eye when he said, **"The light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye is sound, thy whole body will be bright. But if thine eye is bad, thy whole body will be dark. If therefore the light that is in thee is darkness, how great is the darkness!"** (Mat. 6:22-23).

We cannot perceive correctly if we do not have correct knowledge and sound understanding. Nor can we obtain correct knowledge and sound understanding if we do not perceive correctly. The information of the senses interacts with our knowledge and our attitude to give us the power to perceive and understand. That is one of the reasons why ignorant men learn so slowly, and educated men learn so quickly. These words of Jesus apply: **"For whoever has, to him it will be given. And he who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him"** (Mark 4:25).

Solomon said that the wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool and the wicked man both walk in darkness. If the eye of the mind is sound, we understand correctly. If it is not sound, we either misperceive or misunderstand the information we receive by the senses. That is why Paul could say,

But even if our good news is concealed, it is concealed in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, in order for the light of the good news of the glory of the Christ (who is a likeness of God) not to shine forth to them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves are your bondmen through Jesus. Because it is God who said, Out of darkness light is to shine, who shone in our hearts for an enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ (Second Corinthians 4:3-6).

Moreover, Solomon said, **“A high look, and a proud heart, even the lamp of the wicked, is sin”** (Proverbs 21:4). The lamp of the wicked is a proud heart misinforming them about their rightful place in the world, perverting their perception of right and wrong, leading them into rebellion against authority, and causing them to commit selfish cruelty against others. Also notice how Agur used the word “eye”:

There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are swords, and their jaw teeth, knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men (Proverbs 30:13-14).

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 (Proverbs 30:17).

There is another way the eye of the mind can be perverted: through a kind of lust. Perhaps the eye is to the heart as the mouth is to the stomach. As the mouth is never satisfied (for long), the eye too is never full:

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied (Proverbs 27:20).

All things are full of weariness, man cannot utter *it*. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (Ecclesiastes 1:8).

Receptiveness to knowledge helps enlighten the eyes of the heart, thereby enabling it to grow in wisdom, which, in turn, increases its power to perceive. Paul wrote the Christians at Ephesus, saying, **“... the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened. For you to know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in the sanctified”** (Eph. 1:15-18).

Our physical growth ends after fifteen or twenty years. Our physical strength grows for twenty or thirty years and then declines. Intellectual growth can continue almost to the end. The elderly may lose their youthful vigor and strength, but they compensate

for that loss by the quality of their wisdom, which is symbolized by gray hair or a hoary head:

The hoary head is a crown of glory. It shall be found in the way of righteousness (Proverbs 16:31).

The glory of young men is their strength, and the beauty of old men is the hoary head (Proverbs 20:29).

Nevertheless, no matter how much wisdom and/or strength we may acquire, worldly wisdom cannot deliver us from grief and sorrow. For Solomon said, **“And I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also was a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow”** (Ecclesiastes 1:17-18).

Jehovah said, through Jeremiah the prophet, that our true glory is understanding and knowing him:

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor let the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he has understanding, and knows me, that I am Jehovah who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth. For in these things I delight, says Jehovah (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Only our knowledge about and faith in Jesus Christ can save our souls for the greater and perfect world of heaven in the afterlife.

Chapter 5

Living Righteously

The Journey

Solomon, and other authors of the Bible, sometimes referred to life as a kind of journey. And Solomon said wisdom provides light for that journey. The light of wisdom will direct a man's way, enabling him to enjoy the beauty of the scenery while guiding him away from its dangers. Our knowledge and understanding are like headlights that we use as we travel through this dark world. Here are a few examples of what Solomon said:

My son, walk not thou in the way with them. Restrain thy foot from their path (Proverbs 1:15).

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom. I have led thee in paths of uprightness (Proverbs 4:11).

But the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shines more and more to the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness. They know not at what they stumble (Proverbs 4:18-19).

Life is in the way of righteousness, and in the pathway thereof there is no death (Proverbs 12:28).

Since life is like a journey, then being righteous means following the road, staying on the correct route—the path of wisdom. Righteousness means using the light of knowledge and understanding to walk in the good way that Jehovah has chosen for us. When we drive on a highway we can travel at high speed in relative comfort and security if we are careful to stay within our bounds. Death and destruction result from erratic, reckless driving—and careless living. Thus, Solomon urged caution, saying,

Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make the path of thy feet level, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left. Remove thy foot from evil (Proverbs 4:25-27).

There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 16:25).

The benefits of righteousness

Every right way is contained within the universal wisdom of God. And righteousness is simply the process of manifesting or fulfilling his divine plans. Thus it is through righteousness that all the blessings of wisdom become realized. For this reason the many benefits of righteousness, stated by Solomon, are virtually identical to the many blessings of wisdom he gave.

He said that righteousness promotes a long life of growth and progress whose work continues to bear fruit even after death:

... the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shines more and more to the perfect day (Proverbs 4:18).

... the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf (Proverbs 11:28).

Life is in the way of righteousness, and in the pathway thereof there is no death (Proverbs 12:28).

A righteous man who walks in his integrity, blessed are his sons after him (Proverbs 20:7).

A righteous life is a joyful life:

The hope of the righteous is gladness (Proverbs 10:28).

The light of the righteous rejoices (Proverbs 13:9).

... a righteous man sings and rejoices (Proverbs 29:6).

Right living, he said, produces good things to enjoy:

Blessings are upon the head of a righteous man (Proverbs 10:6).

... the desire of the righteous shall be granted (Proverbs 10:24).

A righteous man eats to the satisfying of his soul (Proverbs 13:25).

In the house of a righteous man is much treasure (Proverbs 15:6).

Righteousness gives strength and favor:

The way of Jehovah is a stronghold to the upright (Proverbs 10:29).

He who follows after righteousness and kindness finds ... honor (Proverbs 21:21).

Right living promotes peace and safety:

He who walks uprightly walks securely (Proverbs 10:9).

When a man's ways please Jehovah, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7).

He who keeps his way preserves his soul (Proverbs 16:17).

Through righteousness comes lasting security:

Jehovah will not allow the soul of a righteous man to famish (Proverbs 10:3).

A righteous man shall never be removed (Proverbs 10:30).

Righteousness rescues us from crises:

A righteous man is delivered out of trouble (Proverbs 11:8).

In the fear of Jehovah is strong confidence, and his sons shall have a place of refuge (Proverbs 14:26).

The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. A righteous man runs into it, and is safe (Proverbs 18:10).

Since the universal plans of Jehovah include all the consequences of right living, therefore, the laws of nature insure blessings for righteousness. Indeed, the very actions of righteous men initiate a natural sequence of events designed by God to return to them the good they perform, a kind of rebound effect intended to reward their efforts:

The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them (Proverbs 11:6).

The merciful man does good to his own soul (Proverbs 11:17).

... a good man shall be filled from his own fruits (Proverbs 14:14).

All of these benefits—long life, prosperity, good reputation, security, and health—are natural consequences of right living. The righteous are the good citizens of the world. They earn their wages; they deserve the respect of their friends and neighbors; they enjoy the protection of the law; they maintain both their environment and their own bodies; all because of their manner of living. Moreover, they leave the world a better place.

Nevertheless, righteousness will not keep us from sorrow and pain because this is a world permeated with evil and injustice. Although our righteousness will cause God to save us, as these passages teach:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but Jehovah delivers him out of them all (Psalm 34:19).

For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again, but the wicked are overthrown by calamity (Proverbs 24:16).

Moreover, the world's injustice tends to defeat the Lord's intention that righteousness be properly rewarded. Too often Jehovah gives but the wicked take away. For example, many righteous men are kept poor because of oppression: **"Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is some consumed because of injustice"** (Proverbs 13:23). And our righteousness may even cost us our lives here on earth. For Solomon said, **"All this I have seen in my days of vanity. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness"** (Ecclesiastes 7:15). And indeed, Jesus was crucified in his perfect righteousness. Nevertheless, Jehovah has a better life prepared for all the pious, no matter what happens here under the sun.

The qualities of the righteous

Righteousness depends partly upon wisdom. For we cannot live and act right if we do not know what is right. Just as a tornado passing through a lumberyard cannot build a house, so a life of ignorance cannot create good. Neither random action nor impulsive living produce constructive enterprise. Therefore, the righteous seek to learn, and Jehovah adequately supplies them:

For Jehovah gives wisdom. Out of his mouth is knowledge and understanding. He lays up sound wisdom for the upright, a shield to those who walk in integrity (Proverbs 2:6-7).

Give opportunity to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser. Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning (Proverbs 9:9).

The purpose of educating our minds is to enable us to live fruitful lives. It equips us to continue the creation process—to produce good as the Lord does. Therefore, being righteous involves more than becoming wise. It means to apply the knowledge and understanding we have to our actions, so as to be productive. The very existence of the world is a result of God applying his wisdom to the original formless void. Like faith without works (see Jam. 2:17), wisdom without application is dead. The vigorous application of our knowledge and understanding is called industriousness. And righteous men are industrious.

Industriousness requires faith and trust, faith and trust that our endeavors will succeed. Indeed, civilization could not exist without some trust. We must all trust each other to some degree. As individuals we are small and insignificant in this vast and complicated universe. The knowledge and abilities of each one of us are exceedingly limited. Consequently, we must rely a great deal upon our trust in the reliability of other men, as well as the things in our world.

The most important trust is in God. Therefore, Solomon urged the development of that virtue when he spoke these inspiring words: **“Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he**

will direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear Jehovah, and depart from evil. It will be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones” (Proverbs 3:5-8).

One benefit of knowledge is that it can increase our trust and confidence in Jehovah and his ways. We can increasingly recognize that his ways are the ways of victory because his wisdom enables us to ultimately succeed in our struggles, even during times of temporary failure. When Solomon urged the reader to hearken to the words of the wise, he said, **“That thy trust may be in Jehovah, I have made them known to thee this day, even to thee”** (Proverbs 22:17-19). With that kind of trust, the righteous have confidence. For Solomon said,

... the righteous are bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1).

The fear of man brings a snare, but he who puts his trust in Jehovah shall be safe (Proverbs 29:25).

And Jehovah has confidence in the righteous. Referring to him, Solomon said,

... his friendship is with the upright (Proverbs 3:32).

... such as are perfect in *their* way are his delight (Proverbs 11:20).

... he loves him who follows after righteousness (Proverbs 15:9).

With that mutual trust Jehovah permits us to enjoy increasingly greater freedom to unleash our creative potential. Being irresponsible limits our freedom. Just as we do not allow young children or drunkards to drive automobiles, neither will God allow us much freedom beyond our level of maturity. As we mature in righteousness, we gain freedom, as Jesus said to his disciples, **“If ye remain in my word, ye are truly my disciples, and ye will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”** (John 8:31). Paul also said,

... where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (Second Corinthians 3:17).

For ye, brothers, were called to liberty, only not liberty for an opportunity to the flesh, but be servants to each other through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour each other, watch out that ye be not consumed by each other (Gal. 5:13-15).

The righteous are Jehovah's obedient children in the world. We love him as the good Father he is, and seek to imitate all the noble virtues of life that are personified by his Son Jesus Christ: love, mercy, kindness, generosity, patience, humility, obedience, unselfishness, self-control, industriousness, and such like. These are the qualities that build up and promote joy and peace.

The righteous seek good even in their thoughts:

The desire of the righteous is only good (Proverbs 11:23).

The thoughts of the righteous are just (Proverbs 12:5).

They use their speech to promote good:

The mouth of a righteous man is a fountain of life (Proverbs 10:11).

The lips of a righteous man feeds many (Proverbs 10:21).

The mouth of a righteous man brings forth wisdom (Proverbs 10:31).

Indeed they use all of their efforts to promote what is right and good. They plan good works themselves, and they support the good works of others:

The labor of a righteous man produces life (Proverbs 10:16).

A righteous man is a guide to his neighbor (Proverbs 12:26).

It is joy to the righteous to do justice (Proverbs 21:15).

A righteous man takes knowledge of the cause of the poor (Proverbs 29:7).

Like God, our eternal Father, the righteous hate evil and oppose it:

A righteous man hates lying (Proverbs 13:5).

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil (Proverbs 16:17).

He who keeps his soul shall be far from them [the perverse] (Proverbs 22:5).

An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous (Proverbs 29:27).

The above composite presents the qualities Solomon gave of the ideal righteous man. But, of course, growing in righteousness, like growing in wisdom, is a lifelong process. Even the noble Paul, near the end of his very righteous life, said, **“Brothers, I reckon myself not to have seized, but one thing, indeed forgetting the things behind, and reaching forward to the things ahead, I press forward toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”** (Php. 3:11-12).

And Solomon said,

Who can say, I have made my heart clean. I am pure from my sin? (Proverbs 20:9).

Surely there is not a righteous man upon earth that does good, and sins not (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Wise and righteous

Wise and righteous appear to be like two sides of one coin, two aspects of one general kind of man: he who trusts Jehovah and loves his wisdom, then upon getting it, uses it to promote good in the world. The perfect example of this wise-righteous combination is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Almost half of the New Testament is a record his life, describing his mind and his manner of living. And we are encouraged to imitate both. Speaking about fellow Christians, Paul said, **“But we have the mind of Christ”** (1Co. 2:16). And Peter said, **“For ye were called for this. Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, so that ye should follow his footsteps”** (1Pe. 2:21).

An excellent example of a wise-righteous man in the Old Testament is Job, whom God described as the most righteous man on earth during his generation. At the time of his terrible persecution

by Satan, Job was forced to defend himself against many false charges brought against him by, of all people, some of his good friends, men who were deluded by a false philosophy of life. Here is how he described himself:

O that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in the ripeness of my days, when the friendship of God was upon my tent, when the Almighty was yet with me, and my sons were about me, when my steps were washed with butter, and the rock poured out streams of oil to me, when I went forth to the gate to the city, when I prepared my seat in the street.

The young men saw me and hid themselves, and the aged rose up and stood. The rulers refrained from talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The voice of the ranking men was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth.

For when the ear heard *me*, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw *me*, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor who cried, also the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me. My justice was as a robe and a diadem.

I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the case of him whom I did not know. And I broke the jaws of the unrighteous, and plucked the prey out of his teeth.

Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand. My root is spread out to the waters, and the dew lays all night upon my branch. My glory is fresh in me, and my bow is renewed in my hand.

To me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence for my counsel. After my words they spoke not again, and my speech distilled upon them. And they waited for me as for

the rain. And they opened their mouth wide *as* for the latter rain. I smiled on them when they had no confidence, and they did not cast down the light of my countenance. I chose out their way, and sat *as* chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as a man who comforts the mourners. But now ...
(Job 29:2-25).

Notice (1) all the good deeds he listed as evidence of his righteousness, (2) how awed people were of his wisdom, and how eagerly they awaited his counsel, and (3) how much Jehovah had blessed him.

Notice also God's compassion after the time of his severe test: **“And Jehovah turned *back* the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. And Jehovah gave Job twice as much as he had before. ... And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, *even* four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days”** (Job 42:10, 16-17).

Chapter 6

Folly and the Way of Fools

The meaning of folly

Remember, the first third of the book of Proverbs, which is a kind of introduction, is primarily an appeal urging young men (my son, sons) to seek wisdom and shun folly. It concludes with two pleas. The first plea is from that honorable lady, wisdom. About her, Solomon said,

Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn out her seven pillars. She has killed her beasts. She has mingled her wine. She has also furnished her table. She has sent forth her maidens. She cries out upon the highest places of the city: He who is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who is void of understanding, she says to him, Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake ye simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of understanding (Proverbs 9:1-6).

Folly is behavior in violation of Jehovah's divine plans, and it is also personified in the form of a woman. This one is a seductive temptress offering immediate pleasure for sin to those ignorant of its deadly penalties. And she too makes her plea to men, for Solomon said,

The foolish woman is clamorous, simple, and knows nothing. And she sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call to those who pass by, who go right on their ways: He who is simple, let him turn in here. And as for him who is void of understanding, she says to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread in secret is pleasant. But he knows not that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol (Proverbs 9:13-18).

One of wisdom's benefits is that she will protect men from the evil woman: **"... to deliver thee from the interloping woman, even from the stranger who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her**

God (for her house inclines to death, and her paths to the dead; none who go to her return again, nor do they attain to the paths of life)” (Proverbs 2:16-19).

In many places of the Bible, sin in general is characterized as adultery against Jehovah. For example, the prophet Isaiah rebuked the people of Jerusalem when he said,

How the faithful city has become a harlot! She who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Thy silver has become dross, thy wine mixed with water. Thy rulers are rebellious, and companions of thieves. Everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They judge not the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come to them (Isaiah 1:21-23).

Another example is from the prophet Jeremiah:

Moreover Jehovah said to me in the days of Josiah the king, Have thou seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, She will return to me, but she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorcement, yet treacherous Judah her sister feared not, but she also went and played the harlot. And it came to pass through the frivolity of her whoredom, that the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not returned to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says Jehovah (Jeremiah 3:6-10).

An even more lengthy example was given by the prophet Ezekiel (see Eze. 23). And in the New Testament the apostle John, in his great vision, told of **“Babylon the great, the mother of whores and of the abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17:5).**

The penalties of folly

One-fourth of the introductory part of Proverbs consists of warnings against adultery, not simply the sex-act, but the whole process of folly and evil.

The cost of ignoring wisdom is not merely the loss of her benefits. There are severe penalties: distress and panic, fear and anguish, poverty and disgrace, calamity, destruction, even death. Moreover, when the guilty plea for mercy, Solomon said they would be ignored in the same way they ignored the cries of wisdom:

Wisdom cries aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the broad places. She cries in the chief place of concourse, at the entrance of the gates, in the city.

She utters her words: How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And scoffers delight them in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Turn back at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you. I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called, and ye have refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man has regarded, but ye have made all my counsel void, and want none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear comes, when your fear comes as a storm, and your calamity comes on as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me, because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Jehovah. They wanted none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof.

Therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the backsliding of the simple shall kill them, and the careless ease of fools shall destroy them. But he who hearkens to me shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil (Proverbs 1:20-33).

Below are a few similar warnings:

... the foolish die for lack of understanding (Proverbs 10:21).

He who despises the word brings destruction on himself (Proverbs 13:13).

Poverty and shame *are to* him who refuses correction (Proverbs 13:18).

He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination (Proverbs 28:9).

The development of folly

Wisdom in its fullest sense refers to all the ways of performing righteousness; folly refers to all the ways of committing sin. And since adultery personifies folly, we may, therefore, generalize the dynamics of adultery to all forms of sin. Examining the process of adultery described by Solomon reveals an interesting pattern of development that involves what appears to be three stages.

First, for any one kind of sin, the folly process begins with ignorance about it, although rarely complete ignorance. Typically, those involved have heard warnings against it, but they choose to ignore them. They do not appreciate its perils, and being unconvinced they are willing to take their chances for the pleasure it brings. Remember Solomon's example of the young man who was tempted: **"For at the window of my house I looked forth through my lattice, and I beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding passing through the street near her corner. And he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the middle of the night and in the darkness"** (Proverbs 7:6-9).

No doubt that young man was taught adultery is wrong, but the temptress assured him there was no risk. Such lack of conviction about the wrongness of something may be the result of either a temporary lapse from wisdom, or it may reflect a chronic state of rejection. However, whether for a foolish moment or a lifetime, when wisdom is rejected the mind becomes defenseless, and thus, vulnerable to temptation. Hence, folly calls out for the simple—

those without understanding—because they are the vulnerable ones. She says, **“He who is simple, let him turn in here. And as for him who is void of understanding, she says to him ...”** (Proverbs 9:16).

Paul said that God always provides a way of escape from temptation, at least for his sanctified. For Paul told the Corinthian brothers, **“No temptation has taken you except is common to man. But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what ye are able, but with the temptation will also make the way to escape, to enable you to endure”** (1Co. 10:13). And accepting a wise father’s advice will preserve a man from such grief. Solomon pleaded, **“Now therefore, ye sons, hearken to me, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thy heart decline to her ways. Go not astray in her paths”** (Proverbs 7:24-25).

Solomon described how those who are victimized by folly often reflect back to the beginning and make confession of their rebellious attitude: **“... and thou mourn at thy latter end when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!”** (Proverbs 5:11-13).

The final step in the first stage involves experiencing alluring temptations (found wherever the spirit of Satan is active) which arouse the appetites. Sin is said to be deceitful (see Heb. 3:13) because it misleads its victims. It offers an immediate reward, like bait on a hook. Thus, failure to appreciate warnings plus heightened arousal equals little resistance. Folly (the “strange” or “interloping woman”) flatters and seduces with a variety of smooth tactics, all designed to attract and captivate. Solomon said,

... [wisdom will] deliver thee from the interloping woman, even from the stranger who flatters with her words (Proverbs 2:16).

For the lips of an interloping woman drop honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil (Proverbs 5:3).

Thus the stage is set for committing the forbidden deed, which, in turn, opens the curtain for act two of the morbid drama. When sin is committed, it then gives its reward—immediate pleasure—to reinforce the sin. Folly says, **“Stolen waters are sweet, and bread in secret is pleasant”** (Proverbs 9:17).

Each time the particular sin is committed, resistance to temptation is lowered, until the behavior becomes so habitual that the man loses his power of choice. Pleasure and appetite go together, and indulging one heightens the other. Thus the victim no longer needs to be lured or enticed because he has become caught in the grip of his own feelings. His cultivated appetite has become a craving that cannot be ignored. He is trapped in a deep, narrow “pit.” His sin is now a depraved need which has become so much a part of his body that, somehow, even its healthy physio-chemical system is corrupted (pierced by an arrow):

... till an arrow strikes through his liver, as a bird hastens to the snare. And he does not know that it is for his life (Proverbs 7:23).

For a harlot is a deep ditch, and an interloping woman is a narrow pit (Proverbs 23:27).

The behavior is now practiced not only for the pleasure it gives, but also to escape the pain of resistance or abstinence. The most familiar examples of this process may be seen in those who are addicted to various chemical substances like alcohol and nicotine. Drunkenness is an ancient addiction, for Solomon described the words of a habitual drunk: **“They have stricken me, and I was not hurt. They have beaten me, and I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again”** (Proverbs 23:35).

Yet addiction to alcohol and/or drugs is only one of many ways a man can fall victim to folly. Indeed, the Bible teaches that all habitual sin will enslave. Jesus said emphatically, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that every man who does the sin is a bondman of the sin”** (John 8:34). Paul elaborated about that truth when he said,

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body in order to obey it, in its lusts. ... Know ye not, that to what ye present yourselves as bondmen for obedience, ye are bondmen to

what ye obey, whether of sin for death, or of obedience for righteousness? But thanks to God, that ye were bondmen of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart a model of doctrine for which ye were delivered. And having been set free from sin, ye were made servile to righteousness (I speak man-like because of the weakness of your flesh).

For as ye presented your body-parts servile to uncleanness, and to lawlessness for lawlessness, so now present your body-parts servile to righteousness for sanctification. For when ye were bondmen of sin, ye were uninhibited by righteousness. What fruit therefore did ye have then, of which things ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been made free from sin, and having become servile to God, ye have your fruit for sanctification, and the end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:12-23).

And Peter wrote a similar warning when he described degenerate men:

... those going rear of flesh in a degenerate lust, and who despise lordship. ... like irrational beasts of nature, having been born for capture and destruction, speaking evil at which things they do not understand For, uttering swollen things of vanity, they entice (to sensuality by lusts of flesh) those who actually escaped from those who live in error, promising them freedom, while they themselves are bondmen of corruption, for by what any man has been overcome, of this he has also been enslaved (2Pe. 2:10-12, 18-19).

Besides adultery and drunkenness Solomon's words suggest other addictions or compulsions not commonly considered to be such. He told, for example, of the craving that motivates those addicted to the excitement of human predation. He also mentioned the habitual hothead. And he spoke of the slothful man who wants to earn a living, but being addicted to idleness, he loses the struggle with his body. Here is what he said about those things:

For they do not sleep unless they do evil. And their sleep is taken away unless they cause to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence (Proverbs 4:16-17).

A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty, for if thou deliver *him*, thou must do it yet again (Proverbs 19:19).

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor (Proverbs 21:25).

The last stage in the process involves the cumulative consequences of folly on the addict. Continuing with the analysis of adultery—the general model of folly—consider Solomon’s description of its tragic climax:

But in the end she [folly] is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps take hold on Sheol (Proverbs 5:4-5).

... lest thou give thine honor to others, and thy years to the cruel, lest strangers be filled with thy strength, and thy labors *be* in the house of an alien, and thou mourn at thy latter end when thy flesh and thy body are consumed (Proverbs 5:9-11).

Folly, being a general term for diseases of the spirit, is a degenerative process that ultimately leads to death. Speaking about folly Solomon said,

... none who go to her return again, nor do they attain to the paths of life (Proverbs 2:19).

For she has cast down many wounded. Yea, all her slain are a mighty host. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death (Proverbs 7:26-27).

As a process, Solomon’s description of folly reminds me of the pitcher plant, a carnivorous one that feeds on insects. It attracts them by displaying a colorful appearance and secreting aromatic nectar at the region of its mouth. Besides giving off an attractive aroma, the nectar serves two other functions: it has an intoxicating effect when ingested, and it lubricates the area making it very slippery. There are also hair projections oriented toward the throat and

stomach making entrance easy but escape almost impossible. Once lured inside, the victim is drawn down by the force of gravity, accelerated by its own activity, eventually falling into a pool of digestive fluid.

In another way, perhaps we can look upon the entire process as something like a descending spiral or a vortex. The ignorant and foolish ride along the edge enjoying the excitement and pleasure of flirting with its dangers. But once over the edge, the descent begins. Each time the cycle of lust-sin-pleasure is repeated they swirl downward, sinking deeper into the dark hole, losing control of themselves. They have flirted with folly and lost. They have forsaken wisdom and made themselves fools—what I call regressive fools, in contrast to developmental fools of childhood.

There are, of course, an enormous variety of ways in which to sin. Moreover, there are many predisposing factors and unique circumstances that can lead a man to become enslaved to a particular sin. But the basic pattern appears to be as follows: First, ignorance (promoted by refusing to heed warnings) creates vulnerability to temptation which leads to sin. Then the pleasures of sin encourage habitual indulgence, which eventually develops into a compulsion that, in varying degrees, threatens the health and well-being of the individual.

Folly is like a vortex

It appears that this process, which I call the “folly vortex,” is the common denominator underlying every way to indulge in folly; whether in mind or in body; whether in the perversion of some natural good or in the creation of some unnatural evil; whether in a neglect or in some excess; even, it seems, in gaining wisdom and performing righteousness if other important duties are neglected (see Ecc. 7:16). Whether it concerns the way we think, reason, feel, talk; or the way we react to our body’s needs, appetites, and impulses; or the way we deal with material possessions and people—in any aspect of our life—habitual sin enslaves.

The folly process also explains more clearly, I believe, the relationship between personal responsibility and the disease components within many forms of mental illness. Addictions are

developed from things we have control over, and thus can be avoided or prevented. When a man becomes addicted his bad habit can become a disease. It is, however, a self-inflicted disease that he is responsible for. Because almost always addicts receive many prior warnings about such indulgences.

Health professionals have begun to recognize the addiction threat in some of the more common contemporary vices. William R. Miller and Patrick Carnes both wrote about similarities among various addictions. Miller said he noticed “possible commonalities among these seemingly diverse problems.”¹ And Carnes made the following statement: “First, addiction taps into the most fundamental human process. Whether the need is to be high, to be sexual, to eat, or even to work—the addictive process can turn creative, life-giving energy into destructive, demoralizing compulsivity.”²

The following is a quotation from the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia about addictive behaviors:

Addictive behavior is any activity, substance, object, or behavior that becomes the major focus of a person's life, during which they withdraw from other activities. Along with this, there are often other signs of having an addiction either physically, mentally, or socially.

A person can become addicted with nearly anything. Some researchers imply that there are similarities between physical addiction to various chemicals, such as alcohol and heroin, and psychological dependence to activities such as compulsive gambling, sex, work, running, shopping, or eating disorders. The type of activities which some people find addictive include gambling, food, sex, pornography, computers, video games, internet, work, exercise, spiritual obsession (as opposed to religious devotion), pain, cutting and shopping.

Nevertheless, the chronic sinner who becomes helplessly addicted to his sin (vice) is no more an innocent victim than the burglar

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1. William Miller, *The Addictive Behaviors: Treatment of Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Smoking, & Obesity* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980).
 2. Patrick Carnes, *The Sexual Addictions* (Minneapolis: Compucare Publications, 1983).

found trapped inside the chimney of a house he was trying to enter and rob.

One good defense against becoming addicted to some forms of folly is to resist harboring thoughts about them, lest they grow and take control, for Solomon said, **“The thought of foolishness is sin”** (Proverbs 24:9). Paul gave these beautiful words of advice about what to spend our thoughts upon: **“Finally brothers, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are commendable, if anything is a virtue, and if anything is praiseworthy, think on these things”** (Php. 4:8).

Madness appears to be an extreme form of folly. For Solomon said,

I turned about, and my heart *was set* to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason *of things* and to know that wickedness is folly, and that foolishness is madness (Ecclesiastes 7:25).

The beginning of the words of his [the fool’s] mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is mischievous madness (Ecclesiastes 10:13).

It seems in this world we are never free from the potential for folly and madness. Like the germs in and around our bodies, foolishness is ever ready to undermine our health. Indeed, the prophet Jeremiah said, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt. Who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9).

And Solomon said,

Surely oppression makes the wise man foolish (Ecclesiastes 7:7).

Yea also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that *they go to the dead* (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

The modern term for chronic madness is psychosis, and the most prevalent psychosis is schizophrenia. Perhaps many cases of schizophrenia involve the folly vortex. For example, individuals

who overindulge in careless fantasies may become addicted to fantasizing, thereby losing control of their thought processes. However, that is a conjecture.

Of course, just as in physical disease, the severity of a particular compulsion on the man's life will vary depending primarily upon the nature of the behavior itself. Some addictions may be only mildly irritating bad habits like nail-biting, whereas others may develop into devastating addictions like drunkenness. Some may be obvious to all, like gluttony, whereas others may remain private like pornography. Paul mentioned that when he said, **"The sins of some men are evident, leading to judgment, but also for some they follow after. Likewise also good works are evident, and those faring otherwise cannot be hid"** (1Ti. 5:24-25).

Now, eating, drinking, satisfying our sexual appetite, and such things, are not sins unless they are done in the wrong way. Righteousness and sinfulness are often distinguished not by what is done, but by how, how much, when, and where they are done. Remember, Solomon said,

For everything there is a season, and a time for very purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to kill, and a time to heal, a time to break down, and a time to build up, a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance, a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together, a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to seek, and a time to lose, a time to keep, and a time to cast away, a time to tear, and a time to sew, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak, a time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

Hence, overindulging in (or otherwise misapplying) acceptable behavior can also become addictive. For example, a man's sexual intimacy with his wife is acceptable and honorable. However, if it becomes addictive it will cause him to be abusive both to himself and to his wife. Another example is the workaholic, whose industriousness causes him to be negligent and/or abusive.

Servile to righteousness

One final word. Generalizing from the process of the folly vortex, perhaps a kind of reverse dynamics are involved in developing good habits of living. First, sound knowledge and careful discipline generates ambition for righteousness. That cultivated motivation, guided by intelligence, enables a man to patiently endure labor and striving. That, in turn, leads to increasing rewards of achievement. His efforts at labor become not only more successful, but increasingly satisfying. His work feels more like play to him, but unlike play it is productive.

Somehow our psychological nature appears able to be transformed in a positive way by developing an urge for wise behavior. Unlike the original mentality of our childhood, folly now seems naturally repulsive, while right living seems naturally appealing. Indeed, a cultivated “need” to do right things motivates such a man’s behavior. Perhaps that was why Jesus sometimes seemed driven to do good, especially when healing those who were afflicted. The following scripture, which describes a time Jesus was healing many people, seems to imply that: **“And the multitude comes together again, so as for them, no, not even to be able to eat bread. And when those with him heard it, they went out to grasp him, for they said, He is beside himself”** (Mark 3:20-21).

Another scripture tells of a time he would not eat while he was waiting for the citizens of a Samaritan city to come out to him. The record says, **“In the meanwhile the disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that ye know not. The disciples therefore said to each other, Did any man bring him to eat? Jesus says to them, My food is that I do the will of him who sent me, and may finish his work”** (John 4:31-34).

Now in this life a man’s spirit is in bondage to his body, either for good or for evil. When he is in bondage to his lusts it is for evil, a bondage that leads to sin. However, there are healthy kinds of bondages, which enable us to live more successfully for righteousness in the world. For example, developing an urge for righteousness could be called a “noble bondage.” Remember what Paul said about these two contrasting forms of bondage:

Know ye not, that to what ye present yourselves as bondmen for obedience, ye are bondmen to what ye obey, whether of sin for death, or of obedience for righteousness? But thanks to God, that ye were bondmen of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart a model of doctrine for which ye were delivered. And having been set free from sin, ye were made servile to righteousness (I speak man-like because of the weakness of your flesh).

For as ye presented your body-parts servile to uncleanness, and to lawlessness for lawlessness, so now present your body-parts servile to righteousness for sanctification. For when ye were bondmen of sin, ye were uninhibited by righteousness. What fruit therefore did ye have then, of which things ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been made free from sin, and having become servile to God, ye have your fruit for sanctification, and the end, eternal life (Rom. 6:16-22).

Nevertheless, no such noble bondage as being servile to righteousness causes a man to lose his self-control. Servility to righteousness is not an addiction.

Types of fools

Only Jehovah God is omniscient. Each of us is ignorant of many things. We often find ourselves in situations where we know not what to do. In such situations a wise man looks for someone who does have knowledge, and he learns from him. If that is not possible, and he is forced to act, a wise man will rely upon anything relevant that he knows before responding. Then when he does act he will respond cautiously, except perhaps in unavoidable emergencies when he must rely upon his trained reflexes.

We may fail because of unavoidable ignorance or misinformation, and suffer because of it, but there is no condemnation in not having knowledge (unless it was willfully rejected). Jesus once told some Pharisees, **“If ye were blind, ye would have no sin”** (John 9:41). Also, Jesus forgave those who crucified him because they did it in ignorance. For the record says, **“And when they came to the place called Skull, there they crucified him, and the male-**

factors, one at the right hand and the other at the left. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23:33-34). And Paul wrote about his own forgiveness, saying he was “the man who was formerly blasphemous, and a persecutor, and an aggressor. But I obtained mercy because I did it being ignorant in unbelief” (1Ti. 1:13).

In its broadest sense the word fool refers to any man who thinks or acts unwisely. Such behavior may be habitual or it may be limited to certain circumstances. For example, it is recorded that Jesus called some of his beloved disciples foolish men when they could not believe that he had risen from the dead. Jesus admonished them, saying, **“O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke!” (Luke 24:25).** On other occasions he referred to people as foolish men when they did not think rationally. For example, Matthew recorded an occasion when he sternly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, saying,

Woe to you, ye blind guides, who say, Whoever may swear by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever may swear by the gold of the temple, he is obligated. Ye foolish and blind men, for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? And, Whoever may swear by the altar, it is nothing, but whoever may swear by the gift upon it, he is obligated. Ye foolish and blind men, for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? (Mat. 23:16-19).

Everybody has sinned and acted foolishly at some time. Nevertheless, not everybody is an habitual fool any more than everybody is an habitual sinner. Habitual fools are those who willingly and persistently reject Jehovah’s wisdom. It can occur in childhood or in adult life. Moreover, a man may be wise in one realm, such as in his occupation, but a fool in some other realm, such as with his family. There are many possible combinations of living wisely and foolishly in our complex lives.

The most tragic fool of all is the spiritual fool. He is the man who ignores knowledge about his spiritual life and refuses to prepare for his soul’s eternal destiny. No matter how brilliant a man’s intellect, or how skilled he may be in worldly affairs, if he pays no

attention to the good news of Jesus Christ he is a spiritual fool. And alas, I fear that most men are spiritual fools, for Jesus said, **“Enter ye in by the narrow gate, because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it”** (Mat. 7:13-14).

Jesus told the following parable to warn against being spiritually foolish:

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins, who, having taken their lamps, went forth to the bridegroom’s gathering. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, foolish women, who, having taken their lamps, took no olive oil with them. But the wise took olive oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

But at midnight a shout occurred, Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go ye forth for his gathering. Then all those virgins were roused, and put their lamps in order. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us from your olive oil, because our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Perhaps there may not be enough for us and you. But go ye rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. And the prepared entered in with him for the wedding festivities, and the door was shut. But afterward the other virgins also came, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But having answered, he said, Truly I say to you, I know you not. Watch therefore, because ye know not the day nor the hour in which the son of man comes (Mat. 25:1-13).

Notice the foolish women were virgins, yet they were still rejected because they were not properly prepared. In another parable Jesus said,

The land of a certain rich man brought forth well. And he pondered within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have nowhere I will store my crops? And he said, I will do this. I will dismantle my barns, and I will build greater, and

there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou have many goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, Thou foolish man, they demand thy soul from thee this night, and the things that thou prepared, whose will they be? So is he who stores up for himself, and is not being rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).

Fools, then, are those who have both the potential and the opportunity to learn, but either refuse to learn to begin with or, after having once learned, abandon wisdom and turn back into folly. These could be called developmental fools and regressive fools, respectively. Regressive fools are those who, having developed their minds with knowledge and understanding, abandon it and indulge themselves in dissipation with folly.

Children might be considered developmental fools, but the Bible does not classify them as fools. Children, in whose heart Solomon said folly abounds, are not called fools because of their attitude toward learning. Fools are ignorant because they hate and reject learning. Children are merely undeveloped, which is why they are simple-minded. They are inexperienced to the dangers of the world, too trusting and too careless. However, if they apply themselves to learn, they can become wise. And every loving parent prays they will.

Fools of whatever kind deserve condemnation. However, Jesus warned against uttering that accusation rashly against a brother. He said, **“But I say to you, that every man who is angry at his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment, and whoever speaks an insult to his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, Foolish man, will be liable to the hell of fire”** (Mat. 5:22).

A total fool

In this section I give all of the characteristics that Solomon said were associated with fools. Collectively, it describes what could be called the total fool. The description is useful because it shows how the characteristics relate together. Moreover, there are some men that actually fit the description. They are foolish in virtually

every realm of their lives. I have personally met a few. Although perfectly sober, they act and reason like drunk men. About the only difference between them, is that sober fools retain their muscular coordination. Most of them are incorrigible youths. However, some can be found at all ages. Here now is how Solomon described them.

From the first part of Proverbs, we find that fools blindly reject all knowledge, advice, and counsel. Indeed, they hate knowledge and reproof. They do not choose the fear of Jehovah, but instead they turn away from wisdom, and remain complacent in ignorance. Notice their resistance to learning:

The foolish despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And scoffers delight them in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Turn back at my reproof. Behold, I [wisdom] will pour out my spirit upon you. I will make my words known to you (Proverbs 1:22-23).

... he who hates reproof is brutish (Proverbs 12:1).

A fool despises his father's correction (Proverbs 15:5).

A fool has no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself [like giving his opinion] (Proverbs 18:2).

Fools hate discipline and education. Instead, what they love is what they should hate:

It is as sport to a fool to do mischief (Proverbs 10:23).

... it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil (Proverbs 13:19).

Folly is joy to him who is void of wisdom (Proverbs 15:21).

As a dog who returns to his vomit, is a fool who repeats his folly (Proverbs 26:11).

Since their mental orientation is backwards, fools become incapable of acquiring knowledge and understanding:

Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, since he has no understanding? (Proverbs 17:16).

Wisdom is too high for a fool. He opens not his mouth in the gate (Proverbs 24:7).

Thus, fools lack self-control, and are slaves of their primitive impulses and urges:

... the fool bears himself insolently, and is confident (Proverbs 14:16).

... every fool will be quarrelling (Proverbs 20:3).

If a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, whether he be angry or laugh, there will be no rest (Proverbs 29:9).

A fool utters all his anger (Proverbs 29:11).

... anger rests in the bosom of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

Their impulsiveness gives them immediate gratification, and thereby, deceives them: “**... the folly of fools is deceit**” (Proverbs 14:8).

Like children they are transparent, easily exposed as fools:

A fool’s vexation is instantly known (Proverbs 12:16).

... the heart of fools proclaims foolishness (Proverbs 12:23).

... a fool flaunts folly (Proverbs 13:16).

Yea also, when the fool walks by the way, his understanding fails him, and he says to everyone *that* he is a fool (Ecclesiastes 10:3).

Their primitive minds are egocentric, and incapable of objective judgment about right and wrong:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 12:15).

Fools mock at sin (Proverbs 14:9).

... the fool bears himself insolently, and is confident (Proverbs 14:16).

The foolishness of a man subverts his way, and his heart rages against Jehovah (Proverbs 19:3).

Fools lack both the will and the ability to perform concentrated labor. They prefer to chase wild schemes:

... he who pursues vanities is void of understanding (Proverbs 12:11).

... the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth (Proverbs 17:24).

The fool folds his hands together, and eats his own flesh [destroys his life] (Ecclesiastes 4:5).

The labor of fools wearies every one of them, for he knows not how to go to the city (Ecclesiastes 10:15).

Having mature bodies governed by a child's mentality makes them troublesome, destructive, and dangerous:

Every wise woman builds her house, but a foolish woman plucks it down with her own hands (Proverbs 14:1).

Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly (Proverbs 17:12).

A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty, but a fool's vexation is heavier than both (Proverbs 27:3).

Their speech mirrors their nature: primitive, unrestrained, useless, and destructive. Like a wildfire, it wanders about both generating heat and feeding upon it. And because of the rebound effect, it is a major cause of their own grief:

... the mouth of a foolish man is a present destruction (Proverbs 10:14).

In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride (Proverbs 14:3).

... the mouth of fools pours out folly (Proverbs 15:2).

A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for stripes. A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul (Proverbs 18:6-7).

If a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, whether he be angry or laugh, there will be no rest (Proverbs 29:9).

... the lips of a fool will swallow himself up. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. A fool also multiplies words; yet man knows not what shall be, and that which shall be after him, who can tell him? (Ecclesiastes 10:12-14).

A summary of a total fool

The complete picture looks something like the following. They are men who resist developing their minds. They are proud, self-satisfied, complacent individuals who are too lazy to put forth the effort to develop. They hate good advice because it condemns their way of life, and in their pride they cannot endure criticism. They only abuse those who try to correct them. Their dreaded enemy is pain. They cannot bear discipline and the discomfort that goes along with it. Therefore, they cannot endure work or study. Knowledge is just too tiresome to achieve, and so they ignore all opportunities to learn and gain an education. Indeed, they prefer the easy way of remaining ignorant. Their primitive minds deceive them into thinking they know best what is good for them. And what is good for them, they believe, is immediate pleasure.

Their god is pleasure, and they devote their lives to it. They live for the moment. Whatever makes them feel good, whatever brings the most enjoyment the quickest way is what they do: be it drug abuse, sexual license, reckless driving, vandalism, brutality, theft, senseless talk, raging against someone or something, or simply lazy idleness. They love the wild abandon of unrestrained freedom. It gives them a thrill to vandalize, deface, plunder, injure, rage, and destroy. They perceive life to be a crazy game, and they love to laugh at it.

They live impulsively, and their impulsiveness and lack of sense make them victims of circumstances. Their brutish minds cannot think. They have no intellect to direct them or to help them solve problems. And so, faced with difficulty, they become frustrated, helpless, invalid. Under stress they become agitated. If the stress is threatening to them (real or imagined), like cattle, they panic and go berserk. When provoked, they instantly show their wrath and give full vent to it. Moreover, they are easily provoked. They are

“thin skinned,” “touchy,” and “hot-tempered” as a matter of temperament. Beware of them! At the slightest provocation they are liable to erupt into a fit, and create violence of one kind or another, depending upon whatever impulse most directs them.

Being totally self-centered, their disregard for the feelings of others naturally generates friction. Thus, they are quarrelsome and often in conflict with others. They are easily recognized because they are so transparent. They expose themselves like little children. They are as obvious as a raucous, staggering drunk man in a saloon. They announce to all that they are dumb, immature, stupid, senseless dolts. They broadcast the message that they are clowns and fools. They do not have sense enough to care. They cannot see far enough ahead to know the grief they bring upon themselves.

If forced to labor, they quickly become exhausted and confused. They require constant oversight and supervision, which is deeply resented. The results of their efforts are usually bungling failures. Like hogs in a man’s house, they are out of place with, and unfit for fine things. Properly cared for, goods can last for years, but at their hands they age and wear out overnight.

Like everything else about them their language is unrestrained, excessive, vulgar, and senseless. Having no intelligent knowledge, they talk of stupidity and comedy. It is unproductive and unhealthy; it is without redeeming value. Worst, it is provocative and irritating, like the constant barking of dogs. They hate anybody who speaks intelligently of knowledgeable things. Not understanding, they just mock and laugh in response. Their unrestrained use of talk often gets them into trouble simply because it is so offensive, irritating, and insulting.

These kinds of men viewed on a screen may look amusing to some people, but in real life they are miserable to be around. Their lives involve a constant tumultuous cycle between the thrills of pleasure and the sorrows of grief. They are tragic, pathetic creatures both to be pitied and condemned. Since they are at once blind victims of their primitive nature, while at the same time, they have freely chosen to live that way, and they hurt everybody who tries to improve them.

The characteristics of this mentality appear to be such a threat to childhood that almost the entire first one-third of Proverbs is a plea directed toward the young, urging them to learn and acquire wisdom—the only treatment that will either prevent or cure the malady. Solomon’s words “my son,” “sons,” “children” are used to address the reader about twenty times within those first six pages (in a modern Bible). Solomon warned the young against indulging in a devil-may-care, happy-go-lucky life. Do not play it away in ignorance and pleasure, he said:

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes. But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).

Remember, developing our mind is a responsibility that is decidedly personal, and the consequences to ourselves are inevitable. For Solomon said, **“If thou are wise, thou are wise for thyself. And if thou scoff, thou alone shall bear it”** (Proverbs 9:12).

Dealing with fools

Solomon warned against involvement with fools, whether it be regular involvement or a brief encounter. He said,

... the companion of fools shall smart for it (Proverbs 13:20)

Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy word (Proverbs 23:9).

If you must respond to them, consider the circumstances, and act accordingly. Nevertheless, do not respond by joining him in his folly, but respond instead by exposing it for what it is. Solomon advised, **“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like to him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit”** (Proverbs 26:4-5).

Solomon also advised against either praising them or giving them responsibility. He who does so will only suffer for his efforts. It is

naïve to think all they need is an opportunity and a little encouragement. For Solomon said,

He who sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off the feet, *and* drinks injury (Proverbs 26:6).

As he who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honor to a fool (Proverbs 26:8).

As an archer who wounds all, so is he who hires a fool, and he who hires those who pass by (Proverbs 26:10).

Those in authority, who are required to maintain order, have the responsibility to punish and control fools with force and firmness.

... a rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding (Proverbs 10:13).

Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and stripes for the back of fools (Proverbs 19:29).

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools (Proverbs 26:3).

Yet no matter how much fools may be punished, the ultimate cure for this spiritual malady does not come from without. For punishment will not cure them, because their stubborn mentality prevents them from learning. Solomon said,

A rebuke enters deeper into him who has understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool (Proverbs 17:10).

Though thou should pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him (Proverbs 27:22).

Treatment for fools

The value of punishing them is to restrain their foolishness, and show an example to those who can learn by observation. The fool, of his own free will, must initiate an attitude change. External consequences can only offer encouraging incentives. If, and when, he reverses his mind-set and becomes motivated to shun folly and love learning, he is no longer a fool. He can then begin the long and arduous task of mental development.

Treatment for those who are addicted to folly appears to differ little from that used to cure folly in children. It involves developing in them a spirit of humility with the right mental orientation (penitence); a willingness to endure much suffering; and the establishment of good habits of living. Those are the basic ingredients in Jehovah's prescription for everybody's spiritual health. That message permeates the Bible.

The key to cure, however, remains the state of a man's will. How a man chooses to live has a certain effect on the health of his body, but it has an even more profound effect on the health of his spirit. All the physicians of the world cannot save the life of a sick man if his body refuses to cooperate. No amount of effort on the part of another (no, not even Jehovah God) can save a man's soul unless his spirit chooses to cooperate. It is the nature of our God-given freedom.

Many scriptures show how God wants to save us, but he cannot if we do not cooperate. For example, Jeremiah said, **"For the Lord will not cast off forever. For though he causes grief, yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses. For he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the sons of men"** (Lam. 3:31-33).

And Ezekiel said,

Have I any pleasure in the death of a wicked man? says lord Jehovah, and not rather that he should return from his way, and live? (Ezekiel 18:23).

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each one according to his ways, says lord Jehovah. Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit. For why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says lord Jehovah, therefore turn yourselves back, and live (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Jehovah cannot save us without our cooperation because he has voluntarily limited his omnipotence. He has limited himself in

order to share his divinity with us, so that we can become sons of God. But in order to fulfill that potential, we must use the freedom he has given us to imitate his holiness. Peter wrote these words of encouragement for that:

Therefore having girded up the loins of your mind, being sober, hope entirely for the grace brought to you at the revealing of Jesus Christ. As children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves to the former desires in your ignorance, but according to the Holy Man, he who called you, ye yourselves also become holy in all conduct, because it is written, Become ye holy, since I am holy (1Pe. 1:13-16).

Chapter 7

The Wicked— Predators of Men

They corrupt wisdom

One of wisdom's benefits is that it provides defense against wicked men. And when you suffer because of them (as we all do sometime), remember what Solomon said:

For wisdom shall enter into thy heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant to thy soul, discretion shall watch over thee, understanding shall keep thee, to deliver thee from the way of evil, from the men who speak perverse things, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil, who are crooked in their ways, and wayward in their paths (Proverbs 2:10-15).

The wicked are the very antithesis of the righteous. The two kinds contrast because of their primary nature: the righteous apply the Lord's wisdom correctly, whereas the wicked pervert and misapply it. Fools are men who reject knowledge. Wicked men acquire it, but then use it to commit evil. They corrupt their wisdom.

When Jehovah rebuked the king of Tyre, among other things he said, **"Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty. Thou have corrupted thy wisdom because of thy brightness"** (Ezekiel 28:17). The psalmist also told how a wicked man ceases to be wise: **"The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit. He has ceased to be wise and to do good. He devises iniquity upon his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not abhor evil"** (Psalm 36:3-4).

They are deceitful

Jesus told of their origin. Speaking to his enemies he said, **"Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father. He was a man-killer from the beginning, and he has not**

stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Deceit seems to be the major weapon of the wicked man. And with it he gains power—power he uses to prey upon others. In his great vision the apostle John described some things about Satan, among which he said, **“And the great dragon was cast out [of heaven], the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray” (Rev. 12:9).** Peter also wrote this warning about him: **“Be sober, be vigilant. Your opponent the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom to devour. Whom resist, steadfast in the faith” (1Pe. 5:8-9).**

Different from fools

That mysterious, powerful adversary of righteousness, father of all the wicked, is no ordinary fool. We are told, **“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made” (Gen. 3:1).** Although Satan may be very cunning he is not wise. More appropriate words are “sly,” “crafty,” “shrewd,” “wily.” And so also are those men who imitate his ways—the wicked of the world. But no matter how intelligent a wicked man may appear to us, in the sight of God he is, indeed, a great fool. For Solomon said, **“His own iniquities shall take a wicked man, and he shall be held with the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction. And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray” (Proverbs 5:21-23).**

Fools do evil impulsively, wicked men premeditate evil. As Solomon said,

A worthless man devises mischief (Proverbs 16:27).

He who shuts his eyes devises perverse things (Proverbs 16:30).

For their heart meditates oppression (Proverbs 24:2).

Remember, wisdom is something like money; it is a resource. Knowledge and understanding are assets. They give strength:

A wise man is strong, yea, a man of knowledge increases might (Proverbs 24:5).

For wisdom is a defense, even as money is a defense (Ecclesiastes 7:12).

Rotten minds

A wicked man is one who takes this resource and uses it wrongfully. Sound wisdom cannot be used wrongfully. What the wicked man does is to take what he knows of truth and knowledge, and makes changes here and alterations there, producing an inferior mutation. His knowledge, therefore, becomes perverted. A man's wisdom can be compared with an apple. An apple is food providing nourishment and energy for the body. However, an apple can rot, and when it rots, we no longer call it food.

The wicked man's mind is rotten, no longer worthy to be called truly wise. And because those kinds of men have freely chosen to corrupt God's truth, they are an abomination to him even more than a rotten apple is to us.

Here are a few of the things Solomon said about that:

Do not envy thou the man of violence, and choose none of his ways. For the perverse man is an abomination to Jehovah The curse of Jehovah is in the house of a wicked man (Proverbs 3:31-33).

The heart of the wicked is little worth (Proverbs 10:20).

The way of a wicked man is an abomination to Jehovah (Proverbs 15:9).

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he brings it with a wicked mind! (Proverbs 21:27).

They love evil

Like fools, wicked men are the consequence of an evil will. By their own choice, the wicked pervert their minds away from sound wisdom to pursue the transient pleasures of sin. Their mental ori-

entation is similar to that of fools—backward from what it should be. They love what they should hate, and they hate what they should love:

... [they] **rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil** (Proverbs 2:14).

For they do not sleep unless they do evil. And their sleep is taken away unless they cause to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence (Proverbs 4:16-17).

... **he who is perverse in his ways despises him** [Jehovah] (Proverbs 14:2).

With the development of computers and the internet wicked men now use high technology to cheat, steal, and destroy. Hackers are electronic burglars, sneaking into other men's computers. The creators of computer viruses and other malicious software are wicked men that use all kinds of deceit to prey upon the innocent. Often they do so merely for the morbid pleasure of causing trouble.

Puffed up with pride

The wicked are men who have acquired some understanding, and have come to appreciate the value of knowledge, but they have become puffed up with pride. Solomon said, **“A high look, and a proud heart, even the lamp of the wicked, is sin”** (Proverbs 21:4). And Paul said, **“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (1Co. 8:1). Remember what Jehovah said about the king of Tyre: **“Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty. Thou have corrupted thy wisdom because of thy brightness”** (Ezekiel 28:17).

Dear reader, beware lest pride grow in you as you gain more knowledge. Treat pride as it truly is: a deadly disease of the spirit. What is exalted by this adulterous generation as self-esteem, is too often a new euphemism for old-fashioned pride.

Their skill with deceit

The wicked think that with the power of their knowledge they can sin with impunity. And they use their major weapon—deceit—to prey upon others.

Wisdom is light; it informs; it reveals what is true and right. Paul defined light in this broad sense when he said, **“But all things exposed are revealed by the light, for everything that is seen is light”** (Eph. 5:13).

Darkness, then, is either absence of information or misinformation. The fool gropes in darkness because he lacks knowledge. The wicked man lurks in darkness. Indeed, he creates it; he deliberately misinforms to gain advantage. The wicked misinform in order to weaken and manipulate others to prey upon them, and to escape the just consequences of their evil doings. Wicked men are now even deceiving computers in order to cheat, steal, and destroy.

Magicians, actors, and novelists also use misinformation. However, they are not necessarily deceitful, for they generally admit using illusion and fiction. They use it to entertain and/or to educate. However, as the entertainment industry has become increasingly corrupt, more of them are manipulating and distorting information for ulterior motives.

The wicked are hypocrites pretending to be what they are not in order to gain selfish advantage—to prey upon people. They are the predators of human society. Beware of what they say. The messages they send out are designed to entice, to lure, to mislead. The information they give is perverted and treacherous. They are the proverbial wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Paul warned of them, when he said, **“... for even Satan disguises himself into an agent of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his helpers also disguise themselves as helpers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”** (Second Corinthians 11:14-15).

Below are a few things that Solomon said about their deceitfulness:

The counsels of the wicked are deceit. The words of the wicked lay in wait for blood (Proverbs 12:5-6).

A man of violence entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good (Proverbs 16:29).

When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart (Proverbs 26:25).

They are “two-faced” men who speak with a “forked tongue.” They utilize an underground language, including various kinds of body signals, to communicate with their accomplices while misleading their hapless victims:

A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he who walks with a perverse mouth, who winks with his eyes, who speaks with his feet, who makes signs with his fingers (Proverbs 6:12-13).

He who shuts his eyes [winking] devises perverse things. He who moves his lips brings evil to pass (Proverbs 16:30).

Preying upon men legally

Doing violence does not always refer to a literal attack against the body of another. There are more subtle, indirect ways to “shed blood.” There are (for want of a better expression) “white collar” or “genteel” ways to devour others. These are tactics especially popular with the better-educated predators of the world, such as plundering, oppressing, and destroying men’s lives without laying a hand upon them.

Of course, in many cases it is all perfectly “legal,” that is, according to human law. These include ways to commit violence with “the mouth,” such as the use of obscure or ambiguous laws, fine print agreements, half-truths, innuendo, gossip, slander, flattery, and the like.

Isaiah rebuked the leaders of Israel for that kind of thing when he said,

Jehovah stands up to contend, and stands to judge the peoples. Jehovah will enter into judgment with the elders of his people, and the rulers of it. It is ye who have eaten up the

vineyard; the spoil of a poor man is in your houses. What do ye mean that ye crush my people, and grind the face of the poor? says the Lord, Jehovah of hosts (Isaiah 3:13-15).

Micah spoke the same thing about them when he said,

Woe to those who devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and seize them, and houses, and take them away. And they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage (Mic. 2:1-2).

And I Jehovah said, Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? Ye who hate the good, and love the evil, who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones, who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. Then they shall cry to Jehovah, but he will not answer them. Yea, he will hide his face from them at that time, according as they have wrought evil in their doings (Mic. 3:1-4).

And to a later generation of them Ezekiel said,

Thus says the Lord Jehovah: Let it suffice you, O rulers of Israel. Remove violence and spoil, and execute justice and righteousness. Take away your exactions from my people, says the Lord Jehovah (Ezekiel 45:9).

Their crooked lives

Unlike fools wicked men are more difficult to identify because they are careful to disguise themselves. Life in this world, recall, is like a journey. The ways of righteousness are like good pathways. And if we walk in the light of truth, our steps will not wander from those paths.

However, the wicked man vacillates his behavior. He lives obedient and lawful when he must to avoid detection, but when nobody is looking he becomes rebellious and criminal. Right and wrong

have no objective meaning for such men. They are opportunists who live righteously or unrighteously depending upon what they think they can get away with. Therefore, they live crooked lives:

... to deliver thee from the way of evil, from the men who speak perverse things, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil, who are crooked in their ways, and wayward in their paths (Proverbs 2:12-15).

Enter not into the path of the wicked, and walk not in the way of evil men. Avoid it. Do not pass by it. Turn from it, and pass on (Proverbs 4:14-15).

The way of him who is laden with guilt is exceedingly crooked (Proverbs 21:8).

These men of perverted mind do not understand the meaning of real justice:

A wicked man receives a bribe out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of justice (Proverbs 17:23).

Evil men do not understand justice (Proverbs 28:5).

Nor do they show mercy:

... he [the wicked man] sows discord (Proverbs 6:14).

... the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel (Proverbs 12:10).

The soul of a wicked man desires evil. His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes (Proverbs 21:10).

And they hate the upright:

Bloodthirsty men hate him who is perfect (Proverbs 29:10).

... he who is upright in the way is an abomination to a wicked man (Proverbs 29:27).

The way of the wicked is an abomination to God, because they use both their minds and their bodies to bring harm and sorrow to the innocent. Solomon said, **“There are six things which Jehovah hates, yea, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a**

heart that devises wicked purposes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

A summary description of them

In two of the psalms there is a good summary description of these kinds of men:

In the pride of the wicked man the poor man is hotly pursued. Let them be taken in the devices that they have conceived. For the wicked man boasts of his heart’s desire. And the greedy man renounces, *yea*, despises Jehovah. The wicked man, in the pride of his countenance, *says*, He will not require *it*. All his thoughts are, There is no God. His ways are profane at all times. Thy judgments are far above out of his sight. As for all his adversaries, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, I shall not be moved. To all generations I shall not be in adversity.

His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue is mischief and iniquity. He sits in the lurking-places of the villages. In the covert places he murders the innocent man. His eyes are secretly set against the poor man. He lurks in secret as a lion in his covert. He lays in wait to catch the poor man. He catches the poor man when he draws him in his net. He crouches, he bows down, and helpless men fall by his strong men. He says in his heart, God has forgotten. He hides his face. He will never see it (Psalm 10:2-11).

The transgression of the wicked man says within my heart, There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, that his iniquity will not be found out and be hated. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit. He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good. He devises iniquity upon his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not abhor evil (Psalm 36:1-4).

Jesus issued a special warning about certain kinds of wicked men who prey upon others while claiming to speak for God. He said

they can be detected by the way they live and the consequences of their lives:

But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves. From their fruits ye will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits. Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. So then from their fruits ye will know them (Mat. 7:15-20).

Envy of the wicked

Until a man gains enough insight to understand its deadly nature, there can be the temptation to enter their paths and to walk in their ways. Observing their successes can make a man envious. Therefore, Solomon pleaded,

Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them (Proverbs 24:1).

Fret not thyself because of evildoers; neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the lamp of the wicked shall be put out (Proverbs 24:19-20).

One of the Psalmists describes the temptation with greater detail:

Surely God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone. My steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as *other* men, nor are they plagued like *other* men. Therefore pride is as a chain around their neck. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than heart could wish. They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression. They speak loftily. They have set their mouth in the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.

Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full *cup* are drained by them. And they say, How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked, and those who always prosper. They have possessed wealth.

Surely in vain I have cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocence, for all the day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, behold, I would have dealt treacherously with the generation of thy sons.

When I thought how I might understand this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God, and considered their latter end. Surely thou set them in slippery places. Thou cast them down to destruction. How they have become a desolation in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream from awakening, O Jehovah, when thou waken, thou will despise their form.

For my soul was grieved, and I was pricked in my heart. So I was brutish, and ignorant. I was a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee. Thou have held my right hand. Thou will guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart fails, *but* God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, lo, those who are far from thee shall perish. Thou have destroyed all those who go a whoring from thee.

But it is good for me to draw near to God. I have made the Lord Jehovah my refuge, that I may tell of all thy works (Psalm 73).

Some young men—those with weak consciences—seem especially vulnerable to joining in league with the more physical kind. It takes less skill, and it seems to offer such an easy way to get gain. Solomon told of that, when he said,

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us. Let us lay wait for blood. Let us lurk secretly

for the innocent without cause. Let us swallow them up alive as Sheol, and whole, as those who go down into the pit. We shall find all precious substance. We shall fill our houses with spoil. Thou shall cast thy lot among us. We will all have one bag (Proverbs 1:10-14).

Solomon went on to warn those who may be tempted, to look ahead toward the future:

My son, walk not thou in the way with them. Restrain thy foot from their path. For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, and these lay wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy of gain. It takes away the life of the owners of it (Proverbs 1:15-19).

All the wicked are, indeed, shortsighted fools playing a deadly game of Russian roulette. For any one act the odds are in their favor. Thus, they usually get away with their mischief for a while. But the longer they indulge in it, and the more they play the vicious game, sooner or later the hammer finds the full chamber, and they will pay a bitter price for their wickedness.

The punishment of the wicked

Solomon expressed many times over the various harsh penalties to expect for those who lived wickedly. He also said their punishment is guaranteed. He said, for example, **“For there shall be no reward to the evil man. The lamp of the wicked shall be put out”** (Proverbs 24:20).

Like fast-growing weeds, the wicked may quickly become big and overbearing (depending upon their opportunities and their cunning), but their “successes” are deceptive because they have no future. For Solomon said,

The fear of a wicked man shall come upon him (Proverbs 10:24).

... the expectation of the wicked shall perish (Proverbs 10:28).

A wicked man earns deceitful wages (Proverbs 11:18).

... in the revenues of a wicked man is trouble (Proverbs 15:6).

If Jehovah sees any hope for a man, in his great mercy and patience he will try to correct him. But if he continually rebels, God will give up on him:

... he who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief (Proverbs 28:14).

He who, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Proverbs 29:1).

When Jehovah's wrath descends upon the wicked, their end will be swift. Catastrophe will strike them from any one of a host of directions—from men or from nature, legal or illegal (that is, by human laws):

Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly. Suddenly he shall be broken, and that without remedy (Proverbs 6:15).

When the whirlwind passes, the wicked man is no more (Proverbs 10:25).

These kinds of transgressors know they are doing wrong, and they know there are many risks. But they are incapable of either anticipating or preventing what will ruin them because they walk in darkness surrounded by traps:

The way of the wicked is as darkness. They know not at what they stumble (Proverbs 4:19).

Thorns *and* snares are in the way of a perverse man (Proverbs 22:5).

A wicked man flees when no man pursues (Proverbs 28:1).

And the wicked are eventually exposed to people and justly condemned:

... he who perverts his ways shall be known (Proverbs 10:9).

... a man of wicked devices is hated (Proverbs 14:17).

When a wicked man comes, contempt also comes, and with disgrace, reproach (Proverbs 18:3).

The power of law enforcement agencies and justice systems are designed to oppose and punish them:

A wise king winnows the wicked, and brings the wheel over them (Proverbs 20:26).

... [justice done] is a destruction to the workers of iniquity (Proverbs 21:15).

Most awesome is the opposition of God against the wicked:

The curse of Jehovah is in the house of a wicked man (Proverbs 3:33).

Jehovah is far from the wicked (Proverbs 15:29).

The rebound effect

Indeed, having anticipated rebellion, Jehovah made provision within his divine plans for dealing with the rebellious. Remember, Solomon said, **“Jehovah has made everything for its own end, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil”** (Proverbs 16:4). Paul also said, **“And if God, wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he previously prepared for glory, even us whom he called”** (Rom. 9:22-24).

In his infinite wisdom Jehovah has built into the laws of nature the consequences of wickedness, even as the rewards of righteousness are built into the universal design plans of God. Ironically, the very behavior of the wicked initiates their own punishment. It sets in motion a train of events (usually imperceptible to us) that causes the evil they create to rebound upon their own heads.

It may be years in coming, but the consequences are as inevitable as are the growth of crops when the farmer buries seeds beneath the surface of the ground. Below are a few things Solomon said about this:

... and these lay wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy of gain. It takes away the life of the owners of it (Proverbs 1:18-19).

His own iniquities shall take a wicked man, and he shall be held with the cords of his sin (Proverbs 5:22).

... the wicked man shall fall by his own wickedness (Proverbs 11:5).

... the treacherous shall be taken in their own iniquity (Proverbs 11:6).

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways (Proverbs 14:14).

He who causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit (Proverbs 28:10).

Like the Nazis of Germany, the glory of the wicked soon perishes and fades into a contemptuous memory:

But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and the treacherous shall be rooted out of it (Proverbs 2:22).

... the name of the wicked shall rot (Proverbs 10:7).

The wicked are overthrown, and are not (Proverbs 12:7).

Those who escape punishment

Solomon wrote many other words about the punishment of the wicked. Nevertheless, remember, in this vain world there are exceptions to everything, and sometimes a wicked man may live long and prosper:

All this I have seen in my days of vanity. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs *his life* in his evildoing (Ecclesiastes 7:15).

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked, again, there are wicked men to whom it

happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 8:14).

Yet Solomon said the days of the wicked are numbered: **“Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and prolongs his *days*, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before him. But it shall not be well with a wicked man, neither shall he prolong *his days*, *which are* as a shadow, because he did not fear before God”** (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13).

Even though some crooked men may escape their punishment here on earth, hell awaits them in the next life. Jesus, the Son of God, uttered curses upon such men. Some men are so evil they deserve being cursed. The ancient Jewish scholars and Pharisees were such kind, and Jesus cursed them to their faces. He said to them,

Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye tithe the mint and the anise and the cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law—justice and mercy and faith. These things must be done, and not neglecting those things. Ye blind guides, who strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel.

Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but inside they are full of plunder and unrighteousness. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, so that the outside of them may also become clean.

Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. In this way also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So then ye testify to yourselves that

ye are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Then fill ye up the measure of your fathers.

Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how will ye escape from the damnation of hell? (Mat. 23:23-33).

Eventual vengeance for them

Regarding the desire for vengeance, the apostle John told of hearing the cry for vengeance from the martyrs in heaven. He said,

I saw underneath the altar [in heaven] the souls of those who had been killed because of the word of God, and because of the testimony of the Lamb that they held. And they cried out in a great voice, saying, Master, Holy and True, how long do thou not judge and avenge our blood from those who dwell on the earth?

And a white robe was given to them each, and it was said to them that they should still rest a time, until also their fellow bondmen, and their brothers, and those going to be killed as they too, would be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9-11).

Moreover, Jesus approved the desire for vengeance on earth, as clearly shown in this passage from Luke:

And he [Jesus] spoke a parable to them about it being necessary to always pray, and not to give up, saying, In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God, and he did not regard man.

And a widow was in that city, and she came to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent. And for a time he would not, but after these things he said within himself, Although I fear not God, and regard not man, yet because this widow causes me a beating, I will avenge her, lest by no end of coming she give me a black eye.

And the Lord said, Hear ye what the unrighteous judge says. And God, will he, no, not do vengeance of his chosen who cry out to him day and night, and yet being patient toward them? I say to you, that he will do their vengeance speedily (Luke 18:1-8).

How, therefore, can any man say it is wrong to want vengeance against vicious wicked men? Vengeance is justice, and God loves justice. Indeed, the psalmist said about him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne. Loving kindness and truth go before thy face”** (Psalm 89:14).

Chapter 8

Managing Our Feelings

Pride

Love of self is certainly desirable, but excessive self-love is a vice called pride. Overbearing pride is called arrogance. The emotional component of pride is called a haughty spirit. And it generates aggressiveness, rashness, and wantonness that leads to strife and trouble. Pride also includes an intellectual component, which is a value judgment about self-worth that reflects a false perception of a man's strengths and weaknesses. Being a false perception, it eventually leads to conflicts with reality. Arrogance typically includes belittling other people, and behaving unjustly by overstepping proper bounds and restrictions.

Below are some of the things Solomon said about pride:

Better is he who is lightly esteemed, and has a servant, than he who honors himself, and lacks bread (Proverbs 12:9).

Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Jehovah. Hand in hand, he shall not be unpunished (Proverbs 16:5).

Pride is before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

See thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope for a fool than of him (Proverbs 26:12).

The scoffer appears to be a special kind of proud man. He is another type of fool, one who not only rejects knowledge, but also actively and openly opposes it. Solomon said, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not”** (Proverbs 14:6).

Solomon said scoffers are especially troublesome and dangerous:

Cast out the scoffer, and contention will go out, yea, strife and reproach will cease (Proverbs 22:10).

Scoffers set a city in a flame (Proverbs 29:8).

However, as in dealing with ordinary fools, unless a man is in a position of authority, Solomon said it was not advisable to contend with them:

He who corrects a scoffer gets himself reviling. ... Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate thee (Proverbs 9:7-8).

... a scoffer listens not to rebuke (Proverbs 13:1).

A scoffer does not like to be reproved. He will not go to the wise (Proverbs 15:12).

I suspect pride is the most deadly vice of the mind. It appears to be a root cause of rebellion against Jehovah, for Solomon said, **“A high look, and a proud heart, even the lamp of the wicked, is sin”** (Proverbs 21:4). Pride (the lamp of the wicked) leads a man away from the paths of righteousness. Satan—that powerful but invisible dragon who sent marauders, the “fire from God” (probably lightning), and a violent wind (probably a tornado), against all that Job possessed—was described by Jehovah as **“king over all the sons of pride”** (Job. 41:34). And when Paul wrote Timothy, warning him against exalting a man prematurely, he said, **“... lest having been puffed up he may fall into the condemnation of the devil”** (1Ti. 3:6).

Humility

Humility involves the right kind of self-love. And it is a vital quality of the mind if a man is to be wise and righteous. Humility includes an accurate self-perception, a realistic and honest appraisal of our strengths and weaknesses, and an appreciation for our relative insignificance in this vast universe. However, humility goes beyond simple self-perception. It also includes a subdued, submissive, and gentle spirit reflecting self-control of feelings—a quality of maturity that Jesus praised, saying that kind of spirit will inherit both heaven and earth:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs (Mat. 5:3).

Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth (Mat. 5:5).

An honest self-concept, a gentle spirit, and an attitude of submission are all qualities of humility that make for a willingness to elevate others over ourselves for a higher good. A humble spirit reflects a wise mind. And, in gratitude, others will reward and honor the humble man as he becomes known.

Below are some of the things Solomon said about humility:

... with the lowly is wisdom (Proverbs 11:2).

Better it is to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than to divide the spoil with the proud (Proverbs 16:19).

The reward of humility *and* the fear of Jehovah is riches and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4).

Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth, a stranger, and not thine own lips (Proverbs 27:2).

Humility does not involve timidity or cowardice. Considering that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, his earthly life proved that he was humble. His life also demonstrated that he was neither timid nor cowardly. Paul was a man who walked in the steps of Jesus, and he once wrote, **“Now I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who indeed am lowly in presence among you, but am bold toward you when absent. But I pray not to be bold when present with the confidence by which I consider to be valiant toward some who consider us as walking according to flesh”** (Second Corinthians 10:1-2).

Now there is always danger in receiving more than we are prepared for. Remember, Paul said that knowledge puffs up, and both Solomon and Agur said that wealth usually brings pride. Agur added what may be called “heady success.” Here are their words (Solomon’s words are in the first scripture.):

The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out (Proverbs 28:11).

Two things I have asked of thee, deny me not before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who is Jehovah?

or lest I be poor, and steal, and use the name of my God profanely (Proverbs 30:7-9).

For three things the earth trembles, and for four, *which* it cannot bear: For a servant when he is king, and a fool when he is filled with food, for a hateful woman when she is married, and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress (Proverbs 30:21-23).

A broken spirit

Humility appears to be a balance between two extremes: pride, which involves excessive self-love, and a broken spirit, which involves a loss of self-love. A broken spirit can be a tragic disease of the soul, for Solomon said, **“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a broken spirit who can bear?”** (Proverbs 18:14). Not only can a broken spirit paralyze the mind, but it can also afflict the body: **“A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones”** (Proverbs 17:22).

There appears to be only one circumstance when a broken spirit is desirable, and that is during penance following guilt, when self-mortification is necessary. After David’s great sin, he asked the Lord’s forgiveness. That prayer may have been recorded in one of the Psalms, which says, **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise”** (Psalm 51:17).

Normally, however, a broken spirit is not a healthy reaction. Nevertheless, like many aspects of this troubled life, it is an ever-present threat. And all of the things that cause sorrow predispose us to it. Solomon said, **“A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken”** (Proverbs 15:13). And the loss of hope is a major contributor to a broken spirit. For he said, **“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life”** (Proverbs 13:12). Remember the tragedy Solomon spoke about that broke a man’s spirit:

There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches *were* kept by the owner of it to his hurt. And those riches perish in a bad venture. And if he has begotten a son,

there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he that he labored for the wind? All his days also he eats in gloom, and he is greatly troubled, and has depression and anger (Ecclesiastes 5:13-17).

Remember too that excessive punishment can break the spirit. It takes wisdom to apply just punishment. It will also require courage, because the more you love, the more sorrowful it will be to punish. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church, it contained many rebukes against them. In his second letter, he revealed the sorrow he felt as he wrote that first letter:

For if I make you sad, who then is he who makes me glad except he who is made sad by me? And I wrote this same thing to you, so that when I came, I would not have sadness from whom I ought to rejoice, having been confident toward you all, because my joy is of all of you. For out of much stress and dismay of heart, through many tears, I wrote to you, not that ye would be grieved, but that ye might know the love that I have so much more for you (Second Corinthians 2:2-4).

Paul knew that excessive or unjust punishment can break the spirit, because to another church he said, **"Fathers, do not provoke your children, so that they may not be discouraged"** (Col. 3:21). Therefore, when Paul wrote the Corinthian church later, he gave the following instructions regarding the disciple he told them to shun: **"But if any man has caused sadness, he has not caused me sadness, but in part (that I may not bear down) you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment by the many, so that instead, for you rather to forgive and encourage, lest perhaps such a man would be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I beseech you to affirm love for him"** (Second Corinthians 2:5-8).

Anger

Anger appears to be a type of hatred. It is an emotion of displeasure, and is a reaction to being offended. There is no sin in becoming angry, although uncontrolled anger, such as rage, is wrong. The Bible mentions many times the wrath of God. For example, the prophet Zephaniah said, **“Therefore wait ye for me, says Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey. For my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them my indignation, even all my fierce anger”** (Zep. 3:8).

Nevertheless, whether justified or not, our anger rarely motivates constructive or creative enterprises. It typically fuels punishment and destructiveness. James warned about that when he said, **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God”** (James 1:19-20).

Anger can be painfully violent, and wise men will seek ways to turn it away:

The wrath of a king is messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it (Proverbs 16:14).

Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming (Proverbs 27:4).

... wise men turn away wrath (Proverbs 29:8).

Solomon said the best defense against wrath, once aroused, is to calm it down, perhaps with a gentle word, or perhaps by providing compensation privately for the offense that provoked it:

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a grievous word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).

A gift in secret pacifies anger, and a present in the bosom, strong wrath (Proverbs 21:14).

Many times daily we experience irritations and frustrations. The wise keep control of their emotions, but there are those who indulge themselves in venting their wrath. Such men are fools, easily provoked, who carry anger to excess. It becomes an addiction. They create much trouble for themselves and for others.

Those who try to correct them waste their time. Solomon also warned others against fraternizing with such men lest they too succumb to the vice. Here are some of his words:

He who is soon angry will deal foolishly (Proverbs 14:17).

He who is slow to anger is of great understanding, but he who is hasty of spirit exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29).

A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty, for if thou deliver *him*, thou must do it yet again (Proverbs 19:19).

Make no friendship with a man who is given to anger, and thou shall not go with a wrathful man, lest thou learn this ways, and get a snare to thy soul (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Such men are always fomenting trouble and strife, as Solomon said:

A wrathful man stirs up contention (Proverbs 15:18).

An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in transgression (Proverbs 29:22).

Understanding helps a man be slow to become angry:

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city (Proverbs 16:32).

The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression (Proverbs 19:11).

Paul warned against harboring anger when he said, **“Be ye angry, and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath”** (Eph. 4:26). Prolonged anger is unhealthy for the mind and the body.

Jealousy and envy

Jealousy and envy appear to be compound emotions involving both love and anger. Jealousy is a desirable emotion when used to guard lawful relationships. In the Bible, Jehovah is often said to be jealous of his people. Husbands are justly jealous of their wives and children when someone or something threatens the relationship. Jealousy can be the most fierce emotion, for Solomon said,

“Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming, but who is able to stand before jealousy?” (Proverbs 27:4). And when he warned about adultery, he said, **“He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who would destroy his own soul does it. Wounds and dishonor he shall get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is a man’s fury, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom, nor will he be satisfied, though thou give many gifts”** (Proverbs 6:32-35).

Envy is not normally desirable since it usually involves unjustified anger and love. Solomon especially warned against envying the wicked who may appear successful and happy:

Do not envy thou the man of violence, and choose none of his ways (Proverbs 3:31).

Let not thy heart envy sinners, but *be thou* in the fear of Jehovah all the day long (Proverbs 23:17).

Fret not thyself because of evildoers, nor be thou envious at the wicked (Proverbs 24:19).

Envy can become an unhealthy state of mind that can afflict the body like a deadly disease. For Solomon said, **“A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh, but envy is the rottenness of the bones”** (Proverbs 14:30). A wise man will keep it out of his heart.

Happiness

Joy and pleasure, sorrow and pain, are opposite feelings related to the state of the body and the spirit. Solomon mentioned many honorable sources of joy and pleasure. Most important is the happiness obtained through acquiring wisdom.

Also remember the common everyday sources of comfort that Solomon mentioned. Of course they do not comprise the whole of life, but Jehovah has provided them for us all to help compensate for the sorrows of existence in this world.

They include (1) the satisfaction of our daily needs, (2) our employment, (3) our possessions, and (4) our wives. Below are samples of what Solomon said about them:

Then I commended joy, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be cheerful. For that shall abide with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God has given him under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8:15).

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God has already accepted thy works (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor. *It is the gift of God* (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

Behold, that which I have seen to be good and to be fitting is *for a man* to eat and drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor in which he labors under the sun all the days of his life which God has given him, for this is his portion (Ecclesiastes 5:18).

Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answers *him* in the joy of his heart (Ecclesiastes 5:19-20).

Live joyfully with the wife whom thou love all the days of thy life of vanity, which he has given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity. For that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor in which thou labor under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

Other sources of joy that Solomon mentioned (which I quote under separate headings) include good words, wise children, successful achievement, various other physical comforts. Indeed, all the fruits of righteousness are designed to bring us the kind of joy and happiness that the pleasure-seeking sinner does not experience.

Sorrow and pain

There are senseless, wasteful forms of pleasure: **“For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 7:6). And there are pleasures that eventually cause sorrow and lead to grief. Those are the many different vices practiced by fools. They are those pleasures which

eventually add to the sorrows of the world and bring grief to those who indulge in them.

There are many sources of sorrow and pain. Indeed, this whole existence is a perpetual state of sorrow mixed with joy. Even the greatest of our pleasures are inevitably accompanied by some degree of discomfort: **“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth is heaviness”** (Proverbs 14:13). And the more we learn about this vain world the more sorrow and frustration we feel. Remember these words? **“For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow”** (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

Yet there is some value in sorrow. It tends to make us more serious, and life is best taken seriously. The wise do not let themselves forget that sorrow is a natural part of this life, and every man’s earthly happiness ends in the tragedy of death. Indeed, Solomon said, **“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. For that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth”** (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

Feelings and wisdom

Feelings of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, can be used to promote wisdom and encourage righteous living. Justly applied, they can be powerful and effective sources of feedback regarding the consequences of actions. But justice does not always prevail in this life, and sometimes the consequences of actions seem to reward sin and punish righteousness, thus encouraging more evil. One failure of our modern American legal system is the extremely slow judicial process, which only enriches lawyers.

Moreover, the continual delays of punishment defeat justice and encourage more evil. Solomon warned against that when he said, **“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil”** (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

In this sinful world the innocent often suffer with the guilty. Nevertheless, it is wise to reflect carefully upon your life when many sorrows come, in order to see what may perhaps need correcting, because the Lord chastens those whom he loves: **“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider”** (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

The experiences of sorrow and joy are pervasive feelings, and deeply personal. For Solomon said, **“The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not intermeddle with its joy”** (Proverbs 14:10). He also said to empathize with the afflicted properly. Be careful not to add to their unhappiness: **“As he who takes off a garment in cold weather, and vinegar upon soda, so is he who sings songs to a heavy heart”** (Proverbs 25:20). Paul also said, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep”** (Rom. 12:15).

All of the things that bring joy and pleasure can be used to combat sorrow and pain, including drugs that anesthetize and sedate (intended for medicinal purposes). Near the end of Proverbs Lemuel said, **“Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish, and wine to the bitter in soul. Let him drink, and forget his need, and remember his misery no more”** (Proverbs 31:6-7). He was obviously referring to the use of alcoholic beverages to reduce pain during serious health afflictions.

Hope and fear

Feelings of hope and fear refer to anticipated consequences. Fear and anxiety involve the expectation of sorrow and/or pain, while hope is the expectation of joy and/or pleasure. The hope of the righteous is for good, and Solomon said it would be realized. The hope of the wicked is for evil, and evil will come upon them:

The hope of the righteous is gladness, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish (Proverbs 10:28).

Let not thy heart envy sinners, but *be thou* in the fear of Jehovah all the day long. For surely there is a reward, and thy hope shall not be cut off (Proverbs 23:17-18).

And remember what Solomon said about how hope affects a man's spirit: **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life"** (Proverbs 13:12).

Drunkenness and gluttony

Our bodies have appetites, and Jehovah provides for them all. He also made our bodies such that the gratification of our appetites gives pleasure. These are the simple pleasures intended to ease the sorrows of this life. Yet there are those who become greedy for pleasure, who overindulge themselves, turning their healthy appetites into lusts of the flesh. The evils of both gluttony and drunkenness have been well documented throughout history. Solomon warned against them both when he said,

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever errs thereby is not wise (Proverbs 20:1).

Be not among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags (Proverbs 23:20-21).

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long at the wine. Those who go to seek out mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly.

At the end it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thy heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shall be as he who lays down in the midst of the sea, or as he who lays upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, *thou shall say*, and I was not hurt. They have beaten me, and I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Have thou found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled with it, and vomit it (Proverbs 25:16).

Adultery

Sins of sex are many and varied. Solomon gives advice on only the most common kind—the illicit union between a man and a woman. The focus of Solomon’s words is upon the woman. She is most often called by two names: strange and interloping. There are two kinds of women involved: the professional looking for a wage, and the amateur looking for a thrill. Only a little is written by Solomon about the prostitute, none of it good. He said, **“For a harlot is a deep ditch”** (Proverbs 23:26), and, **“... he who keeps company with harlots wastes his substance”** (Proverbs 29:3).

The deadly one is the adulteress. (Remember, adultery personifies all folly.) An unfaithful wife violates her commitment both to Jehovah and to her husband, and she prowls about instinctively like a viper seeking prey:

... [the interloping woman] forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God (Proverbs 2:17).

For the price of a harlot is as much as a piece of bread, but the adulteress hunts for the precious life (Proverbs 6:26).

Her feet abide not in her house. Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places, and lays in wait at every corner (Proverbs 7:11-12).

With animal cunning the adulteress uses two major weapons, her sensual beauty and her smooth talk:

For the lips of an interloping woman drop honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil (Proverbs 5:3).

For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the stranger’s tongue. Do not lust after her beauty in thy heart, nor let her take thee with her eyelids (Proverbs 6:23-25).

With her much fair speech she causes him to yield. With the flattering of her lips she forces him along (Proverbs 7:21).

Solomon gives a vivid portrayal of how the adulteress operates in the following story:

For at the window of my house I looked forth through my lattice, and I beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding passing through the street near her corner. And he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the middle of the night and in the darkness.

And, behold, there met him a woman attired like a harlot, and wily of heart. She is loud and headstrong. Her feet abide not in her house. Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places, and lays in wait at every corner. So she caught him, and kissed him. With an impudent face she said to him, Sacrifices of peace-offerings are with me. I have paid my vows this day. Therefore I came forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have spread my couch with carpets of tapestry, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning. Let us solace ourselves with love. For the man is not at home. He has gone a long journey. He has taken a bag of money with him. He will come home at the full moon. With her much fair speech she causes him to yield. With the flattering of her lips she forces him along.

He goes after her straightaway, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow strikes through his liver, as a bird hastens to the snare. And he does not know that it is for his life (Proverbs 7:6-23).

The adulteress is, for all her craftiness, a foolish beast, both callous and brazen. Solomon said, **“She is loud and headstrong”** (Proverbs 7:11), and, **“The foolish woman is clamorous, simple, and knows nothing”** (Proverbs 9:13). Agur also said, **“So is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats, and wipes her mouth, and says, I have done no iniquity”** (Proverbs 30:20).

Of course, those addicted to adultery (or similar sex sins) who prowl about preying upon the ignorant of mind and weak of character are not always women. Under Moses’ law adultery carried the death penalty for both parties. It is a cardinal sin in its effects. It divides that holy union between a man and his wife. Solomon

said, **“Yea, she lays in wait as a robber, and increases the treacherous among men”** (Proverbs 23:28). The prophet Ezekiel even called such women murderers, perhaps because they destroy the sacred oneness of marital unity: **“And righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands”** (Ezekiel 23:45).

Warnings about adultery

Solomon gave strict warning against succumbing to the temptation of adultery. One of the benefits of wisdom is that it will open a man's eyes to its danger, just as we mature and learn to appreciate the deadly dangers of playing on a busy street. He said wisdom would **“deliver thee from the interloping woman, even from the stranger who flatters with her words”** (Proverbs 2:16).

A man who commits adultery, Solomon said, lacks sense because the penalties are both severe and inevitable. Let no man think he will escape. Exposure will come, Solomon said, and once exposed there will be no escaping the sorrows:

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife. Whoever touches her shall not be unpunished. Men do not despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry. Yet if he is found, he shall restore sevenfold. He shall give all the substance of his house.

He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who would destroy his own soul does it. Wounds and dishonor he shall get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is a man's fury, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom, nor will he be satisfied, though thou give many gifts (Proverbs 6:27-35).

The many penalties for practicing adultery include bitterness, abuse and wounds, dishonor and unforgiven reproach, loss of

wealth, even death and the destruction of the soul. Below are a few of the warnings Solomon gave:

But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps take hold on Sheol (Proverbs 5:4-5).

... lest thou give thine honor to others, and thy years to the cruel, lest strangers be filled with thy strength, and thy labors *be* in the house of an alien, and thou mourn at thy latter end when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the assembly and congregation (Proverbs 5:9-14).

For she has cast down many wounded. Yea, all her slain are a mighty host. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death (Proverbs 7:26-27).

Notice Solomon said, **“Yea, all her slain are a mighty host”** (Proverbs 7:26). Adultery has been the downfall of many men, great and small. In my lifetime I have seen many fall that way. Consider only famous men whose lives are in the public eye. How long a list could be made of those (especially in high, responsible positions) who fell from the top in a moment because they succumbed to the sin of adultery, who fell and never regained their status.

Fornication is a general term that refers to any illicit sexual activity between a man and a woman, whether by the married or the unmarried. And Paul said this about it: **“Flee fornication. Every sin, whatever a man may do, is outside the body, but he who fornicates sins against his own body”** (1Co. 6:18). How that happens is still a mystery, but God warned about uncleanness with disease long before men discovered germs. Therefore, beware of fornication, no matter how harmless it may appear.

If your appetite is strong, do not risk your life and your soul. Find a good wife and marry. For God intended that marriage satisfy the sexual appetite. Therefore, Solomon pleaded,

Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Should thy springs be dispersed abroad, and streams of water in the streets? Let them be for thyself alone, and not for strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of thy youth: a loving hind and a pleasant doe. Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love. For why should thou, my son, be ravished with an interloping woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? (Proverbs 5:15-20).

Chapter 9

Using Our Words

The power of language

Words have great power for both good and evil. Indeed, Solomon said, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it shall eat the fruit of it”** (Proverbs 18:21), and, **“... a soft tongue breaks the bone”** (Proverbs 25:15).

James also wrote of their power:

Behold we put bits into the mouths of horses for them to obey us, and we guide about their whole body. Behold also the ships, being so great and driven by fierce winds, are guided about by a very small rudder, wherever the impulse of the man who steers determines. So also the tongue is a little body-part, and boasts greatly. Behold a little fire, how much wood it kindles. And the tongue is a fire (James 3:3-5).

Solomon said if we have wisdom our words will help us, and with them we can help others:

The mouth of a righteous man is a fountain of life (Proverbs 10:11).

The tongue of a righteous man is choice silver (Proverbs 10:20).

The lips of a righteous man feeds many (Proverbs 10:21).

... the lips of the wise shall preserve them (Proverbs 14:3).

If we have enough wisdom, we can use them to understand even the inner thoughts of others. For he said, **“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters”** (Proverbs 18:4), and, **“Purpose in the heart of man is deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out”** (Proverbs 20:5).

Words used skillfully bring rewards. Indeed, he said that some men are able to earn a living by them:

A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth
(Proverbs 12:14).

A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth.
With the increase of his lips he shall be satisfied (Proverbs
18:20).

If a man is a fool, his words will hurt him, because he will not know how to use their power:

A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for stripes. A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul (Proverbs 18:6-7).

... the lips of a fool will swallow himself up. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is mischievous madness (Ecclesiastes 10:12-13).

Words well spoken can be very beautiful, bringing joy and happiness:

A man has joy in the answer of his mouth, and a word in due season, how good it is! (Proverbs 15:23).

He who gives a right answer kisses the lips (Proverbs 24:26).

A word fitly spoken is apples of gold in a network of silver. An ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear (Proverbs 25:11-12).

Words well spoken are pleasant and gracious. They refresh the soul, increase persuasiveness, and make important men our friends. They are even good for our health. As every health professional knows, soft, gentle words have remarkable healing power. As Solomon said,

Heaviness in the heart of a man makes it droop, but a good word makes it glad (Proverbs 12:25).

A soft answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1).

A gentle tongue is a tree of life (Proverbs 15:4).

Pleasant words are a honeycomb: Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones (Proverbs 16:24).

He who loves pureness of heart, *for* the grace of his lips, the king will be his friend (Proverbs 22:11).

However, we all learn early in life that words can hurt. Solomon said, **“There is he who speaks rashly like the piercings of a sword”** (Proverbs 12:18). He also said **“... a grievous word stirs up anger”** (Proverbs 15:1). Yet sometimes harsh words may be necessary. See Luke 11:45-54 and Acts 7:51-54 for examples.

Good words are true and faithful. They bring joy and relief, and they endure:

The lips of truth shall be established forever (Proverbs 12:19).

... a faithful ambassador is health (Proverbs 13:17).

A true witness delivers souls (Proverbs 14:25).

Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks right (Proverbs 16:13).

As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, *is* a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters (Proverbs 25:13).

The misuse of language

Words, like all powerful things, should be used with caution and great care. They should be used the way we handle knives and live electric wires and fire, with caution. Remember, James warned about this when he said, **“So also the tongue is a little body-part, and boasts greatly. Behold a little fire, how much wood it kindles. And the tongue is a fire”** (James 3:5-6).

Solomon also gave many warnings about using our words carefully. Among them are the following:

Transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words, but he who refrains his lips does wisely (Proverbs 10:19).

He who guards his mouth keeps his life. He who opens wide his lips shall have destruction (Proverbs 13:3).

He who spares his words has knowledge, and he who is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is considered wise. When he shuts his lips, he is prudent (Proverbs 17:27-28).

See thou a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Proverbs 29:20).

Notice that first scripture in the above list. It says that transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words. One of the tactics of Jesus' enemies was to provoke him to say many things in order to trap him in his own words.

Here is one passage that describes how the scholars and the Pharisees used that evil device: **"And after he said these things to them, the scholars and the Pharisees began to harass him extremely, and to provoke him to speak impulsively about more things, waiting to ambush him, seeking to catch something out of his mouth so that they might accuse him"** (Luke 11:53-54).

Beware of such traps, and always restrain your words.

Solomon urged special care when making promises, whether to Jehovah or to men. Both expect them to be kept, and we will suffer if we do not. He said,

My son, if thou have become surety for thy neighbor, if thou have struck thy hands for a stranger, thou are snared with the words of thy mouth, thou are taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, since thou have come into the hand of thy neighbor.

Go, humble thyself, and importune thy neighbor. Do not give sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler (Proverbs 6:1-5).

When thou vow a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou vow. Better is it that thou should not vow, than that thou should vow and not pay. Do not allow thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin, nor say thou before the agent, that it was an error. Why

should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands? For in the multitude of dreams there are vanities, and in many words. But fear thou God (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7).

Although James warned about not controlling our speech, he also pointed out the difficulty of complete control: **“For we all stumble in many things. If any man does not stumble in word, this is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body”** (James 3:2).

One especially insidious overuse of words is the common practice of gossip. Gossip often involves information that is distorted or false. It can never be trusted, which is why it is not admissible in courts. Nevertheless, even when it is true, some things should be kept private.

Those who spread such gossip are like voyeurs and pornographers. What makes gossip appealing and popular to most people is that it is both entertaining and seemingly harmless. In fact it is a poison that creates conflict, and destroys friendships. Solomon told of its evils:

... he who utters a slander is a fool (Proverbs 10:18).

He who goes around as a tale-bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter (Proverbs 11:13).

... a whisperer separates chief friends (Proverbs 16:28).

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates chief friends (Proverbs 17:9).

The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts (Proverbs 18:8).

The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts (Proverbs 26:22).

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention ceases (Proverbs 26:20).

Few people know that the Greek word for devil literally means slanderer. Slander is one of the chief weapons of Satan (the word Satan literally means adversary or enemy). Consequently, slander

is one of the chief weapons of the devil's disciples here on earth. Making false accusations, amplifying a man's shortcomings, distorting facts about him, are all part of the slander that is used by sinners against those they do not like.

The so-called "feeding frenzies" practiced by many in our pagan news media are good examples of how the devil works. Like his other tactics, if and when the truth becomes known, the slanderers just shrug it off, because usually the damage has already occurred, and it is rarely reversible.

Solomon advised to neither spread gossip nor listen to it: **"He who goes about as a tale-bearer reveals secrets. Therefore do not associate with him who opens wide his lips"** (Proverbs 20:19).

Words are used to deceive in many ways. One insidious example is flattery. It too appears innocuous, but in fact, flattery is a device used to disarm the defenses of a victim in order to take advantage of him. For Solomon said,

A lying tongue hates those whom it has wounded, and a flattering mouth works ruin (Proverbs 26:28).

A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps (Proverbs 29:5).

The liar and the false witness are an abomination to God, because they also promote injustice. Deceit is often used to conceal malice. It seems to be the major weapon of the devil and his disciples. Deceit can be very effective in the short term, but time brings exposure, and exposure brings penalties. Be assured, Solomon said, the deceiver will not escape his punishment.

Below are a few things he said about deceit:

The hypocrite destroys his neighbor with his mouth (Proverbs 11:9).

Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah, but those who deal truly are his delight (Proverbs 12:22).

A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he who utters lies shall not escape (Proverbs 19:5).

... a poor man is better than a liar (Proverbs 19:22).

Bread of falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel (Proverbs 20:17).

As a madman who casts firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, Am I not in sport [joking]? (Proverbs 26:18-19).

Remember, however, there is a proper time for all things, including the use of deception. Deception is like killing, which is sanctioned only under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, beware lest that be used to justify sin, and you be condemned for it. For James said, **“So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty”** (James 2:12).

Chapter 10

Labor and Accumulating Goods

Industriousness

Jehovah gave us hands to work with, and he expects us to use them productively. Solomon advised, **“Whatever thy hand finds to do, do with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, where thou go”** (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Solomon mentioned two things that motivate men to work: earning a living and competition. Both are intended to be honorable motives energizing our collective progress in the world. When they fail, stagnation tends to occur, as communism and modern welfare systems have demonstrated. He said,

The appetite of the laboring man labors for him, for his mouth urges him (Proverbs 16:26).

Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17).

Then I saw all labor and every skilful work, that for this a man is envied by his neighbor (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

Work and labor are synonymous with arduous effort, be it mental or physical. Yet it is through arduous effort, guided by wisdom, that we can survive and improve our world. Sin brought the curse that makes work arduous (see Gen. 3:17-19). Obedience makes work prosperous:

I, wisdom, cause those who love me to inherit substance, and that I may fill their treasuries (Proverbs 8:21).

In the house of a righteous man is much treasure (Proverbs 15:6).

The reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah is riches and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4).

And obedience involves diligent labor:

... the hand of the diligent makes rich (Proverbs 10:4).

He who tills his land shall have plenty of bread (Proverbs 12:11).

He who tills his land shall have plenty of bread (Proverbs 28:19).

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule (Proverbs 12:24).

Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished, but he who gathers by labor shall have increase (Proverbs 13:11).

See thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before obscure men (Proverbs 22:29).

Fools work only destruction, and they reap poverty:

Poverty and shame *are to* him who refuses correction (Proverbs 13:18).

... a foolish man swallows it [precious treasure] up (Proverbs 21:20).

The wicked labor in vain. No matter how much they may prosper, there is no lasting profit in sin; their gains merely deceive them:

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing (Proverbs 10:2).

A wicked man earns deceitful wages (Proverbs 11:18).

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vapor driven to and fro by those who seek death (Proverbs 21:6).

Indolence

Rest is pleasant, and sleep is a blessing. Both are a reward for our labor, and the more we labor, the more we enjoy them. For Solomon said, **“The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much”** (Ecclesiastes 5:12). However, a common temptation is to overdo sleep and rest. It is called laziness. It is the vice of the sluggard or slothful man. He loves his sleep and he wal-

lows in it: **“The door turns upon its hinges, so does the sluggard upon his bed”** (Proverbs 26:14).

The sluggard is also a fool deceiving himself. His warped reasoning defends him. Work, he argues, is bad for his health, besides countless other explanations and far-fetched excuses:

The sluggard will not plow because of the winter (Proverbs 20:4).

The sluggard says, There is a lion outside. I shall be slain in the streets (Proverbs 22:13).

The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men who can render a reason (Proverbs 26:16).

As the condition worsens, the sluggard’s possessions degenerate, and poverty begins to descend upon him. Solomon gave these warnings:

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty (Proverbs 20:13).

By slothfulness the roof sinks in, and through idleness of the hands the house leaks (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

I went by the field of the sluggard, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns. The face of it was covered with nettles, and the stone wall of it was broken down. Then I beheld, and considered well. I saw, and received instruction: Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so thy poverty shall come as a robber, and thy want as an armed man (Proverbs 24:30-34).

Go to the ant, thou sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise. Which, having no chief, overseer, or ruler, provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will thou sleep, O sluggard? When will thou arise out of thy sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so thy poverty shall come as a robber, and thy want as an armed man (Proverbs 6:6-11).

The lazy man reaps an even more severe penalty in himself. His overindulgence becomes addictive, making him a victim of his

own body. He desires the good things of life like everybody else, but his lack of self-control keeps him from earning wages. Even the simple effort involved in self-care exhausts him, and his body and appearance degenerate. That may be the cause of some cases of what mental health professionals called “clinical depression.” Solomon said,

The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing (Proverbs 13:4).

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor (Proverbs 21:25).

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish. It wearies him to bring it again to his mouth (Proverbs 26:15).

The lazy man deserves no sympathy because he only contributes to the world’s problems:

He who gathers in summer is a wise son. He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame (Proverbs 10:5).

As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him (Proverbs 10:26).

He also that is slack in his work is brother to him that is a destroyer (Proverbs 18:9).

Like the other common vices of the world, laziness is a moral disease caused by a failure of the will, a failure to resist temptation, a failure to exercise self-control. Like the other common vices, it can enslave a man so that he is no longer able to overcome it by self-control. And in its final stage he must be managed like a child. For Solomon said, “... **the slothful shall be put under task work**” (Proverbs 12:24).

Business and possessions

Solomon gave various kinds of advice about business and endeavor. Make careful preparation before being committed to a project, he said. Moreover, do not wait until disaster strikes before seeking protection for your goods and your job:

Prepare thy work outside, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thy house (Proverbs 24:27).

If the serpent bites before it is charmed, then is there no advantage in the charmer (Ecclesiastes 10:11).

Solomon also advised using care in maintaining all possessions. In this imperfect world everything tends to continual degeneration, and neglect will ruin as much as active destruction:

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, *and* look well to thy herds. For riches are not forever. And does the crown endure to all generations? The hay is carried, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the cost of the field. And *then will be* goats' milk enough for thy food; for the food of thy household, and maintenance for thy maidens (Proverbs 27:23-27).

Good tools and a good head make our efforts more successful. He said, **“If the iron be blunt, and he does not whet the edge, then he must increase strength. But wisdom is advantageous to make right”** (Ecclesiastes 10:10). No man needs to be told that money is good to have. It not only protects, but as a universal medium of exchange it can purchase almost anything: **“A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes glad the life, and money answers all things”** (Ecclesiastes 10:19).

Nevertheless, Solomon said the protection of money is limited. Whoever puts all his trust in money will eventually be betrayed. Moreover, money is useless when disaster strikes, although it may be able to help some of the survivors. Solomon said, **“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath”** (Proverbs 11:4), and, **“He who trusts in his riches shall fall”** (Proverbs 11:28).

Solomon advised against striving to become rich. Money is an unreliable, slippery commodity. He said, **“Weary not thyself to be rich. Out of thine own wisdom, cease. Will thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For it certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward heaven”** (Proverbs 23:4-5). And Agur said, **“Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that**

is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who is Jehovah? or lest I be poor, and steal, and use the name of my God profanely” (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Moreover, accumulating wealth will not bring satisfaction. A man may own twenty cars, but he can only drive one at a time. Besides, it usually takes time and effort to learn to enjoy any one thing. He will also need many employees to maintain them, and they will likely enjoy them all as much, perhaps even more than he. Solomon said, **“He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they are increased who eat them. And what advantage is there to the owner of it, except the beholding of them with his eyes?”** (Ecclesiastes 5:10-11).

And remember Solomon’s description of certain kinds of rich men:

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy upon men: A man to whom God gives riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but an alien eats it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

If a man begets a hundred sons, and lives many years so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not filled with good, and moreover he has no burial, I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For it comes in vanity, and departs in darkness, and the name of it is covered with darkness. Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it, this *one* has rest rather than the other. Yea, though he lives a thousand years twice told, and yet enjoys no good, do not all go to one place? (Ecclesiastes 6:1-6).

A man may inherit some wealth. However, there are serious risks in the sudden acquisition of money, unless a man is well prepared for how to use it:

House and riches are an inheritance from fathers (Proverbs 19:14).

An inheritance gotten hastily at the beginning shall not be blessed in the end (Proverbs 20:21).

Every occupation in life carries some hazards with it. We should expect to suffer injury from time to time. For Solomon said, **“He who digs a pit shall fall into it, and he who breaks through a wall, a serpent shall bite him. He who hews out stones shall be hurt therewith, and he who splits wood is endangered thereby”** (Ecclesiastes 10:8-9). He also said that adversity tests our strength: **“If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small”** (Proverbs 24:10).

Solomon advised against being afraid to take any risk; that is an excuse of the lazy. However, he also advised against committing everything on a single venture. A cardinal rule of good finance is diversification. He said,

He who observes the wind shall not sow, and he who regards the clouds shall not reap (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou know not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

In trade dealings with others, remember that frankness and objectivity are rare. We should not naïvely trust all that a trader says. For Solomon said, **“It is bad, it is bad, says the buyer, but when he is gone his way, then he boasts”** (Proverbs 20:14).

We live in an age of widespread borrowing. Some things, like cars and houses, are difficult for most people to purchase without first borrowing money to pay for them. However, borrowing always adds to the expense of what we buy. For then we have to pay the lender interest as well as repaying the principle, which is probably what Solomon meant when he said, **“... the borrower is servant to the lender”** (Proverbs 22:7).

Solomon strongly warned against becoming surety—making a financial commitment for another. It is highly risky, and usually leads to loss. He said that only fools do it:

A man void of understanding strikes hands, and becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor (Proverbs 17:18).

Be thou not one of those who strike hands, or of those who are sureties for debts. If thou have not wherewith to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? (Proverbs 22:26-27).

It is especially wise to shun financial dealings with mere acquaintances. Police files bulge with pathetic cases of people taken in by confidence men and bunko artists who prey upon the gullible. The swindler's deal looks like a sure thing. That is because he has worked hard to make it appear that way. He relies on people's naïveté and/or greed to entice them, and Solomon said that whoever goes along with him deserves to lose it all:

He who is surety for a stranger shall smart for it, but he who hates suretyship is secure (Proverbs 11:15).

Take his garment who is surety for a stranger, and hold him in pledge for foreigners (Proverbs 20:16).

Greed

Excessive appetite for riches is called avarice, greed, and covetousness. As earlier stated, this lust is another common vice, a type of gluttony for money involving the lust of the eye. Its dynamics are similar to all the others: its pleasures are deceptive, and ultimately unsatisfying. Moreover, greed provokes a man to illegalities. It tempts men to commit dishonesty and fraud.

Solomon warned against greed, when he said,

He who is greedy of gain troubles his own house (Proverbs 15:27).

... he who makes haste to be rich shall not be unpunished (Proverbs 28:20).

He who is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife (Proverbs 28:25).

Regarding the matter of interest, Solomon said, **"He who augments his substance by interest and increase, gathers it for him who has pity on the poor"** (Proverbs 28:8). What Solomon probably meant by interest and increase is what we call profiteering, excessive charges. There is no sin in charging interest for loans, although the ancient Israelites were not allowed to charge interest

to each other (see Deu. 23:19-20). God wanted his people to be like a loving family, eager to help each other without personal profit, just as a father helps his son, or a man helps his brother.

Christians should also be like that. For example, I and some fellow Christians have occasionally lent each other our vehicles without charge. Moreover, we have worked in other ways to help each other without cost. And our Christian spirit of fairness prevents such things from becoming one-sided. Such things cannot work unless each one has the spirit of Christ within him. For no genuine Christian would ever take advantage of such generosity. And any who try should be condemned and cast out of fellowship. Indeed, without that kind of strict church discipline such sharing would invite abuse. Nevertheless, getting a fair return on our capital in the business world is something that Jesus approved. For examples, see Matthew 25:27 and Mark 12:2.

Paul said that greed fuels all manner of evils: **“For the love of money is a root of all the evils”** (1Ti. 6:10). Solomon mentions a few such evils. He referred to theft when he warned about adultery: **“Men do not despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry. Yet if he is found, he shall restore sevenfold. He shall give all the substance of his house”** (Proverbs 6:30-31).

Effective and just penalties for theft include full compensation for the victim paid by the thief out of his own pocket, compensation being much more than simply returning in good condition what was taken. Moses’ law contains many guidelines for the application of justice in both criminal cases and civil disputes. The sevenfold that Solomon mentions was figurative, meaning full and complete (the symbolic meaning of seven). For the maximum literal restoration and compensation stated in the law of Moses was fivefold. Solomon also warned against cooperating with thieves, even when it involves simply not informing about them: **“He who is partner with a thief hates his own soul; he hears the adjuration and utters nothing”** (Proverbs 29:24).

Fraud and bribery are the other evils Solomon mentioned. He spoke of two kinds of fraud: altering measuring scales, and changing property boundaries. The list of possible ways to commit fraud

is mammoth and continually growing, but those two were apparently common examples during Solomon's time:

A just balance and scales are Jehovah's. All the weights of the bag are his work (Proverbs 16:11).

Diverse weights, and diverse measures, both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah (Proverbs 20:10).

Remove not the ancient landmark. And enter not into the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong. He will plead their cause against thee (Proverbs 23:10-11).

Bribery involves an unjust exchange where both parties seek more than they deserve. It is a corruption of justice, and is condemned by Jehovah. What makes bribery so attractive when used is that it gives power—almost magical power. It can solve a man's problems when nothing else can. Therefore, it is another widespread moral disease in this sinful world.

Many places accept bribery as just another way of doing business or conducting affairs, although by definition it is illegal. They look upon it as a harmless device. Nevertheless, it is evil and worthy of condemnation, because it is deceitful and a perversion of justice. It is a spiritual disease in any society. Solomon said,

A bribe is a precious stone in the eyes of him who has it; wherever it turns, it prospers (Proverbs 17:8).

A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men (Proverbs 18:16).

A wicked man receives a bribe out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of justice (Proverbs 17:23).

... a bribe destroys the understanding (Ecclesiastes 7:7).

And Jesus warned about greed when he said, **"Watch, and keep away from greed, because to any man, life to him is not in the abundance of things possessed by him"** (Luke 12:15).

Rich and poor

Wealth and money are not equally distributed any more than anything else is. They never have been, and (despite socialist and

communist promises to the contrary) they never will be. Jesus said, **“For ye always have the poor with you”** (Mat. 26:11).

The Bible defines poverty in both an absolute and a relative sense. In Moses’ law, for example, the word poor is used both ways (see Deu. 15:4-11). In the relative sense, the poor are simply people at the lowest economic level of a society. In that sense the poor of a prosperous society are wealthier than the rich of an undeveloped or backward one. In the absolute sense of the word, poverty refers to the state of being impoverished—going hungry, being clothed in rags, living in shacks. In some communities there may be few if any of this kind of poor people. In other communities they may comprise the majority. The same differences in connotation can be applied to the definition of the rich.

Recognizing who is rich and who is poor is not always obvious. Solomon said we cannot tell by a casual glance who is rich and who is not. For Solomon said, **“There is he who makes himself rich, yet has nothing, and he who makes himself poor, yet has great wealth”** (Proverbs 13:7).

Solomon pointed out advantages to being rich:

The rich man's wealth is his strong city (Proverbs 10:15).

Wealth adds many friends (Proverbs 19:4).

The rich rule over the poor (Proverbs 22:7).

However, he also pointed out some disadvantages. The rich are often targets for extortion; wealth tends to create arrogance and overconfidence; and the easy life of the rich dulls the pleasures of simple things:

The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor hears no threatening (Proverbs 13:8).

A poor man uses entreaties, but a rich man answers roughly (Proverbs 18:23).

The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out (Proverbs 28:11).

The full soul loathes a honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet (Proverbs 27:7).

The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the fullness of the rich will not allow him to sleep (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

Moreover, the pursuit of wealth can put a man's soul at risk. Solomon said, "... **aggressive men obtain riches**" (Proverbs 11:16), but Jesus said, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs**" (Mat. 5:3), and, "**Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth**" (Mat. 5:5). Jesus also warned his disciples about wealth when he said, "**Truly I say to you, that a rich man will enter into the kingdom of the heavens difficultly. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the hole of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God**" (Mat. 19:23-24). Also Paul said, "**For the love of money is a root of all the evils, of which some aspiring have wandered from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows**" (1Ti. 6:10).

And James said,

Go now, ye rich, weep, howling for your miseries that are approaching. Your wealth has decayed, and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have cankered, and their corrosion will be testimony against you, and will eat your flesh like fire. Ye have hoarded in the last days. Behold the wage of the workmen who reaped your fields. The man who was defrauded by you cries out. And the outcries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Ye have lived in luxury on the earth, and were self-indulgent. Ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned, ye have murdered the righteous man. He is not hostile to you (James 5:2-6).

However, Solomon warned against reviling anybody who is wealthy even in private. It will somehow become known, and they have power to take cruel revenge. He said, "**... revile not the rich in thy bedchamber. For a bird of the heavens shall carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter**" (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

Although Solomon was rich all his life, he wrote twice as much about the poor. There are not many advantages to poverty. The poor have little to lose, and they enjoy more pleasure from common things. Remember these words?

The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor hears no threatening (Proverbs 13:8).

... to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet (Proverbs 27:7).

The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the fullness of the rich will not allow him to sleep (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

Moreover, Jehovah has ways of compensating righteous men who are poor, for James said, **“Listen, my beloved brothers, did not God choose the poor of the world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him? But ye have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich exploit you, and they themselves drag you into courts? Do they not blaspheme the good name that was called upon you?”** (James 2:5-7).

Furthermore, in this vain life under certain circumstances it is better to be poor than rich. Poverty is better where there is love, peace, and unity than having riches where there is hatred, trouble, and strife. Also, a God-fearing man who has a good reputation and walks in his uprightness, though poor, is better off than a perverse rich man living in unrighteousness.

Here is what Solomon said about those things:

Better is little with the fear of Jehovah, than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred with it (Proverbs 15:16-17).

Better is a little, with righteousness, than great revenues with injustice (Proverbs 16:8).

Better is a dry morsel, and quietness with it, than a house full of feasting with strife (Proverbs 17:1).

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold (Proverbs 22:1).

Better is the poor man who walks in his integrity, than he who is perverse in *his* ways, though he be rich (Proverbs 28:6).

Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 4:6).

Nevertheless, poverty is truly a handicap. For one thing, justified or not, people resent the poor, and the poor must plead humbly to mostly deaf ears:

The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor (Proverbs 14:20).

A poor man uses entreaties (Proverbs 18:23).

... a poor man is separated from his friend (Proverbs 19:4).

All the brothers of a poor man regard him inferior, how much more do his friends go far from him! He pursues *with* words, *but* they are gone (Proverbs 19:7).

Moreover, poverty increases the temptation to commit theft. Remember, Agur said, **“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Jehovah? or lest I be poor, and steal, and use the name of my God profanely”** (Proverbs 30:8-9). God does not want men to become too rich or too poor. It is unhealthy for the nation and for the persons involved. The great middle class of America is a blessing from God, but it is shrinking because of this sinful generation.

There are many causes of poverty, some of which are self imposed. Perhaps the major cause is idleness. Others that Solomon mentioned include neglecting education, impatience with the drudgery of work, overindulging in sensual pleasures:

Poverty and shame *are* to him who refuses correction, but he who regards reproof shall be honored (Proverbs 13:18).

In all labor there is profit, but the talk of the lips *tends* only to poverty (Proverbs 14:23).

The thoughts of a diligent man *lead* only to abundance, but everyone who is hasty, only to want (Proverbs 21:5).

He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil shall not be rich (Proverbs 21:17).

Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thy heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags (Proverbs 23:19-21).

Those kinds of poor men deserve rebuke. But there are other causes of poverty not associated with moral failures. A man can be born into poverty, or he can fall into it later in life because of unforeseen consequences.

Moreover, poverty tends to perpetuate itself. It leaves a man without resources, and limits his opportunities. Being without money and the help it gives is almost like having lame hands and feet. For Solomon said, **“The destruction of the poor is their poverty”** (Proverbs 10:15), and, **“Where no oxen are, the crib is clean, but by the strength of the ox is much increase”** (Proverbs 14:4).

Furthermore, the poor are most vulnerable to exploitation. As individuals they have no influential friends; they cannot hire clever lawyers; they can only weakly defend themselves against the predators of the world. Remember, Solomon said, **“Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is some consumed because of injustice”** (Proverbs 13:23).

Solomon issued a strong warning against succumbing to the temptation to prey upon these innocent poor people. Indeed, do not so much as ridicule them, he said, because those who do reproach the Creator of us all:

He who oppresses a poor man reproaches his maker, but he who has mercy on a needy man honors him (Proverbs 14:31).

He who mocks a poor man reproaches his maker (Proverbs 17:5).

He who stops his ears at the cry of a poor man, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard (Proverbs 21:13).

He who oppresses a poor man to his increase, *and* he who gives to a rich man, *comes* only to want (Proverbs 22:16).

Do not rob a poor man, because he is poor, nor oppress an afflicted man in the gate. For Jehovah will plead their cause, and despoil of life those who despoil them (Proverbs 22:22-23).

Generosity

God is the ultimate source of all good things, and he is generous far beyond measure. Those who walk in his ways are also generous. As Solomon said, “... **the righteous gives and does not withhold**” (Proverbs 21:26). Throughout the Bible, we are commanded to contribute the first fruits of our labor—our harvest, our salary, our profits—to honor the Lord. Solomon said, “**Honor Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase, so thy barns shall be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine**” (Proverbs 3:9-10).

It is a paradox, but generosity—the giving of our money, goods, labor—actually serves to multiply and enrich both our financial security and our reputation, whereas stinginess tends to erode both. For Solomon said,

There is he who scatters, and increases yet more, and there he is who withholds more than is proper, but only to want. The generous soul shall be made prosperous, and he who waters shall also be watered himself (Proverbs 11:24-25).

He who has a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor (Proverbs 22:9).

Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shall find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, yea, even to eight, for thou know not what evil shall be upon the earth (Ecclesiastes 11:1-2).

However, Solomon advised against accepting a gift from a miserly man when he offers it. Your gratitude means nothing to him. He is

a hypocrite, already calculating how to force it back from you, perhaps with interest. That seems to be what Solomon meant when he said, **“Eat thou not the bread of an evil eye, nor desire thou his dainties. For as he thinks within himself, so is he. Eat and drink, he says to thee, but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou have eaten thou shall vomit up, and lose thy sweet words”** (Proverbs 23:6-8).

It is not only a responsibility but a privilege to give to the deserving poor, to help him climb out of the pit of poverty. Solomon said Jehovah would repay the generous man for his kindness:

He who has pity upon a poor man lends to Jehovah, and he will repay him his good deed (Proverbs 19:17).

He who gives to the poor shall not lack, but he who hides his eyes shall have many a curse (Proverbs 28:27).

Indeed, Jesus said, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35). However, Paul warned against supporting indolence: **“... if any man will not work, neither let him eat”** (2Th. 3:10).

Solomon also said it was inadvisable to give to the rich, no matter how noble your motives. Like oppressing the poor, those who do will only suffer loss in the end. For he said, **“... he who gives to a rich man, comes only to want”** (Proverbs 22:16).

Regarding generosity, Agur said, **“The leach has two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four that do not say, Enough: Sheol, and the barren womb, the earth that is not satisfied with water, and the fire that does not say, Enough”** (Proverbs 30:15-16). That saying is somewhat of a riddle, but perhaps it refers to certain kinds of men who beg perpetually. Sheol and the barren womb represent the end and the beginning of the cycle of life which goes on perpetually. Rain falls upon the earth, never satisfying its need. And a fire would live forever if it were kept fed. Whenever we give to some people, they always come back for more, never satisfied. They are a type of sinner who preys upon other people in a more insidious parasitic fashion—the leeches of society.

Chapter 11

Marriage and Family Life

The nature of marriage

The book Song of Solomon describes the relationship between a man and his wife—how they look upon, feel about, and act toward each other. The style of the book differs noticeably from those of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The Song appears to teach by presenting a model to imitate. It demonstrates by example the kind of mentality and behavior that should occur in a healthy marriage. During childhood we learn to speak simply by attending to good models. Perhaps that is also how we best learn to live together as partners in marriage, which would explain the style of the book.

It also appears to contain a large proportion of figurative language. (Of course, the figures were relevant for their circumstances, e.g., a flock of goats, the tower of David, the peak of Amana.) At times the language is quite explicit, such as when he mentions various parts of her body. At other times, however, the language is very symbolic, such as when describing very intimate activity—an elegant way of dealing with delicate matters.

In Jehovah's design, marriage and family are the chief occupation of women. It is a glorious role because when it follows his plan, holy matrimony is the nearest thing to heaven on earth. Indeed, Solomon makes reference to his wife as his own private garden paradise—a gift of God for pleasure and nurturing:

A garden shut up is my sister, *my* bride, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits, henna with spikenard plants, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. *Thou are* a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

I have come into my garden, my sister, *my* bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. I have drunk my wine with my milk.

Eat, O friends. Drink, yea. Drink abundantly, O beloved
(Song 4:12-5:1).

Holy matrimony is the union of a man with a woman, a union where two people become one—one in heart and one in body. Solomon's wife said, **"My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds among the lilies. Until the day be cool, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether"** (Song 2:16-17).

Since the time of Adam and Eve, Jehovah God has sanctified in a very special way this most intimate human relationship: **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh"** (Gen. 2:24). Paul called that union a great mystery: **"... a man will leave his father and mother behind, and will be bonded with his wife, and the two will be in one flesh. This mystery is great"** (Eph. 5:31-32).

Separation, whether the original separation of pre-marriage or those temporary periods away from each other, is sometimes compared to the coldness of winter and the dampness of rain. At other times it is compared to the harsh roughness of rugged mountains or primitive survival in a wilderness. And the reunion of a husband with his wife is like the glory of spring in their garden paradise:

My beloved spoke, and said to me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past. The rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens her green figs, and the vines are in blossom. They give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, who are in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the steep place, let me see thy countenance; let me hear thy voice. For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely (Song 2:8-14).

Her love for him

Women differ from men in mind as well as in body, and one important difference is in the desire for marriage: women have the

greater need. God told Eve (the prototype woman), “... **thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee**” (Gen. 3:16).

Both the opening (after the title) and the closing words of Song of Solomon are those of Solomon’s wife expressing her love and desire for him:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine. Thine oils have a good fragrance. Thy name is oil poured forth. Therefore the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in thee. We will make mention of thy love more than of wine. Rightly do they love thee (Song 1:2-4).

Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices (Song 8:14).

A woman’s husband is very special to her, and she takes delight in his love. Indeed, her beloved husband supplies her greatest pleasure, nurturing, and healing. Alas, American women of this pagan generation have become harlots to our government, which is now their protector and provider.

Solomon’s wife warns young maidens, telling them that amorous love arouses strong passions. Therefore they should not awaken such feelings prematurely, but rather to wait for the proper time, the proper place, and the proper man. Three times in the book she says, “**I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake love, until it please**” (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The rapid increase in fornication in America is a natural result of abandoning the age-old practice of chaperoning. That, in turn, has contributed to the spreading breakdown of the institution of marriage.

The appetites of love can be overwhelming. Solomon’s wife told of being aroused in the night by her need for him, a need so strong that she went to great lengths to bring him into her arms. She said,

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I did not find him. I said, I will rise now, and go around the city. In the streets and in the broad ways

I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me. *I said*, Did ye see him whom my soul loves? It was but a little that I passed from them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me (Song 3:1-4).

The sensual pleasures of marital intimacy are wholesome and honorable. Consider how this virtuous wife used her charms to strengthen their bond. Her attitude is that she belongs to him, and she recognizes that his desire is for her. Therefore, she invites him to partake of the joys of marital pleasure that she has carefully prepared to give. Nevertheless, she uses discretion in her behavior. Although wanting to display her affection for him publicly, she nevertheless acts with restrained dignity. Here is what she said:

I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards. Let us see whether the vine has budded, its blossom is open, the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give thee my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance. And at our doors are all manner of precious fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

Oh that thou were as my brother, who sucked the breasts of my mother! *When* I should find thee outside, I would kiss thee. Yes, and none would despise me. I would lead thee, *and* bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me. I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate. His left hand under my head, and his right hand should embrace me (Song 7:10-8:3).

The pleasures of marriage were created by God as a gift for that special relationship, to reward and strengthen it. Illicit sensual intimacy defiles us. In the letter to the Hebrews we find these words: **“Marriage is precious in every way, and the undefiled bed, but God will judge fornicators and adulterers” (Hebrews 13:4).**

Consider how the actions of the faithful, virtuous wife described in Song of Solomon compare with those of the unfaithful, adulterous

wife described in Proverbs (see 7:6-23). That woman made herself both look and act like a whore. Her appetite was also strong, but she foolishly let it turn into a wanderlust transforming her into a beast of prey prowling in the night. Like a whore, she acted erotically in public with her paramours without shame. She too invited with sweet words, saying that she had made careful preparation for sharing pleasure, but not in the way God approves—with her husband. And she gave no warning. No, she belittled the danger. Such women lead many men into grief.

Pleasure and appetite go together. Thus, the delights of marital pleasure are accompanied by an equally intense appetite, one difficult to restrain once cultivated by practice. Therefore, Paul said each partner has a serious responsibility to satisfy the needs of the other:

But because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render the goodwill owed to the wife, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife has not the right of her private body, but the husband, and likewise also the husband has not the right of his private body, but the wife. Do not defraud each other except from agreement for a time, so that ye may have time for fasting and prayer. And come together again for the same thing, so that Satan not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1Co. 7:2-5).

His love for her

By definition not every woman can be exceptionally beautiful. Nevertheless, virtually every woman who takes care of herself has a natural beauty that is appealing to most men. Solomon's wife considered herself attractive, but recognized that she was not especially beautiful. She had known hard labor and servitude, and apparently some of the delicate refinement of her beauty had been lost. She said, **"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me. My mother's sons were incensed against me.**

They made me keeper of the vineyards, *but* my own vineyard I have not kept” (Song 1:5-6).

Solomon’s wife told him she was only a common woman, an ordinary rose or lily: **“I am a rose of Sharon. A lily of the valleys”** (Song 2:1). But he saw her differently. In his eyes her beauty was outstanding: **“As a lily among thorns, So is my love among the daughters”** (Song 2:2). There is something about the union of marriage that changes perception. I can personally testify that my own wife still seems very beautiful to me, although she is now in her seventh decade of life. I will never forget a few years ago when I returned after being separated from her four months. For several weeks I could not keep my eyes away from her, she looked so beautiful. I doubt if any other man saw her that attractive. It must be part of the oneness of flesh the Bible says a husband and wife become.

And apparently that oneness grows in strength with time. Yet, like a lovely garden, it must be nurtured and protected. It is wise for a husband to actively cultivate and maintain his appreciation for the beautiful work of art that is his wife. Remember, Solomon encouraged husbands when he said,

Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Should thy springs be dispersed abroad, and streams of water in the streets? Let them be for thyself alone, and not for strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of thy youth: a loving hind and a pleasant doe. Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love (Proverbs 5:15-19).

Moreover, a wise husband will tell her often, and with sweet words, how very beautiful her body (a masterfully made work from God) is in his eyes—every part of it—and how thrilling it is to indulge himself with her body and partake of her love. Roughly twenty percent of the entire text of Song of Solomon is devoted to expressing his love for her. Here are some of his words:

Behold, thou are fair, my love, behold, thou are fair. Thine eyes are doves behind thy veil. Thy hair is as a flock of goats that lay along the side of mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a

flock of ewes that are *newly* shorn, which have come up from the washing, of which every one has twins, and none is bereaved among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy mouth is comely. Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind thy veil. Thy neck is like the tower of David built for an armory, on which there hang a thousand bucklers, all the shields of the mighty men. Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, which feed among the lilies (Song 4:1-5).

Thou have ravished my heart, my sister, *my* bride. Thou have ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, *my* bride! How much better is thy love than wine, and the fragrance of thine oils than all manner of spices! Thy lips, O *my* bride, drop the honeycomb. Honey and milk are under thy tongue, and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon (Song 4:9-11).

How beautiful are thy feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! Thy rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skilful workman. Thy body is a round goblet, no mingled wine is wanting. Thy waist is a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe. Thy neck is like the tower of ivory. Thine eyes, the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus. Thy head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thy head like purple. The king is held captive in the tresses (Song 7:1-5).

Indeed, a beautiful woman is a joy to behold, and truly a beautiful body is a gift from God. However, like all material things it is ultimately a vain blessing. Moreover, Solomon said that a beautiful woman who is a fool is a bizarre spectacle—admirable for what she has, repulsive for what she is: **“A ring of gold in a swine's snout, is a beautiful woman who is without discretion”** (Proverbs 11:22).

Moreover, although charm is appealing and entertaining, the fact is, Solomon said it was deceitful. If a woman wants respect and

appreciation, let her be genuinely gracious: **“A gracious woman obtains honor”** (Proverbs 11:16). The Bible also teaches that regardless of how a woman may look, if she fears Jehovah, she deserves praise and honor: **“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears Jehovah, she shall be praised”** (Proverbs 31:30).

Companionship

When a husband tells his wife how beautiful she is, it is an important way for her to know how much he loves her. When she knows that, it makes her even more beautiful. His reflections of her loveliness actually serve to enhance her beauty. Others cannot help but notice her enhanced beauty, and so come to admire their marriage. Notice what Solomon said about her, and how others reacted: **“My dove, my undefiled, is *but* one. She is the only one of her mother. She is the choice one of her who bore her. The daughters saw her, and called her blessed, *yea*, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, sublime as an army with banners?”** (Song 6:9-10).

A devoted wife who loves her husband also appreciates the qualities of his appearance. But he does not need to be told so much directly. It is more advantageous for her to proclaim how attractive he is to others, because when they see her enhanced beauty, and hear her praise him, it strengthens his reputation in the community. Moreover, he will notice what she is doing, and will rejoice in the benefits of her good influence. Thus, both build each other up in love.

The book says that on one occasion his wife went in search for him. When she asked for the help of some other women, they said, **“What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou do so adjure us?”** (Song 5:9). She replied,

My beloved is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand. His head is the most fine gold. His locks are bushy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks, washed with milk, fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed

of spices, banks of sweet herbs. His lips are lilies, dropping liquid myrrh. His hands are rings of gold set with beryl. His body is ivory work overlaid *with* sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold. His aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet. Yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem (Song 5:10-16).

At another place in the book his wife mentions how the virgins loved Solomon because he was such a good husband. She said,

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine. Thine oils have a good fragrance. Thy name is oil poured forth. Therefore the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in thee. We will make mention of thy love more than of wine. Rightly do they love thee (Song 1:2-4).

I should point out, however, that Solomon turned bad in his later years. Against the law of Moses he accumulated wives, eventually having seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (secondary wives). He also turned to other gods. Therefore, Jehovah rebuked him, and began to raise up adversaries against him. However, all of that was obviously after the events described in this book.

From the time of the wedding, the husband should be supportive and the wife should be submissive. Moreover, during the honeymoon period when the marriage is consummated, each should awaken the other to the joys of holy matrimony. While underneath the apple tree, which symbolized him (see Song 2:3), she aroused him in the location where offspring come forth: **“Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? Under the apple tree I awoke thee. There thy mother was in travail with thee. There she who brought thee forth was in travail”** (Song 8:5).

A wife may ask her husband what she must do to bind their relationship closer together and to rest secure in his care. He should tell her (if she really needs to know) to submit herself to his leadership. She said to him, **“Tell me, O thou whom my soul loves,**

where thou feed thy flock, where thou make it to rest at noon. For why should I be as she who is veiled beside the flocks of thy companions?” (Song 1:7). The symbolism of those words suggests she wanted to know how she could be closer in her relationship to him, and not be just another companion. He replied, **“If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds’ tents”** (Song 1:8).

In the figure, he was a shepherd, and he led his flock to pasture. In response to her question, he told her to follow the footsteps, and care for her flock with his. Thus, a wife should follow her husband in his life, and work under his supervision with what she has. For example, if a husband must move to another state, his wife should go with him. That was all quite expected in America before the female rebellion called “feminism.”

Although a wife is clearly to be submissive and obedient to her husband, she is by no means to be helpless or burdensome, lying around like a pet waiting for her call to play. King Lemuel gave a beautiful description (see Pro. 31:10-29), from his own mother’s teachings, of what he called a worthy woman, an ideal wife at the apex of her maturity, which I summarize below.

He said she is a rare and precious asset. She is both strong and dignified with the inner confidence of the righteous. She uses her words wisely and kindly. She conducts business by manufacturing and agriculture, managing her affairs well, not indulging in idleness. She enjoys much freedom because she uses it responsibly—wisely and righteously. With energetic zeal she works diligently with her hands from early morning to late night. Which helps make her family secure and well provided for. And her house is filled with fine furnishings.

He said she is also kind and generous to the deprived, sharing what she has. Her husband trusts her fully because she adds to his prosperity, and to his prominence in the community. Her children and her husband all justly praise her. She deserves to reap the benefits of her labor and enjoy the reputation of her industriousness.

Marriage is a good thing in Jehovah's eyes, and a good woman is a gift from him. Solomon said such a woman will ennoble and enrich a man's life:

A worthy woman is the crown of her husband (Proverbs 12:4).

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from Jehovah (Proverbs 18:22).

House and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from Jehovah (Proverbs 19:14).

Problems

In this dark world there will be disturbances even in a paradise. A husband and his wife together must be vigilant in purging whatever (however small) may invade their lives that threaten the health and productivity of their home, especially when there are children. That seems to be the figurative meaning of these words: **"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards. For our vineyards are in blossom"** (Song 2:15). Perhaps the vineyards represent their marriage, the blossoms represent children, and the foxes represent intruding problems.

There will also be times of misunderstanding between a husband and his wife, which cause sorrow. Solomon's wife mentions one (see Song 5:2-9). He approached her unexpectedly at an unusual hour. And she (not being prepared) was slow to respond. Hence, he withdrew, motivated perhaps by a combination of impatience, misunderstanding, and a desire not to impose.

Such circumstances can produce a temporary period of disharmony of feelings that makes reconciliation difficult. Certainly, misunderstanding and disappointment in love can produce a state of dismay. However, when such minor occasions arise, it is a mistake to involve outsiders. Whatever may be their motives, they will only multiply sorrow and expense.

Even his wife's friends were unsympathetic. After describing in detail how wonderful her husband is and how much she loves him (see 5:10-16) they are finally persuaded to help. However, it was all unnecessary; they are together again. Time heals minor wounds

best without the help of others. That story ends, **“Where has thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Where has thy beloved turned, that we may seek him with thee? My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies”** (Song 6:1-2). In other words, he returned to enjoy being with her.

Solomon mentioned even more serious problems. Besides that most deadly of all women—the adulteress—he spoke of another kind that is grievous to live with. It is better, he said, to live in a closet or in the hot desert than have to endure a contentious, fretful, quarrelsome woman. That type of woman is like the infamous Chinese water torture, and she is impossible to restrain. No wonder so many husbands of her kind flee. As Solomon said,

It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a contentious woman in a wide house (Proverbs 21:9 and 25:24).

It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman (Proverbs 21:19).

A continual dropping in a very rainy day, and a contentious woman are alike. He who would restrain her restrains the wind, and his right hand encounters oil (Proverbs 27:15-16).

Perhaps even worse is the woman who is treacherous and domineering. She is a bitter tormenter—a suitable reward for sinners: **“And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are chains. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her”** (Ecclesiastes 7:26).

Solomon said an evil wife destroys her own home and afflicts her husband like a deadly disease:

A worthy woman is the crown of her husband, but she who makes ashamed is as rottenness in his bones (Proverbs 12:4).

Every wise woman builds her house, but a foolish woman plucks it down with her own hands (Proverbs 14:1).

Child rearing

Properly done, rearing children is one of the most rewarding experiences of life. They too are a gift of God. The psalmist said of them, **“Lo, sons are a heritage of Jehovah, and the fruit of the womb is a reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the sons of youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. They shall not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies in the gate”** (Psalm 127:3-5).

Of course, daughters are also desirable and a blessing, but the facts show that parents typically prefer sons. All children are a great blessing, and managed wisely they eventually bring joy, strength, and prosperity. The problem is not in numbers, but in quality. The righteous souls of the Bible worried about not having enough, and the barren womb was likened to poverty and drought. **“Be fruitful and multiply”** (Gen. 1:28) was the first command God gave to mankind. Done rightly, God always provides.

Although they are a blessing, still, as every parent knows, rearing children is one of the most challenging tasks of life. The pain is not over after the delivery. Suffering and sacrifice go along with proper child rearing. We all owe our parents an incalculable debt. Who could hire anybody to provide all the attention and tender loving care that righteous parents give free of charge?

And in order to do the job right, parents need honor and obedience. Children have a grave responsibility to honor and obey their parents. One of the great ten commandments states: **“Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God gives thee”** (Exo. 20:12). Parents should not have to worry about earning honor and respect from their children. Of course, parents should so live as to encourage love in their children, but honor is their natural right, and God does not take lightly the dishonoring of parents. Simply cursing or striking a parent was a capital offense according to the Law of Moses (see Exo. 21:15-17). Such behavior is a deadly moral poison contributing to social decay. For Solomon said,

He who does violence to his father, and chases away his mother, is a son that causes shame and brings reproach (Proverbs 19:26).

He who curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness (Proverbs 20:20).

He who robs his father or his mother, and says, It is no transgression, the same is the companion of a destroyer (Proverbs 28:24).

Agur added these words:

There is a generation who curses their father, and does not bless their mother. There is a generation who are pure in their own eyes, and *yet* are not washed from their filthiness (Proverbs 30:11-12).

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 (Proverbs 30:17).

A strong father in a healthy home is a great asset to a child, and so he has a vested interest in supporting his parents. For Solomon said, “... **the glory of sons are their fathers**” (Proverbs 17:6). And Parents have a grave responsibility to train their children. They do not develop well on their own. Parents must chasten and encourage them to hate the evil and love the good—not abusively, but with love. Remember, Paul said, “**And ye fathers, do not exasperate your children, but rear them in the training and admonition of the Lord**” (Eph. 6:4). And remember Solomon said,

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him promptly (Proverbs 13:24).

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying (Proverbs 19:18).

Withhold not correction from the child, *for* if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from Sheol (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Both parents and children must cooperate in the process of education and development. Fathers and mothers must teach and discipline, and children must be respectful, obedient, and learn. If both children and parents succeed in working together, both will reap

the rewards. If either parents or children, or both, neglect their duty, both will suffer adverse consequences. Remember these and other words like them:

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother (Proverbs 10:1).

A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him (Proverbs 17:25).

A foolish son is the calamity of his father (Proverbs 19:13).

The father of a righteous man will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will have joy of him. Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and let her who bore thee rejoice (Proverbs 23:24-25).

Dear reader, treat your family well, for Solomon said, **“He who troubles his own house shall inherit the wind”** (Proverbs 11:29). Producing a successful family results in some of the richest rewards of later life. For example, Solomon said, **“Son’s sons are the crown of old men”** (Proverbs 17:6). Nevertheless remember, each individual—father, mother, son, daughter—is ultimately responsible for his own soul. For God said to the prophet Ezekiel,

Behold, all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul that sins, it shall die. But if a man be just, and does that which is lawful and right. And has not ... lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor has defiled his neighbor’s wife ... [but] has walked in my statutes, and has kept my ordinances, to deal truly, he is just. He shall surely live, says lord Jehovah. If he begets a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things, and who does not do any of those *duties*, but has even eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbor’s wife ... shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations. He shall surely die. His blood shall be upon him. Now, lo, if he begets a son, who sees all his father’s sins, which he has done, and fears, and does not do such like, who has not eaten upon the mountains ... but has given his bread to a hungry man ... he shall not die for the iniquity of his father. He shall surely

live. As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother, and did that which is not good among his people, behold, he shall die in his iniquity (Ezekiel 18:4-18).

Preparation

Young girls should be prepared for marriage early in their lives, according to their temperament and special nature, by cultivating their individual talents. If one be reserved (a wall), let her learn well how to protect and shelter. If one be sociable (a door), teach her how to be a gracious hostess. Solomon's wife was reserved, and she brought both beauty and peace to his life. That seems to be the figurative meaning of these words: **"We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver. And if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. I am a wall, and my breasts like the towers. Then I was in his eyes as one who found peace"** (Song 8:8-10).

A young man should also prepare for marriage. He should gain possession of quality goods, durable and attractive. And he should have all-round protection to ensure adequate security. These are things needed to aid a couple as they journey together through life. And all of the young ladies should be invited to the wedding so that they may come to recognize the joy that marriage brings. That seems to be the figurative meaning of these words:

Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant? Behold, it is the litter of Solomon. Sixty mighty men are around it, of the mighty men of Israel. They all handle the sword, *and* are expert in war. Every man has his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night.

King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the seat thereof of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, from the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon

with the crown with which his mother has crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart (Song 3:6-11).

Those with experience in marriage (dwelling in the gardens) should offer to share counsel and good advice. And those who are inexperienced should be desirous to learn. Which is what this seems to mean: **“Thou who dwell in the gardens, the companions hearken for thy voice. Cause me to hear it”** (Song 8:13).

The power of love

Love between a husband and his wife is a powerful force, able to stir strong feelings. Care and tenderness are both necessary. A lovely modern song advises, “Try a little tenderness” because “love is her whole happiness.” Solomon’s wife revealed the intensity of her feelings when she said, **“Sustain ye me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am sick from love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. His left hand under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake love, until it please”** (Song 8:3-4).

And Solomon confessed her power over his feelings when he said,

Thou have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride. Thou have ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck (Song 4:9).

Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me (Song 6:5).

The following words near the end of Song of Solomon appear to be a plea made by Solomon’s wife for loyalty and faithfulness, lest terrifying storms be unleashed. Love is a priceless commodity, and it cannot be bought and sold, or traded like merchandise. She said, **“Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm. For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as Sheol. The flashes of it are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned”** (Song 8:6-7).

Chapter 12

Friends and Community

Cooperation

The Bible contains many passages that speak of the strength and beauty of unity. One of the most famous is the following: **“Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”** (Psalm 133:1). Solomon also taught the value of cooperation, when he said,

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lay together, then they have warmth, but how can one be warm *alone*? And if a man prevails against him who is alone, two shall withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Faithfulness acts like a bond to help maintain cooperation, and it is rewarded by both men and the Lord:

Let not kindness and truth forsake thee. Bind them about thy neck, write them upon the tablet of thy heart, so thou shall find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man (Proverbs 3:3-4).

Forsake not thine own friend, and thy father’s friend. And go not to thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity. Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far off (Proverbs 27:10).

He who keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit of it, and he who regards his master shall be honored (Proverbs 27:18).

Solomon said that faithfulness promotes a good reputation, and a good reputation is worth more than wealth. He said, **“A good name is better than precious oil”** (Ecclesiastes 7:1). Many men claim to be faithful, but not all are. As Solomon said, **“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness, but a faithful man**

who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6). Friends can be a great blessing, but Solomon warned against having too many: **“He who makes many friends does it to his own destruction, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”** (Proverbs 18:24). Friends can require much time and effort to satisfy and maintain.

Adversity reveals true faithfulness. **“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”** (Proverbs 17:17). A similar extra-Biblical proverb says, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” Solomon said that unfaithfulness in time of need is like a painful disease: **“Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint”** (Proverbs 25:19).

It is every man’s duty to come to the aid of somebody in danger (those not condemned for their guilt). Jehovah will hold accountable those who think of excuses and close their eyes. For Solomon said, **“Deliver those who are carried away to death, and hold thou back those who are ready to be slain. If thou say, Behold, we did not know this, Does not he who weighs the hearts consider it? And he who keeps thy soul, does he not know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his work?”** (Proverbs 24:11-12).

Solomon warned against returning evil for good: **“He who rewards evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house”** (Proverbs 17:13). However, he also said we need to use good judgment when doing good to another: **“He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be considered a curse to him”** (Proverbs 27:14). Moreover, it is best not to overdo a friendship. **“Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbor’s house, lest he be weary of thee, and hate thee”** (Proverbs 25:17).

Strife

Disagreements among people are inevitable, but Solomon warned against both prejudice and hasty judgments:

A wicked man receives a bribe out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of justice (Proverbs 17:23).

He who pleads his case first *seems* just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out (Proverbs 18:17).

To have respect of persons in judgment is not good (Proverbs 24:23).

... a bribe destroys the understanding (Ecclesiastes 7:7).

It is wise to try to settle disputes privately. It is unwise to be quick to lodge formal accusations. Solomon advised, **“Go not forth hastily to strive. What will thou do in the end of it when thy neighbor has put thee to shame? Debate thy case with thy neighbor *himself*, and disclose not the secret of another, lest he who hears it revile thee, and thine infamy turn not away”** (Proverbs 25:8-10). Agur added, **“Slander not a servant to his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be held guilty”** (Proverbs 30:10). Being under a curse can be a frightful thing, but there is comfort in these words: **“As the sparrow in her wandering, as the swallow in her flying, so the curse that is causeless does not alight”** (Proverbs 26:2). No curse has any potency if it is without justification.

Strife or contention in itself is not wrong. Indeed, it is a responsibility of law-abiding citizens to contend with the wicked. For Solomon said, **“Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them”** (Proverbs 28:4). However, it is certainly wrong to be contentious without justification. He advised,

Do not devise evil against thy neighbor, since he dwells securely by thee. Do not strive with a man without cause, if he has done thee no harm (Proverbs 3:29-30).

He who despises his neighbor is void of wisdom (Proverbs 11:12).

And, like anger, strife rarely leads to constructive or creative endeavor. For the most part, he said, it is to be avoided:

The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water. Therefore leave off contention, before there is quarrelling (Proverbs 17:14).

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife (Proverbs 20:3).

Solomon advised against getting involved in other men's disputes; it is best to mind our own business. According to a news report I once read, Lyndon Johnson, who escalated our country's involvement in the Vietnam war, was seen lifting a man's dog by its ears. Three thousand years ago Solomon said, **"He who passes by, and meddles with strife not his, is like he who takes a dog by the ears"** (Proverbs 26:17).

Strife can create a wall between people that becomes very hard to tear down. Moreover, it can lead a man to commit injustice. Solomon said,

He who desires to separate himself seeks excuses, and rages against all sound wisdom (Proverbs 18:1).

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and such contentions are like the bars of a castle (Proverbs 18:19).

There are many causes of strife including hatred, pride, greed,

Hatred stirs up strife (Proverbs 10:12).

Through pride a vain man causes contention (Proverbs 13:10).

He who is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife (Proverbs 28:25).

the wicked,

... in whose heart is perverseness, who devises evil continually, who sows discord (Proverbs 6:14).

A perverse man scatters abroad strife (Proverbs 16:28).

the fool and the scoffer,

A fool's lips enter into contention (Proverbs 18:6).

Cast out the scoffer, and contention will go out, yea, strife and reproach will cease (Proverbs 22:10).

the gossip,

... a whisperer separates chief friends (Proverbs 16:28).

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention ceases (Proverbs 26:20).

the drunkard,

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long at the wine. Those who go to seek out mixed wine (Proverbs 23:29-30).

excessive anger,

A wrathful man stirs up contention, but he who is slow to anger appeases strife (Proverbs 15:18).

An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in transgression (Proverbs 29:22).

For the churning of milk brings forth butter, and the wringing of the nose brings forth blood, so the forcing of wrath brings forth strife (Proverbs 30:33).

and some people who are addicted to it:

He loves transgression who loves strife (Proverbs 17:19).

As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife (Proverbs 26:21).

Regarding this latter kind of quarrelsome man, Paul wrote,

... he is puffed up, understanding nothing, but doting about disputes and word controversies, from which develop envy, strife, revilings, evil surmisings, constant frictions of men corrupted in mind, and destitute of the truth (1Ti. 6:4-5).

But shun foolish and uneducated questions, knowing that they breed quarrels. And a bondman of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient ... (2Ti. 2:23-24).

Quarreling and strife should be avoided when possible. However, the strivings of friendly competition can be constructive:

Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17).

Then I saw all labor and every skilful work, that for this a man is envied by his neighbor (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

When disagreements can be resolved no other way, Solomon advised letting the Lord decide. The practice is common at the beginning of a football game. He said,

The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah (Proverbs 16:33).

The lot causes contentions to cease, and decides between the mighty (Proverbs 18:18).

Forgiveness

Solomon said confession with repentance must precede forgiveness. That too is an oft stated Bible truth. Here is what he said,:

By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for (Proverbs 16:6).

He who covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

However, it is wrong to laugh and rejoice when an adversary or competitor has problems, even if he deserves them and remains unrepentant:

He who is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished (Proverbs 17:5).

Rejoice not when thine enemy falls, and let not thy heart be glad when he is overthrown, lest Jehovah see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him (Proverbs 24:17-18).

We should be willing to forgive some offenses. We all offend others (even our friends) in countless little ways. Hypersensitivity only amplifies conflict. Shock absorbers on a car give stability, comfort, and greater control. In the same way we should act as “shock absorbers” toward our minor social conflicts, for it promotes peace. Love ignores minor offenses, and love is great medicine; it is a prime quality of God. Even an adversary or competitor deserves the same courtesy and kindness that we show to others. In

so doing, we may “melt his heart,” and perhaps even become friends. But if not, at least we may prick his conscience, and he will have no excuses to harm us. Solomon said,

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions
(Proverbs 10:12).

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates chief friends (Proverbs 17:9).

Say thou not, I will recompense evil. Wait for Jehovah, and he will save thee (Proverbs 20:22).

Say not, I will do so to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work (Proverbs 24:29).

If thine enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. For thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head, and Jehovah will reward thee (Proverbs 25:21-22).

Also do not take heed to all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee. For many times also thine own heart knows that thou thyself likewise have cursed others (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22).

Paul quoted both Moses and Solomon when he wrote about those things:

Become not wise according to yourselves, rendering to no man evil for evil, premeditating things right in the sight of all men. If possible from you, keeping peace with all men, not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him to drink. For by doing this thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good (Rom. 12:16-21).

However, Paul went on to add that governing authorities have no right to forgive. The power of American rulers to issue pardons at will is a violation of justice. The right to forgive can come only from the one offended—be he man or God. Authorities are Jehovah’s servants to execute his wrath against the guilty. Hence, they

have no right to forgive, and thus deprive justice from the one offended—be he man or God. Paul said,

Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher, for there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God, are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves.

For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil (Rom. 13:1-4).

Years ago I read a news story about a man who had murdered an estimated one hundred people. Twenty-seven years earlier he had murdered his own mother—a cardinal sin against both her and God. Refusing to carry out justice by executing the murderer, the authorities later released him. God commanded from the beginning that murderers be put to death (see Gen. 9:6). That dereliction of duty on their part (which deluded souls claim is an act of compassion) was, in fact, a cruel sentence of death passed upon one hundred innocent people. That kind of failure to carry out justice is very common by this most adulterous generation of Americans. Abolishing capital punishment in society is like abolishing anti-septics in medical practice. It sets the stage for more sorrow and misery.

Solomon wrote the following things regarding forgiveness for the wicked:

Behold, a righteous man shall be recompensed in the earth, how much more the wicked man and the sinner! (Proverbs 11:31).

He who justifies a wicked man, and he who condemns a righteous man, both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah (Proverbs 17:15).

He who says to a wicked man, Thou are righteous, peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him. But to those who rebuke *him* shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them (Proverbs 24:24-25).

A troubled fountain, and a corrupted spring, is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked (Proverbs 25:26).

A man who is laden with the blood of any person shall flee to the pit. Let no man stay him (Proverbs 28:17).

Therefore, let nobody claim that the Lord loves wicked, blood-thirsty men. The Bible teaches the opposite. For example, Malachi the prophet said to the ancient Jews, **“Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words. Yet ye say, How have we wearied him? In that ye say, Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delights in them”** (Mal. 2:17). And in the Psalms we find these words:

For thou are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. Evil shall not sojourn with thee. The arrogant shall not stand in thy sight. Thou hate all workers of iniquity. Thou will destroy those who speak lies. Jehovah abhors the blood-thirsty and deceitful man (Psalm 5:4-6).

Yet they challenged and rebelled against the Most High God, and kept not his testimonies, but turned back, and dealt treacherously like their fathers. They were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard, he was angry, and greatly abhorred Israel (Psalm 78:56-59).

And the prophet Hosea quoted these words of Jehovah: **“All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them. Because of the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more. All their rulers are rebels”** (Hos. 9:15).

Moreover, the Lord, through the prophet Ezekiel, addressed those kinds of professional hypocrites (such as our modern lawyers) who promote aborting the lives of the most innocent, while at the same time opposing capital punishment for the most guilty. He said, **“And ye have profaned me among my people for handfuls**

of barley and for pieces of bread, to kill the souls who should not die, and to save the souls alive who should not live, by your lying to my people who listen to lies” (Ezekiel 13:19).

Nevertheless, during periods of extreme moral decay with widespread guilt, even Jehovah will not promote harsh penalties against specific acts of sin. When almost everybody is guilty, law enforcement degenerates to the punishment of only those who are caught. And God will have no part in that kind of perverted justice. His wrath will be directed against the whole community. For example, Jehovah, through the prophet Hosea, said, **“I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, nor your brides when they commit adultery. For themselves go apart with harlots, and they sacrifice with the prostitutes. And the people who do not understand shall be overthrown”** (Hos. 4:14).

Jesus also refused to punish the woman brought to him who had been caught in the act of adultery, because all of her accusers were guilty. (See John 8:2-11.) And the nation of the Jews was completely destroyed during that generation. However, during more sensible times, when respect for law and morality is high, such tolerance is not recommended. For example, concerning the execution of murderers, Moses urged the people, saying, **“Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shall put away the innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee”** (deuteronomy 19:13). Remember the words of Solomon: **“For everything there is a season, and a time for very purpose under heaven: ... a time to kill, and a time to heal, ... a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace”** (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 3, 8). And there is a time for mercy and a time for vengeance.

Advice about rulers

We can apply what Solomon taught about kings to all chief government rulers. A king, president, chancellor, prime minister, is simply an instrument of governmental authority. Without government support he is an ordinary man. However, with governmental authority such men have great power; although heads of state in

today's complex societies are rarely like the monarchs of the past with the power of life and death in their hands.

The possession of power and authority typically promotes dignified confidence. For Augur said, **“There are three things which are stately in their march, yea, four which are stately in going: The lion, which is mightiest among beasts, and turns not away from any, the greyhound, also the he-goat, and the king against whom there is no rising up”** (Proverbs 30:29-31).

With their power and authority heads of state have great ability to provide benefits, and those who serve them wisely can best enjoy such. Their favor, Solomon said, is like dew on the grass and like the spring rain—both encourage life and growth. On the other hand, because of their power and authority, Solomon sternly warned about rebelling against them, or even reviling them in your thoughts. It will become known somehow and the guilty party may find himself locked up in some unpleasant place or worse.

Their anger is especially directed against those who cause shame and/or commit crime. Be assured, they are able to bring destruction and ruin. Solomon said they are like a roaring lion or a herald of death to the wicked. And those who provoke them to wrath pass a bitter sentence against themselves:

The king's favor is toward a servant who deals wisely, but his wrath will be to him who causes shame (Proverbs 14:35).

The wrath of a king is messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain (Proverbs 16:14-15).

The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion, but his favor is as dew upon the grass (Proverbs 19:12).

My son, fear thou Jehovah and the king, and do not associate with those who are given to change [like revolutionaries]. For their calamity shall rise suddenly, and the destruction from them both, who knows it? (Proverbs 24:21-22).

Reville not the king, no, not in thy thought, and revile not the rich in thy bedchamber. For a bird of the heavens shall

carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

Regarding those who find themselves in the presence of a chief official, Solomon advised restraint and caution (a general quality of the wise). It is prudent to keep back humbly until noticed: **“Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men. For it is better that it be said to thee, Come up here, than that thou should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom thine eyes have seen”** (Proverbs 25:6-7).

Those who are invited to dine with a high authority should eat with dignity and refinement. It is foolish to rush in and overeat. They watch others in order to examine their personal qualities. Solomon advised, **“When thou sit to eat with a ruler, consider diligently him who is before thee, and put a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, since they are deceitful food”** (Proverbs 23:1-3).

We should also choose our words well, and speak the truth. For the power of rulers rests upon accurate information. And after making a request, we should wait patiently, for Solomon said,

Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks right (Proverbs 16:13).

He who loves pureness of heart, *for* the grace of his lips, the king will be his friend (Proverbs 22:11).

By long-suffering a ruler is persuaded (Proverbs 25:15).

If a ruler gives an order to a man who has committed his allegiance to him, Solomon advised patience, and he warned against persisting in a bad thing. He also advised perseverance in obedience to a command. No matter how difficult and/or distasteful it may be there is always a way. Solomon advised using wisdom to make the method and timing right, and then take your chances. That seems to be the meaning of these words:

I say, Keep the king’s command, and that because of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his presence. Persist not in an evil matter, for he does whatever pleases him. For

the king's word *has* power, and who may say to him, What are thou doing? He who keeps a commandment shall know no evil thing. And a wise man's heart discerns the time and decision. For to every purpose there is a time and decision, although the distress of man is great upon him. For he knows not that which shall be, for who can tell him how it shall be? (Ecclesiastes 8:2-7).

If you happen to provoke his anger, you should quietly endure his displeasure. It is a mistake to run away and ruin your position. For Solomon said, **"If the spirit of the ruler rises up against thee, leave not thy place, for deference allays great offences"** (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

Advice for rulers

Here is some advice from the book of Proverbs for rulers by King Lemuel. Rulers should resist the temptation to indulge in sensual pleasures. He said intoxicating beverages are especially to be avoided. They cloud judgment and impair functioning. It is folly and/or craftiness when such drinking is encouraged at official functions. And rulers should both aid and defend the poor and the needy by guaranteeing their rights. The book of Proverbs says,

The words of king Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him. What, my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows? Give not thy strength to women, nor thy ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for rulers *to say*, Where is strong drink? Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice *due* to any who is afflicted. ... Open thy mouth for the mute, in the cause of all such as are left desolate. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and minister justice to the poor and needy (Proverbs 31:1-5, 8-9).

Here is King Solomon's advice for rulers. He said they should love truth, and work at increasing wisdom both in themselves and in others. They should promote scholarship and research; discoveries thereby will bring honor both to the researcher and to the authority

who encouraged him. He said it is out of place for officials to lie, and those who give ear to liars will find their entire staff corrupted.

Moreover, no matter how many great obstacles a ruler may have overcome in the past, and no matter how many subjects he may reign over, if he indulges in ignorance and refuses to be corrected, he will contribute to the miseries of the populace. And they will eventually hate him, even preferring an unknown but wise youth over him. Those things are taught in the following words:

By me [wisdom] kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me rulers rule, and ranking men, *even* all the judges of the earth (Proverbs 8:15-16).

Excellent speech is not appropriate to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince (Proverbs 17:7).

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter (Proverbs 25:2).

The ruler who lacks understanding is also a great oppressor (Proverbs 28:16).

If a ruler hearkens to falsehood, all his servants are wicked (Proverbs 29:12).

Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who does not know how to receive admonition any more. For he came forth out of prison to be king, yea, even in his kingdom he was born poor. I saw all the living who walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the second, who stood up in his stead. There was no end of all the people, even of all those over whom he was. Yet those who come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 4:13-16).

However, regardless of how great may be the power and knowledge of a ruler, if he loses the support of the people, then he will suffer ruin. Loyalty, faithfulness, and righteousness make a ruler's position secure. For Solomon said,

In the multitude of people is the king's glory, but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince (Proverbs 14:28).

It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness (Proverbs 16:12).

Kindness and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by kindness (Proverbs 20:28).

Also a vital duty of rulers is to defend the rights of the weak and helpless, the handicapped and the impoverished. The rich and the strong can look out for themselves, and they will. The poor and needy count on the authorities to defend them. Only they have that power and legal right. When rulers do all those things, they also make themselves secure, as Solomon said: **“The king who faithfully judges the poor, his throne shall be established forever”** (Proverbs 29:14).

And remember Lemuel’s words: **“Open thy mouth for the mute, in the cause of all such as are left desolate. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and minister justice to the poor and needy”** (Proverbs 31:8-9). Also Moses told the sons of Israel, **“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment. Thou shall not respect the person of the poor man, nor honor the person of the mighty man, but thou shall judge thy neighbor in righteousness”** (Lev. 19:15).

A wise ruler also makes his position secure by promoting just economic dealings, and by opposing fraud, bribery, profiteering, and such like. Solomon said, **“... [a ruler] who hates covetousness shall prolong his days”** (Proverbs 28:16).

He also said, **“A divine sentence is in the lips of the king. His mouth shall not transgress in judgment”** (Proverbs 16:10). What that passage seems to say is that heads of state have God’s support for their authority. Remember Paul’s words: **“... he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God.”** Hence, the passage, **“A divine sentence is in the lips of the king. His mouth shall not transgress in judgment,”** is apparently a command: his mouth *shall* not transgress. Therefore, rulers should not make sinful judgments.

Therefore, we are not obligated to obey them when they oppose the righteousness of God. For Paul also said, **“Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher, for there is no**

office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God, are those that have been instituted” (Rom. 13:1). The extent to which the offices or the officeholders oppose the righteousness of God, to that extent they are illegitimate.

Another vital duty of rulers is to punish criminals. Ordinary citizens have neither the means nor the authority to enforce sanctions against wrongdoers. A wise ruler will not neglect to do it because it also contributes to his own stability. Remember, Paul said they are the Lord’s servants to execute his wrath against wrongdoers. Here is what Solomon said about it:

A king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes (Proverbs 20:8).

A wise king winnows the wicked, and brings the wheel over them (Proverbs 20:26).

Take away the dross from the silver, and there comes forth a vessel for the refiner. Take away the wicked *from* before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness (Proverbs 25:4-5).

Nations

Every citizen of every nation should memorize the following words of Solomon: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). He also described several specific things that contribute to a nation’s well-being. Namely, when the people have knowledge and understanding; when they rely on many wise counselors; when they are law-abiding; and when the righteous are secure in the streets. And these are the benefits: peace, progress, happiness, and long stability.

Solomon also mentioned several things that contribute to a nation’s woes. Namely, when the people ignore God’s word; when they fail to use counsel; when they become lawless and run wild; when they have crooked, corrupt, degenerate rulers; and when they are influenced by the words of wicked men and scoffers. And these are the penalties: multiple rulers (which reduces freedom); contemptuous international reputation; fear and insecurity among the citizens; burning and destruction.

A modern myth says that no national or ethnic culture is better than any other. The word of God says otherwise. Observe the righteousness or unrighteousness of a people. Then notice their condition, and you will see the truth of these words: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

The following are proverbs from Solomon that teach all those things:

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. And when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked (Proverbs 11:10-11).

Where no wise guidance is, the people fall, but in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).

For the transgression of a land many are the rulers of it. But by men of understanding *and* knowledge the state shall be prolonged (Proverbs 28:2).

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves (Proverbs 28:12).

A roaring lion, and a ranging bear, is a wicked ruler over a poor people (Proverbs 28:15).

When the wicked rise, men hide themselves, but when they perish, the righteous increase (Proverbs 28:28).

When the righteous are increased, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man bears rule, the people sigh (Proverbs 29:2).

By justice the king establishes the land, but he who exacts gifts overthrows it (Proverbs 29:4).

Scoffers set a city in a flame, but wise men turn away wrath (Proverbs 29:8).

When the wicked are increased, transgression increases, but the righteous shall look upon their fall (Proverbs 29:16).

Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint, but he who keeps the law, happy is he (Proverbs 29:18).

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy rulers feast in the morning! Happy are thou, O land, when thy king is the son of noble men, and thy rulers feast in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! (Ecclesiastes 10:16-17).

Finally, we can expect some injustice by government officials from time to time, but nations have organization, and even heads of state are dependent upon the national health. Like an infection in some part of the body, injustice cannot remain hidden or ignored very long. That seems to be the lesson of these words of Solomon: **“If thou see the oppression of a poor man, and the violent wresting of justice and righteousness in a province, marvel not at the matter. For a man higher than the high is observing, and there are higher men than they. Moreover the abundance of the land is for all. The king *himself* is served by the field”** (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9).

Remember, Jehovah God has the ultimate authority, and if you see heads of state do strange things (wise or foolish), the Lord may be behind it all, perhaps to reward, or perhaps to punish a people. For Solomon said,

The king’s heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the water-courses. He turns it wherever he will (Proverbs 21:1).

As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable (Proverbs 25:3).

It is comforting to know, however, that the King of kings guarantees ultimate justice. As Solomon said, **“Many seek the ruler’s favor, but a man’s justice is from Jehovah”** (Proverbs 29:26). If not in this life then it will be in the life to come, to reward or to punish. It is so sad that most men seek the favor of other men and not the **“King of kings and Lord of lords”** (Revelation 19:16).

*Epilogue:***Jesus and Wisdom**

Although we live in a world of good and evil, the Bible teaches that all things, good and bad, ultimately serve God's purpose. And the very center of his purpose is his only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ. Paul spoke about that when he said to the Ephesian brothers,

Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his desire, which he purposed within himself for an administration of the fullness of the times. To gather together all things in the Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth (Eph. 1:9-10).

To me, a man less than the least of all the sanctified, this grace was given to preach good-news among the Gentiles, the unsearchable wealth of Christ, and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery hidden from the ages in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. So that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church, according to the purpose of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

God certainly moves in mysterious ways. And truly, it is through obedience to the lordship of that special man, Jesus Christ, that evil is overcome. Of course, this man Jesus is far more than a man. Consider what John said of him:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This man was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:1-5).

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life (and the life

was made known, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father, and was made known to us) (1Jo. 1:1-2).

There is something very deep in the meaning of *word* as used in some holy scriptures. We know that when God spoke, the world came into being. And the Bible records a time Jesus was praying, when he said to his heavenly Father, “... **thy word is truth**” (John 17:17). The word truth as used in the New Testament often carries the same meaning as the word wisdom used by Solomon.

Regarding the word truth, Jesus also used it to apply to himself when he told his apostles, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me**” (John 14:6). When Paul wrote to the Corinthian brothers he said this about Jesus Christ: “**Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God**” (1Co. 1:24). And when he wrote to the brothers at Colossae he said he wanted them to have “**all wealth of the full assurance of understanding, to knowledge of the mystery of the God and Father of the Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (Col. 2:2-3).

Jesus, then, is the “word,” and the “truth,” and the “wisdom and power of God.” He possesses “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” revealing to us understanding and knowledge of God’s mystery.

However, there is another being involved—the Helper, the Holy Spirit of God—whom Jesus referred to as the Spirit of truth. Remember, Jesus said to his apostles, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life**” (John 14:6). And about the Holy Spirit he said to them, “**However when that, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak from himself, but as many things as he may hear, he will speak. And he will report to you the things that are coming**” (John 16:13). And later John wrote: “... **the Spirit is truth**” (1Jo. 5:6).

Thus, we find Jesus is the Word; God’s Word is truth; Jesus is God’s wisdom, and he is the truth and the life; the Spirit is the truth. Putting all together we find a oneness between the Son of God, the Holy Spirit of God, and God the Father, who is said to be love (see 1st John 4:16). In the Bible, therefore, we find an emphasis on these aspects of divinity: power, truth-wisdom, and love.

Combined, they make the essence of life—a dynamic intelligent unity.

Solomon lived about a thousand years before Christ and the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the supreme Son of God, and his wisdom recorded in the New Testament is the climax of Holy Scripture. It is the last and best of the divinely inspired truth. As Jesus said to the Jews who rejected him, **“The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here”** (Mat. 12:42).

Nevertheless, Jesus did not come to do away with the wisdom of Solomon or any of the Old Testament truth. He came not to abolish it, but rather to extend and enlarge it, to enrich it and make it mature and complete. For he said, **“Think not that I came to abolish the law or the prophets. I came not to abolish, but to fulfill”** (Mat. 5:17).

He also said, **“... every scholar who has been instructed in the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a house-ruler, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old”** (Mat. 13:52). There are treasures of wisdom in the Old Testament and the New Testament. I have tried, with the teachings of Solomon in this book, to help you increase the treasures of your wisdom. May you use it to the glory of Christ our Lord, and God our heavenly Father.

“Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, alone wise, to God is honor and glory into the ages of the ages. Truly” (1Ti. 1:17).

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