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# **MHryCom 20**

## **Proverbs**

*Bible Commentary:  
Matthew Henry - 20*

**Matthew Henry**

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# Proverbs

AN

EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE

## PROVERBS.

We have now before us, I. A new author, or penman rather, or pen (if you will) made use of by the Holy Ghost for making known the mind of God to us, writing as moved by the *finger of God* (so the Spirit of God is called), and that is Solomon; through his hand came this book of Scripture and the two that follow it, Ecclesiastes and Canticles, a sermon and a song. Some think he wrote Canticles when he was very young, Proverbs in the midst of his days, and Ecclesiastes when he was old. In the title of his song he only writes himself *Solomon*, perhaps because he wrote it before his accession to the throne, being filled with the Holy Ghost when he was young. In the title of his Proverbs he writes himself *the son of David, king of Israel*, for then he ruled over all Israel. In the title of his Ecclesiastes he writes himself *the son of David, king of Jerusalem*, because then perhaps his influence had grown less upon the distant tribes, and he confined himself very much in Jerusalem. Concerning this author we may observe, 1. That he was a king, and a king's son. The penmen of scripture, hitherto, were most of them men of the first rank in the world, as Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, and now Solomon; but, after him, the inspired writers were generally poor prophets, men of no figure in the world, because that dispensation was approaching in the which God would choose the *weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty* and the poor should be employed to evangelize. Solomon was a very rich king, and his dominions were very large, a king of the first magnitude, and yet he addicted himself to the study of divine things, and was a prophet and a prophet's son. It is no disparagement to the greatest princes and potentates in the world to instruct those about them in religion and the laws of it. 2. That he was one whom

God endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom and knowledge, in answer to his prayers at his accession to the throne. His prayer was exemplary: *Give me a wise and an understanding heart*; the answer to it was encouraging: he had what he desired and *all other things were added to him*. Now here we find what good use he made of the wisdom God gave him; he not only governed himself and his kingdom with it, but he gave rules of wisdom to others also, and transmitted them to posterity. Thus must we trade with the talents with which we are entrusted, according as they are.

3. That he was one who had his faults, and in his latter end turned aside from those good ways

of God which in this book he had directed others in. We have the story of it 1 Kings xi., and a sad story it is, that the penman of such a book as this should apostatize as he did. *Tell it not in Gath*. But let those who are most eminently useful take warning by this not to be proud or secure; and let us all learn not to think the worse of good instructions though we have them from those who do not themselves altogether live up to them.

II. A new way of writing, in which divine wisdom is taught us by Proverbs, or short sentences, which contain their whole design within themselves and are not connected with one another. We have had divine *laws, histories, and songs*, and how divine *proverbs*; such various methods has Infinite Wisdom used for our instruction, that, no stone being left unturned to do us good, we may be inexcusable if we perish in our folly. Teaching by proverbs was, 1. An ancient way of teaching. It was the most ancient way among the Greeks; each of the seven wise men of Greece had some one saying that he valued himself upon, and that made him famous. These sentences were inscribed on pillars, and had in great veneration as that which was said to come down from heaven. *A cælo descendit, Gnothi seauton*—*Know thyself is a precept which came down from heaven*. 2. It was a plain and easy way of teaching, which cost neither the teachers nor the learners much pains, nor put their understandings nor their memories to the stretch. Long periods, and arguments far-fetched, must be laboured both by him that frames them and by him that would understand them, while a proverb, which carries both its sense and its evidence in a little compass, is quickly apprehended and subscribed to, and is easily retained. Both David's devotions and Solomon's instructions are sententious, which may recommend that way of expression

to those who minister about holy things, both in praying and preaching. 3. It was a very profitable way of teaching, and served admirably well to answer the end. The word *Mashal*, here used for a proverb, comes from a word that signifies *to rule* or *have dominion*, because of the commanding power and influence which wise and weighty sayings have upon the children of men; he that teaches by them *dominatur in concionibus—rules his auditory*. It is easy to observe how the world is governed by proverbs. *As saith the proverb of the ancients* (1 Sam. xxiv. 13), or (as we commonly express it) *As the old saying is*, goes very far with most men in forming their notions and fixing their resolves. Much of the wisdom of the ancients has been handed down to posterity by proverbs; and some think we may judge of the temper and character of a nation by the complexion of its vulgar proverbs. Proverbs in conversation are like axioms in philosophy, maxims in law, and postulata in the mathematics, which nobody disputes, but every one endeavours to expound so as to have them on his side. Yet there are many corrupt proverbs, which tend to debauch men's minds and harden them in sin. The devil has his proverbs, and the world and the flesh have their proverbs, which reflect reproach on God and religion (as Ezek. xii. 22; xviii. 2), to guard us against the corrupt influences of which God has his proverbs, which are all wise and good, and tend to make us so. These proverbs of Solomon were not merely a collection of the wise sayings that had been formerly delivered, as some have imagined, but were the dictates of the Spirit of God in Solomon. The very first of them (ch. i. 7) agrees with what God said to man in the beginning (Job xxviii. 28, *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom*); so that though Solomon was great, and his name may serve as much as any man's to recommend his

writings, yet, behold, *a greater than Solomon is here*. It is God, by Solomon, that here speaks to us: I say, to *us*; for these proverbs were *written for our learning*, and, when Solomon speaks to his son, the exhortation is said *to speak to us as unto children*, Heb. xii. 5. And, as we have no book so useful to us in our devotions as David's psalms, so have we none so serviceable to us, for the right ordering of our conversations, as Solomon's proverbs, which as David says of the commandments, are *exceedingly broad*, containing, in a little compass, a complete body of divine ethics, politics, and economics, exposing every vice, recommending every virtue, and suggesting rules for the government of ourselves in every

relation and condition, and every turn of the conversation. The learned bishop Hall has drawn up a system of moral philosophy out of Solomon's Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The first nine chapters of this book are reckoned as a preface, by way of exhortation to the study and practice of wisdom's rules, and caution against those things that would hinder therein. We have then the first volume of Solomon's proverbs (ch. x.-xxiv.); after that a second volume (ch. xxv.-xxix.); and then Agur's prophecy (ch. xxx.), and Lemuel's (ch. xxxi.). The scope of all is one and the same, to direct us so to order our conversation aright as that in the end we may see the salvation of the Lord. The best comment on these rules is to be ruled by them.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. I.

Those who read David's psalms, especially those towards the latter end, would be tempted to think that religion is all rapture and consists in nothing but the ecstasies and transports of devotion; and doubtless there is a time for them, and if there be a heaven upon earth it is in them: but, while we are on earth, we cannot be wholly taken up with them; we have a life to live in the flesh, must have a conversation in the world, and into that we must now be taught to carry our religion, which is a rational thing, and very serviceable to the government of human life, and tends as much to make us discreet as to make us devout, to make the face shine before men, in a prudent, honest, useful conversation, as to make the heart burn towards God in holy and pious affections. In this chapter we have, I. The title of the book, showing the general scope and design of it, ver. 1-6. II. The first principle of it recommended to our serious consideration, ver. 7-9. III. A necessary caution against bad company, ver. 10-19. IV. A faithful and lively representation of wisdom's reasonings with the children of men, and the certain ruin of those who turn a deaf ear to those reasonings, ver. 20-33.

The Design of the Proverbs.

**1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;    2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;    3 To receive**

**the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; 4 To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man**

**knowledge and discretion. 5 A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: 6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.**

We have here an introduction to this book, which some think was prefixed by the collector and publisher, as Ezra; but it is rather supposed to have been penned by Solomon himself, who, in the beginning of his book, proposes his end in writing it, that he might keep to his business, and closely pursue that end. We are here told,

I. Who wrote these wise sayings, v. 1. They are *the proverbs of Solomon*. 1. His name signifies *peaceable*, and the character both of his spirit and of his reign answered to it; both were peaceable. David, whose life was full of troubles, wrote a book of devotion; for *is any afflicted? let him pray*. Solomon, who lived quietly, wrote a book of instruction; for when the *churches had rest they were edified*. In times of peace we should learn ourselves, and teach others, that which in troublous times both they and we must practise. 2. He was *the son of David*; it was his honour to stand related to that good man, and he reckoned it so with good reason, for he fared the better for it, 1 Kings xi.

12. He had been blessed with a good education, and many a good prayer had been put up for him (Ps. lxxii. 1), the effect of both which appeared in his wisdom and usefulness. The *generation of the upright* are sometimes thus blessed, that they are made blessings, eminent blessings, in their day. Christ is often called *the Son of David*, and Solomon was a type of him in this, as in other things, that he *opened his mouth in parables or proverbs*. 3. He was *king of Israel*—a king, and yet it was no disparagement to him to be an instructor of the ignorant, and a teacher of babes—king of Israel, that people among whom God was known and his name was great; among them he learned wisdom, and to them he communicated it. All the earth sought to

Solomon *to hear his wisdom*, which excelled all men's (1 Kings iv. 30; x. 24); it was an honour to Israel that their king was such a dictator, such an oracle. Solomon was famous for apophthegms; every word he said had weight in it, and something that was surprising and edifying. His servants who attended him, and heard his wisdom, had, among them, collected 3000 proverbs of his which they wrote in their day-books; but these were of his own writing, and do not amount to nearly a thousand. In these he was divinely inspired. Some think that out of those other proverbs of his, which were not so inspired, the apocryphal books of *Ecclesiasticus* and the *Wisdom of Solomon* were compiled, in which are many excellent sayings, and of great use; but, take altogether, they are far short of this book. The Roman emperors had each of them his symbol or motto, as many now have with their coat of arms. But Solomon had many weighty sayings, not as theirs, borrowed from others, but all the product of that extraordinary wisdom which God had endued him with.

II. For what end they were written (v. 2-4), not to gain a reputation to the author, or strengthen his interest among his subjects, but for the use and benefit of all that in every age and place will govern themselves by these dictates and study them closely. This book will help us, 1. To form right notions of things, and to possess our minds with clear and distinct ideas of them, that we may *know wisdom and instruction*, that wisdom which is got by instruction, by divine revelation, may know both how to speak and act wisely ourselves and to give instruction to others. 2. To distinguish

between truth and falsehood, good and evil—to *perceive the words of understanding*, to apprehend them, to judge of them, to guard against mistakes, and to accommodate what we are taught to ourselves and our own use, that we may *discern things that differ* and not be imposed upon, and may *approve things that are excellent* and not lose the benefit of them, as the apostle prays, Phil.

i. 10. 3. To order our conversation aright in every things, v. 3. This book will give, that we may *receive, the instruction of wisdom*, that knowledge which will guide our practice in *justice, judgment, and equity* (v. 3), which will dispose us to render to all their due, to God the things that are God's, in all the exercises of religion, and to all men what is due to them, according



to the obligations which by relation, office, contract, or upon any other account, we lie under to them. Note, Those are truly wise, and none but those, who are universally conscientious; and the design of the scripture is to teach us that wisdom, *justice* in the duties of the first table, *judgment* in those of the second table, *and equity* (that is sincerity) in both; so some distinguish them.

III. For whose use they were written, v. 4. They are of use to all, but are designed especially,

1. For *the simple*, to give *subtlety* to them. The instructions here given are plain and easy, and level to the meanest capacity, *the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*; and those are likely to receive benefit by them who are sensible of their own ignorance and their need to be taught, and are therefore desirous to receive instruction; and those who receive these instructions in their light and power, though they be simple, will hereby be made subtle, graciously crafty to know the sin they should avoid and the duty they should do, and to escape the tempter's wiles. He that is *harmless as the dove* by observing Solomon's rules may become *wise as the serpent*; and he that has been sinfully foolish when he begins to govern himself by the word of God becomes graciously wise.

2. For young people, to give them *knowledge and discretion*. Youth is the learning age, catches at instructions, receives impressions, and retains what is then received; it is therefore of great consequence that the mind be then seasoned well, nor can it receive a better tincture than from Solomon's proverbs. Youth is rash, and heady, and inconsiderate; *man is born like the wild ass's colt*, and therefore needs to be broken by the restraints and managed by the rules we find here. And, if young people will but take heed to their ways according to Solomon's proverbs, they will soon gain the knowledge and discretion of the ancients. Solomon had an eye to posterity in writing this book, hoping by it to season the minds of the rising generation with the generous principles of wisdom and virtue.

IV. What good use may be made of them, v. 5, 6. Those who are young and simple may by them be made wise, and are not excluded from Solomon's school, as they were from Plato's. But is it only for such? No; here is not only milk for babes, but strong meat for strong men. This book will not

only make the foolish and bad wise and good, but the wise and good wiser and better; and though the simple and the young man may perhaps slight those instructions, and not be the better for them, yet the *wise man will hear*. Wisdom will be justified by her own children, though not by the children sitting in the market-place. Note, Even wise men must hear, and not think themselves too wise to learn. *A wise man* is sensible of his own defects (*Plurima ignoro, sed ignorantiam meam non ignoro—I am ignorant of many things, but not of my own ignorance*), and therefore is still

pressing forward, that he may *increase in learning*, may know more and know it better, more clearly and distinctly, and may know better how to make use of it. As long as we live we should strive to increase in all useful learning. It was a saying of one of the greatest of the rabbins, *Qui non auget scientiam, amittit de ea—If our stock of knowledge by not increasing, it is wasting*; and those that would increase in learning must study the scriptures; these *perfect the man of God*. A wise man, by increasing in learning, is not only profitable to himself, but to others also, 1. As a counsellor. *A man of understanding* in these precepts of wisdom, by comparing them with one another and with his own observations, *shall* by degrees *attain unto wise counsels*; he stands fair for preferment, and will be consulted as an oracle, and entrusted with the management of public affairs; he shall come to *sit at the helm*, so the word signifies. Note, Industry is the way to honour; and those whom God has blessed with wisdom must study to do good with it, according as their sphere is. It is more dignity indeed to be counsellor to the prince, but it is more charity to be counsellor to the poor, as Job was with his wisdom. Job xxix. 15, *I was eyes to the blind*. 2. As an interpreter (v. 6)—*to understand a proverb*. Solomon was himself famous for expounding riddles and resolving hard questions, which was of old the celebrated entertainment of the eastern princes, witness the solutions he gave to the enquiries with which the queen of Sheba thought to puzzle him. Now here he undertakes to furnish his readers with that talent, as far as would be serviceable to the best purposes. "They shall *understand a proverb*, even *the interpretation*, without which the proverb is a nut uncracked; when they hear a wise saying, though it be figurative, they shall take the sense of it, and know how to make use of it." *The words of the wise* are sometimes *dark sayings*. In St. Paul's epistles there is that which is *hard to be understood*; but to those who, being well-versed in the scriptures,

know how to *compare spiritual things with spiritual*, they will be easy and safe; so that, if you ask them, *Have you understood all these things?* they may answer, *Yea, Lord*. Note, It is a credit to religion when men of honesty are men of sense; all good people therefore should aim to be intelligent, and *run to and fro*, take pains in the use of means, that their *knowledge may be increased*.

Parental Admonitions.

**7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction. 8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 9 For they *shall be* an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.**

Solomon, having undertaken to *teach a young man knowledge and discretion*, here lays down two general rules to be observed in order thereunto, and those are, to fear God and honour his parents, which two fundamental laws of morality Pythagoras begins his golden verses with, but the former of them in a wretchedly corrupted state. *Primum, deos immortales cole, parentesque honora—First worship the immortal gods, and honour your parents*. To make young people such as they should be,

I. Let them have regard to God as their supreme.

1. He lays down this truth, that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge* (v. 7); it is *the principal part of knowledge* (so the margin); it is the head of knowledge; that is, (1.) Of all

things that are to be known this is most evident, that *God is to be feared*, to be revered, served, and worshipped; this is so the beginning of knowledge that those know nothing who do not know this. (2.) In order to the attaining of all useful knowledge this is most necessary, that we fear God; we are not qualified to profit by the instructions that are given us unless our minds be possessed with a holy reverence of God, and every thought within us be brought into obedience to him. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine*, John vii. 17. (3.) As all our knowledge

must take rise from the fear of God, so it must tend to it as its perfection and centre. Those know enough who know how to fear God, who are careful in every thing to please him and fearful of offending him in any thing; this is the Alpha and Omega of knowledge.

2. To confirm this truth, that an eye to God must both direct and quicken all our pursuits of knowledge, he *observes, Fools* (atheists, who have no regard to God) *despise wisdom and instruction*; having no dread at all of God's wrath, nor any desire of his favour, they will not give you thanks for telling them what they may do to escape his wrath and obtain his favour. Those who say to the Almighty, *Depart from us*, who are so far from fearing him that they set him at defiance, can excite no surprise if they desire not the knowledge of his ways, but despise that instruction. Note, Those are fools who do not fear God and value the scriptures; and though they may pretend to be admirers of wit they are really strangers and enemies to wisdom.

II. Let them have regard to their parents as their superiors (v. 8, 9): *My son, hear the instruction of thy father*. He means, not only that he would have his own children to be observant of him, and of what he said to them, nor only that he would have his pupils, and those who came to him to be taught, to look upon him as their father and attend to his precepts with the disposition of children, but that he would have all children to be dutiful and respectful to their parents, and to conform to the virtuous and religious education which they give them, according to the law of the fifth commandment.

1. He takes it for granted that parents will, with all the wisdom they have, instruct their children, and, with all the authority they have, give law to them for their good. They are reasonable creatures, and therefore we must not give them law without instruction; we must draw them with the cords of a man, and when we tell them what they must do we must tell them why. But they are corrupt and wilful, and therefore with the instruction there is need of a law. Abraham will not only catechize, but command, his household. Both the father and the mother must do all they can for the good education of their children, and all little enough.

2. He charges children both to receive and to retain the good lessons and laws their parents give them. (1.) To receive them with readiness: "*Hear the instruction of thy father*"; hear it and heed it; hear it and bid it welcome, and

be thankful for it, and subscribe to it." (2.) To retain them with resolution: "*Forsake not their law*; think not that when thou art grown up, and no longer under tutors and governors, thou mayest live at large; no, *the law of thy mother* was according to the law of thy God, and therefore it must never be forsaken; thou wast trained up in the way in which thou shouldst go, and therefore, when thou art old, thou must not depart from it." Some observe that

whereas the Gentile ethics, and the laws of the Persians and Romans, provided only that children should pay respect to their father, the divine law secures the honour of the mother also.

3. He recommends this as that which is very graceful and will put an honour upon us: "The instructions and laws of thy parents, carefully observed and lived up to, *shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head* (v. 9), such an ornament as is, in the sight of God, of great price, and shall make thee look as great as those that wear gold *chains about their necks*." Let divine truths and commands be to us a coronet, or a collar of SS, which are badges of first-rate honours; let us value them, and be ambitious of them, and then they shall be so to us. Those are truly valuable, and shall be valued, who value themselves more by their virtue and piety than by their worldly wealth and dignity.

Parental Admonitions.

**10 My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. 11 If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: 12 Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: 13 We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: 14 Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: 15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16 For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. 17 Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. 18 And they lay wait for their *own* blood;**

**they lurk privily for their *own* lives. 19 So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; *which* taketh away the life of the owners thereof.**

Here Solomon gives another general rule to young people, in order to their finding out, and keeping in, the paths of wisdom, and that is to take heed of the snare of bad company. David's psalms begin with this caution, and so do Solomon's proverbs; for nothing is more destructive, both to a lively devotion and to a regular conversation (v. 10): "*My son, whom I love, and have a tender concern for, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.*" This is good advice for parents to give their children when they send them abroad into the world; it is the same that St. Peter gave to his new converts, (Acts ii. 40), *Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* Observe, 1. How industrious wicked people are to seduce others into the paths of the destroyer: they will entice. Sinners love company in sin; the angels that fell were tempters almost as soon as they were sinners. They do not threaten or argue, but entice with flattery and fair speech; with a bait they draw the unwary young man to the hook. But they mistake if they think that by bringing others to partake with them in their guilt, and to be bound, as it were, in the bond with them, they shall have the less to pay themselves; for they will have so much the more to answer for. 2. How cautious young people should be that they be not seduced by them: "*Consent thou not;* and then, though they entice thee, they cannot force thee. Do not say as they say, nor do as they do or would have thee to do; have no fellowship with them." To enforce this caution,

I. He represents the fallacious reasonings which sinners use in their enticements, and the arts of wheedling which they have for the beguiling of unstable souls. He specifies highwaymen, who do what they can to draw others into their gang, v. 11-14. See here what they would have the young

man to do: "*Come with us* (v. 11); let us have thy company." At first they pretend to ask no more; but the courtship rises higher (v. 14): "*Cast in thy lot among us;* come in partner with us, join thy force to ours, and let us resolve to live and die together: thou shalt fare as we fare; and *let us all have one purse,* that what we get together we may spend merrily together," for that is it they aim at. Two unreasonable insatiable lusts they propose to

themselves the gratification of, and therewith entice their pray into the snare:—1. Their cruelty. They thirst after blood, and hate those that are innocent and never gave them any provocation, because by their honesty and industry they shame and condemn them: "*Let us therefore lay wait for their blood, and lurk privily for them*; they are conscious to themselves of no crime and consequently apprehensive of no danger, but travel unarmed; therefore we shall make the more easy prey of them. And, O how sweet it will be to *swallow them up alive!*" v. 12. These bloody men would do this as greedily as the hungry lion devours the lamb. If it be objected, "The remains of the murdered will betray the murderers;" they answer, "No danger of that; we will swallow them whole as those that are buried." Who could imagine that human nature should degenerate so far that it should ever be a pleasure to one man to destroy another! 2. Their covetousness. They hope to get a good booty by it (v. 13): "We shall *find all precious substance* by following this trade. What though we venture our necks by it? we shall *fill our houses with spoil.*" See here, (1.) The idea they have of worldly wealth. They call it *precious substance*; whereas it is neither substance nor precious; it is a shadow; it is vanity, especially that which is got by robbery, Ps. lxii. 10. It is as that which is not, which will give a man no solid satisfaction. It is cheap, it is common, yet, in their account, it is precious, and therefore they will hazard their lives, and perhaps their souls, in pursuit of it. It is the ruining mistake of thousands that they over-value the wealth of this world and look on it as *precious substance*. (2.) The abundance of it which they promise themselves: We shall *fill our houses with it*. Those who trade with sin promise themselves mighty bargains, and that it will turn to a vast account (All this will I give thee, says the tempter); but they only *dream that they eat*; the housefuls dwindle into scarcely a handful, like the grass on the house-tops.

II. He shows the perniciousness of these ways, as a reason why we should dread them (v. 15): "*My son, walk not thou in the way with them*; do not associate with them; get, and keep, as far off from them as thou canst; *refrain thy foot from their path*; do not take example by them, not do as they do." Such is the corruption of our nature that our foot is very prone to step into the path of sin, so that we must use necessary violence upon ourselves to refrain our foot from it, and check ourselves if at any time we take the least step towards it. Consider, 1. How pernicious their way is in its own

nature (v. 16): *Their feet run to evil*, to that which is displeasing to God and hurtful to mankind, for they *make haste to shed blood*. Note, The way of sin is down-hill; men not only cannot stop themselves, but, the longer they continue in it, the faster they run, and make haste in it, as if they were afraid they should not do mischief enough and were resolved to lose no time. They said they would proceed leisurely (Let us *lay wait for blood*, v. 11), but thou wilt find they are all in haste, so much has Satan *filled their hearts*. 2. How pernicious the consequences of it will be. They are plainly told that this wicked way will certainly end in their own destruction, and yet they persist in

it. Herein, (1.) They are like the silly bird, that sees the net spread to take her, and yet it is in vain; she is decoyed into it by the bait, and will not take the warning which her own eyes gave her, v.

17. But we think ourselves *of more value than many sparrows*, and therefore should have more wit, and act with more caution. God has *made us wiser than the fowls of heaven* (Job xxxv. 11), and shall we then be as stupid as they? (2.) They are worse than the birds, and have not the sense which we sometimes perceive them to have; for the fowler knows it is in vain to lay his snare *in the sight of the bird*, and therefore he has arts to conceal it. But the sinner sees ruin at the end of his way; the murderer, the thief, see the jail and the gallows before them, nay, they may see hell before them; their watchmen tell them they shall surely die, but it is to no purpose; they rush into sin, and rush on in it, like the horse into the battle. For really the stone they roll will turn upon themselves, v. 18, 19. They lay wait, and lurk privily, for the blood and lives of others, but it will prove, contrary to their intention, to be for *their own blood, their own lives*; they will come, at length, to a shameful end; and, if they escape the sword of the magistrate, yet there is a divine Nemesis that pursues them. *Vengeance suffers them not to live*. Their greediness of gain hurries them upon those practices which will not suffer them to live out half their days, but will cut off the number of their months in the midst. They have little reason to be proud of their property in that which *takes away the life of the owners* and then passes to other masters; and what is a man profited, though he gain the world, if he lose his life? For then he can enjoy the world no longer; much less if he lose



his soul, and that be drowned in destruction and perdition, as multitudes are by the love of money.

Now, though Solomon specifies only the temptation to rob on the highway, yet he intends hereby to warn us against all other evils which sinners entice men to. Such are the ways of the drunkards and unclean; they are indulging themselves in those pleasures which tend to their ruin both here and for ever; and therefore consent not to them.

Wisdom's Exhortations; Doom of Obdurate Sinners.

**20 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: 21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying*.**

**22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? 23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. 24 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; 25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; 27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: 29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: 30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. 31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. 32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and**

**the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. 33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.**

Solomon, having shown how dangerous it is to hearken to the temptations of Satan, here shows how dangerous it is not to hearken to the calls of God, which we shall for ever rue the neglect of. Observe,

I. By whom God calls to us—by *wisdom*. It is *wisdom* that *crieth without*. The word is plural—*wisdoms*, for, as there is infinite wisdom in God, so there is the *manifold wisdom of God*, Eph. iii. 10. God speaks to the children of men by all the kinds of wisdom, and, as in every will, so in every word, of God there is a counsel. 1. Human understanding is wisdom, the light and law of nature, the powers and faculties of reason, and the office of conscience, Job xxxviii. 36. By these God speaks to the children of men, and reasons with them. *The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord*; and, wherever men go, they may hear a voice behind them, saying, *This is the way*; and the voice of conscience is the voice of God, and not always a still small voice, but sometimes it cries.

2. Civil government is wisdom; it is God's ordinance; magistrates are his vicegerents. God by David had *said to the fools, Deal not foolishly*, Ps. lxxv. 4. *In the opening of the gates*, and in the *places of concourse*, where courts were kept, the judges, the wisdom of the nation, called to wicked people, in God's name, to repent and reform. 3. Divine revelation is wisdom; all its dictates, all its laws, are wise as wisdom itself. God does, by the written word, by the law of Moses, which sets before us the blessing and the curse, by the priests' lips which keep knowledge, by his servants the prophets, and all the ministers of this word, declare his mind to sinners, and give them warning as plainly as that which is proclaimed in the streets or courts of judicature by the criers. God, in his word, not only opens the case, but argues it with the children of men. *Come, now, and let us reason together*, Isa. i. 18. 4. Christ himself is Wisdom, is *Wisdoms*, for *in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and he is the centre of all divine revelation, not only the *essential Wisdom*, but the *eternal Word*, by whom God speaks to us and to whom he has *committed all judgment*; he

it is therefore who here both pleads with sinners and passes sentence on them. He calls himself *Wisdom*, Luke vii. 35.

II. How he calls to us, and in what manner. 1. Very publicly, that whosoever hath ears to hear may hear, since all are welcome to take the benefit of what is said and all are concerned to heed it. The rules of wisdom are published *without in the streets*, not in the schools only, or in the palaces of princes, but *in the chief places of concourse*, among the common people that pass and repass *in the opening of the gates* and *in the city*. It is comfortable casting the net of the gospel where there is a multitude of fish, in hopes that then some will be enclosed. This was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus, who taught openly in the temple, in crowds of people, and *in secret said nothing* (John xviii. 20), and charged his ministers to *proclaim* his gospel *on the housetop*, Matt. x. 27. God says (Isa. xlv.

19), *I have not spoken in secret*. There is *no speech or language where Wisdom's voice is not heard*. Truth seeks not corners, nor is virtue ashamed of itself. 2. Very pathetically; she *cries*, and again she *cries*, as one in earnest. *Jesus stood and cried*. She *utters her voice*, she *utters her words* with all possible clearness and affection. God is desirous to be heard and heeded.

III. What the call of God and Christ is.

1. He reproves sinners for their folly and their obstinately persisting in it, v. 22. Observe, (1.)

Who they are that Wisdom here reproves and expostulates with. In general, they are such as are *simple*, and therefore might justly be despised, such as *love simplicity*, and therefore might justly be despaired of; but we must use the means even with those that we have but little hopes of, because we know not what divine grace may do. Three sorts of persons are here called to:—[1.] *Simple ones that love simplicity*. Sin is simplicity, and sinners are simple ones; they do foolishly, very foolishly; and the condition of those is very bad who love simplicity, are fond of their simple notions of good and evil, their simple prejudices against the ways of God, and are in their element when they are doing a simple thing, sporting themselves in their own deceivings and flattering themselves in their wickedness. [2.] *Scorners*

*that delight in scorning*—proud people that take a pleasure in hectoring all about them, jovial people that banter all mankind, and make a jest of every thing that comes in their way. But scoffers at religion are especially meant, the worst of sinners, that scorn to submit to the truths and laws of Christ, and to the reproofs and admonitions of his word, and take a pride in running down every thing that is sacred and serious. [3.] *Fools that hate knowledge.* None but fools hate knowledge. Those only are enemies to religion that do not understand it aright. And those are the worst of fools that hate to be instructed and reformed, and have a rooted antipathy to serious godliness. (2.) How the reproof is expressed: "*How long will you do so?*" This implies that the God of heaven desires the conversion and reformation of sinners and not their ruin, that he is much displeased with their obstinacy and dilatoriness, that he waits to be gracious, and is willing to reason the case with them.

2. He invites them to repent and become wise, v. 23. And here, (1.) The precept is plain: *Turn you at my reproof.* We do not make a right use of the reproofs that are given us for that which is evil if we do not turn from it to that which is good; for for this end the reproof was given. Turn, that is, return to your right mind, turn to God, turn to your duty, turn and live. (2.) The promises are very encouraging. Those that love simplicity find themselves under a moral impotency to change their own mind and way; they cannot turn by any power of their own. To this God answers, "*Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you;* set yourselves to do what you can, and the grace of God shall set in with you, and work in you both to will and to do that good which, without that grace, you could not do." Help thyself, and God will help thee; *stretch forth thy withered hand,* and Christ will strengthen and heal it. [1.] The author of this grace is the Spirit, and that is promised: *I will pour out my Spirit unto you,* as oil, as water; you shall have the Spirit in abundance, *rivers of living water,* John vii. 38. Our heavenly Father *will give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him.* [2.] The means of this grace is the word, which, if we take it aright, will turn us; it is therefore promised, "*I will make known my words unto you,* not only speak them to you, but make them known, give you to understand them." Note, Special grace is necessary to a sincere conversion. But that grace shall never be denied to any that honestly seek it and submit to it.

3. He reads the doom of those that continue obstinate against all these means and methods of grace. It is large and very terrible, v. 24-32. Wisdom, having called sinners to return, pauses awhile,

to see what effect the call has, *hearkens and hears; but they speak not aright* (Jer. viii. 6), and therefore she goes on to tell them what will be in the end hereof.

(1.) The crime is recited and it is highly provoking. See what it is for which judgment will be given against impenitent sinners in the great day, and you will say they deserve it, and the Lord is righteous in it. It is, in short, rejecting Christ and the offers of his grace, and refusing to submit to the terms of his gospel, which would have saved them both from the curse of the *law of God* and from the dominion of the *law of sin*. [1.] Christ called to them, to warn them of their danger; he *stretched out his hand* to offer them mercy, nay, to help them out of their miserable condition, *stretched out his hand* for them to *take hold of*, but they *refused* and *no man regarded*; some were careless and never heeded it, nor took notice of what was said to them; others were wilful, and, though they could not avoid hearing the will of Christ, yet they gave him a flat denial, they refused,

v. 24. They were in love with their folly, and would not be made wise. They were obstinate to all the methods that were taken to reclaim them. God *stretched out his hand* in mercies bestowed upon them, and, when those would not work upon them, in corrections, but all were in vain; they regarded the operations of his hand no more than the declarations of his mouth. [2.] Christ reproved and counselled them, not only reproved them for what they did amiss, but counselled them to do better (those are *reproofs of instruction* and evidences of love and good-will), but they *set at nought all his counsel* as not worth heeding, and *would none of his reproof*, as if it were below them to be reproved by him and as if they had never done any thing that deserved reproof, v. 25. This is repeated

(v. 30): "They *would none of my counsel*, but rejected it with disdain; they called reproofs reproaches, and took them as an insult (Jer. vi. 10); nay, *they despised all my reproof*, as if it were all a jest, and not worth taking notice of." Note, Those are marked for ruin that are deaf to reproof and good counsel. [3.] They were exhorted to submit to the government of right

reason and religion, but they rebelled against both. *First*, Reason should not rule them, for *they hated knowledge* (v. 29), hated the light of divine truth because it discovered to them the evil of their deeds, John iii. 20. They hated to be told that which they could not bear to know. *Secondly*, Religion could not rule them, for they *did not choose the fear of the Lord*, but chose to walk in the way of *their heart and in the sight of their eyes*. They were pressed to *set God always before them*, but they chose rather to cast him and his fear *behind their backs*. Note, Those who do not *choose the fear of the Lord* show that they *have no knowledge*.

(2.) The sentence is pronounced, and it is certainly ruining. Those that will not submit to God's government will certainly perish under his wrath and curse, and the gospel itself will not relieve them. They would not take the benefit of God's mercy when it was offered them, and therefore justly fall as victims to his justice, ch. xxix. 1. The threatenings here will have their full accomplishment in the judgment of the great day and the eternal misery of the impenitent, of which yet there are some earnest in present judgments. [1.] Now sinners are in prosperity and secure; they live at ease, and set sorrow at defiance. But, *First*, Their *calamity will come* (v. 26); sickness will come, and those diseases which they shall apprehend to be the very arrests and harbingers of death; other troubles will come, in mind, in estate, which will convince them of their folly in setting

God at a distance. *Secondly*, Their calamity will put them into a great fright. Fear seizes them, and they apprehend that bad will be worse. When public judgments are abroad the *sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness surprises the hypocrites*. Death is the *king of terrors* to them (Job xv. 21, &c.;

xviii. 11, &c.); this fear will be their continual torment. *Thirdly*, According to their fright will it be to them. Their *fear shall come* (the thing they were afraid of shall befall them); it shall *come as desolation*, as a mighty deluge bearing down all before it; it shall be their *destruction*, their total and final destruction; and it shall come *as a whirlwind*, which suddenly and forcibly drives away all the chaff. Note, Those that will not admit the fear of God lay themselves open to all other fears, and their fears will not prove causeless. *Fourthly*, Their fright will then be turned into despair: *Distress and anguish shall come upon them*, for, having fallen into the pit they were

afraid of, they shall see no way to escape, v. 27. Saul cries out (2 Sam. i. 9), *Anguish has come upon me*; and in hell there is *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth* for anguish, *tribulation and anguish to the soul* of the sinner, the fruit of the *indignation and wrath of the righteous God*, Rom. ii. 8, 9.

[2.] Now God pities their folly, but he will then *laugh at their calamity* (v. 26): "I also will laugh at your distress, even as you laughed at my counsel." Those that ridicule religion will thereby but make themselves ridiculous before all the world. The righteous will *laugh at them* (Ps. lii. 6), for God himself will. It intimates that they shall be for ever shut out of God's compassions; they have so long sinned against mercy that they have now quite sinned it away. *His eye shall not spare, neither will he have pity*. Nay, his justice being glorified in their ruin, he will be pleased with it, though now he would rather they should *turn and live*. *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*. [3.] Now God is ready to hear their prayers and to meet them with mercy, if they would but seek to him for it; but then the door will be shut, and they shall cry in vain (v. 28): "*Then shall they call upon me* when it is too late, *Lord, Lord, open to us*. They would then gladly be beholden to that mercy which now they reject and make light of; but *I will not answer*, because, when I called, they would not answer;" all the answer then will be, *Depart from me, I know you not*. This has been the case of some even in this life, as of Saul, whom God answered not by *Urim* or *prophets*; but, ordinarily, while there is life there is room for prayer and hope of speeding, and therefore this must refer to the inexorable justice of the last judgment. Then those that slighted God will *seek him early* (that is, earnestly), but in vain; *they shall not find him*, because they sought him not when he might be found, Isa. lv. 6. The rich man in hell begged, but was denied. [4.] Now they are eager upon their own way, and fond of their own devices; but then they will have enough of them (v. 31), according to the proverb, *Let men drink as they brew*; they shall *eat the fruit of their own way*; their wages shall be according to their work, and, as was their choice, *so shall their doom be*, Gal. vi. 7, 8. Note, *First*, There is a natural tendency in sin to destruction, Jam. i. 15. Sinners are certainly miserable if they do but *eat the fruit of their own way*. *Secondly*, Those that perish must thank themselves, and can lay no blame upon any other. It is *their own device*; let them make their boast of it. God *chooses their delusions*, Isa. lxvi. 4. [5.] Now they

value themselves upon their worldly prosperity; but then that shall help to aggravate their ruin, v. 32. *First*, They are now proud that they can turn away from God and get clear of the restraints of religion; but that very thing shall slay them, the

remembrance of it shall cut them to the heart. *Secondly*, They are now proud of their own security and sensuality; but *the ease of the simple* (so the margin reads it) *shall slay them*; the more secure they are the more certain and the more dreadful will their destruction be, *and the prosperity of fools shall help to destroy them*, by puffing them up with pride, gluing their hearts to the world, furnishing them with fuel for their lusts, and hardening their hearts in their evil ways.

4. He concludes with an assurance of safety and happiness to all those that submit to the instructions of wisdom ( v. 33): "*Whoso hearkeneth unto me, and will be ruled by me, he shall,*"

(1.) "Be safe; he *shall dwell* under the special protection of Heaven, so that nothing shall do him any real hurt." (2.) "He shall be easy, and have no disquieting apprehensions of danger; he shall not only be safe from evil, but *quiet from the fear of it*." *Though the earth be removed, yet shall not they fear*. Would we be safe from evil, and quiet from the fear of it? Let religion always rule us and the word of God be our counsellor. That is the way to *dwell safely* in this world, and to *be quiet from the fear of evil* in the other world.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. II.

Solomon, having foretold the destruction of those who are obstinate in their impiety, in this chapter applies himself to those who are willing to be taught; and, I. He shows them that, if they would diligently use the means of knowledge and grace, they should obtain of God the knowledge and grace which they seek, ver. 1-9. II. He shows them of what unspeakable advantage it would be to them. 1. It would preserve them from the snares of evil men (ver. 10-15) and of evil women, ver. 16-19. 2. It would direct them



into, and keep them in, the way of good men, ver. 20-22. So that in this chapter we are taught both how to get wisdom and how to use it when we have it, that we may neither seek it, nor receive it in vain.

The Search after Wisdom Encouraged.

**1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, *and* apply thine heart to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures; 5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and understanding. 7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: *he is* a buckler to them that walk uprightly. 8 He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. 9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; *yea*, every good path.**

Job had asked, long before this, *Where shall wisdom be found? Whence cometh wisdom?* (Job

xxviii. 12, 20) and he had given this general answer (v. 23), *God knoweth the place* of it; but Solomon here goes further, and tells us both where we may find it and how we may get it. We are here told,

I. What means we must use that we may obtain wisdom.

1. We must closely attend to the word of God, for that is the word of wisdom, *which is able to make us wise unto salvation*, v. 1, 2. (1.) We must be convinced that the words of God are the fountain and standard of wisdom and understanding, and that we need not desire to be wiser than they will make us. We must *incline our ear* and *apply our hearts* to them, as

to *wisdom* or *understanding* itself. Many wise things may be found in human compositions, but divine revelation, and true religion built upon it, are all wisdom. (2.) We must, accordingly, receive the word of God with all readiness of mind, and bid it welcome, even the commandments as well as the promises, without murmuring or disputing. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.* (3.) We must hide them with us, as we do our treasures, which we are afraid of being robbed of. We must not only receive, but retain, the word of God, and lodge it in our hearts, that it may be always ready to us. (4.) We must incline our ear to them; we must lay hold on all opportunities of hearing the word of God, and listen to it with attention and seriousness, as those that are afraid of letting it slip. (5.) We must apply our hearts to them, else inclining the ear to them will stand us in no stead.

2. We must be much in prayer, v. 3. We must *cry after knowledge*, as one that is ready to perish for hunger begs hard for bread. Faint desires will not prevail; we must be importunate, as those that know the worth of knowledge and our own want of it. We must cry, as new-born babes, after *the sincere milk of the word*. 1 Pet. ii. 2. We must *lift our voice for understanding* lift it up to heaven; thence these good and perfect gifts must be expected, Jam. i. 17; Job xxxviii. 34. We must *give our voice to understanding* (so the word is), speak for it, vote for it, submit the tongue to the command of wisdom. We must consecrate our voice to it; having applied our heart to it, we must employ our voice in seeking for it. Solomon could write *probatum est—a tried remedy*, upon this method; he prayed for wisdom and so obtained it.

3. We must be willing to take pains (v. 4); we must *seek it as silver*, preferring it far before all the wealth of this world, and labouring in search of it as those who dig in the mines, who undergo great toil and run great hazards, with indefatigable industry and invincible constancy and resolution, in pursuit of the ore; or as those who will be rich rise up early, and sit up late, and turn every stone to get money and fill their treasures. Thus diligent must we be in the use of the means of knowledge, following on to know the Lord.

II. What success we may hope for in the use of these means. Our labour shall not be in vain; for, 1. We shall know how to maintain our acquaintance

and communion with God: "*Thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord* (v. 5), that is, thou shalt know how to worship him aright, shalt be led into the meaning and mystery of every ordinance, and be enabled to answer the end of its institution." *Thou shalt find the knowledge of God*, which is necessary to our fearing him aright. It concerns us to understand how much it is our interest to know God, and to evidence it by agreeable

affections towards him and adorations of him. 2. We shall know how to conduct ourselves aright towards all men (v. 9): "*Thou shalt understand*, by the word of God, *righteousness, and judgment, and equity*, shalt learn those principles of justice, and charity, and fair dealing, which shall guide and govern thee in the whole course of thy conversation, shall make thee fit for every relation, every business, and faithful to every trust. It shall give thee not only a right notion of justice, but a disposition to practise it, and to render to all their due; for those that do not do justly do not rightly understand it." This will lead them in *every good path*, for the scripture will *make the man of God perfect*. Note, Those have the best knowledge who know their duty, Ps. cxi. 10.

III. What ground we have to hope for this success in our pursuits of wisdom; we must take our encouragement herein from God only, v. 6-8.

1. God has wisdom to bestow, v. 6. *The Lord* not only is wise himself, but he *gives wisdom*, and that is more than the wisest men in the world can do, for it is God's prerogative to open the understanding. All the wisdom that is in any creature is his gift, his free gift, and he gives it liberally (Jam. i. 5), has given it to many, and is still giving it; to him therefore let us apply for it.

2. He has blessed the world with a revelation of his will. *Out of his mouth*, by the law and the prophets, by the written word and by his ministers, both which are his mouth to the children of men, *come knowledge and understanding*, such a discovery of truth and good as, if we admit and receive the impressions of it, will make us truly knowing and intelligent. It is both an engagement and encouragement to search after wisdom that we have the scriptures to search, in which we may find it if we seek it diligently.

3. He has particularly provided that good men, who are sincerely disposed to do his will, shall have that *knowledge and that understanding* which are necessary for them, John vii. 17. Let them seek wisdom, and they shall find it; let them ask, and it shall be given them, v. 7, 8. Observe here,

(1.) Who those are that are thus favoured. They are *the righteous*, on whom the image of God is renewed, which consists in righteousness, and those who *walk uprightly*, who are honest in their dealings both with God and man and make conscience of doing their duty as far as they know it. They are *his saints*, devoted to his honour, and set apart for his service. (2.) What it is that is provided for them. [1.] Instruction. The means of wisdom are given to all, but wisdom itself, *sound wisdom*, is laid up for the righteous, laid up in Christ their head, in whom *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and who *is made of God to us wisdom*. The same that is the Spirit of revelation in the word is a Spirit of wisdom in the souls of those that are sanctified, that wisdom of the prudent which is to understand his way; and it is sound wisdom, its foundations firm, its principles solid, and its products of lasting advantage. [2.] Satisfaction. Some read it, He *lays up substance for the righteous*, not only substantial knowledge, but substantial happiness and comfort, Prov. viii. 21. Riches are things that are not, and those that have them only fancy themselves happy; but what is laid up in the promises and in heaven for the righteous will make them truly, thoroughly, and eternally happy. [3.] Protection. Even those who *walk uprightly* may be brought into danger for the trial of their faith, but God is, and will be, *a buckler to them*, so that nothing that happens to them shall do them any real hurt, or possess them with any terrific apprehensions; they are safe,

and they shall think themselves so. *Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield*. It is their way, the paths of judgment in which they walk, that the Lord knows, and owns, and takes care of. [4.] Grace to persevere to the end. If we depend upon God, and seek to him for wisdom, he will uphold us in our integrity, will enable us to *keep the paths of judgment*, however we may be tempted to turn aside out of them; for he *preserves the way of his saints*, that it be not perverted, and so preserves them in it safe and blameless to his heavenly kingdom. The assurances God has given us of his grace, if duly

improved, will excite and quicken our endeavours in doing our duty. *Work out your salvation, for God works in you.*

The Benefits Conferred by Wisdom.

**10 When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; 11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: 12 To deliver thee from the way of the evil *man*, from the man that speaketh froward things; 13 Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; 14 Who rejoice to do evil, *and* delight in the frowardness of the wicked; 15 Whose ways *are* crooked, and *they* froward in their paths:**

**16 To deliver thee from the strange woman, *even* from the stranger *which* flattereth with her words; 17 Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. 18 For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. 19 None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. 20 That thou mayest walk in the way of good *men*, and keep the paths of the righteous. 21 For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. 22 But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.**

The scope of these verses is to show, 1. What great advantage true wisdom will be of to us; it will keep us from the paths of sin, which lead to ruin, and will therein do us a greater kindness than if it enriched us with all the wealth of the world. 2. What good use we should make of the wisdom God gives us; we must use it for our own guidance in the paths of virtue, and for the arming of us against temptations of every kind. 3. By what rules we may try ourselves whether we have this wisdom or no. This tree will be

known by its fruits; if we be truly wise, it will appear by our care to avoid all evil company and evil practices.

This wisdom will be of use to us,

I. For our preservation from evil, from the evil of sin, and, consequently, from the evil of trouble that attends it.

1. In general (v. 10, 11), "When wisdom has entire possession of thee, it will *keep thee*." And when has it an entire possession of us? (1.) When it has dominion over us. When it not only fills the head with notions, but *enters into the heart* and has a commanding power and influence upon that,—when it is upon the throne there, and gives law to the affections and passions,—when it *enters into the heart* as the leaven into the dough, to diffuse its relish there, and to change it into its own image—then it is likely to do us good. (2.) When we have delight in it, when knowledge becomes *pleasant to the soul*: "When thou beginnest to relish it as the most agreeable entertainment, and art subject to its rules, of choice, and with satisfaction,—when thou callest the practice of virtue,

not a slavery and a task, but *liberty* and *pleasure*, and a life of serious godliness the most comfortable life a man can live in this world,—then thou wilt find the benefit of it." Though its restraints should be in some respects unpleasant to the body, yet even those must be pleasant to the soul. When it has come to this, with us, *discretion shall preserve us and keep us*. God keeps *the way of his saints*

(v. 8), by giving them discretion to keep out of harm's way, to keep themselves that the wicked one touch them not. Note, A principle of grace reigning in the heart will be a powerful preservative both against corruptions within and temptations without, Eccl. ix. 16, 18.

2. More particularly, wisdom will preserve us, (1.) From men of corrupt principles, atheistical profane men, who make it their business to debauch young men's judgments, and instil into their minds prejudices against religion and arguments for vice: "It will *deliver thee from the way of the evil man* (v. 12), and a blessed deliverance it will be, as from the very jaws of death, *from the way* in which he walks, and in which he would persuade

thee to walk." The enemy is spoken of as one (v. 12), an *evil man*, but afterwards as many (v. 13); there is a club, a gang of them, that are in confederacy against religion, and join hand in hand for the support of the devil's kingdom and the interests of it. [1.] They have a spirit of contradiction to that which is good: They *speak froward things*; they say all they can against religion, both to show their own enmity to it and to dissuade others from it. They are advocates for Satan; they plead for Baal, and *pervert the right ways of the Lord*. How peevishly will profane wits argue for sin, and with what frowardness will they carp at the word of God! Wisdom will keep us either from conversing with such men or at least from being ensnared by them. [2.] They are themselves apostates from that which is good, and such are commonly the most malicious and dangerous enemies religion has, witness Julian (v. 13): *They leave the paths of uprightness*, which they were trained up in and had set out in, shake off the influences of their education, and break off the thread of their hopeful beginnings, *to walk in the ways of darkness*, in those wicked ways which hate the light, in which men are led blindfold by ignorance and error, and which lead men into utter darkness. The ways of sin are ways of darkness, uncomfortable and unsafe; what fools are those that leave the plain, pleasant, lightsome paths of uprightness, to walk in those ways! Ps. lxxxii. 5; 1 John ii.

11. [3.] They take a pleasure in sin, both in committing it themselves and in seeing others commit it (v. 14): They *rejoice* in an opportunity *to do evil*, and in the accomplishment and success of any wicked project. It is sport to fools to do mischief; nor is any sight more grateful to them than to see *the frowardness of the wicked*, to see those that are hopeful drawn into the ways of sin, and then to see them hardened and confirmed in those ways. They are pleased if they can discern that the devil's kingdom gets ground (see Rom. i. 32), such a height of impiety have they arrived at. [4.] They are resolute in sin (v. 15): Their *ways are crooked*, a great many windings and turnings to escape the pursuit of their convictions and break the force of them; some sly excuse, some subtle evasion or other, their deceitful hearts furnish them with, for the strengthening of their hands in their wickedness; and in the crooked mazes of that labyrinth they secure themselves from the arrests of God's word and their own consciences; for they are *froward in their paths*, that is, they are

resolved to go on in them, whatever is said against it. Every wise man will shun the company of

such as these.

(2.) From women of corrupt practices. The former lead to spiritual wickednesses, the lusts of the unsanctified mind; these lead to *fleshly lusts*, which defile the body, that living temple, but withal *war against the soul*. The adulteress is here called *the strange woman*, because no man that has any wisdom or goodness in him will have any acquaintance with her; she is to be shunned by every Israelite as if she were a heathen, and a stranger to that sacred commonwealth. A strange woman indeed! utterly estranged from all principles of reason, virtue, and honour. It is a great mercy to be delivered from the allurements of the adulteress, considering, [1.] How false she is. Who will have any dealings with those that are made up of treachery? She is a strange woman; for, *First*, She is false to him whom she entices. She speaks fair, tells him how much she admires him above any man, and what a kindness she has for him; but she *flatters with her words*; she has no true affection for him, nor any desire of his welfare, any more than Delilah had of Samson's. All she designs is to pick his pocket and gratify a base lust of her own. *Secondly*, She is false to her husband, and violates the sacred obligation she lies under to him. He was *the guide of her youth*; by marrying him she chose him to be so, and submitted herself to his guidance, with a promise to attend him only, and forsake all others. But she has *forsaken* him, and therefore it cannot be thought that she should be faithful to any one else; and whoever entertains her is partaker with her in her falsehood. *Thirdly*, She is false to God himself: She *forgets the covenant of her God*, the marriage-covenant (v. 17), to which God is not only a witness, but a party, for, he having instituted the ordinance, both sides vow to him to be true to each other. It is not her husband only that she sins against, but her God, who *will judge whoremongers and adulterers* because they despise the oath and break the covenant, Ezek. xvii. 18; Mal. ii. 14. [2.] How fatal it will prove to those that fall in league with her, v. 18, 19. Let the sufferings of others be our warnings. Take heed of the sin of whoredom; for, *First*, The ruin of those who are guilty of it is certain and unavoidable, if they do not repent. It is a sin that has a direct tendency to the killing of the soul, the extinguishing of all good affections and dispositions in it, and the



exposing of it to the wrath and curse of God and the sword of his justice. Those that live in forbidden pleasures are dead while they live. Let discretion preserve every man, not only from the evil woman, but from the evil house, for the *house inclines to death*; it is in the road that leads directly to eternal death; *and her paths unto Rephaim*, to the *giants* (so some read it), the sinners of the old world, who, living in luxury and excess of riot, were cut down out of time, and their foundation was overthrown with a flood. Our Lord Jesus deters us from sinful pleasures with the consideration of everlasting torments which follow them. *Where the worm dies not, nor is the fire quenched*. See Matt. v. 28, 29. *Secondly*, Their repentance and recovery are extremely hazardous: *None*, or next to none, *that go unto her, return again*. It is very rare that any who are caught in this snare of the devil recover themselves, so much is the heart hardened, and the mind blinded, by the deceitfulness of this sin. Having once lost their *hold of the paths of life*, they know not how to take hold of them again, but are perfectly besotted and bewitched with those base lusts. Many learned interpreters think that this caution against the *strange woman*, besides

the literal sense, is to be understood figuratively, as a caution, 1. Against idolatry, which is spiritual whoredom. Wisdom will keep thee from all familiarity with the worshippers of images, and all inclination to join with them, which had for many ages been of such pernicious consequence to Israel and proved so to Solomon himself. 2. Against the debauching of the intellectual powers and faculties of the soul by the lusts and appetites of the body. Wisdom will keep thee from being captivated by the carnal mind, and from subjecting the spirit to the dominion of the flesh, that notorious adulteress which *forsakes its guide*, violates the *covenant of our God*, which *inclines to death*, and which, when it has got an undisturbed dominion, makes the case of the soul desperate.

II. This wisdom will be of use to guide and direct us in that which is good (v. 20): *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men*. We must avoid the way of the *evil man*, and the *strange woman*, in order that we may walk in good ways; we must *cease to do evil*, in order that we may *learn to do well*. Note, 1. There is a way which is peculiarly the way of good men, the way in which good men, as such, and as far as they have really been such, have

always walked. 2. It will be our wisdom to walk in that way, to ask for the good old way and walk therein, Jer. vi. 16; Heb. vi. 12;

xii. 1. And we must not only walk in that way awhile, but we must keep it, keep in it, and never turn aside out of it: *The paths of the righteous* are the paths of life, which all that are wise, having taken hold of, will keep their hold of. "That thou mayest imitate those excellent persons, the patriarchs and prophets (so bishop Patrick paraphrases it), and be preserved in *the paths of those righteous* men who followed after them." We must not only choose our way in general by the good examples of the saints, but must also take directions from them in the choice of our particular paths; observe the track, and go forth by the footsteps of the flock. Two reasons are here given why we should thus choose:—(1.) Because men's integrity will be their establishment, v. 21. It will be the establishment, [1.] Of their persons: *The upright shall dwell in the land*, peaceably and quietly, as long as they live; and their uprightness will contribute to it, as it settles their minds, guides their counsels, gains them the good-will of their neighbours, and entitles them to God's special favour.

[2.] Of their families: *The perfect*, in their posterity, *shall remain in it*. They shall dwell and remain for ever in the heavenly Canaan, of which the earthly one was but a type. (2.) Because men's iniquity will be their destruction, v. 22. See what becomes of *the wicked*, who choose the way of *the evil man*; they *shall be cut off*, not only from heaven hereafter and all hopes of that, but *from the earth* now, on which they set their affections, and in which they lay up their treasure. They think to take root in it, but they and their families *shall be rooted out of it*, in judgment to them, but in mercy to the earth. There is a day coming which *shall leave them neither root nor branch*, Mal. iv. 1. Let that wisdom then *enter into our hearts*, and be *pleasant to our souls*, which will keep us out of a way that will end thus.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. III.

This chapter is one of the most excellent in all this book, both for argument to persuade us to be religious and for directions therein. I. We must be

constant to our duty because that is the way to be happy, ver. 1-4. II. We must live a life of dependence upon God because that is the way to be safe, ver. 5. III. We must keep up the fear of God because that is the way to be healthful, ver. 7, 8. IV. We must serve God with our estates because that is the way to be rich, ver. 9, 10. V. We must hear afflictions well because that is the way to get good by them, ver. 11, 12. VI. We must take pains to obtain wisdom because that is the way to gain her, and to gain by her, ver. 13-20. VII. We must always govern ourselves by the rules of wisdom, of right reason and religion, because that is the way to be always easy, ver. 21-26. VIII. We must do all the good we can, and no hurt, to our neighbours, because according as men are just or unjust, charitable or uncharitable, humble or haughty, accordingly they shall receive of God, ver. 27-35. From all this it appears what a tendency religion has to make men both blessed and blessings.

Communion Conferred by Wisdom.

**1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: 2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: 4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. 5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.**

We are here taught to live a life of communion with God; and without controversy great is this mystery of godliness, and of great consequence to us, and, as is here shown, will be of unspeakable advantage.

I. We must have a continual regard to God's precepts, v. 1, 2.

1. We must, (1.) Fix God's law, and his commandments, as our rule, by which we will in every thing be ruled and to which we will yield obedience. (2.) We must acquaint ourselves with them; for we cannot be said to forget that which we never knew. (3.) We must remember them so that they may

be ready to us whenever we have occasion to use them. (4.) Our wills and affections must be subject to them and must in every thing conform to them. Not only our heads, but our hearts, must *keep God's commandments*; in them, as in the ark of the testimony, both the tables of the law must be deposited.

2. To encourage us to submit ourselves to all the restraints and injunctions of the divine law, we are assured (v. 2) that it is the certain way to long life and prosperity. (1.) It is the way to be long-lived. God's commandments *shall add to us length of days*; to a good useful life on earth, they shall add an eternal life in heaven, *length of days for ever and ever*, Ps. xxi. 4. God shall be our life and the length of our days, and that will be indeed long life, with an addition. But, because length of days may possibly become a burden and a trouble, it is promised, (2.) That it shall prove the way to be easy too, so that even the days of old age shall not be evil days, but days in which thou shalt

have pleasure: *Peace shall they be continually adding to thee*. As grace increases, peace shall increase; and *of the increase of Christ's government and peace*, in the heart as well as in the world, *there shall be no end*. Great and growing *peace have those that love the law*.

II. We must have a continual regard to God's promises, which go along with his precepts, and are to be received, and retained, with them (v. 3): "*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee*, God's mercy in promising, and his truth in performing. Do not forfeit these, but live up to them, and preserve thy interest in them; do not forget these, but live upon them, and take the comfort of them. *Bind them about thy neck*, as the most graceful ornament." It is the greatest honour we are capable of in this world to have an interest in the mercy and truth of God. "*Write to them upon the table of thy heart*, as dear to thee, thy portion, and most delightful entertainment; take a pleasure in applying them and thinking them over." Or it may be meant of the mercy and truth which are our duty, piety and sincerity, charity towards men, fidelity towards God. Let these be fixed and commanding principles in thee. To encourage us to do this we are assured (v. 4) that this is the way to recommend ourselves both to our Creator and fellow-creatures: *So shalt thou find favour and good understanding*.

1. A good man seeks the favour of God in the first place, is ambitious of the honour of being accepted of the Lord, and he shall find that favour, and with it a good understanding; God will make the best of him, and put a favourable construction upon what he says and does. He shall be owned as one of Wisdom's children, and shall have praise with God, as one having that *good understanding* which is ascribed to all those *that do his commandments*. 2. He wishes to have favour with men also (as Christ had, Luke ii. 52), to be *accepted of the multitude of his brethren* (Esth. x.

3), and that he shall have; they shall understand him aright, and in his dealings with them he shall appear to be prudent, shall act intelligently and with discretion. *He shall have good success* (so some translate it), the common effect of good understanding.

III. We must have a continual regard to God's providence, must own and depend upon it in all our affairs, both by faith and prayer. 1. By faith. We must repose an entire confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, assuring ourselves of the extent of his providence to all the creatures and all their actions. We must therefore *trust in the Lord with all our hearts* (v. 5); we must believe that he is able to do what he will, wise to do what is best, and good, according to his promise, to do what is best for us, if we love him, and serve him. We must, with an entire submission and satisfaction, depend upon him to perform all things for us, and not *lean to our own understanding*, as if we could, by any forecast of our own, without God, help ourselves, and bring our affairs to a good issue. Those who know themselves cannot but find their own understanding to be a broken reed, which, if they lean to, will certainly fail them. In all our conduct we must be diffident of our own judgment, and confident of God's wisdom, power, and goodness, and therefore must follow Providence and not force it. That often proves best which was least our own doing. 2. By prayer

(v. 6): *In all thy ways acknowledge God*. We must not only in our judgment believe that there is an over-ruling hand of God ordering and disposing of us and all our affairs, but we must solemnly own it, and address ourselves to him accordingly. We must ask his leave, and not design any thing but what we are sure is lawful. We must ask his advice and beg direction from him, not only when

the case is difficult (when we know not what to do, no thanks to us that we have our eyes up to him), but in every case, be it ever so plain, We must ask success of him, as those who know *the race is not to the swift*. We must refer ourselves to him as one from whom our judgment proceeds, and patiently, and with a holy indifferency, wait his award. *In all our ways* that prove direct, and fair, and pleasant, in which we gain our point to our satisfaction, we must acknowledge God with thankfulness. *In all our ways* that prove cross and uncomfortable, and that are hedged up with thorns, we must acknowledge God with submission. Our eye must be ever towards God; to him we must, in every thing, make our requests known, as Jephthah *uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh*, Judg. xi. 11. For our encouragement to do this, it is promised, "*He shall direct thy paths*, so that thy way shall be safe and good and the issue happy at last." Note, Those that put themselves under a divine guidance shall always have the benefit of it. God will give them that wisdom which is profitable to direct, so that they shall not turn aside into the by-paths of sin, and then will himself so wisely order the event that it shall be to their mind, or (which is equivalent) for their good. Those that faithfully follow the pillar of cloud and fire shall find that though it may lead them about it leads them the right way and will bring them to Canaan at last.

Consecration to God.

**7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. 8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. 9 Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: 10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. 11 My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.**

We have here before us three exhortations, each of them enforced with a good reason:—

I. We must live in a humble and dutiful subjection to God and his government (v. 7): "*Fear the Lord*, as your sovereign Lord and Master; be ruled in every thing by your religion and subject to the divine will." This must be, 1. A humble subjection: *Be not wise in thy own eyes*. Note, There is not a greater enemy to the power of religion, and the fear of God in the heart, than conceitedness of our own wisdom. Those that have an opinion of their own sufficiency think it below them, and a disparagement to them, to take their measures from, much more to hamper themselves with, religion's rules. 2. A dutiful subjection: *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil*; take heed of doing any thing to offend him and to forfeit his care. To *fear the Lord*, so as to *depart from evil*, is true *wisdom and understanding* (Job xxviii. 28); those that have it are truly wise, but self-denyingly so, and not *wise in their own eyes*. For our encouragement thus to live in the fear of God it is here promised (v. 8) that it shall be as serviceable even to the outward man as our necessary food. It will be nourishing: *It shall be health to thy navel*. It will be strengthening: It shall be *marrow to thy bones*. The prudence, temperance, and sobriety, the calmness and composure of mind, and the good government of the appetites and passions, which religion teaches, tend very much not only to the health of the soul, but to a good habit of body, which is very desirable, and without which

our other enjoyments in this world are insipid. Envy is *the rottenness of the bones*; the sorrow of the world dries them; but hope and joy in God are marrow to them.

II. We must make a good use of our estates, and that is the way to increase them, v. 9, 10. Here is,

1. A precept which makes it our duty to serve God with our estates: *Honour the Lord with thy substance*. It is the end of our creation and redemption to honour God, to be to him for a name and a praise; we are no other way capable of serving him than in his honour. His honour we must show forth and the honour we have for him. We must honour him, not only *with our bodies and spirits which are his*, but with our estates too, for they also are his: we and all our appurtenances must be devoted to his glory. Worldly wealth is but poor substance, yet, such as it is, we must honour God with it, and then, if ever, it becomes substantial. We must honour God, (1.) *With our*

*increase*. Where riches increase we are tempted to honour ourselves (Deut. viii. 17) and to set our hearts upon the world (Ps. lxii. 10); but the more God gives us the more we should study to honour him. It is meant of the increase of the earth, for we live upon annual products, to keep us in constant dependence on God. (2.) *With all our increase*. As God has prospered us in every thing, we must honour him. Our law will allow a prescription for a *modus decimandi*—a mode of tithing, but none *de non decimando*—for exemption from paying tithes. (3.) *With the first-fruits of all*, as Abel, Gen.

iv. 4. This was the law (Exod. xxiii. 19), and the prophets, Mal. iii. 10. God, who is the first and best, must have the first and best of every thing; his right is prior to all other, and therefore he must be served first. Note, It is our duty to make our worldly estates serviceable to our religion, to use them and the interest we have by them for the promoting of religion, to do good to the poor with what we have and abound in all works of piety and charity, *devising liberal things*.

2. A promise, which makes it our interest to serve God with our estates. It is the way to make a little much, and much more; it is the surest and safest method of thriving: *So shall thy barns be filled with plenty*. He does not say thy bags, but thy barns, not thy wardrobe replenished, but thy presses: "God shall bless thee with an increase of that which is for use, not for show or ornament—for spending and laying out, not for hoarding and laying up." Those that do good with what they have shall have more to do more good with. Note, If we make our worldly estates serviceable to our religion we shall find our religion very serviceable to the prosperity of our worldly affairs. *Godliness has the promise of the life that now is* and most of the comfort of it. We mistake if we think that giving will undo us and make us poor. No, giving for God's honour will make us rich, Hag. ii. 19. What we gave we have.

III. We must conduct ourselves aright under our afflictions, v. 11, 12. This the apostle quotes (Heb. xii. 5), and calls it *an exhortation which speaks unto us as unto children*, with the authority and affection of a father. We are here in a world of troubles. Now observe,

1. What must be our care when we are in affliction. We must neither despise it nor be weary of it. His exhortation, before, was to those that are rich and



in prosperity, here to those that are poor and in adversity. (1.) We must not despise an affliction, be it ever so light and short, as if it were not worth taking notice of, or as if it were not sent on an errand and therefore required no answer.

We must not be stocks, and stones, and stoics, under our afflictions, insensible of them, hardening ourselves under them, and concluding we can easily get through them without God. (2.) We must not be weary of an affliction, be it ever so heavy and long, not *faint* under it, so the apostle renders it, not be dispirited, dispossessed of our own souls, or driven to despair, or to use any indirect means for our relief and the redress of our grievances. We must not think that the affliction either presses harder or continues longer than is meet, not conclude that deliverance will never come because it does not come so soon as we expect it.

2. What will be our comfort when we are in affliction. (1.) That it is a divine correction; it is *the chastening of the Lord*, which, as it is a reason why we should submit to it (for it is folly to contend with a God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power), so it is a reason why we should be satisfied in it; for we may be sure that a God of unspotted purity does us no wrong and that a God of infinite goodness means us no hurt. It is from God, and therefore must not be despised; for a slight put upon the messenger is an affront to him that sends him. It is from God, and therefore we must not be weary of it, for he knows our frame, both what we need and what we can bear. (2.) That it is a fatherly correction; it comes not from his vindictive justice as a Judge, but his wise affection as a Father. The father corrects *the son whom he loves*, nay, and because he loves him and desires he may be wise and good. He delights in that in his son which is amiable and agreeable, and therefore corrects him for the prevention and cure of that which would be a deformity to him, and an alloy to his delight in him. Thus God hath said, *As many as I love I rebuke and chasten*, Rev. iii. 19. This is a great comfort to God's children, under their afflictions, [1.] That they not only consist with, but flow from, covenant-love. [2.] That they are so far from doing them any real hurt that, by the grace of God working with them, they do a great deal of good, and are happy means of their satisfaction.

**The Excellency of Wisdom; Happiness of Those Who Find Wisdom.**

**13 Happy is the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth understanding. 14 For the merchandise of it *is* better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. 16 Length of days *is* in her right hand; *and* in her left hand riches and honour. 17 Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace. 18 She *is* a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy *is every one* that retaineth her. 19 The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. 20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.**

Solomon had pressed us earnestly to seek diligently for wisdom (ch. ii. 1, &c.), and had assured us that we should succeed in our sincere and constant pursuits. But the question is, What shall we get by it when we have found it? Prospect of advantage is the spring and spur of industry; he therefore shows us how much it will be to our profit, laying this down for an unquestionable truth, *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom*, that true wisdom which consists in the knowledge and love of God, and an entire conformity to all the intentions of his truths, providences, and laws. Now observe,

I. What it is to find wisdom so as to be made happy by it.

1. We must get it. He is the happy man who, having found it, makes it his own, gets both an interest in it and the possession of it, who *draws out understanding* (so the word it), that is, (1.) Who derives it from God. Having it not in himself, he draws it with the bucket of prayer from the fountain of all wisdom, *who gives liberally*. (2.) Who takes pains for it, as he does who draws ore out of the mine. It if do not come easily, we must put the more strength to draw it. (3.) Who improves in it, who, having some

understanding, draws it out by growing in knowledge and making five talents ten. (4.) Who does good with it, who draws out from the stock he has, as wine from the vessel, and communicates to others, for their instruction, *things new and old*. That is well got, and to good purpose, that is thus used to good purpose.

2. We must trade for it. We read here of the merchandise of wisdom, which intimates, (1.) That we must make it our business, and not a by-business, as the merchant bestows the main of his thoughts and time upon his merchandise. (2.) That we must venture all in it, as a stock in trade, and be willing to part with all for it. This is that pearl of great price which, when we have found it, we must willingly sell all for the purchase of, Matt. xiii. 45, 46. *Buy the truth*, (Prov. xxiii. 23); he does not say at what rate, because we must buy it at any rate rather than miss it.

3. We must lay hold on it as we lay hold on a good bargain when it is offered to us, which we do the more carefully if there be danger of having it taken out of our hands. We must apprehend with all our might, and put forth our utmost vigour in the pursuit of it, lay hold on all occasions to improve in it, and catch at the least of its dictates.

4. We must retain it. It is not enough to lay hold on wisdom, but we must keep our hold, hold it fast, with a resolution never to let it go, but to persevere in the ways of wisdom to the end. We must *sustain it* (so some read it), must embrace it with all our might, as we do that which we would sustain. We must do all we can to support the declining interests of religion in the places where we live.

## II. What the happiness of those is who do find it.

1. It is a transcendent happiness, more than can be found in the wealth of this world, if we had ever so much of it, v. 14, 15. It is not only a surer, but a more gainful merchandise to trade for wisdom, for Christ, and grace, and spiritual blessings, than for silver, and gold, and rubies. Suppose a man to have got these in abundance, nay, to have all the things he can desire of this world (and who is it that ever had?), yet, (1.) All this would not purchase heavenly wisdom; no, it would *utterly be contemned*; *it cannot be gotten for gold*, Job xxviii. 15, &c. (2.) All this would not countervail the want of

heavenly wisdom nor be the ransom of a soul lost by its own folly. (3.) All this would not make a man half so happy, no, not in this world, as those are who have true wisdom, though they have none of all these things. (4.) Heavenly wisdom will procure that for us, and secure that to us, which silver, and gold, and rubies, will not be the purchase of.

2. It is a true happiness; for it is inclusive of, and equivalent to, all those things which are supposed to make men happy, v. 16, 17. Wisdom is here represented as a bright and bountiful queen, reaching forth gifts to her faithful and loving subjects, and offering them to all that will

submit to her government. (1.) Is length of days a blessing? Yes, the most valuable; life includes all good, and therefore she offers that *in her right hand*. Religion puts us into the best methods of prolonging life, entitles us to the promises of it, and, though our days on earth should be no more than our neighbour's, yet it will secure to us everlasting life in a better world. (2.) Are riches and honour accounted blessings? They are so, and then she reaches out with *her left hand*. For, as she is ready to embrace those that submit to her with both arms, so she is ready to give out to them with both hands. They shall have the wealth of this world as far as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them; while the true riches, by which men are rich towards God, are secured to them. Nor is there any honour, by birth or preferment, comparable to that which attends religion; it makes the *righteous more excellent than his neighbour*, recommends men to God, commands respect and veneration with all the sober part of mankind, and will in the other world make those that are now buried in obscurity to *shine forth as the sun*. (3.) Is pleasure courted as much as any thing? It is so, and it is certain that true piety has in it the greatest true pleasure. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness*; the ways in which she has directed us to walk are such as we shall find abundance of delight and satisfaction in. All the enjoyments and entertainments of sense are not comparable to the pleasure which gracious souls have in communion with God and doing good. That which is the only right way to bring us to our journey's end we must walk in, fair or foul, pleasant or unpleasant; but the way of religion, as it is the right way, so it is a pleasant way; it is smooth and clean, and strewed with roses: *All her paths are peace*. There is not only peace in the end, but peace in the way; not only in the way of religion in general, but in the particular paths of that way, in

all her paths, all the several acts, instances, and duties of it. One does not embitter what the other sweetens, as it is with the allays of this world; but they are all peace, not only sweet, but safe. The saints enter into peace on this side heaven, and enjoy a present sabbatism.

3. It is the happiness of paradise (v. 18): *She is a tree of life*. True grace is that to the soul which the tree of life would have been, from which our first parents were shut out for eating of the forbidden tree. It is a seed of immortality, a *well of living waters, springing up to life eternal*. It is an earnest of the New Jerusalem, in the midst of which is *the tree of life*, Rev. xxii. 2; ii. 7. Those that feed and feast on this heavenly wisdom shall not only be cured by it of every fatal malady, but shall find an antidote against age and death; they shall *eat and live for ever*.

4. It is a participation of the happiness of God himself, for wisdom is his everlasting glory and blessedness, v. 19, 20. This should make us in love with the wisdom and understanding which God gives, that *the Lord by wisdom founded the earth*, so that it cannot be removed, nor can ever fail of answering all the ends of its creation, to which it is admirably and unexceptionably fitted. *By understanding he has likewise established the heavens* and directed all the motions of them in the best manner. The heavenly bodies are vast, yet there is no flaw in them—numerous, yet no disorder in them—the motion rapid, yet no wear or tear; the depths of the sea are broken up, and thence come the waters beneath the firmament, and *the clouds drop down the dews*, the waters from above the firmament, and all this by the divine wisdom and knowledge; therefore *happy is the man that finds wisdom*, for he will thereby be *thoroughly furnished for every good word and work*. Christ is

that Wisdom, by whom the worlds were made and still consist; happy therefore are those to whom he is *made of God wisdom*, for he has wherewithal to make good all the foregoing promises of long life, riches, and honour; for all the wealth of heaven, earth, and seas, is his.

The Excellency of Wisdom.

**21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: 22 So shall they be**

**life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. 23 Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. 24 When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. 25 Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. 26 For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.**

Solomon, having pronounced those happy who not only lay hold on wisdom, but retain her, here exhorts us therefore to retain her, assuring us that we ourselves shall have the comfort of doing so.

I. The exhortation is, to have religion's rules always in view and always at heart, v. 21. 1. To have them always in view: "*My son, let them not depart from thy eyes*"; let not thy eyes ever depart from them to wander after vanity. Have them always in mind, and do not forget them; be ever and anon thinking of them, and conversing with them, and never imagine that thou hast looked upon them long enough and that it is time now to lay them by; but, as long as thou livest, keep up and cultivate thy acquaintance with them." He who learns to write must always have his eye upon his copy, and not let that be out of his sight; and to the words of wisdom must those, in like manner, have a constant respect, who will walk circumspectly. 2. To have them always at heart; for it is in that treasury, the hidden man of the heart, that we must *keep sound wisdom and discretion*, keep to the principles of it and keep in the ways of it. It is wealth that is worth keeping.

II. The argument to enforce this exhortation is taken from the unspeakable advantage which wisdom, thus kept, will be of to us. 1. In respect of strength and satisfaction: "It will be *life to thy soul* (v. 22); it will quicken thee to thy duty when thou beginnest to be slothful and remiss; it will revive thee under thy troubles when thou beginnest to droop and despond. It will be thy spiritual life, an earnest of life eternal." Life to the soul is life indeed. 2. In respect of honour and reputation: It shall be *grace to thy neck*, as a chain of gold, or a jewel. *Grace to thy jaws* (so the word is), grateful to thy *taste and relish* (so some); it shall infuse *grace into all thou sayest* (so others), shall furnish thee with acceptable words, which shall gain thee

credit. 3. In respect of safety and security. This he insists upon in four verses, the scope of which is to show that *the effect of righteousness* (which is the same with *wisdom* here) is *quietness and assurance for ever*; Isa. xxxii. 17. Good people are taken under God's special protection, and therein they may have an entire satisfaction. They are safe and may be easy, (1.) In their motions by day, v. 23. If our religion be our companion, it will be our convoy: "*Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely*. The natural life, and all that belongs to it, shall be under the protection of God's providence; the spiritual life, and all its interests, are under the protection of his grace; so that thou shalt be kept from falling into sin or trouble." Wisdom will direct us into, and keep us in, the safe way, as far as may be, from temptation, and will enable

us to walk in it with holy security. The way of duty is the way of safety. "We are in danger of falling, but wisdom will keep thee, that *thy foot shall not stumble* at those things which are an offence and overthrow to many, but which thou shalt know how to get over." (2.) In their rest by night, v. 24. In our retirements we lie exposed and are most subject to frights. "But keep up communion with God, and keep a good conscience, and then *when thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid* of fire, or thieves, or specters, or any of the terrors of darkness, knowing that when we, and all our friends, are asleep, yet *he that keeps Israel* and every true-born Israelite *neither slumbers nor sleeps*, and to him thou hast committed thyself and taken shelter under the shadow of his wings. *Thou shalt lie down*, and not need to sit up to keep guard; having lain down, thou shalt sleep, and not have thy eyes held waking by care and fear; and *thy sleep shall be sweet* and refreshing to thee, being not disturbed by any alarms from without or from within," Ps. iv. 8; cxvi. 7. The way to have a good night is to keep a good conscience; and the sleep, as of the labouring man, so of the wise and godly man, is sweet. (3.) In their greatest straits and dangers. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us, so that we need *not be afraid of sudden fear*, v. 25. The harms that surprise us, unthought of, giving us no time to arm ourselves by consideration, are most likely to put us into confusion. But let not the wise and good man forget himself, and then he will not give way to any fear that has torment, be the alarm ever so sudden. Let him not fear the *desolation of the wicked, when it comes*, that is, [1.] The desolation which the wicked ones make of religion and the religious; though it comes, and

seems to be just at the door, yet be not afraid of it; for, though God may make use of the wicked as instruments of his people's correction, yet he will never suffer them to be the authors of their desolation. Or rather, [2.] The desolation which wicked men will be brought into in a moment. It will come, and timorous saints may be apprehensive that they shall be involved in it; but let this be their comfort, that though judgments lay waste generally, at least promiscuously, yet God knows who are his and how to separate between the precious and the vile. Therefore be not afraid of that which appears most formidable, for (v. 26) "*the Lord shall be* not only thy protector to keep thee safe, but *thy confidence* to keep thee secure, so that thy foot *shall not be taken* by thy enemies nor ensnared by thy own fears." God has engaged to keep the feet of his saints.

Justice and Kindness Recommended; Caution against Envy.

**27 Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do *it* 28 Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. 29 Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. 30 Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. 31 Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. 32 For the froward *is* abomination to the Lord: but his secret *is* with the righteous. 33 The curse of the Lord *is* in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. 34 Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. 35 The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.**

True wisdom consists in the due discharge of our duty towards man, as well as towards God, in honesty as well as piety, and therefore we have here divers excellent precepts of wisdom which relate to our neighbour.



I. We must render to all their due, both in justice and charity, and not delay to do it (v. 27, 28): "*Withhold not good from those to whom it is due* (either for want of love to them or through too much love to thy money) *when it is in the power of thy hand to do it*, for, if it be not, it cannot be expected; but it was thy great fault if thou didst, by thy extravagances, disable thyself to do justly and show mercy, and it ought to be the greatest of thy griefs if God had disabled thee, not so much that thou art straitened in thy own comforts and conveniences as that thou hast not wherewithal to give to those to whom it is due." *Withhold* it not; this implies that it is called for and expected, but that the hand is drawn in and the *bowels of compassion are shut up*. We must not hinder others from doing it, not be ourselves backward to it. "If thou hast it by thee to-day, hast it in the power of thy hand, say not to thy neighbour, *Go thy way for this time*, and come at a more convenient season, and I will then see what will be done; *to-morrow I will give*; whereas thou art not sure that thou shalt live till to-morrow, or that to-morrow thou shalt *have it by thee*. Be not thus loth to part with thy money upon a good account. Make not excuses to shift off a duty that must be done, nor delight to keep thy neighbour in pain and in suspense, nor to show the authority which the giver has over the beggar; but readily and cheerfully, and from a principle of conscience towards God, give good to *those to whom it is due*," to the *lords and owners of it* (so the word is), to those who upon any account are entitled to it. This requires us, 1. To pay our just debts without fraud, covin, or delay. 2. To give wages to those who have earned them. 3. To provide for our relations, and those that have dependence on us, for to them it is due. 4. To render dues both to church and state, magistrates and ministers. 5. To be ready to all acts of friendship and humanity, and in every thing to be neighbourly; for these are things that are due by the law of doing as we would be done by. 6. To be charitable to the poor and necessitous. If others want the necessary supports of life, and we have wherewithal to supply them, we must look upon it as due to them and not withhold it. Alms are called *righteousness* because they are a debt to the poor, and a debt which we must not defer to pay, *Bis dat, qui cito dat* —*He gives twice who gives speedily*.

II. We must never design any hurt or harm to any body (v. 29): "*Devise not evil against thy neighbour*; do not contrive how to do him an ill-turn undiscovered, to prejudice him in his body, goods, or good name, and the

rather because *he dwells securely by thee*, and, having given thee no provocation, entertains no jealousy or suspicion of thee, and therefore is off his guard." It is against the laws both of honour and friendship to do a man an ill-turn and give him no warning. *Cursed be he that smites his neighbour secretly*. It is a most base ungrateful thing, if our neighbours have a good opinion of us, that we will do them no harm, and we thence take advantage to cheat and injure them.

III. We must not be quarrelsome and litigious (v. 30): "Do not *strive with a man without cause*; contend not for that which thou hast no title to; resent not that as a provocation which peradventure was but an oversight. Never trouble thy neighbour with frivolous complaints and accusations, or

vexatious law-suits, when either there is no harm done thee or none worth speaking of, or thou mightest right thyself in a friendly way." Law must be the last refuge; for it is not only our duty, but our interest, *as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men*. When accounts are balanced, it will be found there is little got by striving.

IV. We must not envy the prosperity of evil-doers, v. 31. This caution is the same with that which is so much insisted on, Ps. xxxvii. "*Envy not the oppressor*"; though he be rich and great, though he live in ease and pleasure, and make all about him to stand in awe of him, yet do not think him a happy man, nor wish thyself in his condition. *Choose none of his ways*; do not imitate him, nor take the courses he takes to enrich himself. Never think of doing as he does, though thou wert sure to get by it all that he has, for it would be dearly bought." Now, to show what little reason saints have to envy sinners, Solomon here, in the last four verses of the chapter, compares the condition of sinners and saints together (as his father David had done, Ps. xxxvii.), sets the one over against the other, that we may see how happy the saints are, though they be oppressed, and how miserable the wicked are, though they be oppressors. Men are to be judged of as they stand with God, and as he judges of them, not as they stand in the world's books. Those are in the right who are of God's mind; and, if we be of his mind, we shall see, whatever pretence one sinner may have to envy another, that saints are so happy themselves that they have no reason at all to envy any sinner, though his condition be ever so prosperous. For, 1. Sinners are hated of God, but

saints are beloved, v. 32. The froward sinners, who are continually going from-ward him, whose lives are a perverse contradiction to his will, are *abomination to the Lord*. He that hates nothing that he has made yet abhors those who have thus marred themselves; they are not only abominable in his sight, but an abomination. The righteous therefore have no reason to envy them, for they have his secret with them; they are his favourites; he has that communion with them which is a secret to the world and in which they have a joy that a stranger does not intermeddle with; he communicates to them the secret tokens of his love; his covenant is with them; they know his mind, and the meanings and intentions of his providence, better than others can. *Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?* 2. Sinners are under the curse of God, they and their houses; saints are under his blessing, they and their habitation, v. 33. The wicked has a house, a strong and stately dwelling perhaps, but *the curse of the Lord* is upon it, it is *in it*, and, though the affairs of the family may prosper, yet the very blessings are curses, Mal. ii. 2. There is *leanness in the soul*, when the body is fed to the full, Ps. cvi. 15. The curse may work silently and slowly; but it is as a fretting leprosy; it will consume the *timber thereof and the stones thereof*, Zech. v. 4; Hab. ii. 11. The just have a habitation, a poor cottage (the word is used for sheep-cotes), a very mean dwelling; but God blesses it; he is continually blessing it, from the beginning of the year to the end of it. The curse or blessing of God is upon the house according as the inhabitants are wicked or godly; and it is certain that a blessed family, though poor, has no reason to envy a cursed family, though rich. 3. God puts contempt upon sinners, but shows respect to saints, v. 34. (1.) Those who exalt themselves shall certainly be abased: *Surely he scorns the scorers*. Those who scorn to submit to the discipline of religion, scorn to take God's yoke upon them, scorn to be beholden to his grace, who scoff at godliness and godly people, and

take a pleasure in bantering and exposing them, God will scorn them, and lay them open to scorn before all the world. He despises their impotent malice, *sits in heaven and laughs at them*, Ps. ii.

4. He retaliates upon them (Ps. xviii. 26); he *resists the proud*. (2.) Those who humble themselves shall be exalted, for *he gives grace to the lowly*; he works that in them which puts honour upon them and for which they are *accepted of God and approved of men*. Those who patiently bear contempt

from scornful men shall have respect from God and all good men, and then they have no reason to envy the scorers or to choose their ways. 4. The end of sinners will be everlasting shame, the end of saints endless honour, v. 35. (1.) Saints are wise men, and act wisely for themselves; for though their religion now wraps them up in obscurity, and lays them open to reproach, yet they are sure to inherit glory at last, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. They shall have it, and have it by inheritance, the sweetest and surest tenure. God gives them grace (v. 34), and therefore they shall inherit glory, for grace is glory, 2 Cor. iii. 18. It is glory begun, the earnest of it, Ps.

lxxxiv. 11. (2.) Sinners are fools, for they are not only preparing disgrace for themselves, but at the same time flattering themselves with a prospect of honour, as if they only took the way to be great. Their end will manifest their folly: *Shame shall be their promotion*. And it will be so much the more their punishment as it will come instead of their promotion; it will be all the promotion they must ever expect, that God will be glorified in their everlasting confusion.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. IV.

When the things of God are to be taught precept must be upon precept, and line upon line, not only because the things themselves are of great worth and weight, but because men's minds, at the best, are unapt to admit them and commonly prejudiced against them; and therefore Solomon, in this chapter, with a great variety of expression and a pleasant powerful flood of divine eloquence, inculcates the same things that he had pressed upon us in the foregoing chapters. Here is, I. An earnest exhortation to the study of wisdom, that is, of true religion and godliness, borrowed from the good instructions which his father gave him, and enforced with many considerable arguments, ver. 1-13. II. A necessary caution against bad company and all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, ver. 14-19. III. Particular directions for the attaining and preserving of wisdom, and bringing forth the fruits of it, ver. 20-27. So plainly, so pressingly, is the

case laid before us, that we shall be for ever inexcusable if we perish in our folly.

Parental Instructions.

**1 Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. 2 For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. 3 For I was my father's son, tender and only *beloved* in the sight of my mother. 4 He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine**

**heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. 5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget *it* not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. 9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. 10 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. 11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. 12 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. 13 Take fast hold of instruction; let *her* not go: keep her; for she *is* thy life.**

Here we have,

I. The invitation which Solomon gives to his children to come and receive instruction from him (v. 1, 2): *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father.* That is, 1. "Let my own children, in the first place, receive and give good heed to those instructions which I set down for the use of others also." Note,

Magistrates and ministers, who are entrusted with the direction of larger societies, are concerned to take a more than ordinary care for the good instruction of their own families; from this duty their public work will by no means excuse them. This charity must begin at home, though it must not end there; for he that has not his children in subjection with all gravity, and does not take pains in their good education, how shall he do his duty as he ought *to the church of God*? 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5. The children of those that are eminent for wisdom and public usefulness ought to improve in knowledge and grace in proportion to the advantages they derive from their relation to such parents. Yet it may be observed, to save both the credit and the comfort of those parents whose children do not answer the hopes that arose from their education, that Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was far from being either one of the wisest or one of the best. We have reason to think that thousands have got more good by Solomon's proverbs than his own son did, to whom they seem to have been dedicated. 2. Let all young people, in the days of their childhood and youth, take pains to get knowledge and grace, for that is their learning age, and then their minds are formed and seasoned. He does not say, *My children*, but *You children*. We read but of one son that Solomon had of his own; but (would you think it?) he is willing to set up for a schoolmaster, and to teach other people's children! for at that age there is most hope of success; the branch is easily bent when it is young and tender. 3. Let all that would receive instruction come with the disposition of children, though they be grown persons. Let all prejudices be laid aside, and the mind be as white paper. let them be dutiful, tractable, and self-diffident, and take the word as the word of a father, which comes both with authority and with affection. We must see it coming from God as *our Father in heaven*, to whom we pray, from whom we expect blessings, the Father of our spirits, to whom we ought to be in subjection, that we may live. We must look upon our teachers as our fathers, who love us and seek our welfare; and therefore though the instruction carry in it reproof and correction, for so the word signifies, yet we must bid it welcome. Now, (1.) To recommend it to us, we are told, not only that it is the *instruction of a father*, but that it is *understanding*, and therefore should be welcome

to intelligent creatures. Religion has reason on its side, and we are taught it by fair reasoning. It is a law indeed (v. 2), but that law is founded upon doctrine, upon unquestionable principles of truth, upon *good doctrine*,

which is not only faithful, but worthy of all acceptation. If we admit the doctrine, we cannot but submit to the law. (2.) To rivet it in us, we are directed to receive it as a gift, to attend to it with all diligence, to attend so as to know it, for otherwise we cannot do it, and not to forsake it by disowning the doctrine or disobeying the law.

II. The instructions he gives them. Observe, 1. How he came by these instructions; he had them from his parents, and teaches his children the same that they taught him, v. 3, 4. Observe, (1.) His parents loved him, and therefore taught him: *I was my father's son*. David had many sons, but Solomon was his son *indeed*, as Isaac is called (Gen. xvii. 19) and for the same reason, because on him the covenant was entailed. He was his father's darling, above any of his children. God had a special kindness for Solomon (the prophet called him *Jedidiah*, because the Lord loved him, 2 Sam. xii. 25), and for that reason David had a special kindness for him, for he was a man after God's own heart. If parents may ever love one child better than another, it must not be till it plainly appears that God does so. He was *tender, and only beloved, in the sight of his mother*. Surely there was a manifest reason for making such a distinction when both the parents made it. Now we see how they showed their love; they catechised him, kept him to his book, and held him to a strict discipline. Though he was a prince, and heir-apparent to the crown, yet they did not let him live at large; nay, therefore they tutored him thus. And perhaps David was the more strict with Solomon in his education because he had seen the ill effects of an undue indulgence in Adonijah, whom he had not *crossed in any thing* (1 Kings

i. 6), as also in Absalom. (2.) What his parents taught him he teaches others. Observe, [1.] When Solomon was grown up he not only remembered, but took a pleasure in repeating, the good lessons his parents taught him when he was a child. He did not forget them, so deep were the impressions they made upon him. He was not ashamed of them, such a high value had he for them, nor did he look upon them as the childish things, the mean things, which, when he became a man, a king, he should put away, as a disparagement to him; much less did he repeat them: as some wicked children have done, to ridicule them, and make his companions merry with them, priding himself that he had got clear from grave lessons and restraints. [2.] Though Solomon was a wise man himself, and divinely

inspired, yet, when he was to teach wisdom, he did not think it below him to quote his father and to make use of his words. Those that would learn well, and teach well, in religion, must not affect new-found notions and new-coined phrases, so as to look with contempt upon the knowledge and language of their predecessors; if we must keep to the good old way, why should we scorn the good old words? Jer. vi. 16. [3.] Solomon, having been well educated by his parents, thought himself thereby obliged to give his children a good education, the same that his parents had given him; and this is one way in which we must requite our parents for the pains they took with us, even by showing piety at home, 1 Tim. v. 4. They taught us, not only that we might learn ourselves, but that we might teach our children, the good knowledge of God, Ps. lxxviii. 6. And we are false to a trust if we do not; for the sacred deposit of religious doctrine and law was lodged

in our hands with a charge to transmit it pure and entire to those that shall *come after us*, 2 Tim. ii.

2. [4.] Solomon enforces his exhortations with the authority of his father David, a man famous in his generation upon all accounts. Be it taken notice of, to the honour of religion, that the wisest and best men in every age have been most zealous, not only for the practice of it themselves, but for the propagating of it to others; and we should therefore *continue in the things which we have learned, knowing of whom we have learned them*, 2 Tim. iii. 14.

2. What these instructions were, v. 4-13.

(1.) By way of precept and exhortation. David, in teaching his son, though he was a child of great capacity and quick apprehension, yet to show that he was in good earnest, and to affect his child the more with what he said, expressed himself with great warmth and importunity, and inculcated the same thing again and again. So children must be taught. Deut. vi. 7, *Thou shalt whet them diligently upon thy children*. David, though he was a man of public business, and had tutors for his son, took all this pains with him himself.

[1.] He recommends to him his Bible and his catechism, as the means, his father's *words* (v.



4), the *words of his mouth* (v. 5), his *sayings* (v. 10), all the good lessons he had taught him; and perhaps he means particularly the book of Psalms, many of which were *Maschils*—*psalms of instruction*, and two of them are expressly said to be *for Solomon*. These, and all his other words, Solomon must have an eye to. *First*, He must *hear and receive them* (v. 10), diligently attend to them, and imbibe them, *as the earth drinks in the rain that comes often upon it*, Heb. vi. 7. God thus bespeaks our attention to his word: *Hear, O my son! and receive my sayings*. *Secondly*, He must *hold fast the form of sound words* which his father gave him (v. 4): *Let thy heart retain my words*; and except the word be hid in the heart, lodged in the will and affections, it will not be retained. *Thirdly*, He must govern himself by them: *Keep my commandments*, obey them, and that is the way to increase in the knowledge of them, John vii. 17. *Fourthly*, He must stick to them and abide by them: "*Decline not from the words of my mouth* (v. 5), as fearing they will be too great a check upon thee, but *take fast hold of instruction* (v. 13), as being resolved to keep thy hold and never let it go." Those that have a good education, though they strive to shake it off, will find it hang about them a great while, and, if it do not, their case is very sad.

[2.] He recommends to him wisdom and understanding as the end to be aimed at in the use of these means; that *wisdom* which is the *principal wisdom*, get that. *Quod caput est sapientia eam acquire sapientiam*—*Be sure to mind that branch of wisdom which is the top branch of it*, and that is the *fear of God*, ch. i. 7. Junius and Tremellius. A principle of religion in the heart is the one thing needful; therefore, *First*, Get this *wisdom*, get this *understanding*, v. 5. And again, "*Get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding*, v. 7. Pray for it, take pains for it, give diligence in the use of all appointed means to attain it. *Wait at wisdom's gate*, Prov. viii. 34. Get dominion over thy corruptions, which are thy follies: get possession of wise principles and the habits of wisdom. Get wisdom by experience, get it *above all thy getting*; be more in care and take more pains to get this than to get the wealth of this world; whatever thou forgettest, get this, reckon it a great achievement, and pursue it accordingly." True wisdom is God's gift, and yet we are here

commanded to get it, because God gives it to those that labour for it; yet, after all, we must not say, *Our might and the power of our hand have gotten*

*us this wealth. Secondly, Forget her not* (v. 5), *forsake her not* (v. 6), *let her not go* (v. 13), *but keep her*. Those that have got this wisdom must take heed of losing it again by returning to folly: it is indeed a good part, that shall not be *taken from us*; but then we must take heed lest we throw it from us, as those do that forget it first, and let it slip out of their minds, and then forsake it and turn out of its good ways. That good thing which is committed to us we must keep, and not let it drop, through carelessness, nor suffer it to be forced from us, nor suffer ourselves to be wheedled out of it; never let go such a jewel. *Thirdly, Love her*

(v. 6), and *embrace her* (v. 8), as worldly men love their wealth and set their hearts upon it. Religion should be very dear to us, dearer than any thing in this world; and, if we cannot reach to be great masters of wisdom, yet let us be true lovers of it; and what grace we have let us embrace it with a sincere affection, as those that admire its beauty. *Fourthly, "Exalt her,* v. 8. Always keep up high thoughts of religion, and do all thou canst to bring it into reputation, and maintain the credit of it among men. Concur with God in his purpose, which is to magnify the law and make it honourable, and do what thou canst to serve that purpose." Let *Wisdom's* children not only justify her, but magnify her, and prefer her before that which is dearest to them in this world. In honouring those that fear the Lord, though they are low in the world, and in regarding a *poor wise man*, we exalt wisdom.

(2.) By way of motive and inducement thus to labour for wisdom, and submit to the guidance of it, consider, [1.] It is the main matter, and that which ought to be the chief and continual care of every man in this life (v. 7): *Wisdom is the principal thing*; other things which we are solicitous to get and keep are nothing to it. It is the *whole of man*, Eccl. xii. 13. It is that which recommends us to God, which beautifies the soul, which enables us to answer the end of our creation, to live to some good purpose in the world, and to get to heaven at last; and therefore it is the principal thing.

[2.] It has reason and equity on its side (v. 11): "*I have taught thee in the way of wisdom*, and so it will be found to be at last. *I have led thee*, not in the crooked ways of carnal policy, which does wrong under colour of wisdom, but *in right paths*, agreeable to the eternal rules and reasons of good and evil." The rectitude of the divine nature appears in the rectitude of

all the divine laws. Observe, David not only taught his son by good instructions, but led him both by a good example and by applying general instructions to particular cases; so that nothing was wanting on his part to make him wise. [3.] It would be much for his own advantage: "If thou be wise and good, thou shalt be so for thyself." *First*, "It will be thy life, thy comfort, thy happiness; it is what thou canst not live without:" *Keep my commandments and live*, v. 4. That of our Saviour agrees with this, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*, Matt. xix. 17. It is upon pain of death, eternal death, and in prospect of life, eternal life, that we are required to be religious. "Receive wisdom's sayings, *and the years of thy life shall be many* (v. 10), as many in this world as Infinite Wisdom sees fit, and in the other world thou shalt live that life the years of which shall never be numbered. *Keep her* therefore, whatever it cost thee, *for she is thy life*, v. 13. All thy satisfaction will be found in this;" and a soul without true wisdom and grace is really a dead soul. *Secondly*, "It will be thy guard

and guide, thy convoy and conductor, through all the dangers and difficulties of thy journey through this wilderness. Love wisdom, and cleave to her, and she shall *preserve thee, she shall keep thee*

(v. 6) from sin, the worst of evils, the worst of enemies; she shall keep thee from hurting thyself, and then none else can hurt thee." As we say, "Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee;" so, "Keep thy wisdom, and thy wisdom will keep thee." It will keep us from straits and stumbling-blocks in the management of ourselves and our affairs, v. 12. 1. That our steps be not straitened when we go, that we bring not ourselves into such straits as David was in, 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. Those that make God's word their rule shall walk at liberty, and be at ease in themselves. 2. That our feet do not stumble when we run. If wise and good men be put upon sudden resolves, the certain rule of God's word which they go by will keep them even then from stumbling upon any thing that may be pernicious. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us. *Thirdly*, "It will be thy honour and reputation

(v. 8): *Exalt* wisdom (do thou but show thy good-will to her advancement) and though she needs not thy service she will abundantly recompense it, *she shall promote thee, she shall bring thee to honour*." Solomon was to be a king, but his wisdom and virtue would be more his honour than his crown

or purple; it was that for which all his neighbours had him so much in veneration; and no doubt, in his reign and David's, wise and good men stood fairest for preferment. However, religion will, first or last, bring all those *to honour* that cordially *embrace her*; they shall be accepted of God, respected by all wise men, owned in the great day, and shall inherit everlasting glory. This he insists on (v. 9): "*She shall give to thy head an ornament of grace* in this world, shall recommend thee both to God and man, and in the other world *a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee*, a crown that shall never totter, a crown of glory that shall never wither." That is the true honour which attends religion. *Nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus—Virtue is the only nobility!* David having thus recommended wisdom to his son, no marvel that when God bade him ask what he would he prayed, Lord, *give me a wise and an understanding heart*. We should make it appear by our prayers how well we are taught.

Cautions against Bad Company.

**14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil *men*. 15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. 16 For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause *some* to fall. 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. 18 But the path of the just *is* as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked *is* as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.**

Some make David's instructions to Solomon, which began v. 4, to continue to the end of the chapter; nay, some continue them to the end of the ninth chapter; but it is more probable that Solomon begins here again, if not sooner. In these verses, having exhorted us to walk in the paths of wisdom, he cautions us against the path of the wicked. 1. We must take heed of the ways of sin and avoid them, every thing that looks like sin and leads to it. 2. In order to this we must keep out of the ways of sinners, and have no

fellowship with them. For fear of falling into wicked courses, we must shun wicked company. Here is,

I. The caution itself, v. 14, 15. 1. We must take heed of falling in with sin and sinners: *Enter not into the paths of the wicked*. Our teacher, having like a faithful guide shown us the *right paths*

(v. 11), here warns us of the by-paths into which we are in danger of being drawn aside. Those that have been well educated, and trained up in the way they should go, let them never turn aside into the way they should not go; let them not so much as enter into it, no, not to make trial of it, lest it prove a dangerous experiment and difficult to retreat with safety. "Venture not into the company of those that are infected with the plague, no, not though thou think thyself guarded with an antidote."

2. If at any time we are inveigled into an evil way, we must hasten out of it. "If, ere thou wast aware, thou didst enter in at the gate, because it was wide, *go not on in the way of evil men*. As soon as thou art made sensible of thy mistake, retire immediately, take not a step more, stay not a minute longer, in the way that certainly leads to destruction." 3. We must dread and detest the ways of sin and sinners, and decline them with the utmost care imaginable. "*The way of evil men* may seem a pleasant way and sociable, and the nearest way to the compassing of some secular end we may have in view; but it is an evil way, and will end ill, and therefore if thou love thy God and thy soul *avoid it, pass not by it*, that thou mayest not be tempted to enter into it; and, if thou find thyself near it, *turn from it and pass away*, and get as far off it as thou canst." The manner of expression intimates the imminent danger we are in, the need we have of this caution, and the great importance of it, and that our watchmen are, or should be, in good earnest, in giving us warning. It intimates likewise at what a distance we should keep from sin and sinners; he does not say, Keep at a due distance, but at a great distance, the further the better; never think you can get far enough from it. *Escape for thy life: look not behind thee*.

II. The reasons to enforce this caution.

1. "Consider the character of the men whose way thou art warned to shun." They are mischievous men (v. 16, 17); they not only care not what hurt they

do to those that stand in their way, but it is their business to do mischief, and their delight, purely for mischief-sake. They are continually designing and endeavouring to *cause some to fall*, to ruin them body and soul. Wickedness and malice are in their nature, and violence is in all their actions. They are spiteful in the highest degree; for, (1.) Mischief is rest and sleep to them. As much satisfaction as a covetous man has when he has got money, an ambitious man when he has got preferment, and a good man when he has done good, so much have they when they have said or done that which is injurious and ill-natured; and they are extremely uneasy if they cannot get their envy and revenge gratified, as Haman, to whom every thing was unpleasant as long as Mordecai was unchanged. It intimates likewise how restless and unwearied they are in their mischievous pursuits; they will rather be deprived of sleep than of the pleasure of being vexatious. (2.) Mischief is meat and drink to them; they feed and feast upon it. *They eat the bread of the wickedness (they eat up my people as they eat bread, Ps. xiv. 4) and drink the wine of violence (v. 17), drink iniquity like water, Job xv. 16.* All they eat and drink is got by rapine and oppression. Do wicked men think the time lost in which they are not doing hurt? Let good men make it as much their business and delight to do good. *Amici, diem perdidit—Friends, I have lost a day.* And let all that are wise, and wish well to themselves, avoid the society of the

wicked; for, [1.] It is very scandalous; for there is no disposition of mind that is a greater reproach to human nature, a greater enemy to human society, a bolder defiance to God and conscience, that has more of the devil's image in it, or is more serviceable to his interests, than a delight to do mischief and to vex, and hurt, and ruin every body. [2.] It is very dangerous. "Shun those that delight to do mischief as thou tenderest thy own safety; for, whatever friendship they may pretend, one time or other they will do thee mischief; thou wilt ruin thyself if thou dost concur with them (ch.

i. 18) and they will ruin thee if thou dost not."

2. "Consider the character of the way itself which thou art warned to shun, compared with the right way which thou art invited to walk in."

(1.) The way of righteousness is light (v. 18): *The path of the just*, which they have chosen, and in which they walk, *is as light*; the *light shines on their ways* (Job xxii. 28) and makes them both safe and pleasant. Christ is *their way* and he is *the light*. They are guided by the word of God and that is *a light to their feet*; they themselves are *light in the Lord* and they *walk in the light as he is in the light*. [1.] It is a *shining light*. Their way shines to themselves in the joy and comfort of it; it shines before others in the lustre and honour of it; *it shines before men, who see their good works*, Matt. v. 16. They go on in their way with a holy security and serenity of mind, as those that *walk in the light*. It is as the morning-light, which *shines out of obscurity* (Isa. lviii. 8, 10) and puts an end to the *works of darkness*. [2.] It is a growing light; it *shines more and more*, not like the light of a meteor, which soon disappears, or that of a candle, which burns dim and burns down, but like that of the rising sun, which goes forward shining, mounts upward shining. Grace, the guide of this way, is growing; *he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger*. That joy which is the pleasure of this way, that honour which is the brightness of it, and all that happiness which is indeed its light, shall be still increasing. [3.] It will arrive, in the end, at *the perfect day*. The light of the dayspring will at length be noon-day light, and it is this that the enlightened soul is pressing towards. The saints will not be perfect till they come to heaven, but there they shall themselves *shine as the sun when he goes forth in his strength*, Matt. xiii. 43. Their graces and joys shall be all consummate. Therefore it is our wisdom to keep close to *the path of the just*.

(2.) The way of sin is as darkness, v. 19. The works he had cautioned us not to have fellowship with are *works of darkness*. What true pleasure and satisfaction can those have who know no pleasure and satisfaction but what they have in doing mischief? What sure guide have those that cast God's word behind them? *The way of the wicked is dark*, and therefore dangerous; for they stumble and yet *know not at what they stumble*. They fall into sin, but are not aware which way the temptation came by which they were overthrown, and therefore know not how to avoid it the next time. They fall into trouble, but never enquire wherefore God contends with them; they *consider not that they do evil*, nor what will be in the end of it, Ps. lxxxii. 5; Job xviii. 5, 6. This is the way we are directed to shun.

**Parental Instructions.**

**20 My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. 21 Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. 22 For they *are* life unto those that**

**find them, and health to all their flesh. 23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life. 24 Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. 25 Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. 26 Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. 27 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.**

Solomon, having warned us not to do evil, here teaches us how to do well. It is not enough for us to shun the occasions of sin, but we must study the methods of duty.

I. We must have a continual regard to the word of God and endeavour that it may be always ready to us.

1. The sayings of wisdom must be our principles by which we must govern ourselves, our monitors to warn us of duty and danger; and therefore, (1.) We must receive them readily: "*Incline thy ear to them* (v. 20); humbly bow to them; diligently listen to them." The attentive hearing of the word of God is a good sign of a work of grace begun in the heart and a good means of carrying it on. It is to be hoped that those are resolved to do their duty who are inclined to know it. (2.) We must retain them carefully (v. 21); we must lay them before us as our rule: "*Let them not depart from thy eyes*; view them, review them, and in every thing aim to conform to them." We must lodge them within us, as a commanding principle, the influences of which are diffused throughout the whole man: "*Keep them in the midst of thy heart*, as things dear to thee, and which thou art afraid of losing." Let the word of God be written in the heart, and that which is written there will remain.



2. The reason why we must thus make much of the words of wisdom is because they will be both food and physic to us, like *the tree of life*, Rev. xxii. 2; Ezek. xlvii. 12. Those that seek and find them, find and keep them, shall find in them, (1.) Food: *For they are life unto those that find them*, v. 22. As the spiritual life was begun by the word as the instrument of it, so by the same word it is still nourished and maintained. We could not live without it; we may by faith live upon it. (2.) Physic. They are *health to all their flesh*, to the whole man, both body and soul; they help to keep both in good plight. They are *health to all flesh*, so the LXX. There is enough to cure all the diseases of this distempered world. They are *a medicine to all their flesh* (so the word is), to all their corruptions, for they are called flesh, to all their grievances, which are as thorns in the flesh. There is in the word of God a proper remedy for all our spiritual maladies.

II. We must keep a watchful eye and a strict hand upon all the motions of our inward man, v.

23. Here is, 1. A great duty required by the laws of wisdom, and in order to our getting and preserving wisdom: *Keep thy heart with all diligence*. God, who gave us these souls, gave us a strict charge with them: Man, woman, *keep thy heart; take heed to thy spirit*, Deut. iv. 9. We must maintain a holy jealousy of ourselves, and set a strict guard, accordingly, upon all the avenues of the soul; keep our hearts from doing hurt and getting hurt, from being defiled by sin and disturbed by trouble; keep them as our jewel, as our vineyard; keep a conscience void of offence; keep out bad thoughts; keep up good thoughts; keep the affections upon right objects and in due bounds. *Keep them with all keepings* (so the word is); there are many ways of keeping things—by care, by strength, by calling in help, and we must use them all in keeping our hearts; and all little enough, so deceitful

are they, Jer. xvii. 9. Or *above all keepings*; we must keep our hearts with more care and diligence than we keep any thing else. We must keep our eyes (Job xxxi. 1), keep our tongues (Ps. xxxiv.

13), keep our feet (Eccl. v. 1), but, above all, keep our hearts. 2. A good reason given for this care, because *out of it are the issues of life*. Out of a heart well kept will flow living issues, good products, to the glory of God and the edification of others. Or, in general, all the actions of the life flow

from the heart, and therefore keeping that is making the tree good and healing the springs. Our lives will be regular or irregular, comfortable or uncomfortable, according as our hearts are kept or neglected.

III. We must set a *watch before the door of our lips*, that we offend not with out tongue (v.

24): *Put away from thee a froward mouth and perverse lips*. Our hearts being naturally corrupt, out of them a great deal of corrupt communication is apt to come, and therefore we must conceive a great dread and detestation of all manner of evil words, cursing, swearing, lying, slandering, brawling, filthiness, and foolish talking, all which come from a *froward mouth and perverse lips*, that will not be governed either by reason or religion, but contradict both, and which are as unsightly and ill-favoured before God as a crooked distorted mouth drawn awry is before men. All manner of tongue sins, we must, by constant watchfulness and stedfast resolution, *put from us*, *put far from us*, abstaining from all words that have an appearance of evil and fearing to learn any such words.

IV. We must make a covenant with our eyes: "Let them *look right on and straight before thee*,

v. 24. Let the eye be fixed and not wandering; let it not rove after every thing that presents itself, for then it will be diverted from good and ensnared in evil. Turn it from beholding vanity; let thy eye be single and not divided; let thy intentions be sincere and uniform, and look not asquint at any by-end." We must keep our eye upon our Master, and be careful to approve ourselves to him; keep our eye upon our rule, and conform to that; keep our eye upon our mark, the *prize of the high calling*, and direct all towards that. *Oculum in metam—The eye upon the goal*.

V. We must act considerately in all we do (v. 26): *Ponder the path of thy feet, weigh it* (so the word is); "put the word of God in one scale, and what thou hast done, or art about to do, in the other, and see how they agree; be nice and critical in examining whether thy way be good before the Lord and whether it will end well." We must consider our past ways and examine what we have done, and our present ways, what we are doing, whither we are going, and *see that we walk circumspectly*. It concerns us to consider

what are the duties and what the difficulties, what are the advantages and what the dangers, of our way, that we may act accordingly. "Do nothing rashly."

VI. We must act with steadiness, caution, and consistency: "*Let all thy ways be established* (v.

26) and be not unstable in them, as the double-minded man is; halt not between two, but go on in an even uniform course of obedience; *turn not to the right hand not to the left*, for there are errors on both hands, and Satan gains his point if he prevails to draw us aside either way. Be very careful to *remove thy foot from evil*; take heed of extremes, for in them there is evil, and *let thy eyes look right on*, that thou mayest keep the golden mean." Those that would approve themselves wise must always be watchful.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. V.

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of ch. ii. To write the same things, in other words, ought not to be grievous, for it is safe, Phil. iii. 1. Here is, I. An exhortation to get acquaintance with and submit to the laws of wisdom in general, ver. 2. II. A particular caution against the sin of whoredom, ver. 3-14. III. Remedies prescribed against that sin. 1. Conjugal love, ver. 15-20. 2. A regard to God's omniscience, ver. 21. 3. A dread of the miserable end of wicked people, ver. 22, 23. And all little enough to arm young people against those fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Parental Instructions; Cautions against Sensuality.

**1 My son, attend unto my wisdom, *and* bow thine ear to my understanding: 2 That thou mayest regard discretion, and *that* thy lips may keep knowledge. 3 For the lips of a strange woman drop *as* an honeycomb, and her mouth *is* smoother than oil: 4 But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a**

twoedged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. 6 Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, *that* thou canst not know *them*. 7 Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. 8 Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: 9 Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: 10 Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours *be* in the house of a stranger; 11 And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, 12 And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; 13 And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! 14 I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.

Here we have,

I. A solemn preface, to introduce the caution which follows, v. 1, 2. Solomon here addresses himself to his son, that is, to all young men, as unto his children, whom he has an affection for and some influence upon. In God's name, he demands attention; for he writes by divine inspiration, and is a prophet, though he begins not with, *Thus saith the Lord*. "*Attend, and bow thy ear*; not only hear what is said, and read what is written, but apply thy mind to it and consider it diligently." To gain attention he urges, 1. The excellency of his discourse: "It is *my wisdom, my understanding*; if I undertake to teach thee wisdom I cannot prescribe any thing to be more properly called so; moral philosophy is my philosophy, and that which is to be learned in my school." 2. The usefulness of it: "Attend to what I say," (1.) "That thou mayest act wisely—*that thou mayest regard discretion*." Solomon's lectures are not designed to fill our heads with notions, with matters of nice speculation, or doubtful disputation, but to guide us in the government of ourselves, that we may act prudently, so as becomes us and so as will be for our true interest. (2.) "That thou mayest speak wisely—*that*

*thy lips may keep knowledge*, and thou mayest have it ready at thy tongue's end" (as we say), "for the benefit of those with whom thou dost converse." The priest's lips are said to *keep knowledge* (Mal. ii. 7); but those that are ready and mighty in the scriptures may not only in their devotions, but in their discourses, be spiritual priests.

II. The caution itself, and that is to abstain from fleshly lusts, from adultery, fornication, and all uncleanness. Some apply this figuratively, and by the adulterous woman here understand idolatry, or false doctrine, which tends to debauch men's minds and manners, or the sensual appetite, to which it may as fitly as any thing be applied; but the primary scope of it is plainly to warn us against seventh-commandment sins, which youth is so prone to, the temptations to which are so violent, the examples of which are so many, and which, where admitted, are so destructive to all the seeds of virtue in the soul that it is not strange that Solomon's cautions against it are so very pressing and so often repeated. Solomon here, as a faithful watchman, gives fair warning to all, as they regard their lives and comforts, to dread this sin, for it will certainly be their ruin. Two things we are here warned to take heed of:—

1. That we do not listen to the charms of this sin. It is true *the lips of a strange woman drop as a honey-comb* (v. 3); the pleasures of fleshly lust are very tempting (like the wine that *gives its colour in the cup and moves itself aright*); its mouth, the kisses of its mouth, the words of its mouth, are *smoother than oil*, that the poisonous pill may go down glibly and there may be no suspicion of harm in it. But consider, (1.) How fatal the consequences will be. What fruit will the sinner have of his honey and oil when the end will be, [1.] The terrors of conscience: *It is bitter as wormwood*,

v. 4. What was luscious in the mouth rises in the stomach and turns sour there; it cuts, in the reflection, like *a two-edged sword*; take it which way you will, it wounds. Solomon could speak by experience, Eccl. vii. 26. [2.] The torments of hell. If some that have been guilty of this sin have repented and been saved, yet the direct tendency of the sin is to destruction of body and soul; the *feet of it go down to death*, nay, they *take hold on hell*, to pull it to the sinner, as if the damnations slumbered too long, v. 4. Those that are

entangled in this sin should be reminded that there is but a step between them and hell, and that they are ready to drop into it. (2.) Consider how false the charms are. The adulteress flatters and speaks fair, her words are honey and oil, but she will deceive those that hearken to her: *Her ways are movable, that thou canst not know them*; she often changes her disguise, and puts on a great variety of false colours, because, if she be rightly known, she is certainly hated. Proteus-like, she puts on many shapes, that she may keep in with those whom she has a design upon. And what does she aim at with all this art and management? Nothing but to keep them from *pondering the path of life*, for she knows that, if they once come to do that, she shall certainly lose them. Those are *ignorant of Satan's devices* who do not understand that the great thing he drives at in all his temptations is, [1.] To keep them from choosing the path of life, to prevent them from being religious and from going to heaven, that, being himself shut out from happiness, he may keep them out from it. [2.] In order hereunto, to keep them from pondering the path of life, from considering how reasonable it is that they should walk in that path, and how much it will be for their advantage. Be it observed, to the honour of religion, that it certainly gains its

point with all those that will but allow themselves the liberty of a serious thought and will weigh things impartially in an even balance, and that the devil has no way of securing men in his interests but by diverting them with continual amusements of one kind or another from the calm and sober consideration of the *things that belong to their peace*. And uncleanness is a sin that does as much as any thing blind the understanding, sear the conscience, and keep people from pondering the path of life. Whoredom *takes away the heart*, Hos. iv. 11.

2. That we do not approach the borders of this sin, v. 7, 8.

(1.) This caution is introduced with a solemn preface: "*Hear me now therefore, O you children!*"

whoever you are that read or hear these lines, take notice of what I say, and mix faith with it, treasure it up, and *depart not from the words of my mouth*, as those will do that hearken to the words of the strange woman. Do not only receive what I say, for the present merely, but cleave to it, and let it be

ready to thee, and of force with thee, when thou art most violently assaulted by the temptation."

(2.) The caution itself is very pressing: "*Remove thy way far from her*; if thy way should happen to lie near her, and thou shouldst have a fair pretence of being led by business within the reach of her charms, yet change thy way, and alter the course of it, rather than expose thyself to danger; *come not nigh the door of her house*; go on the other side of the street, nay, go through some other street, though it be about." This intimates, [1.] That we ought to have a very great dread and detestation of the sin. We must fear it as we would a place infected with the plague; we must loathe it as the odour of carrion, that we will not come near. *Then* we are likely to preserve our purity when we conceive a rooted antipathy to all fleshly lusts. [2.] That we ought industriously to avoid every thing that may be an occasion of this sin or a step towards it. Those that would be kept from harm must keep out of harm's way. Such tinder there is in the corrupt nature that it is madness, upon any pretence whatsoever, to come near the sparks. If we thrust ourselves into temptation, we mocked God when we prayed, *Lead us not into temptation*. [3.] That we ought to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, and not to be so confident of the strength of our own resolutions as to venture upon the brink of sin, with a promise to ourselves that *hitherto we will come and no further*. [4.] That whatever has become a snare to us and an occasion of sin, though it be as a *right eye* and a *right hand*, we must *pluck it out, cut it off, and cast it from us*, must part with that which is dearest to us rather than hazard our own souls; this is our Saviour's command, Matt. v. 28-30.

(3.) The arguments which Solomon here uses to enforce this caution are taken from the same topic with those before, the many mischiefs which attend this sin. [1.] It blasts the reputation. "Thou wilt *give thy honour unto others* (v. 9); thou wilt lose it thyself; thou wilt put into the hand of each of thy neighbours a stone to throw at thee, for they will all, with good reason, cry shame on thee, will despise thee, and trample on thee, as a foolish men." Whoredom is a sin that makes men contemptible and base, and no man of sense or virtue will care to keep company with one that keeps company with harlots. [2.] It wastes the time, gives *the years*, the years of youth, the flower of men's time, *unto the cruel*, "that base lust of thine, which with the

utmost cruelty  *wars against the soul*, that base harlot which pretends an affection for thee, but really hunts for the precious life." Those years that should be given to the honour of a gracious God are spent in the service of a cruel

sin. [3.] It ruins the estate (v. 10): "*Strangers will be filled with thy wealth*, which thou art but entrusted with as a steward for thy family; and the fruit of *thy labours*, which should be provision for thy own house, will be in *the house of a stranger*; that neither has right to it nor will ever thank thee for it." [4.] It is destructive to the health, and shortens men's days: *Thy flesh and thy body will be consumed* by it, v. 11. The lusts of uncleanness not only *war against the soul*, which the sinner neglects and is in no care about, but they war against the body too, which he is so indulgent of and is in such care to please and pamper, such deceitful, such foolish, such hurtful lusts are they. Those that give themselves to work uncleanness with greediness waste their strength, throw themselves into weakness, and often have their bodies filled with loathsome distempers, by which the number of their months is cut off in the midst and they fall unpitied sacrifices to a cruel lust. [5.] It will fill the mind with horror, if ever conscience be awakened. "Though thou art merry now, *sporting thyself in thy own deceivings*, yet thou wilt certainly *mourn at the last*, v. 11. Thou art all this while making work for repentance, and laying up matter for vexation and torment in the reflection, when the sin is set before thee in its own colours." Sooner or later it will bring sorrow, either when the soul is humbled and brought to repentance or when the *flesh and body are consumed*, either by sickness, when conscience flies in the sinner's face, or by the grave; when the body is rotting there, the soul is racking in the torments of hell, where the worm dies not, and "*Son, remember*," is the constant peal. Solomon here brings in the convinced sinner reproaching himself, and aggravating his own folly. He will then most bitterly lament it. *First*, That because he hated to be reformed he therefore hated to be informed, and could not endure either to be taught his duty (*How have I hated* not only the discipline of being instructed, but the *instruction* itself, though all true and good!) or to be told of his faults—*My heart despised reproof*, v. 12. He cannot but own that those who had the charge of him, parents, ministers, had done their part; they had been his teachers; they had instructed him, had given him good counsel and fair warning (v. 13); but to his own shame and confusion does



he speak it, and therein justifies God in all the miseries that were brought upon him, he had not *obeyed their voice*, for indeed he *never inclined his ear to those that instructed him*, never minded what they said nor admitted the impressions of it. Note, Those who have had a good education and do not live up to it will have a great deal to answer for another day; and those who will not now remember what they were taught, to conform themselves to it, will be made to remember it as an aggravation of their sin, and consequently of their ruin. *Secondly*, That by the frequent acts of sin the habits of it were so rooted and confirmed that his heart was fully set in him to commit it (v.

14): *I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly*. When he came into the synagogue, or into the courts of the temple, to worship God with other Israelites, his unclean heart was full of wanton thoughts and desires and his eyes of adultery. Reverence of the place and company, and of the work that was doing, could not restrain him, but he was almost as wicked and vile there as any where. No sin will appear more frightful to an awakened conscience than the profanation of holy things; nor will any aggravation of sin render it more exceedingly sinful than the place we are honoured with in the congregation and assembly, and the advantages we enjoy thereby. Zimri and Cozbi avowed their villany *in the sight of Moses and all the congregation* (Num.

xxv. 6), and heart-adultery is as open to God, and must needs be most offensive to him, when we draw nigh to him in religious exercises. *I was in all evil* in defiance of the magistrates and judges, and their assemblies; so some understand it. Others refer it to the evil of punishment, not to the evil of sin: "I was made an example, a spectacle to the world. I was under almost all God's sore judgments *in the midst of the congregation of Israel*, set up for a mark. *I stood up and cried in the congregation*," Job xxx. 28. Let that be avoided which will be thus rued at last.

**Conjugal Fidelity Enjoined.**

**15 Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. 16 Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, *and* rivers of waters in the**

**streets. 17 Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. 18 Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. 19 *Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.* 20 And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? 21 For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. 22 His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. 23 He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.**

Solomon, having shown the great evil that there is in adultery and fornication, and all such lewd and filthy courses, here prescribes remedies against them.

I. Enjoy with satisfaction the comforts of lawful marriage, which was ordained for the prevention of uncleanness, and therefore ought to be made use of in time, lest it should not prove effectual for the cure of that which it might have prevented. Let none complain that God has dealt unkindly with them in forbidding them those pleasures which they have a natural desire of, for he has graciously provided for the regular gratification of them. "Thou mayest not indeed eat of every tree of the garden, but choose thee out one, which thou pleasest, and of that thou mayest freely eat; nature will be content with that, but lust with nothing." God, in thus confining men to one, has been so far from putting any hardship upon them that he has really consulted their true interest; for, as Mr. Herbert observes, "*If God had laid all common, certainly man would have been the encloser.*"—Church-porch. Solomon here enlarges much upon this, not only prescribing it as an antidote, but urging it as an argument against fornication, that the allowed pleasures of marriage (however wicked wits may ridicule them, who are factors for the unclean spirit) far transcend all the false forbidden pleasures of whoredom.

1. Let young men marry, marry and not burn. Have *a cistern, a well of thy own* (v. 15), even the wife *of thy youth*, v. 18. *Wholly abstain, or wed.*—Herbert. "The world is wide, and there are varieties of accomplishments, among which thou mayest please thyself."

2. Let him that is married take delight in his wife, and let him be very fond of her, not only because she is the wife that he himself has chosen and he ought to be pleased with his own choice, but because she is the wife that God in his providence appointed for him and he ought much more to be pleased with the divine appointment, pleased with her because she is his own. *Let thy fountain be blessed* (v. 18); think thyself very happy in her, look upon her as a blessed wife, let her have thy

blessing, pray daily for her, and then *rejoice with her*. Those comforts we are likely to have joy of that are sanctified to us by prayer and the blessing of God. It is not only allowed us, but commanded us, to be pleasant with our relations; and it particularly becomes yoke-fellows to rejoice together and in each other. Mutual delight is the bond of mutual fidelity. It is not only taken for granted that the *bridegroom rejoices over his bride* (Isa. lxii. 5), but given for law. Eccl. ix. 9, *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life*. Those take not their comforts where God has appointed who are jovial and merry with their companions abroad, but sour and morose with their families at home.

3. Let him be fond of his wife and love her dearly (v. 19): *Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe*, such as great men sometimes kept tame in their houses and played with. Desire no better diversion from severe study and business than the innocent and pleasant conversation of thy own wife; let her lie in thy bosom, as the poor man's ewe-lamb did in his (2 Sam. xii. 3), and do thou repose thy head in hers, and let that *satisfy thee at all times*; and seek not for pleasure in any other. "*Err thou always in her love*. If thou wilt suffer thy love to run into an excess, and wilt be dotingly fond of any body, let it be only of thy own wife, where there is least danger of exceeding." This is *drinking waters*, to quench the thirst of thy appetite, *out of thy own cistern*, and *running waters*, which are clear, and sweet, and wholesome, *out of thy own well*, v. 15. 1 Cor. vii. 2, 3.

4. Let him take delight in his children and look upon them with pleasure (v. 16, 17): "Look upon them as streams from thy own pure fountains" (the Jews are said to *come forth out of the waters of Judah*, Isa. xlviii. 1), "so that they are parts of thyself, as the streams are of the fountain. Keep to thy own wife, and thou shalt have," (1.) "A numerous offspring, like *rivers of water*, which run in abundance, and they shall be dispersed abroad, matched into other families, whereas those that *commit whoredom* shall *not increase*," Hos. iv. 10. (2.) "A peculiar offspring, which shall be *only thy own*, whereas the children of whoredom, that are fathered upon thee, are, probably, not so, but, for aught thou knowest, are the offspring of strangers, and yet thou must keep them." (3.) "A creditable offspring, which are an honour to thee, and which thou mayest send abroad, and appear with, in the

streets, whereas a spurious brood is thy disgrace, and that which thou art ashamed to own." In this matter, virtue has all the pleasure and honour in it; justly therefore it is called *wisdom*.

5. Let him then scorn the offer of forbidden pleasures when he is *always ravished with the love* of a faithful virtuous wife; let him consider what an absurdity it will be for him to be *ravished with a strange woman* (v. 20), to be in love with a filthy harlot, and *embrace the bosom of a stranger*; which, if he had any sense of honour or virtue, he would loathe the thoughts of. "Why wilt thou be so sottish, such an enemy to thyself, as to prefer puddle-water, and that poisoned too and stolen, before pure living waters out of thy own well?" Note, If the dictates of reason may be heard, the laws of virtue will be obeyed.

II. "See the eye of God always upon thee and let his fear rule in thy heart," v. 21. Those that live in this sin promise themselves secrecy (*the eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, Job xxiv.

15); but to what purpose, when it cannot be hidden from God? For, 1. He sees it. *The ways of man*, all his motions, all his actions, are *before the eyes of the Lord*, all the workings of the heart and all the outgoings of the life, that which is done ever so secretly and disguised ever so artfully. God sees it in a true light, and knows it with all its causes, circumstances, and consequences. He does not cast an eye upon men's ways now and then, but they are always actually in his view and under his inspection; and darest thou sin against God in his sight, and do that wickedness under his eye which thou durst not do in the presence of a man like thyself? 2. He will call the sinner to an account for it; for he not only sees, but *ponders all his goings*, judges concerning them, as one that will shortly judge the sinner for them. Every action is *weighed*, and shall be *brought into judgment* (Eccl. xii. 14), which is a good reason why we should *ponder the path of our feet* (ch. iv. 26), and so *judge ourselves* that we *may not be judged*.

III. "Foresee the certain ruin of those that go on still in their trespasses." Those that live in this sin promise themselves impunity, but they deceive themselves; their sin will find them out, v. 22,

23. The apostle gives the sense of these verses in a few words. Heb. xiii. 4, *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*. 1. It is a sin which men with great difficulty shake off the power of. When the sinner is old and weak his lusts are strong and active, in *calling to remembrance the days of his youth*, Ezek. xxiii. 19. Thus *his own iniquities* having *seized the wicked himself* by his own consent, and he having voluntarily surrendered himself a captive to them, he is *held in the cords of his own sins*, and such full possession they have gained of him that he cannot extricate himself, but in the *greatness of his folly* (and what greater folly could there be than to yield himself a servant to such cruel task-masters?) he shall *go astray*, and wander endlessly. Uncleanness is a sin from which, when once men have plunged themselves into it, they very hardly and very rarely recover themselves. 2. It is a sin which, if it be not forsaken, men cannot possibly escape the punishment of; it will unavoidably be their ruin. As their own iniquities do arrest them in the reproaches of conscience and present rebukes (Jer. vii. 19), so their own iniquities shall arrest them and bind them over to the judgments of God. There needs no prison, no chains; they shall be *holden in the cords of their own sins*, as the fallen angels, being incurably wicked, are thereby *reserved in chains of darkness*. The sinner, who, having been *often reproved*, *hardens his neck*, shall *die at length without instruction*. Having had general warnings sufficient given him already, he shall have no particular warnings, but he shall die without seeing his danger beforehand, shall die because he would not receive instruction, but *in the greatness of his folly* would *go astray*; and so shall his doom be, he shall never find the way home again. Those that are so foolish as to choose the way of sin are justly left of God to themselves to go in it till they come to that destruction which it leads to, which is a good reason why we should guard with watchfulness and resolution against the allurements of the sensual appetite.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. VI.

In this chapter we have, I. A caution against rash suretiship, ver. 1-5. II. A rebuke to slothfulness, ver. 6-11. III. The character and fate of a malicious mischievous man, ver. 12-15. IV. An account of seven things which God hates, ver. 16-19. V. An exhortation to make the word of God familiar to us,

ver. 20-23. VI. A repeated warning of the pernicious consequences of the sin of whoredom, ver. 24-35. We are here dissuaded from sin very much by arguments borrowed from our secular interests, for it is not only represented as damning in the other world, but as impoverishing in this.

Cautions against Suretiship.

**1 My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, *if* thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, 2 Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. 3 Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. 4 Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. 5 Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand *of the hunter*, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.**

It is the excellency of the word of God that it teaches us not only divine wisdom for another world, but human prudence for this world, that we may order our affairs with discretion; and this is one good rule, To avoid suretiship, because by it poverty and ruin are often brought into families, which take away that comfort in relations which he had recommended in the foregoing chapter. 1. We must look upon suretiship as a snare and decline it accordingly, v. 1, 2. "It is dangerous enough for a man to be bound for his friend, though it be one whose circumstances he is well acquainted with, and well assured of his sufficiency, but much more to *strike the hands with a stranger*, to become surety for one whom thou dost not know to be either able or honest." Or the stranger here with whom the hand is stricken is the creditor, "the usurer to whom thou art become bound, and yet as to thee he is a stranger, that is, thou owest him nothing, nor hast had any dealings with him. If thou hast rashly entered into such engagements, either wheedled into them or in hopes to have the same kindness done for thee another time, know that *thou art snared with the words of thy mouth*; it was easily done, with a word's speaking; it was but setting thy hand to a paper, a bond is soon sealed and delivered, and a recognizance entered into. But it will not be so easily got clear of; thou art

*in a snare* more than thou art aware of." See how little reason we have to make light of tongue-sins; if by a word of our mouth we may become indebted to men, and lie open to their actions, by the words of our mouth we may become obnoxious to God's justice, and even so may be snared. It is false that words are but wind: they are often snares. 2. If we have been drawn into this snare, it will be our wisdom by all means, with all speed, to get out of it, v. 3-5. It sleeps for the present; we hear nothing of it. The debt is not demanded; the principal says, "Never fear, we will take care of it." But still the bond is in force, interest is running on, the creditor may come

upon thee when he will and perhaps may be hasty and severe, the principal may prove either knavish or insolvent, and then thou must rob thy wife and children, and ruin thy family, to pay that which thou didst neither nor drink for. And therefore *deliver thyself*; rest not till either the creditor give up the bond or the principal give thee counter-security; when *thou art come into the hand of thy friend*, and he has advantage against thee, it is no time to threaten or give ill language (that will provoke and make ill worse), but *humble thyself*, beg and pray to be discharged, go down on thy knees to him, and give him all the fair words thou canst; engage thy friends to speak for thee; leave no stone unturned till thou hast agreed with thy adversary and compromised the matter, so that thy bond may not come against thee or thine. This is a care which may well break thy sleep, and let it do so till thou hast got through. "*Give not sleep to thy eyes* till thou hast *delivered thyself*. Strive and struggle to the utmost, and hasten with all speed, *as a roe* or a *bird* delivers herself out of this snare of *the fowler* or hunter. Delays are dangerous, and feeble efforts will not serve." See what care God, in his word, has taken to make men good husbands of their estates, and to teach them prudence in the management of them. *Godliness* has precepts, as well as promises, relating to *the life that now is*.

But how are we to understand this? We are not to think it is unlawful in any case to become surety, or bail, for another; it may be a piece of justice or charity; he that has friends may see cause in this instance to show himself friendly, and it may be no piece of imprudence. Paul became bound for Onesimus, Philem. 19. We may help a young man into business that we know to be honest and diligent, and gain him credit by passing our word for him, and so do him a great kindness without any detriment to ourselves.



But, 1. It is every man's wisdom to keep out of debt as much as may be, for it is an incumbrance upon him, entangles him in the world, puts him in danger of doing wrong or suffering wrong. The *borrower is servant to the lender*, and makes himself very much a slave to this world. Christians therefore, who are *bought with a price*, should not thus, without need, make themselves *the servants of men*, 1 Cor. vii. 23. 2. It is great folly to entangle ourselves with necessitous people, and to become bound for their debts, that are ever and anon taking up money, and lading, as we say, out of one hole into another, for it is ten to one but, some time or other, it will come upon us. A man ought never to be bound as surety for more than he is both able and willing to pay, and can afford to pay without wronging his family, in case the principal fail, for he ought to look upon it as his own debt. Ecclesiasticus viii. 13, *Be not surety above thy power, for, if thou be surety, thou must take care to pay it*. 3. It is a necessary piece of after-wit, if we have foolishly entangled ourselves, to get out of the snare as fast as we can, to lose no time, spare no pains, and stick at no submission to make ourselves safe and easy, and get our affairs into a good posture. It is better to humble ourselves for an accommodation than to ruin ourselves by our stiffness and haughtiness. *Make sure thy friend* by getting clear from thy engagements from him; for rash suretiship is as much the bane of friendship as that which is prudent is sometimes the bond of it. Let us take heed lest we any way make ourselves guilty of other men's sins against God (1 Tim. v.

22), for that is worse, and much more dangerous, than being bound for other men's debts; and, if we must be in all this care to get our debts to men forgiven, much more to get our peace made with

God. "*Humble thyself* to him; *make sure* of Christ *thy friend*, to intercede for thee; pray earnestly that thy sins may be pardoned, and thou mayest be delivered from going down to the pit, and it shall not be in vain. *Give not sleep to thy eyes nor slumber to thy eye lids*, till this be done."

Slothfulness Reproved.

**6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: 7 Which having no guide, overseer, or**

**ruler, 8 Provideth her meat in the summer, *and* gathereth her food in the harvest. 9 How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? 10 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 11 So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.**

Solomon, in these verses, addresses himself to the sluggard who loves his ease, lives in idleness, minds no business, sticks to nothing, brings nothing to pass, and in a particular manner is careless in the business of religion. Slothfulness is as sure a way to poverty, though not so short a way, as rash suretiship. He speaks here to the sluggard,

I. By way of instruction, v. 6-8. He sends him to school, for sluggards must be schooled. He is to take him to school himself, for, if the scholar will take no pains, the master must take the more; the sluggard is not willing to come to school to him (dreaming scholars will never love wakeful teachers) and therefore he has found him out another school, as low as he can desire. Observe,

1. The master he is sent to school to: *Go to the ant, to the bee*, so the LXX. Man is taught more than the beasts of the earth, and made wiser than the fowls of heaven, and yet is so degenerated that he may learn wisdom from the meanest in sects and be shamed by them. When we observe the wonderful sagacities of the inferior creatures we must not only give glory to the God of nature, who has made them thus strangely, but receive instruction to ourselves; by spiritualizing common things, we may make the things of God both easy and ready to us, and converse with them daily.

2. The application of mind that is required in order to learn of this master: *Consider her ways*. The sluggard is so because he does not consider; nor shall we ever learn to any purpose, either by the word or the works of God, unless we set ourselves to consider. Particularly, if we would imitate others in that which is good, we must consider their ways, diligently observe what they do, that we may do likewise, Phil. iii. 17.

3. The lesson that is to be learned. In general, learn wisdom, *consider, and be wise*; that is the thing we are to aim at in all our learning, not only to be knowing, but to be wise. In particular, learn to *provide meat in summer*; that is, (1.) We must prepare for hereafter, and not mind the present time only, not eat up all, and lay up nothing, but in gathering time treasure up for a spending time. Thus provident we must be in our worldly affairs, not with an anxious care, but with a prudent foresight; lay in for winter, for straits and wants that may happen, and for old age; much more in the affairs of our souls. We must provide meat and food, that which is substantial and will stand us in stead, and which we shall most need. In the enjoyment of the means of grace provide for the want of them, in life for death, in time for eternity; in the state of probation and preparation we must provide for the state of retribution. (2.) We must take pains, and labour in our business, yea, though we labour under inconveniences. Even *in summer*, when the weather is hot, the ant is busy

in *gathering food* and laying it up, and does not indulge her ease, nor take her pleasure, as the grasshopper, that sings and sports in the summer and then perishes in the winter. The ants help one another; if one have a grain of corn too big for her to carry home, her neighbours will come in to her assistance. (3.) We must improve opportunities, we must gather when it is to be had, as the ant does in summer and harvest, in the proper time. It is our wisdom to improve the season while that favours us, because that may be done then which cannot be done at all, or not so well done, at another time. *Walk while you have the light.*

4. The advantages which we have of learning this lesson above what the ant has, which will aggravate our slothfulness and neglect if we idle away our time. She has *no guides, overseers, and rulers*, but does it of herself, following the instinct of nature; the more shame for us who do not in like manner follow the dictates of our own reason and conscience, though besides them we have parents, masters, ministers, magistrates, to put us in mind of our duty, to check us for the neglect of it, to quicken us to it, to direct us in it, and to call us to an account about it. The greater helps we have for working out our salvation the more inexcusable shall we be if we neglect it.

II. By way of reproof, v. 9-11. In these verses, 1. He expostulates with the sluggard, rebuking him and reasoning with him, calling him to his work, as a master does his servant that has over-slept himself: "*How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? How long wouldst thou sleep if one would let thee alone? When wilt thou think it time to arise?*" Sluggards should be roused with a *How long?* This is applicable, (1.) To those that are slothful in the way of work and duty, in the duties of their particular calling as men or their general calling as Christians. "*How long wilt thou waste thy time, and when wilt thou be a better husband of it? How long wilt thou love thy ease, and when wilt thou learn to deny thyself, and to take pains? How long wilt thou bury thy talents, and when wilt thou begin to trade with them? How long wilt thou delay, and put off, and trifle away thy opportunities, as one regardless of hereafter; and when wilt thou stir up thyself to do what thou hast to do, which, if it be not done, will leave thee for ever undone?*"

(2.) To those that are secure in the way of sin and danger: "Hast thou not slept enough? Is it not far in the day? Does not thy Master call? Are not the Philistines upon thee? When then wilt thou arise?"

2. He exposes the frivolous excuses he makes for himself, and shows how ridiculous he makes himself. When he is roused he stretched himself, and begs, as for alms, for more *sleep*, more *slumber*; he is well in his warm bed, and cannot endure to think of rising, especially of rising to work. But, observe, he promises himself and his master that he will desire but *a little more sleep, a little more slumber*, and then he will get up and go to his business. But herein he deceives himself; the more a slothful temper is indulged the more it prevails; let him sleep awhile, and slumber awhile, and still he is in the same tune; still he asks for *a little more sleep, yet a little more*; he never thinks he has enough, and yet, when he is called, pretends he will come presently. Thus men's great work is left undone by being put off yet a little longer, *de die in diem—from day to day*; and they are cheated of all their time by being cheated of the present moments. A little more sleep proves an everlasting sleep. *Sleep on now, and take your rest.*

3. He gives him fair warning of the fatal consequences of his slothfulness, v. 11. (1.) *Poverty and want* will certainly come upon those that are slothful in their business. If men neglect their affairs, they not only will not go

forward, but they will go backward. He that leaves his concerns at sixes and sevens will soon see them go to wreck and ruin, and bring his noble to nine-pence. Spiritual poverty comes upon those that are slothful in the service of God; those will want oil, when they should use it, that provide it not in their vessels. (2.) "It will come silently and insensibly, will grow upon thee, and come step by step, *as one that travels*, but will without fail come at last." *It will leave thee as naked as if thou wert stripped by a highwayman*; so bishop Patrick. (3.) "It will come irresistibly, *like an armed man*, whom thou canst not oppose nor make thy part good against."

The Seven Abominations.

**12 A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. 13 He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; 14 Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. 15 Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. 16 These six *things* doth the Lord hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.**

Solomon here gives us,

I. The characters of one that is mischievous to man and dangerous to be dealt with. If the slothful are to be condemned, that do nothing, much more those that do ill, and contrive to do all the ill they can. It is a *naughty person* that is here spoken of, Heb. *A man of Belial*; I think it should have been so translated, because it is a term often used in scripture, and this is the explication of it. Observe,

1. How a man of Belial is here described. He is *a wicked man*, that makes a trade of doing evil, especially with his tongue, for he *walks* and works his designs *with a froward mouth* (v. 12), by lying and perverseness, and a direct opposition to God and man. He says and does every thing, (1.) Very artfully and with design. He has the subtlety of the serpent, and carries on his projects with a great deal of craft and management (v. 13), *with his eyes, with his feet, with his fingers*. He expresses his malice *when he dares not speak out* (so some), or, rather, thus he carries on his plot; those about him, whom he makes use of as the tools of his wickedness, understand the ill meaning of a wink of his eye, a stamp of his feet, the least motion of his fingers. He gives orders for evil-doing, and yet would not be thought to do so, but has ways of concealing what he does, so that he may not be suspected. He is a close man, and upon the reserve; those only shall be let into the secret that would do any thing he would have them to do. He is a cunning man, and upon the trick; he has a language by himself, which an honest man is not acquainted with, nor desires to be. (2.) Very spitefully and with ill design. It is not so much ambition or covetousness that *is in his heart*, as downright *frowardness*, malice, and ill nature. He aims not so much to enrich and advance himself as to do an ill turn to those about him. He is *continually devising one mischief* or other,

purely for mischief-sake—a man of Belial indeed, of the devil, resembling him not only in subtlety, but in malice.

2. What his doom is (v. 15): *His calamity shall come and he shall be broken*; he that devised mischief shall fall into mischief. His ruin shall come, (1.) Without warning. It shall come suddenly: *Suddenly shall he be broken*, to punish him for all the wicked arts he had to surprise people into his snares. (2.) Without relief. He shall be irreparably broken, and never able to piece again: *He shall be broken without remedy*. What relief can he expect that has disoblged all mankind? *He shall come to his end and none shall help him*, Dan. xi. 45.

II. A catalogue of those things which are in a special manner odious to God, all which are generally to be found in those men of Belial whom he had described in the foregoing verses; and the last of them (which, being the seventh, seems especially to be intended, because he says they are six, yea,

seven) is part of his character, that he *sows discord*. God hates sin; he hates every sin; he can never be reconciled to it; he hates nothing but sin. But there are some sins which he does in a special manner hate; and all those here mentioned are such as are injurious to our neighbour. It is an evidence of the good-will God bears to mankind that those sins are in a special manner provoking to him which are prejudicial to the comfort of human life and society. *Therefore* the men of Belial must expect their ruin to *come suddenly*, and *without remedy*, because their practices are such as the Lord hates and *are an abomination to him*, v. 16. Those things which God hates it is no thanks to us to hate in others, but we must hate them in ourselves. 1. Haughtiness, conceitedness of ourselves, and contempt of others—*a proud look*. There are seven things that God hates, and pride is the first, because it is at the bottom of much sin and gives rise to it. God sees the pride in the heart and hates it there; but, when it prevails to that degree that the show of men's countenance witnesses against them that they overvalue themselves and undervalue all about them, this is in a special manner hateful to him, for then pride is proud of itself and sets shame at defiance. 2. Falsehood, and fraud, and dissimulation. Next to a *proud look* nothing is more an abomination to God than *a lying tongue*; nothing more sacred than truth, nor more necessary to conversation than speaking truth. God and all good men hate and abhor lying. 3. Cruelty and blood-thirstiness. The devil was, from the beginning, a liar and a murderer (John viii. 44), and therefore, as *a lying tongue*, so *hands that shed innocent blood* are hateful to God, because they have in them the devil's image and do him service. 4. Subtlety in the contrivance of sin, wisdom to do evil, *a heart that designs* and a head that *devises wicked imaginations*, that is acquainted with the depths of Satan and knows how to carry on a covetous, envious, revengeful plot, most effectually. The more there is of craft and management in sin the more it is an abomination to God. 5. Vigour and diligence in the prosecution of sin—*feet that are swift in running to mischief*, as if they were afraid of losing time or were impatient of delay in a thing they are so greedy of. The policy and vigilance, the eagerness and industry, of sinners, in their sinful pursuits, may shame us who go about that which is good so awkwardly and so coldly. 6. False-witness bearing, which is one of the greatest mischiefs that the wicked imagination can devise, and against which there is least fence. There cannot be a greater affront to God (to whom in an oath appeal is made) nor a greater injury to our neighbour (all whose

interests in this world, even the dearest, lie open to an attack of this kind) than knowingly to give in a false testimony. There are seven things which God hates, and lying involves two of them; he hates it, and doubly hates it. 7. Making mischief between relations and neighbours, and using all wicked means possible, not only to alienate their affections one from another, but to irritate their passions one against another. The God of love and peace hates *him that sows discord among brethren*, for he delights in concord. Those that by tale-bearing and slandering, by carrying ill-natured stories, aggravating every thing that is said and done, and suggesting jealousies and evil surmises, blow the coals of contention, are but preparing for themselves a fire of the same nature.

Parental Cautions; Cautions against Impurity.

**20 My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 21 Bind them continually upon thine heart, *and* tie them about thy neck. 22 When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and *when* thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. 23 For the commandment *is* a lamp; and the law *is* light; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life: 24 To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. 25 Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. 26 For by means of a whorish woman *a man is brought* to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. 27 Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? 28 Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? 29 So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. 30 *Men* do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; 31 But *if* he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the**



**substance of his house. 32 *But* whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul. 33 A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. 34 For jealousy *is* the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. 35 He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.**

Here is, I. A general exhortation faithfully to adhere to the word of God and to take it for our guide in all our actions.

1. We must look upon the word of God both as a light (v. 23) and as a law, v. 20, 23. (1.) By its arguments it is a light, which our understandings must subscribe to; it *is a lamp* to our eyes for discovery, and so to our feet for direction. The word of God reveals to us truths of eternal certainty, and is built upon the highest reason. Scripture-light is the sure light. (2.) By its authority it is a law, which our wills must submit to. As never such a light shone out of the schools of the philosophers, so never such a law issued from the throne of any prince, so well framed, and so binding. It is such a law as is a lamp and a light, for it carries with it the evidence of its own goodness.

2. We must receive it as *our father's commandment* and *the law of our mother*; v. 20. It is God's commandment and his law. But, (1.) Our parents directed us to it, put it into our hands, trained us up in the knowledge and observance of it, its original and obligation being most sacred. We believe indeed, not for their saying, for we have tried it ourselves and find it to be of God; but we were beholden to them for recommending it to us, and see all the reason in the world to *continue in the*

*things we have learned, knowing of whom we have learned them.* (2.) The cautions, counsels, and commands which our parents gave us agree with the word of God, and therefore we must hold them fast. Children, when they are grown up, must remember *the law of a good mother*; as well as the *commandment* of a good *father*; Ecclesiasticus iii. 2. *The Lord has given the*

*father honour over the children and has confirmed the authority of the mother over the sons.*

3. We must retain the word of God and the good instructions which our parents gave us out of it. (1.) We must never cast them off, never think it a mighty achievement (as some do) to get clear of the restraints of a good education: "*Keep thy father's commandment, keep it still, and never forsake it.*" (2.) We must never lay them by, no, not for a time (v. 21): *Bind them continually*, not only *upon thy hand* (as Moses had directed, Deut. vi. 8) but *upon thy heart*. Phylacteries upon the hand were of no value at all, any further than they occasioned pious thoughts and affections in the heart. There the word must be written, there it must be hid, and laid close to the conscience. *Tie them about thy neck*, as an ornament, a bracelet, or gold chain,—*about thy throat* (so the word is); let them be a guard upon that pass; tie them about thy throat, that no forbidden fruit may be suffered to go in nor any evil word suffered to go out through the throat; and thus a great deal of sin would be prevented. Let the word of God be always ready to us, and let us feel the impressions of it, as of that which is bound upon our hearts and about our necks.

4. We must make use of the word of God and of the benefit that is designed us by it. If we bind it continually upon our hearts, (1.) It will be our guide, and we must follow its direction. "*When thou goest, it shall lead thee* (v. 22); it shall lead thee into, and lead thee in, the good and right way, shall lead thee from, and lead thee out of, every sinful dangerous path. It will say unto thee, when thou art ready to turn aside, *This is the way; walk in it*. It will be that to thee that the pillar of cloud and fire was to Israel in the wilderness. Be led by that, let it be thy rule, and then thou shalt be led by the Spirit; he will be thy monitor and support." (2.) It will be our guard, and we must put ourselves under the protection of it: "*When thou sleepest, and liest exposed to the malignant powers of darkness, it shall keep thee; thou shalt be safe, and shalt think thyself so.*" If we govern ourselves by the precepts of the word all day, and make conscience of the duty God has commanded to us, we may shelter ourselves under the promises of the word at night, and take the comfort of the deliverances God does and will command for us. (3.) It will be our companion, and we must converse with it: "*When thou awakest in the night, and knowest not how to pass away thy*

waking minutes, if thou pleasest, *it shall talk with thee*, and entertain thee with pleasant meditations in the night-watch; *when thou awakest* in the morning, and art contriving the work of the day, *it shall talk with thee* about it, and help thee to contrive for the best," Ps. i. 2. The word of God has something to say to us upon all occasions, if we would but enter into discourse with it, would ask it what it has to say, and give it the hearing. And it would contribute to our close and comfortable walking with God all day if we would begin with him in the morning and let his word be the subject of our first thoughts. *When I awake I am still with thee*; we are so if the word be still with us. (4.) It will be our life; for, as the law *is a lamp and a light* for the present, so the *reproofs of instruction are the way of life*. Those reproofs of the word which not only show us our faults, but instruct us how to do better, are

the way that leads to life, eternal life. Let not faithful reproofs therefore, which have such a direct tendency to make us happy, ever make us uneasy.

II. Here is a particular caution against the sin of uncleanness.

1. When we consider how much this iniquity abounds, how heinous it is in its own nature, of what pernicious consequence it is, and how certainly destructive to all the seeds of the spiritual life in the soul, we shall not wonder that the cautions against it are so often repeated and so largely inculcated. (1.) One great kindness God designed men, in giving them his law, was to preserve them from this sin, v. 24. "The reproofs of instruction are therefore *the way of life* to thee, because they are designed *to keep thee from the evil woman*, who will be certain death to thee, from being enticed by *the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman*, who pretends to love thee, but intends to ruin thee." Those that will be wrought upon by flattery make themselves a very easy prey to the tempter; and those who would avoid that snare must take well-instructed reproofs as great kindnesses and be thankful to those that will deal faithfully with them, Prov. xxvii. 5, 6. (2.) The greatest kindness we can do ourselves is to keep at a distance from this sin, and to look upon it with the utmost dread and detestation (v. 25): "*Lust not after her beauty*, no, not *in thy heart*, for, if thou dost, thou hast *there already committed adultery with her*. Talk not of the charms in her face, neither be thou smitten with her amorous glances; they are all snares and

nets; *let her not take thee with her eye-lids*. Her looks are arrows and fiery darts; they wound, they kill, in another sense than what lovers mean; they call it a pleasing captivity, but it is a destroying one, it is worse than Egyptian slavery."

2. Divers arguments Solomon here urges to enforce this caution against the sin of whoredom. (1.) It is a sin that impoverishes men, wastes their estates, and reduces them to beggary (v. 26): *By means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread*; many a man has been so, who has purchased the ruin of his body and soul at the expense of his wealth. The prodigal son spent his living on harlots, so that he brought himself to be fellow-commoner with the swine. And that poverty must needs lie heavily which men bring themselves into by their own folly, Job xxxi. 12.

(2.) It threatens death; it kills men: *The adulteress will hunt for the precious life*, perhaps designedly, as Delilah for Samson's, at least, eventually, the sin strikes at the life. Adultery was punished by the law of Moses as a capital crime. *The adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death*. Every one knew this. Those therefore who, for the gratifying of a base lust, would lay themselves open to the law, could be reckoned no better than self-murderers.

(3.) It brings guilt upon the conscience and debauches that. He that *touches his neighbour's wife*, with an immodest touch, cannot *be innocent*, v. 29. [1.] He is in imminent danger of adultery, as he that *takes fire in his bosom*, or *goes upon hot coals*, is in danger of being *burnt*. The way of this sin is down-hill, and those that venture upon the temptations to it hardly escape the sin itself. The fly fools away her life by playing the wanton with the flames. It is a deep pit, which it is madness to venture upon the brink of. He that keeps company with those of ill fame, that goes in with them, and touches them, cannot long preserve his innocency; he thrusts himself into temptation and so throws himself out of God's protection. [2.] He that commits adultery is in the high road to

destruction. The bold presumptuous sinner says, "I may venture upon the sin and yet escape the punishment; I shall have peace though I go on." He might as well say, I will *take fire into my bosom and not burn my clothes*, or I will *go upon hot coals and not burn my feet*. *He that goes into his*

*neighbour's wife*, however he holds himself, God will not hold him guiltless. The fire of lust kindles the fire of hell.

(4.) It ruins the reputation and entails perpetual infamy upon that. It is a much more scandalous sin than stealing is, v. 30-33. Perhaps it is not so in the account of men, at least not in our day. A thief is sent to the stocks, to the gaol, to Bridewell, to the gallows, while the vile adulterer goes unpunished, nay, with many, unblemished; he dares boast of his villanies, and they are made but a jest of. But, in the account of God and his law, adultery was much the more enormous crime; and, if God is the fountain of honour, his word must be the standard of it. [1.] As for the sin of stealing, if a man were brought to it by extreme necessity, if he stole meat for the *satisfying of his soul when he was hungry*, though that will not excuse him from guilt, yet it is such an extenuation of his crime that *men do not despise* him, do not expose him to ignominy, but pity him. Hunger will break through stone-walls, and blame will be laid upon those that brought him to poverty, or that did not relieve him. Nay, though he have not that to say in his excuse, *if he be found* stealing, and the evidence be ever so plain upon him, yet he shall only make restitution *seven-fold*. The law of Moses appointed that he who stole a sheep should restore four-fold, and an ox five-fold (Exod.

xxii. 1); accordingly David adjudged, 2 Sam. xii. 6. But we may suppose in those cases concerning which the law had not made provision the judges afterwards settled the penalties in proportion to the crimes, according to the equity of the law. Now, if he that stole an ox out of a man's field must restore five-fold, it was reasonable that he that stole a man's goods out of his house should *restore seven-fold*; for there was no law to put him to death, as with us, for burglary and robbery on the highway, and of this worst kind of theft Solomon here speaks; the greatest punishment was that a man might be forced to *give all the substance of his house* to satisfy the law and his blood was not attainted. But, [2.] Committing adultery is a more heinous crime; Job calls it so, and *an iniquity to be punished by the judge*, Job xxxi. 11. When Nathan would convict David of the evil of his adultery he did it by a parable concerning the most aggravated theft, which, in David's judgment, deserved to be punished with death (2 Sam. xii. 5), and then showed him that his sin was *more exceedingly sinful* than that. *First*, It

is a greater reproach to a man's reason, for he cannot excuse it, as a thief may, by saying that it was to satisfy his hunger, but must own that it was to gratify a brutish lust which would break the hedge of God's law, not for want, but for wantonness. Therefore *whoso commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding*, and deserves to be stigmatized as an arrant fool. *Secondly*, It is more severely punished by the law of God. A thief suffered only a pecuniary mulct, but the adulterer suffered death. The thief *steals to satisfy his soul*, but the adulterer *destroys his own soul*, and falls an unpitied sacrifice to the justice both of God and man. "Sinner, thou hast destroyed thyself." This may be applied to the spiritual and eternal death which is the consequence of sin; *he that does it* wounds his conscience, corrupts his rational power, extinguishes all the sparks of the spiritual life, and exposes himself to the wrath of God for ever, and thus *destroys his own*

*soul*. *Thirdly*, The infamy of it is indelible, v. 33. It will be *a wound* to his good name, a *dishonour* to his family, and, though the guilt of it may be done away by repentance, the *reproach* of it never will, but will stick to his memory when he is gone. David's sin in the matter of Uriah was not only a perpetual blemish upon his own character, but gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme his name too.

(5.) It exposes the adulterer to the rage of the jealous husband, whose honour he puts such an affront upon, v. 34, 35. He that touches his neighbour's wife, and is familiar with her, gives him occasion for jealousy, much more he that debauches her, which, if kept ever so secret, might then be *discovered by the waters of jealousy*, Num. v. 12. "When discovered, thou hadst better meet a bear robbed of her whelps than the injured husband, who, in the case of adultery, will be as severe an avenger of his own honour as, in the case of manslaughter, of his brother's blood. If thou art not afraid of the wrath of God, yet be afraid of the *rage of a man*. Such jealousy is; it is *strong as death* and *cruel as the grave*. In the *day of vengeance*, when the adulterer comes to be tried for his life, the prosecutor will not spare any pains or cost in the prosecution, will not relent towards thee, as he would perhaps towards one that had robbed him. He will not accept of any commutation, any composition; *he will not regard any ransom*. Though thou offer to bribe him, and *give him many gifts* to pacify him, *he will not rest content* with any thing less than the execution of the

law. Thou must be *stoned to death*. If *a man would give all the substance of his house*, it would atone for a theft (v. 31), but not for adultery; in that case it would utterly be condemned. *Stand in awe therefore, and sin not*; expose not thyself to all this misery for a moment's sordid pleasure, which will be bitterness in the end."

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. VII.

The scope of this chapter is, as of several before, to warn young men against the lusts of the flesh. Solomon remembered of what ill consequence it was to his father, perhaps found himself, and perceived his son, addicted to it, or at least had observed how many hopeful young men among his subjects had been ruined by those lusts; and therefore he thought he could never say enough to dissuade men from them, that "every one may possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of uncleanness." In this chapter we have, I. A general exhortation to get our minds principled and governed by the word of God, as a sovereign antidote against this sin, ver. 1-5. II. A particular representation of the great danger which unwary young men are in of being inveigled into this snare, ver. 6-23. III. A serious caution inferred thence, in the close, to take heed of all approaches towards this sin, ver. 24-27. We should all pray, "Lord, lead us not into this temptation."

The Word of God Recommended.

**1 My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. 2 Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. 3 Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. 4 Say unto wisdom, Thou *art* my sister; and call understanding *thy* kinswoman: 5 That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger *which* flattereth with her words.**

These verses are an introduction to his warning against fleshly lusts, much the same with that, ch. vi. 20, &c., and ending (v. 5) as that did (v. 24), *To keep thee from the strange woman*; that is it he aims at; only there he had said, *Keep thy father's commandment*, here (which comes all to one), *Keep my commandments*, for he speaks to us as unto sons. He speaks in God's name; for it is God's *commandments* that we are to *keep*, his *words*, his *law*. The word of God must be to us, 1. As that which we are most careful of. We must keep it as our treasure; we must *lay up God's* commandments with us, lay them up safely, that we may not be robbed of them by the wicked one,

v. 1. We must keep it as our life: *Keep my commandments and live* (v. 2), not only, "Keep them, and you shall live;" but, "Keep them as you would your life, as those that cannot live without them." It would be death to a good man to be deprived of the word of God, for by it he lives, and not *by bread alone*. 2. As that which we are most tender of: *Keep my law as the apple of thy eye*. A little thing offends the eye, and therefore nature has so well guarded it. We pray, with David, that God would keep us as the apple of his eye (Ps. xvii. 8), that our lives and comforts may be precious in his sight; and they shall be so (Zech. ii. 8) if we be in like manner tender of his law and afraid of the least violation of it. Those who reproach strict and circumspect walking, as needless preciseness, consider not that the law is to be kept as the apple of the eye, for indeed it is the *apple of our eye*; the law is light; the law in the heart is the eye of the soul. 3. As that which we are proud of and would be ever mindful of (v. 3): "*Bind them upon thy fingers*; let them be precious to thee; look upon them as an ornament, as a diamond-ring, as the *signet on thy right hand*; wear them continually as thy wedding-ring, the badge of thy espousals to God. Look upon the word of God as putting an honour upon thee, as an ensign of thy dignity. *Bind them on thy fingers*, that they may be constant memorandums to thee of thy duty, that thou mayest have them always in view, as that which is *graven upon the palms of thy hands*." 4. As that which we are fond of and are ever thinking of: *Write them upon the table of thy heart*, as the names of the friends we dearly love, we say, are written in our hearts. *let the word of God dwell richly in us*, and be written there where it will be always at hand to be read. Where sin was written (Jer. xvii. 1) let the word of God be written. It is the matter of a promise (Heb. viii. 10, *I will write my law in their hearts*), which makes the precept practicable and easy. 5. As that which we are



intimately acquainted and conversant with (v. 4): "*Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister, whom I dearly love and take delight in; and call understanding thy kinswoman, to whom thou art nearly allied, and for whom thou hast a pure affection; call her thy friend, whom thou courtest.*" We must make the word of God familiar to us, consult it, and consult its honour, and take a pleasure in conversing with it. 6. As that which we make use of for our defence and armour, to keep us *from the strange woman*, from sin, that flattering but destroying thing, that adulteress; particularly from the sin of uncleanness, v. 5. Let the word of God confirm

our dread of that sin and our resolutions against it; let it discover to us its fallacies and suggest to us answers to all its flatteries.

The Foolish Young Man; Enticements of the Adulteress.

**6 For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, 7 And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, 8 Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, 9 In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: 10 And, behold, there met him a woman *with* the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. 11 (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: 12 Now *is she* without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) 13 So she caught him, and kissed him, *and* with an impudent face said unto him, 14 *I have* peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows. 15 Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. 16 I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved *works*, with fine linen of Egypt. 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18 Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. 19 For the**

**goodman *is* not at home, he is gone a long journey:  
20 He hath taken a bag of money with him, *and* will  
come home at the day appointed. 21 With her much  
fair speech she caused him to yield, with the  
flattering of her lips she forced him. 22 He goeth  
after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the  
slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks;  
23 Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird  
hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it *is* for his  
life.**

Solomon here, to enforce the caution he had given against the sin of whoredom, tells a story of a young man that was ruined to all intents and purposes by the enticements of an adulterous woman. Such a story as this would serve the lewd profane poets of our age to make a play of, and the harlot with them would be a heroine; nothing would be so entertaining to the audience, nor give them so much diversion, as her arts of beguiling the young gentleman and drawing in the country squire; her conquests would be celebrated as the triumphs of wit and love, and the comedy would conclude very pleasantly; and every young man that saw it acted would covet to be so picked up. Thus *fools make a mock at sin*. But Solomon here relates it, and all wise and good men read it, as a very melancholy story. The impudence of the adulterous woman is very justly looked upon, by all that have any sparks of virtue in them, with the highest indignation, and the easiness of the young man with the tenderest compassion; and the story concludes with sad reflections, enough to make all that read and hear it afraid of the snares of fleshly lusts and careful to keep at the utmost distance from them. It is supposed to be a parable, or imagined case, but I doubt it was too true, and, which is worse, that notwithstanding the warning it gives of the fatal consequences of such wicked courses it is still too often true, and the agents for hell are still playing the same game and with similar success.

Solomon was a magistrate, and, as such, inspected the manners of his subjects, looked often through his casement, that he might see with his own

eyes, and made remarks upon those who little thought his eye was upon them, that he might know the better how to make the sword he bore a

terror to evil-doers. But here he writes as a minister, a prophet, who is by office a watchman, to give warning of the approach of the enemies, and especially where they lie in ambush, that we may not be ignorant of Satan's devices, but may know where to double our guard. This Solomon does here, where we may observe the account he gives,

I. Of the person tempted, and how he laid himself open to the temptation, and therefore must thank himself if it end in his destruction. 1. He was a *young man*, v. 7. Fleshly lusts are called *youthful lusts* (2 Tim. ii. 22), not to extenuate them as tricks of youth, and therefore excusable, but rather to aggravate them, as robbing God of the first and best of our time, and, by debauching the mind when it is tender, laying a foundation for a bad life ever after, and to intimate that young people ought in a special manner to fortify their resolutions against this sin. 2. He was a young man *void of understanding*, that went abroad into the world, not principled as he ought to have been with wisdom and the fear of God, and so ventured to sea without ballast, without pilot, cord, or compass; he knew not how to depart from evil, which is the best understanding, Job xxviii. 28. Those become an easy prey to Satan who, when they have arrived to the stature of men, have scarcely the understanding of children. 3. He kept bad company. He was a *young man among the youths*, a silly young man *among the simple* ones. If, being conscious of his own weakness, he had associated with those that were older and wiser than himself, there would have been hopes of him. Christ, at twelve years old, conversed with the doctors, to set young people an example of this. But, if those that are simple choose such for their companions as are like themselves, simple they will still be, and hardened in their simplicity. 4. He was sauntering, and had nothing to do, but *passed through the street* as one that knew not how to dispose of himself. One of the sins of filthy Sodom was *abundance of idleness*, Ezek. xvi. 49. He went in a starched stately manner, so (it is said) the word signifies. He appeared to be a nice formal fop, the top of whose accomplishments was to dress well and walk with a good air; fit game for that bird of prey to fly at. 5. He was a night-walker, that hated and scorned the business that is to be done by daylight, from which the evening calls men in to their repose; and, having

fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, he begins to move *in the twilight in the evening*, v. 9. And he chooses *the black and dark night* as fittest for his purpose, not the moonlight nights, when he might be discovered. 6. He steered his course towards the house of one that he thought would entertain him, and that he might be merry with; he went *near her corner*, *the way to her house* (v. 8), contrary to Solomon's advice (ch. v. 8), *Come not night the door of her house*. Perhaps he did not know it was the way to an infamous house, but, however, it was a way that he had no business in; and when we have nothing to do the devil will quickly find us something to do. We must take heed, not only of idle days, but of idle evenings, lest they prove inlets to temptation.

II. Of the person tempting, not a common prostitute, for she was a married wife (v. 19), and, for aught that appears, lived in reputation among her neighbours, not suspected of any such wickedness, and yet, in the *twilight of the evening*, when her husband was abroad, abominably impudent. She is here described, 1. By her dress. She had the *attire of a harlot* (v. 10), gaudy and flaunting, to set her off as a beauty; perhaps she was painted as Jezebel, and went with her neck

and breasts bare, loose, and *en deshabelle*. The purity of the heart will show itself in the modesty of the dress, which *becomes women professing godliness*. 2. By her craft and management. She is *subtle of heart*, mistress of all the arts of wheedling, and knowing how by all her caresses to serve her own base purposes. 3. By her temper and carriage. *She is loud and stubborn*, talkative and self-willed, noisy and troublesome, wilful and headstrong, all tongue, and will have her saying, right or wrong, impatient of check and control, and cannot bear to be counselled, much less reproved, by husband or parents, ministers or friends. She is a *daughter of Belial*, that will endure no yoke.

4. By her place, not her own house; she hates the confinement and employment of that; her *feet abide not there* any longer than needs must. She is all for gadding abroad, changing place and company. *Now is she without* in the country, under pretence of taking the air, now *in the streets* of the city, under pretence of seeing how the market goes. She is here, and there, and every where but where she should be. She *lies in wait at every*

*corner*, to pick up such as she can make a prey of. Virtue is a penance to those to whom home is a prison.

III. Of the temptation itself and the management of it. She met the young spark. Perhaps she knew him; however she knew by his fashions that he was such a one as she wished for; so she *caught him about* the neck and *kissed* him, contrary to all the rules of modesty (v. 13), and waited not for his compliments or courtship, but *with an impudent face* invited him not only to *her house*, but to *her bed*.

1. She courted him to sup with her (v. 14, 15): *I have peace-offerings with me*. Hereby she gives him to understand, (1.) Her prosperity, that she was compassed about with so many blessings that she had occasion to offer peace-offerings, in token of joy and thankfulness; she was before-hand in the world, so that he needed not fear having his pocket picked. (2.) Her profession of piety. She had been to-day at the temple, and was as well respected there as any that worshipped in the courts of the Lord. She had paid her vows, and, as she thought, made all even with God Almighty, and therefore might venture upon a new score of sins. Note, The external performances of religion, if they do not harden men against sin, harden them in it, and embolden carnal hearts to venture upon it, in hopes that when they come to count and discount with God he will be found as much in debt to them for their peace-offerings and their vows as they to him for their sins. But it is sad that a show of piety should become the shelter of iniquity (which really doubles the shame of it, and makes it more exceedingly sinful) and that men should baffle their consciences with those very things that should startle them. The Pharisees made long prayers, that they might the more plausibly carry on their covetous and mischievous provisions. The greatest part of the flesh of the peace-offerings was by the law returned back to the offerers, to feast upon with their friends, which (if they were peace-offerings of thanksgiving) was to be all eaten *the same day* and *none of it left until the morning*, Lev. vii. 15. This law of charity and generosity is abused to be a colour for gluttony and excess: "Come," says she, "come home with me, for I have good cheer enough, and only want good company to help me off with it." It was a pity that the peace-offerings should thus become, in a bad sense, sin-offerings, and that what was

designed for the honour of God should become the food and fuel of a base lust. But this is not all. (4.) To strengthen the temptation, [1.]

She pretends to have a very great affection for him above any man: "*Therefore*, because I have a good supper upon the table, *I came forth to meet thee*, for no friend in the world shall be so welcome to it as thou shalt, v. 15. Thou art he whom I came on purpose to seek, to *seek diligently*, came myself, and would not send a servant." Surely he cannot deny her his company when she put such a value upon it, and would take all this pains to obtain the favour of it. Sinners take pains to do mischief, and are as the roaring lion himself; they *go about seeking to devour*, and yet pretend they are seeking to oblige. [2.] She would have it thought that Providence itself countenanced her choice of him for her companion; for how quickly had she found him whom she sought!

2. She courted him to lie with her. They will sit down to eat and drink, and then rise up to play, to play the wanton, and there is a bed ready for them, where he shall find that which will be in all respects agreeable to him. To please his eye, it is *decked with coverings of tapestry and carved works*, exquisitely fine; he never saw the like. To please his touch, the sheets are not of home-spun cloth; they are far-fetched and dear bought; they are of *fine linen of Egypt*, v. 16. To gratify his smell, it is *perfumed* with the sweetest scents, v. 17. Come, therefore, and *let us take our fill of love*,

v. 18. Of *love*, does she say? Of *lust* she means, brutish lust; but it is a pity that the name of love should be thus abused. True love is from heaven; this is from hell. How can those pretend to solace themselves and love one another who are really ruining themselves and one another?

3. She anticipated the objection which he might make of the danger of it. Is she not another man's wife, and what if her husband should catch them in adultery, in the very act? he will make them pay dearly for their sport, and where will the solace of their love be then? "Never fear," says she, "*the good man is not at home*" (v. 19); she does not call him her *husband*, for she *forsakes the guide of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God*; but "*the good man of the house, whom I am weary of.*" Thus Potiphar's wife, when she spoke of her husband, would not call him so, but *he*, Gen. xxxix. 14. It is therefore with good reason taken notice of, to Sarah's praise, that

she spoke respectfully of her husband, calling him *lord*. She pleases herself with this that he is not at home, and therefore she is melancholy if she have not some company, and therefore whatever company she has she may be free with them, for she is from under his eye, and he shall never know. But will he not return quickly? No: "he has *gone a long journey*, and cannot return on a sudden; he *appointed the day* of his return, and he never comes home sooner than he says he will. *He has taken a bag of money with him*, either," (1.) "To trade with, to buy goods with and he will not return till he has laid it all out. It is a pity that an honest industrious man should be thus abused, and advantage taken of his absence, when it is upon business, for the good of his family." Or, (2.) "To spend and revel with." Whether justly or not, she insinuates that he was a bad husband; so she would represent him, because she was resolved to be a bad wife, and must have that for an excuse; it is often groundlessly suggested, but is never a sufficient excuse. "He follows his pleasures, and wastes his estate abroad" (says she), "and why should not I do the same at home?"

IV. Of the success of the temptation. Promising the young man every thing that was pleasant, and impunity in the enjoyment, she gained her point, v. 21. It should seem, the youth, though very simple, had no ill design, else a word, a beck, a wink, would have served, and there would have

been no need of all this harangue; but though he did not intend any such thing, nay, had something in his conscience that opposed it, yet *with her much fair speech she caused him to yield*. His corruptions at length triumphed over his convictions, and his resolutions were not strong enough to hold out against such artful attacks as these, but *with the flattery of her lips she forced him*; he could not stop his ear against such a charmer, but surrendered himself her captive. Wisdom's maidens, who plead her cause, and have reason on their side, and true and divine pleasures to invite men to, have a deaf ear turned to them, and with all their rhetoric cannot compel men to come in, but such is the dominion of sin in the hearts of men that its allurements soon prevail by falsehood and flattery. With what pity does Solomon here look upon this foolish young man, when he sees him follow the adulterous woman! (1.) He gives him up for gone; alas! he is undone. he goes to the slaughter (for houses of uncleanness are slaughter-houses to precious souls); a dart will presently *strike through his liver*; going without

his breast-plate, he will receive his death's wound, v. 23. It is his life, his precious life, that is thus irrecoverably thrown away, he is perfectly lost to all good; his conscience is debauched; a door is opened to all other vices, and this will certainly end in his endless damnation. (2.) That which makes his case the more piteous is that he is not himself aware of his misery and danger; he goes blindfold, nay, he goes laughing to his ruin. The ox thinks he is led to the pasture when he is led to the slaughter; *the fool* (that is, the drunkard, for, of all sinners, drunkards are the greatest fools) is led *to the correction of the stocks*, and is not sensible of the shame of it, but goes to it as if he were going to a play. The *bird* that *hastes to the snare* looks only at the bait, and promises herself a good bit from that, and considers not that *it is for her life*. Thus this unthinking unwary young man dreams of nothing but the pleasures he shall have in the embraces of the harlot, while really he is running headlong upon his ruin. Though Solomon does not here tell us that he put the law in execution against this base harlot, yet we have no reason to think but that he did, he was himself so affected with the mischief she did and had such an indignation at it.

#### The Seduction of a Youth.

**24 Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. 25 Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. 26 For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong *men* have been slain by her. 27 Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.**

We have here the application of the foregoing story: "*Hearken to me therefore*, and not to such seducers (v. 24); give ear to a father, and not to an enemy." 1. "Take good counsel when it is given you. *Let not thy heart decline to her ways* (v. 25); never leave the paths of virtue, though strait and narrow, solitary and up-hill, for the way of the adulteress, though green, and broad, and crowded with company. Do not only keep thy feet from those ways, but let not so much as thy heart incline to them; never harbour a disposition this way, nor think otherwise than with abhorrence of such wicked practices as these. Let reason, and conscience, and the fear of God



ruling in the heart, check the inclinations of the sensual appetite. If thou goest in her paths, in any of the paths that lead to this sin, thou goest astray, thou art out of the right way, the safe way; therefore take heed, *go not astray*, lest thou wander endlessly." 2. "Take fair warning when it is given you." (1.) "Look back,

and see what mischief this sin has done. The adulteress has been the ruin not of here and there one, but she has *cast down many wounded*." Thousands have been undone, now and for ever, by this sin; and those not only the weak and simple youths, such as he was of whom he had now spoken, but *many strong men have been slain by her*, v. 26. Herein, perhaps, he has an eye especially to Samson, who was slain by this sin, and perhaps to David too, who by this sin entailed a sword upon his house, though so far the Lord took it away that he himself should not die. These were men not only of great bodily strength, but of eminent wisdom and courage, and yet their fleshly lusts prevailed over them. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be shaken. Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*. (2.) "Look forward with an eye of faith, and see what will be in the end of it," v. 27. Her house, though richly decked and furnished, and called a *house of pleasure*, is the *way to hell*; and her chambers are the stair-case that goes down to the *chambers of death* and everlasting darkness. The cup of fornication must shortly be exchanged for the cup of trembling; and the flames of lust, if not quenched by repentance and mortification, will burn to the lowest hell. Therefore *stand in awe and sin not*.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. VIII.

The word of God is two-fold, and, in both senses, is wisdom; for a word without wisdom is of little value, and wisdom without a word is of little use. Now, I. Divine revelation is the word and wisdom of God, and that pure religion and undefiled which is built upon it; and of that Solomon here speaks, recommending it to us as faithful, and well worthy of all acceptation, ver. 1-21. God, by it, instructs, and governs, and blesses, the children of men. II. The redeemer is the eternal Word and wisdom, the Logos. He is the Wisdom that speaks to the children of men in the former

part of the chapter. All divine revelation passes through his hand, and centres in him; but of him as the personal Wisdom, the second person in the Godhead, in the judgment of many of the ancients, Solomon here speaks, ver. 22-31. He concludes with a repeated charge to the children of men diligently to attend to the voice of God in his word, ver. 32-36.

The Invitation of Wisdom.

**1 Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? 2 She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. 3 She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. 4 Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice *is* to the sons of man. 5 O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. 6 Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips *shall be* right things. 7 For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness *is* an abomination to my lips. 8 All the words of my mouth *are* in righteousness; *there is* nothing froward or perverse in them.**

**9 They *are* all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. 10 Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. 11 For wisdom *is* better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.**

The will of God revealed to us for our salvation is here largely represented to us as easy to be known and understood, that none may have an excuse for their ignorance or error, and as worthy to be embraced, that none may have an excuse for their carelessness and unbelief.

I. The things revealed are easy to be known, for they *belong to us and to our children* (Deut.

xxix. 29), and we need not soar up to heaven, or dive into the depths, to get the knowledge of them (Deut. xxx. 11), for they are published and proclaimed in some measure by the works of the creation (Ps. xix. 1), more fully by the consciences of men and the eternal reasons and rules of good and evil, but most clearly by Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. The precepts of wisdom may easily be known; for, 1. They are proclaimed aloud (v. 1): *Does not Wisdom cry?* Yes, she cries aloud, and does not spare (Isa. lviii. 1); she *puts forth her voice*, as one in earnest and desirous to be heard. *Jesus stood and cried*, John vii. 37. The curses and blessings were read with a loud voice by the Levites, Deut. xxvii. 14. And men's own hearts sometimes speak aloud to them; there are clamours of conscience, as well as whispers. 2. They are proclaimed from on high (v. 2): *She stands in the top of high places*; it was from the top of Mount Sinai that the law was given, and Christ expounded it in a sermon upon the mount. Nay, if we slight divine revelation, we *turn away from him that speaks from heaven*, a high place indeed, Heb. xii. 25. The adulterous woman spoke in secret, the oracles of the heathen muttered, but Wisdom speaks openly; truth seeks no corners, but gladly appeals to the light. 3. They are proclaimed *in the places of concourse*, where multitudes are gathered together, the more the better. Jesus spoke *in the synagogues and in the temple, whither the Jews always resorted*, John xviii. 20. Every man that passes by on the road, of what rank or condition soever, may know what is good, and what the Lord requires of him, if it be not his own fault. There is no speech nor language where Wisdom's voice is not heard; her discoveries and directions are given to all promiscuously. *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*. 4. They are proclaimed where they are most needed. They are intended for the guide of our way, and therefore are published *in the places of the paths*, where many ways meet, that travellers may be shown, if they will but ask, which is the right way, just then when they are at a loss; thou shalt then *hear the word behind thee, saying, This is the way*, Isa. xxx. 21. The foolish man *known not how to go to the city* (Eccl. x. 15), and therefore Wisdom stands ready to direct him, stands *at the gates, at the entry of the city*, ready to tell him where the seer's house is, 1 Sam. ix. 18. Nay, she follows men to their own houses, and cries to them *at the coming in at the doors*, saying, *Peace be to this house; and, if the son of peace be there*, it shall certainly abide upon it. God's ministers are appointed to testify to people both publicly and from house to house. Their own consciences follow them with admonitions

wherever they go, which they cannot be out of the hearing of while they carry their own heads and hearts about with them, which are a law unto themselves. 5. They are directed to the children of men. We attend to that discourse in which we hear ourselves named, though otherwise we should have neglected it; therefore Wisdom speaks to us: "*Unto you, O men! I call* (v. 4), not

to angels (they need not these instructions), not to devils (they are past them), not to the brute-creatures (they are not capable of them), but *to you, O men!* who are taught more than the beasts of the earth and made wiser than the fowls of heaven. To you is this law given, to you is the word of this invitation, this exhortation sent. *My voice is to the sons of men*, who are concerned to receive instruction, and to whom, one would think, it should be very welcome. It is not, to you, O Jews! only, that Wisdom cries, nor to you, O gentlemen! not to you, O scholars! but *to you, O men! O sons of men!* even the meanest." 6. They are designed to make them wise (v. 5); they are calculated not only for men that are capable of wisdom, but for sinful men, fallen men, foolish men, that need it, and are undone without it: "*O you simple ones! understand wisdom.* Though you are ever so simple, Wisdom will take you for her scholars, and not only so, but, if you will be ruled by her, will undertake to give you *an understanding heart.*" When sinners leave their sins, and become truly religious, then the *simple understand wisdom.*

II. The things revealed are worthy to be known, well worthy of all acceptation. We are concerned to hear; for, 1. They are of inestimable value. They are *excellent things* (v. 6), *princely things*, so the word is. Though they are level to the capacity of the meanest, yet there is that in them which will be entertainment for the greatest. They are divine and heavenly things, so excellent that, in comparison with them, all other learning is but children's play. Things which relate to an eternal God, an immortal soul, and an everlasting state, must needs be *excellent things*. 2. They are of incontestable equity, and carry along with them the evidence of their own goodness. They are *right things* (v. 6), *all in righteousness* (v. 8), and *nothing froward or perverse in them*. All the dictates and directions of revealed religion are consonant to, and perfective of, the light and law of nature, and there is nothing in them that puts any hardship upon us, that lays

us under any undue restraints, unbecoming the dignity and liberty of the human nature, nothing that we have reason to complain of. *All God's precepts concerning all things are right*. 3. They are of unquestionable truth. Wisdom's doctrines, upon which her laws are founded, are such as we may venture our immortal souls upon: *My mouth shall speak truth* (v. 7), the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, for it is a testimony to the world. Every word of God is true; there are not so much as pious frauds in it, nor are we imposed upon in that which is told us for our good. Christ is a faithful witness, is the truth itself; *wickedness* (that is, lying) *is an abomination to his lips*. Note, Lying is wickedness, and we should not only refrain from it, but it should be an abomination to us, and as far from what we say as from what God says to us. His word to us is *yea, and amen*; never then let ours be *yea and nay*. 4. They are wonderfully acceptable and agreeable to those who take them aright, who understand themselves aright, who have not their judgments blinded and biassed by the world and the flesh, are not under the power of prejudice, are taught of God, and whose understanding he has opened, who impartially *seek knowledge*, take pains for it, and have found it in the enquiries they have hitherto made. To them, (1.) They are all *plain*, and not hard to be understood. If the book is sealed, it is to those who are willingly ignorant. *If our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost*; but to those who *depart from evil*, which is *understanding*, who have that *good understanding* which those have who *do the commandments*, to them *they are all plain* and there is nothing difficult in them. The

way of religion is a highway, and *the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein*, Isa. xxxv.

8. Those therefore do a great wrong to the common people who deny them the use of the scripture under pretence that they cannot understand it, whereas it is plain for plain people. (2.) They are all *right*, and not hard to be submitted to. Those who discern things that differ, who know good and evil, readily subscribe to the rectitude of all Wisdom's dictates, and therefore, with out murmuring or disputing, govern themselves by them.

III. From all this he infers that the right knowledge of those things, such as transforms us into the image of them, is to be preferred before all the wealth

of this world (v. 10, 11): *Receive my instruction, and not silver*. Instruction must not only be heard, but received. We must bid it welcome, receive the impressions of it, and submit to the command of it; and this *rather than choice gold*, that is, 1. We must prefer religion before riches, and look upon it that, if we have the knowledge and fear of God in our hearts, we are really more happy and better provided for every condition of life than if we had ever so much silver and gold. *Wisdom is* in itself, and therefore must be in our account, *better than rubies*. It will bring us in a better price, be to us a better portion; show it forth, and it will be a better ornament than jewels and precious stones of the greatest value. Whatever we can sit down and wish for of the wealth of this world would, if we had it, be unworthy to be compared with the advantages that attend serious godliness. 2. We must be dead to the wealth of this world, that we may the more closely and earnestly apply ourselves to the business of religion. We must receive instruction as the main matter, and then be indifferent whether we receive silver or no; nay, we must not receive it as our portion and reward, as the rich man in his life-time *received his good things*.

The Advantages of Wisdom.

**12 I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. 13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. 14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I *am* understanding; I have strength. 15 By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. 16 By me princes rule, and nobles, *even* all the judges of the earth. 17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. 18 Riches and honour *are* with me; *yea*, durable riches and righteousness. 19 My fruit *is* better than gold, *yea*, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. 20 I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: 21 That I may cause**

**those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.**

Wisdom here is Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*; it is Christ in the word and Christ in the heart, not only Christ revealed to us, but Christ revealed in us. It is the word of God, the whole compass of divine revelation; it is God the Word, in whom all divine revelation centres; it is the soul formed by the word; it is Christ formed in the soul; it is religion in the purity and power of it. Glorious things are here spoken of this excellent person, this excellent thing.

I. Divine wisdom gives men good heads (v. 12): *I Wisdom dwell with prudence*, not with carnal policy (the wisdom that is from above is contrary to that, 2 Cor. i. 12), but with true discretion,

which serves for the right ordering of the conversation, that wisdom of the prudent which is to *understand his way* and is in all cases *profitable to direct*, the wisdom of the serpent, not only to guard from harm, but to guide in doing good. *Wisdom dwells with prudence*; for prudence is the product of religion and an ornament to religion; and there are more *witty inventions* found out with the help of the scripture, both for the right understanding of God's providences and for the effectual countermining of Satan's devices and the doing of good in our generation, than were ever discovered by the learning of the philosophers or the politics of statesmen. We may apply it to Christ himself; he *dwells with prudence*, for his whole undertaking is the *wisdom of God in a mystery*, and in it God *abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence*. Christ *found out the knowledge of that great invention*, and a costly one it was to him, man's salvation, by his satisfaction, an admirable expedient. We had found out many inventions for our ruin; he found out one for our recovery. The covenant of grace is so well ordered in all things that we must conclude that he who ordered it *dwelt with prudence*.

II. It gives men good hearts, v. 13. True religion, consisting in *the fear of the Lord*, which is the wisdom before recommended, teaches men, 1. To hate all sin, as displeasing to God and destructive to the soul: *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, the evil way*, to hate sin as sin, and therefore to *hate every false way*. Wherever there is an awe of God there is a dread of sin, as

an evil, as only evil. 2. Particularly to hate pride and passion, those two common and dangerous sins. Conceitedness of ourselves, *pride and arrogancy*, are sins which Christ hates, and so do all those who have the Spirit of Christ; every one hates them in others, but we must hate them in ourselves. *The froward mouth*, peevishness towards others, God hates, because it is such an enemy to the peace of mankind, and therefore we should hate it. Be it spoken to the honour of religion that, however it is unjustly accused, it is so far from making men conceited and sour that there is nothing more directly contrary to it than pride and passion, nor which it teaches us more to detest.

III. It has a great influence upon public affairs and the well-governing of all societies, v. 14. Christ, as God, has strength and wisdom; wisdom and might are his; as Redeemer, he is *the wisdom of God and the power of God*. To all that are his he is made of God both *strength* and *wisdom*; in him they are laid up for us, that we may both know and do our duty. He is the wonderful counsellor and gives that grace which alone is *sound wisdom*. He is *understanding* itself, and *has strength* for all those that strengthen themselves in him. True religion gives men the best counsel in all difficult cases, and helps to make their way plain. Wherever it is, it is *understanding*, it has *strength*; it will be all that to us that we need, both for services and sufferings. Where the word of God dwells richly it makes a man *perfect* and *furnishes him thoroughly for every good word and work*. Kings, princes, and judges, have of all men most need of wisdom and strength, of counsel and courage, for the faithful discharge of the trusts reposed in them, and that they may be blessings to the people over whom they are set. And therefore Wisdom says, *By me kings reign* (v. 15, 16), that is, 1. Civil government is a divine institution, and those that are entrusted with the administration of it have their commission from Christ; it is a branch of his kingly office that *by him kings reign*; from him to whom all judgment is committed their power is derived. They reign by him, and therefore ought

to reign for him. 2. Whatever qualifications for government any kings or princes have they are indebted to the grace of Christ for them; he gives them the spirit of government, and they have nothing, no skill, no principles of justice, but what he endues them with. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king*; and kings are to their subjects what he makes them. 3. Religion is



very much the strength and support of the civil government; it teaches subjects their duty, and so *by it kings reign* over them the more easily; it teaches kings their duty, and so *by it kings reign* as they ought; they *decree justice*, while they *rule in the fear of God*. Those rule well whom religion rules.

IV. It will make all those happy, truly happy, that receive and embrace it.

1. They shall be happy in the love of Christ; for he it is that says, *I love those that love me*, v.

17. Those that *love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity* shall be beloved of him with a peculiar distinguishing love: he will *love them and manifest himself to them*.

2. They shall be happy in the success of their enquiries after him: "*Those that seek me early*, seek an acquaintance with me and an interest in me, seek me *early*, that is, seek me earnestly, seek me first before any thing else, that begin betimes in the days of their youth to seek me, they shall find what they seek." Christ shall be theirs, and they shall be his. He never said, *Seek in vain*.

3. They shall be happy in the wealth of the world, or in that which is infinitely better. (1.) They shall have as much riches and honour as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them (v. 18); they are *with Christ*, that is, he has them to give, and whether he will see fit to give them to us must be referred to him. Religion sometimes helps to make people rich and great in this world, gains them a reputation, and so increases their estates; and the riches which Wisdom gives to her favourites have these two advantages:— [1.] That they are *riches and righteousness*, riches honestly got, not by fraud and oppression, but in regular ways, and riches charitably used, for alms are called *righteousness*. Those that have their wealth from God's blessing on their industry, and that have a heart to do good with it, have *riches and righteousness*. [2.] That therefore they are *durable riches*. Wealth gotten by vanity will soon be diminished, but that which is well got will wear well and will be left to the children's children, and that which is well spent in works of piety and charity is put out to the best interest and so will be durable; for the friends made by *the mammon of unrighteousness when we*

*fail will receive us into everlasting habitations*, Luke xvi. 9. It will be found after many days, for the days of eternity. (2.) They shall have that which is infinitely better, if they have not riches and honour in this world (v. 19): "*My fruit is better than gold*, and will turn to a better account, will be of more value in less compass, *and my revenue better than the choicest silver*, will serve a better trade." We may assure ourselves that not only Wisdom's products at last, but her income in the mean time, not only her fruit, but her revenue, is more valuable than the best either of the possessions or of the reversions of this world.

4. They shall be happy in the grace of God now; that shall be their guide in the good way, v.

20. This is that fruit of wisdom which is *better than gold, than fine gold*, it *leads us in the way of righteousness*, shows us that way and goes before us in it, the way that God would have us walk in and which will certainly bring us to our desired end. It leads *in the midst of the paths of judgment*, and saves us from deviating on either hand. *In medio virtus—Virtue lies in the midst*. Christ by his

Spirit guides believers into all truth, and so *leads them in the way of righteousness*, and they *walk after the Spirit*.

5. They shall be happy in the glory of God hereafter, v. 21. *Therefore Wisdom leads in the paths of righteousness*, not only that she may keep her friends in the way of duty and obedience, but that she may *cause them to inherit substance* and may *fill their treasures*, which cannot be done with the things of this world, nor with any thing less than God and heaven. The happiness of those that love God, and devote themselves to his service, is substantial and satisfactory. (1.) It is substantial; it is substance itself. It is a happiness which will subsist of itself, and stand alone, without the accidental supports of outward conveniences. Spiritual and eternal things are the only real and substantial things. Joy in God is substantial joy, solid and well-grounded. The promises are their bonds, Christ is their surety, and both substantial. They *inherit substance*; that is, their inheritance hereafter is substantial; it is a weight of glory; it is substance, Heb. x. 34. All their happiness they have as heirs; it is grounded upon their sonship. (2.) It is satisfying; it will not only fill their hands, but *fill their treasures*, not only

maintain them, but make them rich. The things of this world may fill men's bellies (Ps. xvii. 14), but not their treasures, for they cannot in them secure to themselves *goods for many years*; perhaps they may be deprived of them *this night*. But let the treasures of the soul be ever so capacious there is enough in God, and Christ, and heaven, to fill them. In Wisdom's promises believers have goods laid up, not for days and years, but for eternity; her fruit therefore *is better than gold*.

Wisdom Eternal and Divine.

**22 The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. 23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. 24 When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: 26 While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. 27 When he prepared the heavens, I *was* there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: 28 When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: 29 When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: 30 Then I was by him, *as* one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him; 31 Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights *were* with the sons of men.**

That it is an intelligent and divine person that here speaks seems very plain, and that it is not meant of a mere essential property of the divine nature, for Wisdom here has personal properties and actions; and that intelligent divine person can be no other than the Son of God himself, to whom the principal things here spoken of wisdom are attributed in other scriptures, and we

must explain scripture by itself. If Solomon himself designed only the praise of wisdom as it is an attribute of God, by which he made the world and governs it, so to recommend to men the study of that wisdom which belongs to them, yet the Spirit of God, who indited what he wrote, carried him, as David often, to such expressions as could agree to no other than the Son of God, and would lead us into

the knowledge of great things concerning him. All divine revelation is *the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him*, and here we are told who and what he is, as God, designed in the eternal counsels to be the Mediator between God and man. The best exposition of these verses we have in the first four verses of St. John's gospel. *In the beginning was the Word, &c.* Concerning the Son of God observe here,

I. His personality and distinct subsistence, one with the Father and of the same essence, and yet a person of himself, whom *the Lord possessed* (v. 22), *who was set up* (v. 23), *was brought forth* (v. 24, 25), *was by him* (v. 30), for he was *the express image of his person*, Heb. i. 3.

II. His eternity; he was begotten of the Father, for *the Lord possessed him*, as his own Son, his beloved Son, laid him in his bosom; he was *brought forth as the only-begotten of the Father*, and this *before all worlds*, which is most largely insisted upon here. The Word was eternal, and had a being before the world, before the beginning of time; and therefore it must follow that it was from eternity. *The Lord possessed him in the beginning of his way*, of his eternal counsels, for those were *before his works*. This way indeed had no beginning, for God's purposes in himself are eternal like himself, but God speaks to us in our own language. Wisdom explains herself (v. 23): *I was set up from everlasting*. The Son of God was, in the eternal counsels of God, designed and advanced to be the wisdom and power of the Father, light and life, and all in all both in the creation and in the redemption of the world. That he *was brought forth* as to his being, and *set up* as to the divine counsels concerning his office, before the world was made, is here set forth in a great variety of expressions, much the same with those by which the eternity of God himself is expressed. Ps. xc. 2, *Before the mountains were brought forth*. 1. *Before the earth was*, and that was made *in the beginning*, before man was made; therefore the second Adam

had a being before the first, for the first Adam was *made of the earth*, the second had a being *before the earth*, and therefore is *not of the earth*, John iii. 31. 2. Before the sea was (v. 24), *when there were no depths* in which the waters were gathered together, *no fountains* from which those waters might arise, none of that deep on which the Spirit of God moved for the production of the visible creation, Gen. i. 2. 3. Before the mountains were, the everlasting mountains, v. 25. Eliphaz, to convince Job of his inability to judge of the divine counsels, asks him (Job xv. 7), *Wast thou made before the hills?* No, thou wast not. But *before the hills* was the eternal Word *brought forth*. 4. Before the habitable parts of the world, which men cultivate, and reap the profits of (v. 26), *the fields* in the valleys and plains, to which the mountains are as a wall, which are *the highest part of the dust of the world*; the *first part of the dust* (so some), the atoms which compose the several parts of the world; *the chief or principal part of the dust*, so it may be read, and understood of man, who was made of the dust of the ground and is dust, but is the principal part of the dust, dust enlivened, dust refined. The eternal Word had a being before man was made, for *in him was the life of men*.

III. His agency in making the world. He not only had a being before the world, but he was present, not as a spectator, but as the architect, when the world was made. God silenced and humbled Job by asking him, "*Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who hath laid the measures thereof?*" (Job xxxviii. 4, &c.). Wast thou that eternal Word and wisdom, who was the

prime manager of that great affair? No; thou art of yesterday." But here the Son of God, referring, as it should seem, to the discourse God had with Job, declares himself to have been engaged in that which Job could not pretend to be a witness of and a worker in, the creation of the world. *By him God made the worlds*, Eph. iii. 9; Heb. i. 2; Col. i. 16. 1. When, on the first day of the creation, in the very beginning of time, God said, *Let there be light*, and with a word produced it, this eternal Wisdom was that almighty Word: Then *I was there, when he prepared the heavens*, the fountain of that light, which, whatever it is here, is there substantial. 2. He was no less active when, on the second day, he stretched out the firmament, the vast expanse, and *set that as a compass upon the face of the depth* (v. 27), surrounded it

on all sides with that canopy, that curtain. Or it may refer to the exact order and method with which God framed all the parts of the universe, as the workman marks out his work with his line and compasses. The work in nothing varied from the plan of it formed in the eternal mind. 3. He was also employed in the third day's work, when the *waters above the heavens*, were gathered together by *establishing the clouds above*, and those under the heavens by *strengthening the fountains of the deep*, which send forth those waters (v. 28), and by preserving the bounds of the sea, which is the receptacle of those waters, v. 29. This speaks much the honour of this eternal Wisdom, for by this instance God proves himself a God greatly to be feared (Jer. v.

22) that *he has placed the sand for the bound of the sea*, that the dry land might continue to appear above water, fit to be a habitation for man; and thus he has *appointed the foundation of the earth*. How able, how fit, is the Son of God to be the Saviour of the world, who was the Creator of it!

IV. The infinite complacency which the Father had in him, and he in the Father (v. 30): *I was by him, as one brought up with him*. As by an eternal generation he was brought forth of the Father, so by an eternal counsel he was brought up with him, which intimates, not only the infinite love of the Father to the Son, who is therefore called *the Son of his love* (Col. i. 13), but the mutual consciousness and good understanding that were between them concerning the work of man's redemption, which the Son was to undertake, and about which the *counsel of peace was between them both*, Zech. vi. 13. He was *alumnus patris—the Father's pupil*, as I may say, trained up from eternity for that service which in time, in the fulness of time, he was to go through with, and is therein taken under the special tuition and protection of the Father; he is *my servant whom I uphold*, Isa. xlii. 1. He did what he saw the Father do (John v. 19), pleased his Father, sought his glory, did according to the commandment he received from his Father, and all this *as one brought up with him*. He was *daily his Father's delight* (*my elect, in whom my soul delighteth*), says God, Isa. xliii.

1), and he also *rejoiced always before him*. This may be understood either, 1. Of the infinite delight which the persons of the blessed Trinity have in each other, wherein consists much of the happiness of the divine nature. Or,

2. Of the pleasure which the Father took in the operations of the Son, when he *made the world*; God saw every thing that the Son made, *and, behold, it was very good*, it pleased him, and therefore his Son was *daily*, day by day, during the six days of the creation, upon that account, *his delight*, Exod. xxxix. 43. And the Son also did himself *rejoice before him* in the beauty and harmony of the whole creation, Ps. civ. 31. Or, 3. Of the satisfaction they had in each other, with reference to the great work of man's redemption. The Father delighted in the Son, as Mediator

between him and man, was well-pleased with what he proposed (Matt. iii. 17), and *therefore* loved him because he undertook to *lay down his life for the sheep*; he put a confidence in him that he would go through his work, and not fail nor fly off. The Son also *rejoiced always before him*, delighted to do his will (Ps. xl. 8), adhered closely to his undertaking, as one that was well-satisfied in it, and, when it came to the setting to, expressed as much satisfaction in it as ever, saying, *Lo, I come, to do as in the volume of the book it is written of me*.

V. The gracious concern he had for mankind, v. 31. Wisdom *rejoiced*, not so much in the rich products of the earth, or the treasures hid in the bowels of it, as *in the habitable parts of it*, for her *delights were with the sons of men*; not only in the creation of man is it spoken with a particular air of pleasure (Gen. i. 26), *Let us make man*, but in the redemption and salvation of man. The Son of God was *ordained, before the world*, to that great work, 1 Pet. i. 20. A remnant of the sons of men were given him to be brought, through his grace, to his glory, and these were those in whom his delights were. His church was the habitable part of his earth, made habitable for him, *that the Lord God might dwell even among those* that had been rebellious; and this he rejoiced in, in the prospect of seeing his seed. Though he foresaw all the difficulties he was to meet with in his work, the services and sufferings he was to go through, yet, because it would issue in the glory of his Father and the salvation of those sons of men that were given him, he looked forward upon it with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, in which we have all the encouragement we can desire to come to him and rely upon him for all the benefits designed us by his glorious undertaking.

**Wisdom's Exhortation.**

**32 Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed *are they that* keep my ways. 33 Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. 34 Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. 35 For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. 36 But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.**

We have here the application of Wisdom's discourse; the design and tendency of it is to bring us all into an entire subjection to the laws of religion, to make us wise and good, not to fill our heads with speculations, or our tongues with disputes, but to rectify what is amiss in our hearts and lives. In order to this, here is,

I. An exhortation to hear and obey the voice of Wisdom, to attend and comply with the good instructions that the word of God gives us, and in them to discern the voice of Christ, as the sheep know the shepherd's voice.

1. We must be diligent *hearers of the word*; for how can we believe in him of whom we have not heard? "*Hearken unto me, O you children!*" v. 32. "Read the word written, sit under the word preached, bless God for both, and hear him in both speaking to you." Let children age, and what they hearken to then, it is likely, they will be so seasoned by as to be governed by all their days. Let Wisdom's children justify Wisdom by hearkening to her and show themselves to be indeed her children. We must hear Wisdom's words, (1.) Submissively, and with a willing heart (v. 33): "*Hear instruction, and refuse it not*, either as that which you need not or as that which you like not; it is

offered you as a kindness, and it is at your peril if you refuse it." Those that reject the counsel of God reject it against themselves, Luke vii. 30. "Refuse it not now, lest you should not have another offer." (2.) Constantly, and with an attentive ear. We must hear Wisdom so as to *watch daily at her gates*, as beggars to receive an alms, as clients and patients to receive advice, and to wait as servants, with humility, and patience, and ready observance, *at the*



*posts of her doors*. See here what a good house Wisdom keeps, for every day is dole-day; what a good school, for every day is lecture-day. While we have God's works before our eyes, and his word in our hand, we may be every day hearing Wisdom, and learning instruction from her. See here what a dutiful and diligent attendance is required of all Christ's disciples; they must *watch at the gates*. [1.] We must lay hold on all opportunities of getting knowledge and grace, and must get into, and keep in, a constant settled course of communion with God. [2.] We must be very humble in our attendance on divine instructions, and be glad of any place, even the meanest, so we may but be within hearing of them, as David, who would gladly be a door-keeper in the house of God. [3.] We must raise our expectations of these instructions, and hearken to them with care, and patience, and perseverance, must watch and wait, as Christ's hearers, that *hanged on him* to hear him, as the word in the original is (Luke xix. 48) and (ch. xxi. 38) *came early in the morning to hear him*.

2. We must be conscientious *doers of the work*, for we are *blessed only in our deed*. It is not enough to hearken unto Wisdom's words, but we must *keep her ways* (v. 32), do every thing that she prescribes, keep within the hedges of her ways, and not transgress them, keep in the tracks of her ways, proceed and persevere in them. "*Hear instruction and be wise*; let it be a means to make you wise in ordering your conversation." What we know is known in vain if it do not make us wise,

v. 33.

II. An assurance of happiness to all those that do hearken to Wisdom. They are blessed, v. 32, and again v. 34. Those are blessed that watch and wait at Wisdom's gates; even their attendance there is their happiness; it is the best place they can be in. Those are blessed that wait there, for they shall not be put to wait long; let them continue to knock awhile and it shall be opened to them. They are seeking Wisdom, and they shall find what they seek. But will it make them amends if they do find it? Yes (v. 35): *Whoso finds me finds life*, that is, all happiness, all that good which he needs or can desire. He finds life in that grace which is the principle of spiritual life and the pledge of eternal life. He *finds life*, for he shall *obtain favour of the Lord*, and *in his favour is life*. If the king's favour is towards a wise son, much

more the favour of the King of kings. Christ is Wisdom, and he that finds Christ, that obtains an interest in him, he *finds life*; for Christ is life to all believers. *He that has the Son of God has life*, eternal life, and he *shall obtain favour of the Lord*, who is well-pleased with all those that are in Christ; nor can we obtain God's favour, unless we find Christ and be found in him.

III. The doom passed upon all those that reject Wisdom and her proposals, v. 36. They are left to ruin themselves, and Wisdom will not hinder them, because they have set at nought all her counsel. 1. Their crime is very great; they *sin against Wisdom*, rebel against its light and laws, thwart its designs, and by their folly offend it. They *sin against Christ*; they act in contempt of his

authority, and in contradiction to all the purposes of his life and death. This is construed into hating Wisdom, hating Christ; they are his enemies, who will not have him to reign over them. What can appear worse than hating him who is the centre of all beauty and fountain of all goodness, love itself? 2. Their punishment will be very just, for they wilfully bring it upon themselves. (1.) Those that offend Christ do the greatest wrong to themselves; they *wrong their own souls*; they wound their own consciences, bring a blot and stain upon their souls, which renders them odious in the eyes of God, and unfit for communion with him; they deceive themselves, disturb themselves, destroy themselves. Sin is a wrong to the soul. (2.) Those that are at variance with Christ are in love with their own ruin: *Those that hate me love death*; they love that which will be their death, and put that from them which would be their life. Sinners die because they will die, which leaves them inexcusable, makes their condemnation the more intolerable, and will for ever justify God when he judges. *O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself*.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. IX.

Christ and sin are rivals for the soul of man, and here we are told how they both make their court to it, to have the innermost and uppermost place in it.

The design of this representation is to set before us life and death, good and evil; and there needs no more than a fair stating of the case to determine us which of those to choose, and surrender our hearts to. They are both brought in making entertainment for the soul, and inviting it to accept of the entertainment; concerning both we are told what the issue will be; and, the matter being thus laid before us, let us consider, take advice, and speak our minds. And we are therefore concerned to put a value upon our own souls, because we see there is such striving for them. I. Christ, under the name of Wisdom, invites us to accept of his entertainment, and so to enter into acquaintance and communion with him, ver. 1-6. And having foretold the different success of his invitation (ver. 7-9) he shows, in short, what he requires from us (ver. 10) and what he designs for us (ver. 11), and then leaves it to our choice what we will do, ver. 12. II. Sin, under the character of a foolish woman, courts us to accept of her entertainment, and (ver. 13-16) pretends it is very charming, ver. 17. But Solomon tells us what the reckoning will be, ver. 18. And now choose you, this day, whom you will close with.

#### The Invitation of Wisdom.

**1 Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: 2 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. 3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, 4 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 5 Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine *which* I have mingled. 6 Forsake the foolish, and live; and go**

**in the way of understanding. 7 He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked *man* getteth himself a blot. 8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. 9 Give *instruction* to a wise *man*, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just *man*,**

**and he will increase in learning. 10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. 11 For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. 12 If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but *if* thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear *it***

Wisdom is here introduced as a magnificent and munificent queen, very great and very generous; that Word of God is this Wisdom in which God makes known his goodwill towards men; God the Word is this Wisdom, to whom the Father has committed all judgment. He who, in the chapter before, showed his grandeur and glory as the Creator of the world, here shows his grace and goodness as the Redeemer of it. The word is plural, *Wisdoms*; for in Christ are hid treasures of wisdom, and in his undertaking appears the manifold wisdom of God in a mystery. Now observe here,

I. The rich provision which Wisdom has made for the reception of all those that will be her disciples. This is represented under the similitude of a sumptuous feast, whence it is probable, our Saviour borrowed those parables in which he compared the *kingdom of heaven* to a great supper, Matt. xxii. 2; Luke xiv. 16. And so it was prophesied of, Isa. xxv. 6. It is such a feast as Ahasuerus made to *show the riches of his glorious kingdom*. The grace of the gospel is thus set before us in the ordinance of the Lord's supper. To bid her guests welcome, 1. Here is a stately palace provided,

v. 1. Wisdom, not finding a house capacious enough for all her guests, has built one on purpose, and, both to strengthen it and to beautify it, she has *hewn out her seven pillars*, which make it to be very firm, and look very great. Heaven is the house which Wisdom has built to entertain all her guests that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb; that is her Father's house, where there are many mansions, and whither she has gone to prepare places for us. She has hanged the earth upon nothing, there in it we have no continuing city; but heaven is a city that has foundations, has pillars. The church is Wisdom's house, to which she invites her guests, supported by the power and promise of God, as by *seven pillars*. Probably, Solomon refers to the temple which he himself had lately built for the

service of religion, and to which he would persuade people to resort, both to worship God and to receive the instructions of Wisdom. Some reckon the schools of the prophets to be here intended. 2. Here is a splendid feast got ready (v. 2): *She has killed her beasts; she has mingled her wine*; plenty of meat and drink are provided, and all of the best. *She has killed her sacrifice* (so the word is); it is a sumptuous, but a sacred feast, a feast upon a sacrifice. Christ has offered up himself a sacrifice for us, and it is *his flesh* that is *meat indeed* and *his blood* that is *drink indeed*. The Lord's supper is a feast of reconciliation and joy upon the sacrifice of atonement. The wine is *mingled* with something richer than itself, to give it a more than ordinary spirit and flavour. *She has completely furnished her table* with all the satisfactions that a soul can desire—righteousness and grace, peace and joy, the assurances of God's love, the consolations of the Spirit, and all the pledges and earnestings of eternal life. Observe, It is all Wisdom's own doing; *she* has killed the beasts, *she* has mingled the wine, which denotes both the love of Christ, who makes the provision (he does

not leave it to others, but takes the doing of it into his own hands), and the excellency of the preparation. That must needs be exactly fitted to answer the end which Wisdom herself has the fitting up of.

II. The gracious invitation she has given, not to some particular friends, but to all in general, to come and take part of these provisions. 1. She employs her servants to carry the invitation round about in the country: *She has sent forth her maidens*, v. 3. The ministers of the gospel are commissioned and commanded to give notice of the preparations which God has made, in the everlasting covenant, for all those that are willing to come up to the terms of it; and they, with maiden purity, not corrupting themselves or the word of God, and with an exact observance of their orders, are to call upon all they meet with, even in *the highways and hedges*, to come and feast with Wisdom, for *all things are now ready*, Luke xiv. 23. 2. She herself *cries upon the highest places of the city*, as one earnestly desirous of the welfare of the children of men, and grieved to see them rejecting their own mercies for lying vanities. Our Lord Jesus was himself the publisher of his own gospel; when he had sent forth his disciples he followed them to confirm what they said; nay, it *began to be spoken by the Lord*, Heb. ii. 3. He stood, and cried, *Come unto me*. We see who invited; now let us observe,

(1.) To whom the invitation is given: *Whoso is simple and wants understanding*, v. 4. If we were to make an entertainment, of all people we should not care for, much less court, the company of such, but rather of philosophers and learned men, that we might hear their wisdom, and whose table-talk would be improving. "Have I need of madmen?" But Wisdom invites such, because what she has to give is what they most need, and it is their welfare that she consults, and aims at, in the preparation and invitation. He that is simple is invited, that he may be made wise, and he that *wants a heart* (so the word is) let him come hither, and he shall have one. Her preparations are rather physic than food, designed for the most valuable and desirable cure, that of the mind. Whosoever he be, the invitation is general, and excludes none that do not exclude themselves; though they be ever so foolish, yet, [1.] They shall be welcome. [2.] They may be helped; they shall neither be despised nor despaired of. Our Saviour came, *not to call the righteous, but sinners*, not the wise in their own eyes, who say they see (John ix. 41), but the simple, those who are sensible of their simplicity and ashamed of it, and him that is willing to *become a fool, that he may be wise*, 1 Cor.

iii. 18.

(2.) What the invitation is. [1.] We are invited to Wisdom's house: *Turn in hither*. I say *we* are, for which of us is there that must not own the character of the invited, that are *simple and want understanding*? Wisdom's doors stand open to such, and she is desirous to have some conversation with them, one word for their good, nor has she any other design upon them. [2.] We are invited to her table (v. 5): *Come, eat of my bread*, that is, taste of the true pleasures that are to be found in the knowledge and fear of God. By faith acted on the promises of the gospel, applying them to ourselves and taking the comfort of them, we feed, we feast, upon the provisions Christ has made for poor souls. What we eat and drink we make our own, we are nourished and refreshed by it, and

so are our souls by the word of God; it has that in it which is *meat and drink* to those that have understanding.

(3.) What is required of those that may have the benefit of this invitation, v. 6. [1.] They must break off from all bad company: *"Forsake the foolish,*

converse not with them, conform not to their ways, have no fellowship with the works of darkness, or with those that deal in such works." The first step towards virtue is to shun vice, and therefore to shun the vicious. *Depart from me, you evil-doers*. [2.] They must awake and arise from the dead; they must live, not in pleasure (for those that do so are dead while they live), but in the service of God; for those only that do so live indeed, live to some purpose. "Live not a mere animal-life, as brutes, but now, at length, live the life of men. *Live* and you *shall live*; live spiritually, and you shall live eternally," Eph. v. 14. [3.] They must choose the paths of Wisdom, and keep to them: "*Go in the way of understanding*; govern thyself henceforward by the rules of religion and right reason." It is not enough to forsake the foolish, but we must join ourselves with those that walk in wisdom, and walk in the same spirit and steps.

III. The instructions which Wisdom gives to the maidens she sends to invite, to the ministers and others, who in their places are endeavouring to serve her interests and designs. She tells them,

1. What their work must be, not only to tell in general what preparation is made for souls, and to give a general offer of it, but they must address themselves to particular persons, must tell them of their faults, *reprove, rebuke*, v. 7, 8. They must instruct them how to amend—*teach*, v. 9. The word of God is intended, and therefore so is the ministry of that word, *for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*.

2. What different sorts of persons they would meet with, and what course they must take with them, and what success they might expect.

(1.) They would meet with some *scorners* and *wicked men* who would mock the messengers of the Lord, and misuse them, would *laugh those to scorn* that invite them to the feast of the Lord, as they did, 2 Chron. xxx. 10, would *treat them spitefully*, Matt. xxii. 6. And, though they are not forbidden to invite those simple ones to Wisdom's house, yet they are advised not to pursue the invitation by reproofing and rebuking them. *Reprove not a scorner; cast not these pearls before swine*, Matt. vii. 6. Thus Christ said of the Pharisees, *Let them alone*, Matt. xv. 14. "Do not reprove them." [1.] "In justice to them, for those have forfeited the favour of further means who scorn the means they have had. Those that are thus *filthy, let*

*them be filthy still; those that are joined to idols, let them alone; lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*" [2.] "In prudence to yourselves; because, if you reprove them," *First*, "You lose your labour, and so get to yourselves shame for the disappointment." *Secondly*, "You exasperate them; do it ever so wisely and tenderly, if you do it faithfully, they will hate you, they will load you with reproaches, and say all the ill they can of you, and so you will get a blot; therefore you had better not meddle with them, for your reproofs will be likely to do more hurt than good."

(2.) They would meet with others, who are wise, and good, and just; thanks be to God, all are not scorers. We meet with some who are so wise for themselves, to just to themselves, as to be

willing and glad to be taught; and when we meet with such, [1.] If there be occasion, we must reprove them; for wise men are not so perfectly wise but there is that in them which needs a reproof; and we must not connive at any man's faults because we have a veneration for his wisdom, nor must a *wise man* think that his wisdom exempts him from reproof when he says or does any thing foolishly; but the more wisdom a man has the more desirous he should be to have his weaknesses shown him, because a *little folly* is a great blemish to *him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour*. [2.] With our reproofs we must *give* them *instruction*, and must *teach* them, v. 9. [3.] We may expect that our doing so will be taken as a kindness, Ps. cxli. 5. A wise man will reckon those his friends who deal faithfully with him: "Rebuke such a one, and *he will love thee* for thy plain dealing, will thank thee, and desire thee to do him the same good turn another time, if there be occasion." It is as great an instance of wisdom to take a reproof well as to give it well, [4.] Being taken well, it will do good, and answer the intention. A *wise man* will be made wiser by the reproofs and instructions that are given him; he *will increase in learning*, will grow in knowledge, and so grow in grace. None must think themselves too wise to learn, nor so good that they need not be better and therefore need not be taught. We must still press forward, and follow on to know till we come to the perfect man. *Give to a wise man* (so it is in the original), give him advice, give him reproof, give him comfort, and *he will be yet wiser; give him occasion* (so the LXX.), occasion to show his wisdom, and he will show it, and the acts of wisdom will strengthen the habits.



IV. The instructions she gives to those that are invited, which her maidens must inculcate upon them.

1. Let them know wherein true wisdom consists, and what will be their entertainment at Wisdom's table, v. 10. (1.) The heart must be principled with *the fear of God*; that is *the beginning of wisdom*. A reverence of God's majesty, and a dread of his wrath, are that fear of him which is the beginning, the first step towards true religion, whence all other instances of it take rise. This fear may, at first, have torment, but love will, by degrees, cast out the torment of it. (2.) The head must be filled with the knowledge of the things of God. *The knowledge of holy things* (the word is plural) is *understanding*, the things pertaining to the service of God (those are called *holy things*), that pertain to our own sanctification; reproof is called *that which is holy*, Matt. vii. 6. Or the knowledge which holy men have, which was taught by the holy prophets, of those things which *holy men spoke as they were moved by the holy Ghost*, this is *understanding*; it is the best and most useful understanding, will stand us in most stead and turn to the best account.

2. Let them know what will be advantages of this wisdom (v. 11): "*By me thy days shall be multiplied*. It will contribute to the health of thy body, and so *the years of thy life on earth shall be increased*, while men's folly and intemperance shorten their days. It will bring thee to heaven, and there thy days shall be multiplied *in infinitum—to infinity*, and the *years of thy life shall be increased without end*." There is no true wisdom but in the say of religion and no true life but in the end of that way.

3. Let them know what will be the consequence of their choosing or refusing this fair offer, v.

12. Here is, (1.) The happiness of those that embrace it: "*If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for*

*thyself*; thou wilt be the gainer by it, not Wisdom." A man cannot be profitable to God. It is to our own good that we are thus courted. "Thou wilt not leave the gain to others" (as we do our worldly wealth when we die, which is therefore called *another man's*, Luke xvi. 12), "but thou shalt carry it with thee into another world." Those that are wise for their souls are wise

for themselves, for the soul is the man; nor do any consult their own true interest but those that are truly religious. This recommends us to God, and recovers us from that which is our folly and degeneracy; it employs us in that which is most beneficial in this world, and entitles us to that which is much more so in the world to come. (2.) The shame and ruin of those that slight it: "*If thou scornest Wisdom's proffer, thou alone shalt bar it.*" [1.] "Thou shalt bear the blame of it." Those that are good must thank God, but those that are wicked may thank themselves; it is not owing to God (he is not the author of sin); Satan can only tempt, he cannot force; and wicked companions are but his instruments; so that all the fault must lie on the sinner himself. [2.] "Thou shalt bear the loss of that which thou scornest; it will be to thy own destruction; thy blood will be upon thy own head, and the consideration of this will aggravate thy condemnation. *Son, remember, that thou hadst this fair offer made thee, and thou wouldst not accept it; thou stoodest fair for life, but didst choose death rather.*"

The Invitation of Folly.

**13 A foolish woman is clamorous: *she* is simple, and knoweth nothing. 14 For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, 15 To call passengers who go right on their ways: 16 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 17 Stolen waters are sweet, and bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant. 18 But he knoweth not that the dead *are* there; *and that* her guests *are* in the depths of hell.**

We have heard what Christ has to say, to engage our affections to God and godliness, and one would think the whole world should go after him; but here we are told how industrious the tempter is to seduce unwary souls into the paths of sin, and with the most he gains his point, and Wisdom's courtship is not effectual. Now observe,

I. Who is the tempter—a *foolish woman*, Folly herself, in opposition to Wisdom. Carnal sensual pleasure I take to be especially meant by this

*foolish woman* (v. 13); for that is the great enemy to virtue and inlet to vice; that defiles and debauches the mind, stupefies conscience, and puts out the sparks of conviction, more than any thing else. This tempter is here described to be, 1. Very ignorant: *She is simple and knows nothing*, that is, she has no sufficient solid reason to offer; where she gets dominion in a soul she works out all the knowledge of holy things; they are lost and forgotten. *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart*; they besot men, and make fools of them.

(2.) Very importunate. The less she has to offer that is rational the more violent and pressing she is, and carries the day often by dint of impudence. *She is clamorous* and noisy (v. 13), continually haunting young people with her enticements. *She sits at the door of her house* (v. 14), watching for a prey; not as Abraham at his tent-door, seeking an opportunity to do good. *She sits on a seat (on a throne, so the word signifies) in the high places of the city*, as if she had authority to give law, and we were all *debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh*, and as if she had reputation, and

were in honour, and thought worthy of *the high places of the city*; and perhaps she gains upon many more by pretending to be fashionable than by pretending to be agreeable. "Do not all persons of rank and figure in the world" (says she) "give themselves a greater liberty than the strict laws of virtue allow; and why shouldst thou humble thyself so far as to be cramped by them?" Thus the tempter affects to seem both kind and great.

II. Who are the tempted—young people who have been well educated; these she will triumph most in being the ruin of. Observe, 1. What their real character is; they are *passengers that go right on their ways* (v. 15), that have been trained up in the paths of religion and virtue and set out very hopefully and well, that seemed determined and designed for good, and are not (as that young man, ch. vii. 8) *going the way to her house*. Such as these she has a design upon, and lays snares for, and uses all her arts, all her charms, to pervert them; if they *go right on*, and will not look towards her, she will call after them, so urgent are these temptations. (2.) How she represents them. She calls them *simple* and *wanting understanding*, and therefore courts them to her school, that they may be cured of the restraints and formalities of their religion. This is the method of the stage (which is

too close an exposition of this paragraph), where the sober young man, that has been virtuously educated, is the fool in the play, and the plot is to make him *seven times more a child of hell* than his profane companions, under colour of polishing and refining him, and setting him up for a wit and a beau. What is justly charged upon sin and impiety (v. 4), that it is folly, is here very unjustly retorted upon the ways of virtue; but the day will declare who are the fools.

III. What the temptation is (v. 17): *Stolen waters are sweet*. It is to water and bread, whereas Wisdom invites to the beasts she has killed and the wine she has mingled; however, bread and water are acceptable enough to those that are hungry and thirsty; and this is pretended to be more *sweet* and *pleasant* than common, for it is *stolen water and bread eaten in secret*, with a fear of being discovered. The pleasures of prohibited lusts are boasted of as more relishing than those of prescribed love; and dishonest gain is preferred to that which is justly gotten. Now this argues, not only a bold contempt, but an impudent defiance, 1. Of God's law, in that the waters are the sweeter for being stolen and come at by breaking through the hedge of the divine command. *Nitimur in vetitum—We are prone to what is forbidden*. This spirit of contradiction we have from our first parents, who thought the forbidden tree of all others *a tree to be desired*. 2. Of God's curse. The *bread is eaten in secret*, for fear of discovery and punishment, and the sinner takes a pride in having so far baffled his convictions, and triumphed over them, that, notwithstanding that fear, he dares commit the sin, and can make himself believe that, being eaten in secret, it shall never be discovered or reckoned for. Sweetness and pleasantness constitute the bait; but, by the tempter's own showing, even that is so absurd, and has such allays, that it is a wonder how it can have any influence upon men that pretend to reason.

IV. An effectual antidote against the temptation, in a few words, v. 18. He that so far wants understanding as to be drawn aside by these enticements is led on, ignorantly, to his own inevitable ruin: *He knows not*, will not believe, does not consider, the tempter will not let him know, *that the dead are there*, that those who live in pleasure are *dead while they live, dead in trespasses and sins*.

Terrors attend these pleasures like the terrors of death itself. The giants are there—*Rephaim*. It was this that ruined the sinners of the old world, the giants that were *in the earth in those days*. *Her guests*, that are treated with those *stolen waters*, are not only in the highway to hell and at the brink of it, but they are already *in the depths of hell*, under the power of sin, led captive by Satan at his will, and ever and anon lashed by the terrors of their own consciences, which are a hell upon earth. The depths of Satan are *the depths of hell*. Remorseless sin is remediless ruin; it is the bottomless pit already. Thus does Solomon show the hook; those that believe him will not meddle with the bait.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. X.

Hitherto we have been in the porch or preface to the proverbs, here they begin. They are short but weighty sentences; most of them are distichs, two sentences in one verse, illustrating each other; but it is seldom that there is any coherence between the verses, much less any thread of discourse, and therefore in these chapters we need not attempt to reduce the contents to their proper heads, the several sentences will appear best in their own places. The scope of them all is to set before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse. Many of the proverbs in this chapter relate to the good government of the tongue, without which men's religion is vain.

Weighty Sayings.

**1 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.**

Solomon, speaking to us as unto children, observes here how much the comfort of parents, natural, political, and ecclesiastical, depends upon the good behaviour of those under their charge, as a reason, 1. Why parents should be careful to give their children a good education, and to train them up in the ways of religion, which, if it obtain the desired effect, they themselves will have the comfort of it, or, if not, they will have for their

support under their heaviness that they have done their duty, have done their endeavour. 2. Why children should conduct themselves wisely and well, and live up to their good education, that they may gladden the hearts of their parents, and not sadden them. Observe, (1.) It adds to the comfort of young people that are pious and discreet that thereby they do something towards recompensing their parents for all the care and pains they have taken with them, and occasion pleasure to them in the evil days of old age, when they most need it; and it is the duty of parents to rejoice in their children's wisdom and well-doing, yea, though it arrive at such an eminency as to eclipse them. (2.) It adds to the guilt of those that conduct themselves ill that thereby they grieve those whom they ought to be a joy to, and are a heaviness particularly to their poor mothers who bore them with sorrow, but with greater sorrow see them wicked and vile.

**2 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death. 3 The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.**

These two verses speak to the same purport, and the latter may be the reason of the former. 1. That wealth which men get unjustly will do them no good, because God will blast it: *Treasures of wickedness profit nothing*, v. 2. The treasures of wicked people, much more the treasure which they have made themselves masters of by any wicked people, by oppression of fraud, though it be ever so much, as a treasure, and laid up ever so safely, though it be hidden treasure, yet it *profits nothing*; when profit and loss come to be balanced the profit gained by the treasures will by no means countervail the loss sustained by the wickedness, Matt. xvi. 26. They do not profit the soul; they will not purchase any true comfort or happiness. They will stand a man in no stead at death, or in the judgment of the great day; and the reason is because God *casts away the substance of the wicked*

(v. 3); he takes that from them which they have unjustly gotten; he rejects the consideration of it, not regarding the rich more than the poor. We often see that scattered by the justice of God which has been gathered together by the injustice of men. How can the treasures of wickedness profit, when, though it be counted substance, God casts it away and it vanishes as a

shadow? 2. That which is honestly got will turn to a good account, for God will bless it. *Righteousness delivers from death*, that is, wealth gained, and kept, and used, in a right manner (righteousness signifies both honesty and charity); it answers the end of wealth, which is to keep us alive and be a defence to us. It will deliver from those judgments which men bring upon themselves by their wickedness. It will profit to such a degree as to deliver, though not from the stroke of death, yet from the sting of it, and consequently from the terror of it. For *the Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish*

(v. 3), and so their *righteousness delivers from death*, purely by the favour of God to them, which is their life and livelihood, and which will keep them alive in famine. The soul of the righteous shall be kept alive by the word of God, and faith in his promise, when *young lions shall lack and suffer hunger*.

#### **4 He becometh poor that dealeth *with* a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.**

We are here told, 1. Who those are who, though rich, are in a fair way to *become poor*—those *who deal with a slack hand*, who are careless and remiss in their business, and never mind which end goes foremost, nor ever set their hands vigorously to their work or stick to it; those *who deal with a deceitful hand* (so it may be read); those who think to enrich themselves by fraud and tricking will, in the end, impoverish themselves, not only by bringing the curse of God on what they have, but by forfeiting their reputation with men; none will care to deal with those who deal with sleight of hand and are honest only with good looking to. 2. Who those are who, though poor, are in a fair way to become rich—those who are diligent and honest, who are careful about their affairs, and, what their hands find to do, do it with all their might, in a fair and honourable way, those are likely to increase what they have. *The hand of the acute* (so some), of those who are sharp, but not sharpeners; *the hand of the active* (so others); the stirring hand gets a penny. This is true in the affairs of our

souls as well as in our worldly affairs; slothfulness and hypocrisy lead to spiritual poverty, but

those who are *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*, are likely to be *rich in faith* and *rich in good works*.

## **5 He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: *but* he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.**

Here is, 1. The just praise of those who improve their opportunities, who take pains to gather and increase what they have, both for soul and body, who provide for hereafter while provision is to be made, who *gather in summer*; which is gathering time. He who does so *is a wise son*, and it is his honour; he acts wisely for his parents, whom, if there be occasion, he ought to maintain, and he gives reputation to himself, his family, and his education. 2. The just reproach and blame of those who trifle away these opportunities: *He who sleeps*, loves his ease, idles away his time, and neglects his work, especially *who sleeps in harvest*, when he should be laying in for winter, who lets slip the season of furnishing himself with that which he will have occasion for, *is a son that causes shame*; for he is a foolish son; he prepares shame for himself when winter comes, and reflects shame upon all his friends. He who gets knowledge and wisdom in the days of his youth *gathers in summer*; and he will have the comfort and credit of his industry; but he who idles away the days of his youth will bear the shame of his indolence when he is old.

## **6 Blessings *are* upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.**

Here is, 1. *The head of the just* crowned with *blessings*, with the blessings both of God and man. Variety of blessings, abundance of blessings, shall descend from above, and visibly abide on the head of good men, real blessings; they shall not only be spoken well of, but done well to. Blessings shall be on their head as a coronet to adorn and dignify them and as a helmet to protect and secure them. 2. *The mouth of the wicked covered with violence*. Their mouths shall be stopped with shame for the violence which they have done; they shall not have a word to say in excuse for themselves (Job v. 16); their breath shall be stopped with the violence that shall be done to them, when their violent dealings shall return on their heads, shall be returned to their teeth.



## **7 The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.**

Both the just and the wicked, when their days are fulfilled, must die. Between their bodies in the grave there is no visible difference; between the souls of the one and the other, in the world of spirits, there is a vast difference, and so there is, or ought to be, between their memories, which survive them.

I. Good men are and ought to be well spoken of when they are gone; it is one of the blessings that *comes upon the head of the just*, even when their head is laid. Blessed men leave behind them blessed memories. 1. It is part of the dignity of the saints, especially those who excel in virtue and are eminently useful, that they are remembered with respect when they are dead. Their good name, their name with good men, for good things, is then in a special manner as *precious ointment*, Eccl.

vii. 1. Those that honour God he will thus honour, Ps. cxii. 3, 6, 9. *The elders* by faith *obtained a good report* (Heb. xi. 2), and, being dead, are yet spoken of. 2. It is part of the duty of the survivors: *Let the memory of the just be blessed*, so the Jews read it, and observe it as a precept, not naming an eminently just man that is dead without adding, *Let his memory be blessed*. We must delight in

making an honourable mention of good men that are gone, bless God for them, and for his gifts and graces that appeared in them, and especially be followers of them in *that which is good*.

II. Bad men are and shall be forgotten, or spoken of with contempt. When their bodies are putrefying in the grave their *names* also *shall rot*. Either they shall not be preserved at all, but buried in oblivion (no good can be said of them, and therefore the greatest kindness that can be done them will be to say nothing of them), or they shall be loathsome, and mentioned with detestation, and that rule of honour, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*—*Say nothing to the disadvantage of the dead*, will not protect them. Where the wickedness has been notorious, and cannot but be mentioned, it ought to be mentioned with abhorrence.

## **8 The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.**

Here is, 1. The honour and happiness of the obedient. They *will receive commandments*; they will take it as a privilege, and really an ease to them, to be under government, which saves them the labour of deliberating and choosing for themselves; and they will take it as a favour to be told their duty and admonished concerning it. And this is their wisdom; those are *wise in heart* who are tractable, and those who thus bend, thus stoop, shall stand and be established, shall prosper, being well advised. 2. The shame and ruin of the disobedient, that will not be governed, nor endure any yoke, that will not be taught, nor take any advice. They are fools, for they act against themselves and their own interest; they are commonly *prating fools*, fools of lips, full of talk, but full of nonsense, boasting of themselves, prating spitefully against those that admonish them (3 John 10), and pretending to give counsel and law to others. Of all fools, none more troublesome than the *prating fools*, nor that more expose themselves; but they *shall fall* into sin, into hell, because they received not commandments. Those that are full of tongue seldom look well to their feet, and therefore stumble and fall.

## **9 He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.**

We are here told, and we may depend upon it, 1. That men's integrity will be their security: *He that walks uprightly* towards God and man, that is faithful to both, that designs as he ought and means as he says, *walks surely*; he is safe under a divine protection and easy in a holy security. He goes on his way with a humble boldness, being well armed against the temptations of Satan, the troubles of the world, and the reproaches of men. He knows what ground he stands on, what guide he follows, what guard he is surrounded with, and what glory he is going to, and therefore proceeds with assurance and *great peace*, Isa. xxxii. 17; xxxiii. 15, 16. Some understand it as part of the character of an upright man, that he *walks surely*, in opposition to walking at all adventures. He will not dare to do that which he is not fully satisfied in his own conscience concerning the lawfulness of, but will see his way clear in every thing. 2. That men's dishonesty will be

their shame: *He that perverts his way*, that turns aside into crooked paths, that dissembles with God and man, looks one way and rows another, though he may for a time disguise himself, and pass current, *shall be known* to be what he is. It is a thousand to one but some time or other he betrays himself; at least, God

will discover him in the great day. *He that perverts his ways documento erit*—*shall be made an example of*, for warning to others; so some.

### **10 He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall.**

Mischief is here said to attend, 1. Politic, designing, self-disguising sinners: *He that winks with the eye*, as if he took no notice of you, when at the same time he is watching an opportunity to do you an ill turn, that makes signs to his accomplices when to come into assist him in executing his wicked projects, which are all carried on by trick and artifice, *causes sorrow* both to others and to himself. Ingenuity will be no excuse for iniquity, but the sinner must either repent or do worse, either rue it or be ruined by it. 2. Public, silly, self-exposing sinners: A *prating fool*, whose sins go before unto judgment, *shall fall*, as was said before, v. 8. But his case is less dangerous of the two, and, though he destroys himself, he does not create so much sorrow to others as *he that winks with his eyes*. The dog that bites is not always the dog that barks.

### **11 The mouth of a righteous *man* is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.**

See here, 1. How industrious a good man is, by communicating his goodness, to do good with it: *His mouth*, the outlet of his mind, *is a well of life*; it is a constant spring, whence issues good discourse for the edification of others, like streams that water the ground and make it fruitful, and for their consolation, like streams that quench the thirst of the weary traveller. It is like *a well of life*, that is pure and clean, not only not poisoned, but not muddled, with any corrupt communication.

2. How industrious a bad man is, by concealing his badness, to do hurt with it: *The mouth of the wicked covers violence*, disguises the designed mischief with professions of friendship, that it may be carried on the more securely and effectually, as Joab kissed and killed, Judas kissed and betrayed; this is his sin, to which the punishment answers (v. 6): *Violence covers the mouth of the wicked*; what he got by violence shall by violence be taken from him, Job v. 4, 5.

## **12 Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.**

Here is, 1. The great mischief-maker, and that is malice. Even where there is no manifest occasion of strife, yet *hatred* seeks occasion and so *stirs it up* and does the devil's work. Those are the most spiteful ill-natured people that can be who take a pleasure in setting their neighbours together by the ears, by tale-bearing, evil surmises, and misrepresentations, blowing up the sparks of contention, which had lain buried, into a flame, at which, with an unaccountable pleasure, they warm their hands. 2. The great peace-maker, and that is *love*, which *covers all sins*, that is, the offences among relations which occasion discord. Love, instead of proclaiming and aggravating the offence, conceals and extenuates it as far as it is capable of being concealed and extenuated. Love will excuse the offence which we give through mistake and unadvisedly; when we are able to say that there was no ill intended, but it was an oversight, and we love our friend notwithstanding, this covers it. It will also overlook the offence that is given us, and so cover it, and make the best of it: by this means strife is prevented, or, if begun, peace is recovered and restored quickly. The apostle quotes this, 1 Pet. iv. 8. *Love will cover a multitude of sins*.

## **13 In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.**

Observe, 1. Wisdom and grace are the honour of good men: He *that has understanding*, that good understanding which those have that do the commandments, *wisdom is found in his lips*, that is, it is discovered to be there, and consequently that he has within a good treasure of it, and it is

derived thence for the benefit of others. It is a man's honour to have wisdom, but much more to be instrumental to make others wise. 2. Folly and sin are the shame of bad men: *A rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding—of him that wants a heart*; he exposes himself to the lashes of his own conscience, to the scourges of the tongue, to the censures of the magistrate, and to the righteous judgments of God. Those that foolishly and wilfully go on in wicked ways are preparing rods for themselves, the marks of which will be their perpetual disgrace.

#### **14 Wise *men* lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish *is* near destruction.**

Observe, 1. It is the wisdom of the wise that they treasure up a stock of useful knowledge, which will be their preservation: *Wisdom is therefore found in their lips* (v. 13), because it is laid up in their hearts, out of which store, like the good householder, they bring things new and old. Whatever knowledge may be at any time useful to us we must *lay it up*, because we know not but some time or other we may have occasion for it. We must continue laying up as long as we live; and be sure to lay it up safely, that it may not be to seek when we want it. 2. It is the folly of fools that they lay up mischief in their hearts, which is ready to them in all they say, and works terror and destruction both to others and to themselves. They *love devouring words* (Ps. lii. 4), and these come uppermost. Their *mouth is near destruction*, having the *sharp arrows of bitter words* always at hand to throw about.

#### **15 The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city: the destruction of the poor *is* their poverty.**

This may be taken two ways:—1. As a reason why we should be diligent in our business, that we may avoid that sinking dispiriting uneasiness which attends poverty, and may enjoy the benefit and comfort which those have that are beforehand in the world. Taking pains is really the way to make ourselves and our families easy. Or, rather, 2. As a representation of the common mistakes both of rich and poor, concerning their outward condition. (1.) Rich people think themselves happy because they are rich;

but it is their mistake: *The rich man's wealth is*, in his own conceit, *his strong city*, whereas the worst of evils it is too weak and utterly insufficient to protect them from. It will prove that they are not so safe as they imagine; nay, their wealth may perhaps expose them. (2.) Poor people think themselves undone because they are poor; but it is their mistake: *The destruction of the poor is their poverty*; it sinks their spirits, and ruins all their comforts; whereas a man may live very comfortably, though he has but a little to live on, if he be but content, and keep a good conscience, and live by faith.

## **16 The labour of the righteous *tendeth* to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.**

Solomon here confirms what his father had said (Ps. xxxvii. 16), *A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked*. 1. Perhaps a righteous man has no more than what he works hard for; he eats only *the labour of his hands*, but that *labour tends to life*; he aims at nothing

but to get an honest livelihood, covets not to be rich and great, but is willing to live and maintain his family. Nor does it tend only to his own life, but he would enable himself to do good to others; he labours *that he may have to give* (Eph. iv. 28); all his business turns to some good account or other. Or it may be meant of his labour in religion; he takes most pains in that which has a tendency to eternal life; he *sows to the Spirit*, that he may *reap life everlasting*. 2. Perhaps a wicked man's wealth is fruit which he did not labour for, but came easily by, but it tends *to sin*. He makes it the food and fuel of his lusts, his pride and luxury; he gets hurt with it and not good; he gets hurt by it and is hardened by it in his wicked ways. The things of this world are good or evil, life or death, as they are used, and as those are that have them.

## **17 He *is in* the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.**

See here, 1. That those are in the right that do not only receive instruction, but retain it, that do not let it slip through carelessness, as most do, nor let it

go to those that would rob them of it, that *keep instruction* safely, keep it pure and entire, keep it for their own use, that they may govern themselves by it, keep it for the benefit of others, that they may instruct them; those that do so are *in the way of life*, the way that has true comfort in it and eternal life at the end of it. 2. That those are in the wrong that do not only not receive instruction, but wilfully and obstinately refuse it when it is offered them. They will not be taught their duty because it discovers their faults to them; that instruction which carries reproof in it they have a particular aversion to, and certainly they err; it is a sign that they err in judgment, and have false notions of good and evil; it is a cause of their erring in conversation. The traveller that has missed his way, and cannot bear to be told of it and shown the right way, must needs err still, err endlessly; he certainly misses *the way of life*.

The Proper of the Use of the Tongue.

### **18 He that hideth hatred *with* lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.**

Observe here, Malice is folly and wickedness. 1. It is so when it is concealed by flattery and dissimulation: He *is a fool*, though he may think himself a politician, *that hides hatred with lying lips*, lest, if it break out, he should be ashamed before men and should lose the opportunity of gratifying his malice. *Lying lips* are bad enough of themselves, but have a peculiar malignity in them when they are made *a cloak of maliciousness*. But he *is a fool* who thinks to hide any thing from God. 2. It is no better when it is vented in spiteful and mischievous language: *He that utters slander is a fool* too, for God will sooner or later bring forth that righteousness as the light which he endeavours to cloud, and will find an expedient to roll the reproach away.

### **19 In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.**

We are here admonished concerning the government of the tongue, that necessary duty of a Christian. 1. It is good to say little, because *in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin*, or *sin doth not cease*. Usually,

those that speak much speak much amiss, and among many words there cannot but be many idle words, which they must shortly give an account of. Those that love to hear themselves talk do not consider what work they are making for repentance; for that will be wanted, and first or last will be had, where *there wanteth not sin*. 2. It is therefore good to *keep our mouth as with a bridle*: *He that refrains his lips*, that often checks himself, suppresses what he has thought,

and holds in that which would transpire, is a wise man; it is an evidence of his wisdom, and he therein consults his own peace. Little said is soon amended, Amos v. 13; Jam. i. 19.

**20 The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. 21 The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.**

We are here taught how to value men, not by their wealth and preferment in the world, but by their virtue.

I. Good men are good for something. Though they may be poor and low in the world, and may not have power and riches to do good with, yet, as long as they have a mouth to speak, that will make them valuable and useful, and upon that account we must honour those that fear the Lord, because *out of the good treasure of their heart they bring forth good things*. 1. This makes them valuable: *The tongue of the just is as choice silver*; they are sincere, freed from the dross of guile and evil design. God's words are compared to *silver purified* (Ps. xii. 6), for they may be relied on; and such are the words of just men. They are of weight and worth, and will enrich those that hear them with wisdom, which is better than *choice silver*. 2. It makes them useful: *The lips of the righteous feed many*; for they are full of the word of God, which is the bread of life, and that sound doctrine wherewith souls are nourished up. Pious discourse is spiritual food to the needy, to the hungry.

II. Bad men are good for nothing. 1. One can get no good by them: *The heart of the wicked is little worth*, and therefore that which comes out of the abundance of his heart cannot be worth much. His principles, his notions,



his thoughts, his purposes, and all the things that fill him, and affect him, are worldly and carnal, and therefore of no value. *He that is of the earth speaks of the earth*, and neither understands nor relishes the things of God, John iii. 31; 1 Cor. ii. 14. The wicked man pretends that, though he does not talk of religion as the just do, yet he has it within him, and thanks God that his heart is good; but he that searches the heart here says the contrary: *It is nothing worth*. 2. One can do no good to them. While many are fed by *the lips of the righteous*, *fools die for want of wisdom*; and fools indeed they are to die for want of that which they might so easily come by. *Fools die for want of a heart* (so the word is); they perish for want of consideration and resolution; they have no heart to do any thing for their own good. While the righteous feed others fools starve themselves.

**The Advantages of the Righteous.**

## **22 The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.**

Worldly wealth is that which most men have their hearts very much upon, but they generally mistake both in the nature of the thing they desire and in the way by which they hope to obtain it; we are therefore told here, 1. What that wealth is which is indeed desirable, not having abundance only, but having it and *no sorrow with it*, no disquieting care to get and keep it, no vexation of spirit in the enjoyment of it, no tormenting grief for the loss of it, no guilt contracted by the abuse of it—to have it and to have a heart to take the comfort of it, to do good with it and to serve God with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the use of it. 2. Whence this desirable wealth is to be expected, not by making ourselves drudges to the world (Ps. cxxvii. 2), but by *the blessing of God*. It is this

that *makes rich and adds no sorrow*; what comes from the love of God has the grace of God for its companion, to preserve the soul from those turbulent lusts and passions of which, otherwise, the increase of riches is commonly the incentive. He had said (v. 4), *The hand of the diligent makes rich*, as a means; but here he ascribes it to *the blessing of the Lord*; but that blessing is upon *the hand of the diligent*. It is thus in spiritual riches. Diligence in getting them is our duty, but God's blessing and grace must have all the glory of that which is acquired, Deut. viii. 17, 18.

## **23 *It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.***

Here is, 1. Sin exceedingly sinful: *It is as laughter to a fool to do mischief*; it is as natural to him, and as pleasant, as it is to a man to laugh. *Wickedness is his Isaac* (that is the word here); it is his delight, his darling, and that in which he pleases himself. He makes a laughing matter of sin. When he is warned not to sin, from the consideration of the law of God and the revelation of his wrath against sin, he makes a jest of the admonition, and laughs at the shaking of the spear; when he has sinned, instead of sorrowing for it, he boasts of it, ridicules reproofs, and laughs away the convictions of his own conscience, ch. xiv. 9. 2. Wisdom exceedingly wise, for it carries along with it the evidence of its own excellency; it may be predicated of itself, and this is encomium enough; you need say no more in praise of *a man of understanding* than this, "He is an *understanding man*; he *has wisdom*; he is so wise as not to do mischief, or if he has, through oversight, offended, he is so wise as not to make a jest of it." Or, to pronounce wisdom wise indeed, read it thus: *As it is a sport to a fool to do mischief, so it is to a man of understanding to have wisdom and to show it.* Besides the future recompence, a good man has as much present pleasure in the restraints and exercises of religion as sinners can pretend to in the liberties and enjoyments of sin, and much more, and much better.

## **24 The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. 25 As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no *more*: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.**

It is here said, and said again, to the righteous, that *it shall be well with them*, and to the wicked, *Woe to them*; and these are set the one over against the other, for their mutual illustration.

I. It shall be as ill with the wicked as they can fear, and as well with the righteous as they can desire. 1. The wicked, it is true, buoy themselves up sometimes in their wickedness with vain hopes which will deceive them, but at other times they cannot but be haunted with just fears, and those *fears shall come upon them*; the God they provoke will be every whit as terrible

as they, when they are under their greatest damp, apprehend him to be. *As is thy fear, so is thy wrath*, Ps. xc. 11. Wicked men fear the punishment of sin, but they have not wisdom to improve their fears by making their escape, and so the thing they feared comes upon them, and their present terrors are earnest of their future torments. 2. The righteous, it is true, sometimes have their fears, but their desire is towards the favour of God and a happiness in him, and that *desire shall be granted*. According to their faith, not according to their fear, it shall be *unto them*, Ps. xxxvii. 4.

II. The prosperity of the wicked shall quickly end, but the happiness of the righteous shall never end, v. 25. The wicked make a great noise, hurry themselves and others, like a *whirlwind*,

which threatens to bear down all before it; but, like a *whirlwind*, they are presently gone, and they pass irrecoverably; they are *no more*; all about them are quiet and glad when the storm is over, Ps.

xxxvii. 10, 36; Job xx. 5. *The righteous*, on the contrary, make no show; they lie hid, like a *foundation*, which is low and out of sight, but they are fixed in their resolution to cleave to God, established in virtue, and they shall be an *everlasting foundation*, immovably good. He that is holy shall be holy still and immovably happy; his hope is built on a rock, and therefore not shocked by the storm, Matt. vii. 24. *The righteous is the pillar of the world* (so some read it); the world stands for their sakes; the holy seed is the substance thereof.

The Righteous Exclusively Happy.

**26 As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes,  
so is the sluggard to them that send him.**

Observe, 1. Those that are of a slothful disposition, that love their ease and cannot apply their minds to any business, are not fit to be employed, no, not so much as to be sent on an errand, for they will neither deliver a message with any care nor make any haste back. Such therefore are very unmeet to be ministers, Christ's messengers; he will not own the sending forth of sluggards into his harvest. 2. Those that are guilty of so great an oversight as to entrust such with any affair, and put confidence in them, will certainly

have vexation with them. A slothful servant is to his master as uneasy and troublesome as *vinegar to the teeth* and *smoke to the eyes*; he provokes his passion, as vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and occasions him grief to see his business neglected and undone, as smoke sets the eyes a weeping.

**27 The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. 28 The hope of the righteous *shall be* gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.**

Observe, 1. Religion lengthens men's lives and crowns their hopes. *What man is he that loves life?* Let him *fear God*, and that will secure him from many things that would prejudice his life, and secure to him life enough in this world and eternal life in the other; *the fear of the Lord* will add days more than was expected, will add them endlessly, will prolong them to the days of eternity. *What man is he that would see good days?* Let him be religious, and then his days shall not only be many, but happy, very happy as well as very many, for *the hope of the righteous shall be gladness*; they shall have what they hope for, to their unspeakable satisfaction. It is something future and unseen that they place their happiness in (Rom. viii. 24, 25), not what they have in hand, but what they have in hope, and their hope will shortly be swallowed up in fruition, and it will be their everlasting gladness. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* 2. Wickedness shortens men's lives, and frustrates their hopes: *The years of the wicked*, that are spent in the pleasures of sin and the drudgery of the world, *shall be shortened*. Cut down the trees that cumber the ground. And whatever comfort or happiness a wicked man promises himself, in this world or the other, he will be frustrated; for *the expectation of the wicked shall perish*; his hope shall be turned into endless despair.

**29 The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction *shall be* to the workers of iniquity. 30 The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.**

These two verses are to the same purport with those next before, intimating the happiness of the godly and the misery of the wicked; it is necessary that this be inculcated upon us, so loth are we to believe and consider it. 1. Strength and stability are entailed upon integrity: *The way of the Lord* (the providence of God, the way in which he walks towards us) *is strength to the*

*upright*, confirms him in his uprightness. All God's dealings with him, merciful and afflictive, serve to quicken him to his duty and animate him against his discouragements. Or *the way of the Lord* (the way of godliness, in which he appoints us to walk) is *strength to the upright*; the closer we keep to that way, the more our hearts are enlarged to proceed in it, the better fitted we are both for services and sufferings. A good conscience, kept pure from sin, gives a man boldness in a dangerous time, and constant diligence in duty makes a man's work easy in a busy time. The more we do for God the more we may do, Job xvii. 9. That *joy of the Lord* which is to be found only in the *way of the Lord* will be our strength (Neh. viii. 10), and therefore *the righteous shall never be removed*. Those that have an established virtue have an established peace and happiness which nothing can rob them of; they *have an everlasting foundation*, v. 25. 2. Ruin and destruction are the certain consequences of wickedness. *The wicked shall not* only not inherit the earth, though they lay up their treasure in it, but they shall not so much as *inhabit the earth*; God's judgments will root them out. *Destruction*, swift and sure destruction, *shall be to the workers of iniquity*, destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Nay, that way of the Lord which is the strength of the upright is consumption and terror *to the workers of iniquity*; the same gospel which to the one is a *savour of life unto life* to the other is a *savour of death unto death*; the same providence, like the same sun, softens the one and hardens the other, Hos. xiv. 9.

**31 The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. 32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked *speaketh* frowardness.**

Here, as before, men are judged of, and, accordingly, are justified or condemned, by their words, Matt. xii. 37. 1. It is both the proof and the praise of a man's wisdom and goodness that he speaks wisely and well. A good man, in his discourse, *brings forth wisdom* for the benefit of others. God gives him wisdom as a reward of his righteousness (Eccl. ii. 26), and he, in gratitude for that gift and justice to the giver, does good with it, and with his wise and pious discourses edifies many. He *knows what is acceptable*, what discourse will be pleasing to God (for that is it that he

studies more than to oblige the company), and what will be agreeable both to the speaker and to the hearers, what will become him and benefit them, and that he will speak. 2. It is the sin, and will be the ruin, of a wicked man, that he speaks wickedly like himself. *The mouth of the wicked speaks frowardness*, that which is displeasing to God and provoking to those he converses with; and what is the issue of it? Why, *the froward tongue shall be cut out*, as surely as the *flattering one*, Ps. xii. 3.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XI.

Weighty Sayings.

**1 A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight.**

As religion towards God is a branch of universal righteousness (he is not an honest man that is not devout), so righteousness towards men is a branch of true religion, for he is not a godly man that is not honest, nor can he expect that his devotion should be accepted; for, 1. Nothing is more offensive to God than deceit in commerce. *A false balance* is here put for all manner of unjust and fraudulent practices in dealing with any person, which are all an *abomination to the Lord*, and render those abominable to him that allow themselves in the use of such accursed arts of thriving. It is an affront to justice, which God is the patron of, as well as a wrong to our neighbour, whom God is the protector of. Men make light of such frauds, and think there is no sin in that which there is money to be got by, and, while it passes undiscovered, they cannot blame themselves for it; a blot is no blot till it is hit, Hos. xii. 7, 8. But they are not the less an abomination to God, who will be the avenger of those that are defrauded by their brethren. 2. Nothing is more pleasing to God than fair and honest dealing, nor more necessary to make us and our devotions acceptable to him: *A just weight is his delight*. He himself goes by a just weight, and holds the scale of judgment with an even hand, and therefore is pleased with those that are herein followers of him. A balance cheats, under pretence of doing right most exactly, and therefore is the greater abomination to God.

## **2 *When* pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.**

Observe, 1. How he that exalts himself is here abased, and contempt put upon him. *When pride comes then comes shame*. Pride is a sin which men have reason to be themselves ashamed of; it is a shame to a man who springs out of the earth, who lives upon alms, depends upon God, and has forfeited all he has, to be proud. It is a sin which others cry out shame on and look upon with disdain; he that is haughty makes himself contemptible; it is a sin for which God often brings men down, as he did Nebuchadnezzar and Herod, whose ignominy immediately attended their vain-glory; for God *resists the proud*, contradicts them, and counterworks them, in the thing they are proud of, Isa. ii. 11, &c. 2. How he that humbles himself is here exalted, and a high character is given him. As with the proud there is folly, and will be shame, so *with the lowly there is wisdom*, and will be honour, for a man's wisdom gains him respect and makes his face to shine before men; or, if any be so base as to trample upon the humble, God will give them grace which will be their glory. Considering how safe, and quiet, and easy, those are that are of a humble spirit, what communion they have with God and comfort in themselves, we will say, *With the lowly is wisdom*.

Advantages of the Righteous.

## **3 The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.**

It is not only promised that God will guide the upright, and threatened that he will destroy the transgressors, but, that we may be the more fully assured of both, it is here represented as if the nature of the thing were such on both sides that it would do it itself. 1. The integrity of an honest man will itself be his guide in the way of duty and the way of safety. His principles are fixed, his rule is certain, and therefore his way is plain; his sincerity keeps him steady, and he needs not tack about every time the wind turns, having no other end to drive at than to keep a good conscience. *Integrity and uprightness* will *preserve* men, Ps. xxv. 21. 2. The iniquity of a bad man will itself be his ruin. As the plainness of a good man will be his protection, though he is ever so much exposed, so the perverseness of sinners will be



their destruction, though they think themselves even so well fortified. They shall fall into pits of their own digging, ch. v. 22.

#### **4 Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.**

Note, 1. The *day of death* will be a *day of wrath*. It is a messenger of God's wrath; therefore when Moses had meditated on man's mortality he takes occasion thence to admire *the power of God's anger*; Ps. cx. 11. It is a debt owing, not to nature, but to God's justice. *After death the judgment*, and that is a *day of wrath*, Rev. vi. 17. 2. Riches will stand men in no stead that day. They will neither put by the stroke nor ease the pain, much less take out the sting; what profit will this world's birth-rights be of then? In the day of public judgments riches often expose men rather than protect them, Ezek. vii. 19. 3. It is righteousness only that will *deliver from* the evil of *death*. A good conscience will make death easy, and take off the terror of it; it is the privilege of the righteous only not to be hurt of the second death, and so not much hurt by the first.

#### **5 The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.**

#### **6 The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in *their own* naughtiness.**

These two verses are, in effect, the same, and both to the same purport with v. 3. For the truths are here of such certainty and weight that they cannot be too often inculcated. Let us govern ourselves by these principles.

I. That the ways of religion are plain and safe, and in them we may enjoy a holy security. A living principle of honesty and grace will be, 1. Our best direction in the right way, in every doubtful case to say to us, *This is the way, walk in it*. He that acts without a guide looks right on and sees his way before him. 2. Our best deliverance from every false way: *The righteousness of the upright* shall be armour of proof to them, to deliver them from the allurements of the devil and the world, and from their menaces.

The ways of wickedness are dangerous and destructive: *The wicked shall fail* into misery and ruin *by their own wickedness*, and be *taken in their own naughtiness* as in a snare. *O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself*. Their sin will be their punishment; that very thing by which they contrived to shelter themselves will make against them.

## **7 When a wicked man dieth, *his* expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust *men* perisheth.**

Note, 1. Even wicked men, while they live, may keep up a confident expectation of a happiness when they die, or at least a happiness in this world. The hypocrite has his hope, in which he wraps himself as the spider in her web. The worldling expects great matters from his wealth; he calls it *goods laid up for many years*, and hopes to take his ease in it and to be merry; but in death their expectation will be frustrated: the worldling must leave this world which he expected to continue in and the hypocrite will come short of that world which he expected to remove to, Job xxvii. 8. 2. It will be the great aggravation of the misery of wicked people that their hopes will sink into despair just when they expect them to be crowned with fruition. When a godly man dies his expectations are out-done, and all his fears vanish; but when a wicked man dies his expectations are dashed, dashed to pieces; in that very day his thoughts perish with which he had pleased himself, his hopes vanish.

## **8 The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.**

As always in death, so sometimes in life, the righteous are remarkably favoured and the wicked crossed. 1. Good people are helped out of the distresses which they thought themselves lost in, and their feet are set in a large room, Ps. lxvi. 12; xxxiv. 19. God has found out a way to deliver his people even when they have despaired and their enemies have triumphed, as if the wilderness had shut them in. 2. The wicked have fallen into the distresses which they thought themselves far from, nay, which they had been instrumental to bring the righteous into, so that they seem to come in their stead, as a ransom for the just. Mordecai is saved from the gallows, Daniel from the lion's den, and Peter from the prison; and their persecutors

*come in their stead.* The Israelites are delivered out of the Red Sea and the Egyptians drowned in it. So precious are the saints in God's eye that he *gives men for them*, Isa. xliii. 3, 4.

Common Truths.

**9 An hypocrite with *his* mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.**

Here is, 1. Hypocrisy designing ill. It is not only the murderer with his sword, but the *hypocrite with his mouth*, that *destroys his neighbour*, decoying him into sin, or into mischief, by the specious pretences of kindness and good-will. *Death and life are in the power of the tongue*, but no tongue more fatal than the flattering tongue. 2. Honesty defeating the design and escaping the snare: *Through knowledge* of the devices of Satan *shall the just be delivered* from the snares which the hypocrite has laid for him; seducers shall not deceive the elect. By the knowledge of God, and the scriptures, and their own hearts, shall the just be delivered from those that lie in wait to deceive, and so to destroy, Rom. xvi. 18, 19.

**10 When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, *there is* shouting. 11 By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.**

It is here observed,

I. That good men are generally well-beloved by their neighbours, but nobody cares for wicked people. 1. It is true there are some few that are enemies to the righteous, that are prejudiced against

God and godliness, and are therefore vexed to see good men in power and prosperity; but all indifferent persons, even those that have no great stock of religion themselves, have a good word for a good man; and therefore *when it goes well with the righteous*, when they are advanced and put into a

capacity of doing good according to their desire, it is so much the better for all about them, and *the city rejoices*. For the honour and encouragement of virtue, and as it is the accomplishment of the promise of God, we should be glad to see virtuous men prosper in the world, and brought into reputation. 2. Wicked people may perhaps have here and there a well-wisher among those who are altogether such as themselves, but among the generality of their neighbours they get ill-will; they may be feared, but they are not loved, and therefore *when they perish there is shouting*; every body takes a pleasure in seeing them disgraced and disarmed, removed out of places of trust and power, chased out of the world, and wishes no greater loss may come to the town, the rather because they hope *the righteous may come in their stead*, as they into trouble instead of the righteous, v. 8. Let a sense of honour therefore keep us in the paths of virtue, that we may live desired and die lamented, and not be hissed off the stage, Job xxvii. 23; Ps. lii. 6.

II. That there is good reason for this, because those that are good do good, but (*as saith the proverb of the ancients*) *wickedness proceeds from the wicked*. 1. *Good men are public blessings—Vir bonus est commune bonum*. By the blessing of the upright, the blessings with which they are blessed, which enlarge their sphere of usefulness,—by the blessings with which they bless their neighbours, their advice, their example, their prayers, and all the instances of their serviceableness to the public interest,—by the blessings with which God blesses others for their sake,—by these *the city is exalted* and made more comfortable to the inhabitants, and more considerable among its neighbours. 2. Wicked men are public nuisances, not only the burdens, but the plagues of their generation. The city is *overthrown by the mouth of the wicked*, whose evil communications corrupt good manners, are enough to debauch a town, to ruin virtue in it, and bring down the judgments of God upon it.

**12 He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. 13 A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.**

I. Silence is here recommended as an instance of true friendship, and a preservative of it, and therefore an evidence, 1. Of wisdom: *A man of*

*understanding*, that has rule over his own spirit, if he be provoked, *holds his peace*, that he may neither give vent to his passion nor kindle the passion of others by any opprobrious language or peevish reflections. 2. Of sincerity: *He that is of a faithful spirit*, that is true, not only to his own promise, but to the interest of his friend, *conceals every matter* which, if divulged, may turn to the prejudice of his neighbour.

II. This prudent friendly concealment is here opposed to two very bad vices of the tongue:—1. Speaking scornfully of a man to his face: *He that is void of wisdom* discovers his folly by this; he *despises his neighbour*, calls him *Raca*, and *Thou fool*, upon the least provocation, and tramples upon him as not worthy to be set with the dogs of his flock. He undervalues himself who thus undervalues one that is made of the same mould. 2. Speaking spitefully of a man behind his back:

*A tale-bearer*, that carries all the stories he can pick up, true or false, from house to house, to make mischief and sow discord, *reveals secrets* which he has been entrusted with, and so breaks the laws, and forfeits all the privileges, of friendship and conversation.

## **14 Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors *there is safety*.**

Here is, 1. The bad omen of a kingdom's ruin: *Where no counsel is*, no consultation at all, but every thing done rashly, or no prudent consultation for the common good, but only caballing for parties and divided interests, *the people fall*, crumble into factions, fall to pieces, fall together by the ears, and fall an easy prey to their common enemies. Councils of war are necessary to the operations of war; two eyes see more than one; and mutual advice is in order to mutual assistance.

2. The good presage of a kingdom's prosperity: *In the multitude of counsellors*, that see their need one of another, and act in concert and with concern for the public welfare, *there is safety*; for what prudent methods one discerns not another may. In our private affairs we shall often find it to our advantage to advise with many; if they agree in their advice, our way

will be the more clear; if they differ, we shall hear what is to be said on all sides, and be the better able to determine.

The Rewards of Righteousness.

**15 He that is surety for a stranger shall smart *for it*: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.**

Here we are taught, 1. In general, that we may not use our estates as we will (he that gave them to us has reserved to himself a power to direct us how we shall use them, for they are not our own; we are but stewards), and further that God in his law consults our interests and teaches us that charity which begins at home, as well as that which must not end there. There is a good husbandry which is good divinity, and a discretion in ordering our affairs which is part of the character of a good man, Ps. cxii. 5. Every man must be just to his family, else he is not true to his stewardship.

2. In particular, that we must not enter rashly into suretiship, (1.) Because there is danger of bringing ourselves into trouble by it, and our families too when we are gone: *He that is surety for a stranger*, for any one that asks him and promises him to be bound for him another time, for one whose person perhaps he knows, and thinks he knows his circumstances, but is mistaken, he *shall smart for it. Contritione conteretur—he shall be certainly and sadly crushed and broken by it*, and perhaps become a bankrupt. Our Lord Jesus was surety for us when we were strangers, nay, enemies, and he smarted for it; *it pleased the Lord to bruise him*. (2.) Because he that resolves against all such suretiship keeps upon sure grounds, which a man may do if he take care not to launch out any further into business than his own credit will carry him, so that he needs not ask others to be bound for him.

**16 A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong *men* retain riches.**

Here, 1. It is allowed that *strong men retain riches*, that those who bustle in the world, who are men of spirit and interest, and are able to make their part good against all who stand in their way, are likely to keep what they have

and to get more, while those who are weak are preyed upon by all about them. 2. It is taken for granted that *a gracious woman* is as solicitous to preserve her reputation for wisdom and modesty, humility and courtesy, and all those other graces that are the true ornaments of her sex, as strong men are to secure their estates; and those women who are truly

gracious will, in like manner, effectually secure their honour by their prudence and good conduct. *A gracious woman* is as honourable as a valiant man and her honour is as sure.

### **17 The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but *he that* is cruel troubleth his own flesh.**

It is a common principle, Every one for himself. *Proximus egomet mihi—None so near to me as myself*. Now, if this be rightly understood, it will be a reason for the cherishing of gracious dispositions in ourselves and the crucifying of corrupt ones. We are friends or enemies to ourselves, even in respect of present comfort, according as we are or are not governed by religious principles.

1. A *merciful*, tender, good humoured *man*, *does good to his own soul*, makes and keeps himself easy. He has the pleasure of doing his duty, and contributing to the comfort of those that are to him as *his own soul*; for *we are members one of another*. He that waters others with his temporal good things shall find that God will water him with his spiritual blessings, which will do the best *good to his own soul*. See Isa. lviii. 7, &c. *If thou hide not thy eyes from thy own flesh*, but do good to others, as to thyself, if thou do good with thy own soul and *draw that out to the hungry*, thou wilt do good to thy own soul; for the Lord shall *satisfy thy soul* and *make fat thy bones*. Some make it part of the character of a *merciful man*, that he will make much of himself; that disposition which inclines him to be charitable to others will oblige him to allow himself also that which is convenient and to *enjoy the good of all his labour*. We may by the *soul* understand the *inward man*, as the apostle calls it, and then it teaches us that the first and great act of mercy is to provide well for our own souls the necessary supports of the spiritual life. 2. A *cruel*, froward, ill-natured man, *troubles his own flesh*, and so his sin becomes his punishment; he starves and dies for want of what

he has, because he has not a heart to use it either for the good of others or for his own. He is vexatious to his nearest relations, that are, and should be, to him as his own flesh, Eph. v. 29. Envy, and malice, and greediness of the world, are the rottenness of the bones and the consumption of the flesh.

**18 The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness *shall be* a sure reward.**

Note, 1. Sinners put a most fatal cheat upon themselves: *The wicked works a deceitful work*, builds himself a house upon the sand, which will deceive him when the storm comes, promises himself *that* by his sin which he will never gain; nay, it is cutting his throat when it smiles upon him. *Sin deceived me, and by it slew me*. 2. Saints lay up the best securities for themselves: He *that sows righteousness*, that is good, and makes it his business to do good, with an eye to a future recompence, he shall have *a sure reward*; it is made as sure to him as eternal truth can make it. If the seedness fail not, the harvest shall not, Gal. vi. 8.

**19 As righteousness *tendeth* to life: so he that pursueth evil *pursueth* it to his own death.**

It is here shown that righteousness, not only by the divine judgment, will end in life, and wickedness in death, but that righteousness, in its own nature, has a direct tendency to life and wickedness to death. 1. True holiness is true happiness; it is a preparative for it, a pledge and earnest of it. *Righteousness* inclines, disposes, and leads, the soul *to life*. 2. In like manner, those that indulge themselves in sin are fitting themselves for destruction. The more violent a man is in sinful pursuits

the more eagerly bent he is upon his own destruction; he awakens it when it seemed to slumber and hastens it when it seemed to linger.

Weighty Sayings.

**20 They that are of a froward heart *are* abomination to the Lord: but *such as are* upright in *their way are* his delight.**



It concerns us to know what God hates and what he loves, that we may govern ourselves accordingly, may avoid his displeasure and recommend ourselves to his favour. Now here we are told, 1. That nothing is more offensive to God than hypocrisy and double-dealing, for these are signified by the word which we translate *frowardness*, pretending justice, but intending wrong, walking in crooked ways, to avoid discovery. Those *are of a froward heart* who act in contradiction to that which is good, under a profession of that which is good, and such are, more than any sinners, an *abomination to the Lord*, Isa. lxxv. 5. 2. That nothing is more pleasing to God than sincerity and plain-dealing: *Such as are upright in their way*, such as aim and act with integrity, such as have their conversation in the world *in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom*, these God delights in, these he even boasts of (*Hast thou considered my servant Job?*) and will have us to admire. *Behold an Israelite indeed!*

## **21 *Though* hand *join* in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.**

Observe, 1. That confederacies in sin shall certainly be broken, and shall not avail to protect the sinners: *Though hand join in hand*, though there are many that concur by their practice to keep wickedness in countenance, and engage to stand by one another in defending it against all the attacks of virtue and justice,—though they are in league for the support and propagation of it,—though wicked children tread in the steps of their wicked parents, and resolve to keep up the trade, in defiance of religion,—yet all this will not protect them from the justice of God; they shall not be held guiltless; it will not excuse them to say that they did as the most did and as their company did; they *shall not be unpunished*; witness the flood that was brought upon a whole world of ungodly men. Their number, and strength, and unanimity in sin will stand them in no stead when the day of vengeance comes. 2. That entails of religion shall certainly be blessed: *The seed of the righteous*, that follow the steps of their righteousness, though they may fall into trouble, shall, in due time, *be delivered*. Though justice may come slowly to punish the wicked, and mercy may come slowly to save the righteous, yet both will come surely. Sometimes *the seed of the*

*righteous*, though they are not themselves righteous, are delivered for the sake of their godly ancestors, as Israel often, and the seed of David.

## **22 As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.**

By *discretion* here we must understand *religion* and *grace*, a true taste and relish (so the word signifies) of the honours and pleasures that attend an unspotted virtue; so that *a woman without discretion* is a woman of a loose and dissolute conversation; and then observe, 1. It is taken for granted here that beauty or comeliness of body is *as a jewel of gold*, a thing very valuable, and, where there is wisdom and grace to guard against the temptations of it, it is a great ornament,

(*Gratior est pulchro veniens de corpore virtus—Virtue appears peculiarly graceful when associated with beauty*); but a foolish wanton woman, of a light carriage, is fitly compared to a swine, though she be ever so handsome, wallowing in the mire of filthy lusts, with which the mind and conscience are defiled, and, though washed, returning to them. 2. It is lamented that beauty should be so abused as it is by those that have not modesty with it. It seems ill-bestowed upon them; it is quite misplaced, *as a jewel in a swine's snout*, with which he roots in the dunghill. If beauty be not guarded by virtue, the virtue is exposed by the beauty. It may be applied to all other bodily endowments and accomplishments; it is a pity that those should have them who have not discretion to use them well.

## **23 The desire of the righteous is only good: *but* the expectation of the wicked is wrath.**

This tells us what *the desire* and *expectation of the righteous* and *of the wicked* are and how they will prove, what they would have and what they shall have. 1. *The righteous* would have *good, only good*; all they desire is that it may go well with all about them; they wish no hurt to any, but happiness to all; as to themselves, their desire is not to gratify any evil lust, but to obtain the favour of a good God and to preserve the peace of a good conscience; and good they shall have, that good which they desire, Ps. xxxvii. 4. 2. *The wicked* would have *wrath*; they desire the woeful day, that

God's judgments may gratify their passion and revenge, may remove those that stand in their way, and that they may make an advantage to themselves by fishing in troubled waters; and wrath they shall have, so shall their doom be. They expect and desire mischief to others, but it shall return upon themselves; as they loved cursing, they shall have enough of it.

The Praise of Liberality.

**24 There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and *there* is that withholdeth more than is meet, but *it* *tendeth* to poverty.**

Note, 1. It is possible a man may grow rich by prudently spending what he has, may scatter in works of piety, charity, and generosity, and yet may increase; nay, by that means may increase, as the corn is increased by being sown. By cheerfully using what we have our spirits are exhilarated, and so fitted for the business we have to do, by minding which closely what we have is increased; it gains a reputation which contributes to the increase. But it is especially to be ascribed to God; he blesses the giving hand, and so makes it a getting hand, 2 Cor. ix. 20. *Give, and it shall be given you.* 2. It is possible a man may grow poor by meanly sparing what he has, *withholding more than is meet*, not paying just debts, not relieving the poor, not providing what is convenient for the family, not allowing necessary expenses for the preservation of the goods; this *tends to poverty*; it cramps men's ingenuity and industry, weakens their interest, destroys their credit, and forfeits the blessing of God: and, let men be ever so saving of what they have, if God blast it and blow upon it, it comes to nothing. *A fire not blown shall consume it*, Hag. i. 6, 9.

**25 The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.**

So backward we are to works of charity, and so ready to think that giving undoes us, that we need to have it very much pressed upon us how much it is for our own advantage to do good to others, as before, v. 17. 1. We shall have the comfort of it in our own bosoms: *The liberal soul*, the soul of

blessing, that prays for the afflicted and provides for them, that scatters blessings with

gracious lips and generous hands, that soul *shall be made fat* with true pleasure and enriched with more grace. 2. We shall have the recompence of it both from God and man: *He that waters* others with the streams of his bounty *shall be also watered himself*; God will certainly return it in the dews, in the plentiful showers, of his blessing, which he will *pour out, till there be not room enough to receive it*, Mal. iii. 10. Men that have any sense of gratitude will return it if there be occasion; the *merciful shall find mercy* and the kind be kindly dealt with. 3. We shall be enabled still to do yet more good: *He that waters, even he shall be as rain* (so some read it); he shall be recruited as the clouds are which return after the rain, and shall be further useful and acceptable, as the rain to the new-mown grass. *he that teaches shall learn* (so the Chaldee reads it); he that uses his knowledge in teaching others shall himself be taught of God; to him that has, and uses what he has, more shall be given.

## **26 He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing *shall be* upon the head of him that selleth *it***

See here, 1. What use we are to make of the gifts of God's bounty; we must not hoard them up merely for our own advantage, that we may be enriched by them, but we must bring them forth for the benefit of others, that they may be supported and maintained by them. It is a sin, when corn is dear and scarce, to withhold it, in hopes that it will still grow dearer, so to keep up and advance the market, when it is already so high that the poor suffer by it; and at such a time it is the duty of those that have stocks of corn by them to consider the poor, and to be willing to sell at the market-price, to be content with moderate profit, and not aim to make a gain of God's judgments. It is a noble and extensive piece of charity for those that have stores wherewithal to do it to help to keep the markets low when the price of our commodities grows excessive. 2. What regard we are to have to the voice of the people. We are not to think it an indifferent thing, and not worth heeding, whether we have the ill will and word, or the good will and word, of our neighbours, their prayers or their curses; for here we are taught to dread their curses, and

forego our own profit rather than incur them; and to court their blessings, and be at some expense to purchase them. Sometimes, *vox populi est vox Dei—the voice of the people is the voice of God.*

The Folly and Misery of Sinners.

**27 He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.**

Observe, 1. Those that are industrious to do good in the world get themselves beloved both with God and man: *He that rises early to that which is good* (so the word is), that seeks opportunities of serving his friends and relieving the poor, and lays out himself therein, *procures favour*. All about him love him, and speak well of him, and will be ready to do him a kindness; and, which is better than that, better than life, he has God's lovingkindness. 2. Those that are industrious to do mischief are preparing ruin for themselves: *It shall come unto them*; some time or other they will be paid in their own coin. And, observe, *seeking mischief* is here set in opposition to *seeking good*; for those that are not doing good are doing hurt.

**28 He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.**

Observe, 1. Our riches will fail us when we are in the greatest need: *He that trusts in them*, as if they would secure him the favour of God and be his protection and portion, *shall fall*, as a man who lays his weight on a broken reed, which will not only disappoint him, but run into his hand and pierce him. 2. Our righteousness will stand us in stead when our riches fail us: *The righteous shall then flourish as a branch*, the branch of righteousness, like a tree whose leaf shall not wither, Ps. i. 3. Even in death, when riches fail men, the *bones* of the righteous *shall flourish as a herb*, Isa. lxvi. 14. When those that take root in the world wither those that are grafted into Christ and partake of his root and fatness shall be fruitful and flourishing.

**29 He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.**

Two extremes in the management of family-affairs are here condemned and the ill consequences of them foretold:—1. Carefulness and carnal policy, on the one hand. There are those that by their extreme earnestness in pursuit of the world, their anxiety about their business and fretfulness about their losses, their strictness with their servants and their niggardliness towards their families, *trouble their own houses* and give continual vexation to all about them; while others think, by supporting factions and feuds in their families, which are really a trouble to their houses, to serve some turn for themselves, and either to get or to save by it. But they will both be disappointed; they will *inherit the wind*. All they will get by these arts will not only be empty and worthless as the wind, but noisy and troublesome, vanity and vexation. 2. Carelessness and want of common prudence, on the other. He that is a fool in his business, that either minds it not or goes awkwardly about it, that has no contrivance and consideration, not only loses his reputation and interest, but becomes a *servant to the wise in heart*. He is impoverished, and forced to work for his living; while those that manage wisely raise themselves, and come to have dominion over him, and others like him. It is rational, and very fit, that *the fool should be servant to the wise in heart*, and upon that account, among others, we are bound to submit our wills to the will of God, and to be subject to him, because we are fools and he is infinitely wise.

### **30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.**

This shows what great blessings good men are, especially those that are eminently wise, to the places where they live, and therefore how much to be valued. 1. The righteous are as *trees of life*; the fruits of their piety and charity, their instructions, reproofs, examples, and prayers, their interest in heaven, and their influence upon earth, are like the fruits of that tree, precious and useful, contributing to the support and nourishment of the spiritual life in many; they are the ornaments of paradise, God's church on earth, for whose sake it stands. 2. The wise are something more; they are as trees of knowledge, not forbidden, but commanded knowledge. *He that is wise*, by communicating his wisdom, *wins souls*, wins upon them to bring them in love with God and holiness, and so wins them over into the interests of God's kingdom among men. The wise are said to *turn many to*

*righteousness*, and that is the same with winning souls here, Dan. xii. 3. Abraham's proselytes are called *the souls that he had gotten*, Gen. xii. 5. Those that would win souls have need of wisdom to know how to deal with them; and those that do win souls show that they are wise.

### **31 Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.**

This, I think, is the only one of Solomon's proverbs that has that note of attention prefixed to it, *Behold!* which intimates that it contains not only an evident truth, which may be beheld, but an eminent truth, which must be considered. 1. Some understand both parts of a recompence in displeasure: *The righteous*, if they do amiss, shall be punished for their offences in this world; much more shall wicked people be punished for theirs, which are committed, not through infirmity, but with a high hand. If judgment begin at the house of God, what will become of the ungodly? 1 Pet.

iv. 17, 18; Luke xxiii. 31. 2. I rather understand it of a recompence of reward to the righteous and punishment to sinners. Let us behold providential retributions. There are some recompences *in the earth*, in this world, and in the things of this world, which prove that *verily there is a God that judges in the earth* (Ps. lviii. 11); but they are not universal; many sins go unpunished in the earth, and services unrewarded, which indicates that there is a judgment to come, and that there will be more exact and full retributions in the future state. Many times *the righteous* are *recompensed* for their righteousness here *in the earth*, though that is not the principal, much less the only reward either intended for them or intended by them; but whatever the word of God has promised them, or the wisdom of God sees good for them, they shall have *in the earth*. *The wicked* also, *and the sinner*, are sometimes remarkably punished in this life, nations, families, particular persons. And if the righteous, who do not deserve the least reward, yet have part of their recompence here on earth, much more shall the wicked, who deserve the greatest punishment, have part of their punishment on earth, as an earnest of worse to come. Therefore *stand in awe and sin not*. If those have two heavens that merit none, much more shall those have two hells that merit both.

# PROVERBS

## CHAP. XII.

Advantages of the Righteous.

### **1 Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.**

We are here taught to try whether we have grace or no by enquiring how we stand affected to the means of grace. 1. Those that have grace and love it will delight in all the instructions that are given them by way of counsel; admonition, or reproof, by the word or providence of God; they will value a good education, and think it not a hardship, but a happiness, to be under a strict and prudent discipline. Those that love a faithful ministry, that value it, and sit under it with pleasure, make it to appear that they *love knowledge*. 2. Those show themselves not only void of grace, but void of common sense, that take it as an affront to be told of their faults, and an imposition upon their liberty to be put in mind of their duty: *He that hates reproof is not only foolish, but brutish*,

like the horse and the mule that have no understanding, or the ox that kicks against the goad. Those that desire to live in loose families and societies, where they may be under no check, that stifle the convictions of their own consciences, and count those their enemies that tell them the truth, are the *brutish* here meant.

### **2 A good *man* obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.**

Note, 1. We are really as we are with God. Those are happy, truly happy, for ever happy, that *obtain favour of the Lord*, though the world frown upon them, and they find little favour with men; for in God's favour is life, and that is the fountain of all good. On the other hand those are miserable whom *he condemns*, however men may applaud them, and cry them up; whom he condemns he condemns to the second death. 2. We are with God as we are with men, as we have our conversation in this world. Our Father judges of



his children very much by their conduct one to another; and therefore *a good man*, that is merciful, and charitable, and does good, *draws out favour from the Lord* by his prayers; but a malicious man, that devises wickedness against his neighbours, *he will condemn*, as unworthy of a place in his kingdom.

### **3 A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.**

Note, 1. Though men may advance themselves by sinful arts, they cannot by such arts settle and secure themselves; though they may get large estates they cannot get such as will abide: *A man shall not be established by wickedness*; it may set him in high places, but they are slippery places, Ps. lxxiii. 18. That prosperity which is raised by sin is built on the sand, and so it will soon appear.

2. Though good men may have but little of the world, yet that little will last, and what is honestly got will wear well: *The root of the righteous shall not be moved*, though their branches may be shaken. Those that by faith are rooted in Christ are firmly fixed; in him their comfort and happiness are so rooted as never to be rooted up.

### **4 A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.**

Note, 1. He that is blessed with a good wife is as happy as if he were upon the throne, for she is no less than *a crown* to him. *A virtuous woman*, that is pious and prudent, ingenious and industrious, that is active for the good of her family and looks well to the ways of her household, that makes conscience of her duty in every relation, a woman of spirit, that can bear crosses without disturbance, such a one owns her husband for her head, and therefore she *is a crown* to him, not only a credit and honour to him, as *a crown* is an ornament, but supports and keeps up his authority in his family, as *a crown* is an ensign of power. She is submissive and faithful to him and by her example teaches his children and servants to be so too. 2. He that is plagued with a bad wife is as miserable as if he were upon the dunghill; for

she is no better than *rottenness in his bones*, an incurable disease, besides that *she makes him ashamed*. She that is silly and slothful, wasteful and wanton, passionate and ill-tongued, ruins both the credit and comfort of her husband. If he go abroad, his head is hung down, for his wife's faults turn to his reproach. If he retire into himself, his heart is sunk; he is continually uneasy; it is an affliction that preys much upon the spirits.

## **5 The thoughts of the righteous *are* right: *but* the counsels of the wicked *are* deceit.**

Note, 1. The word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and judges them. We mistake if we imagine that thoughts are free. No, they are under the divine cognizance, and therefore under the divine command. 2. We ought to be observers of the thoughts and intents of our own hearts, and to judge of ourselves by them; for they are the first-born of the soul, that have most of its image undisguised. Right thoughts are a righteous man's best evidences, as nothing more certainly proves a man wicked than wicked contrivances and designs. A good man may have in his mind bad suggestions, but he does not indulge them and harbour them till they are ripened into bad projects and resolutions. 3. It is a man's honour to mean honestly, and to have his thoughts right, though a word or action may be misplaced, or mistimed, or at least misinterpreted. But it is a man's shame to lie always at catch, to act with deceit, with trick and design, not only with a long reach, but with an overreach.

## **6 The words of the wicked *are* to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.**

In the foregoing verse the *thoughts* of the wicked and righteous were compared; here their *words*, and those are as the abundance of the heart is. 1. Wicked people speak mischief to their neighbours; and wicked indeed those are whose *words* are to *lie in wait for blood*; their tongues are swords to those that stand in their way, to good men whom they hate and persecute. See an instance, Luke xx. 20, 21. 2. Good men speak help to their neighbours: The *mouth of the upright* is ready to be opened in the cause of those that are oppressed (ch. xxxi. 8), to plead for them, to witness for them,

and so to *deliver them*, particularly those whom the wicked *lie in wait* for. A man may sometimes do a very good work with one good word.

## **7 The wicked are overthrown, and *are not*: but the house of the righteous shall stand.**

We are here taught as before (v. 3 and ch. x. 25, 30), 1. That the *triumphing of the wicked is short*. They may be exalted for a while, but in a little time they are *overthrown and are not*; their trouble proves their overthrow, and those who made a great show disappear, and their place knows them no more. *Turn the wicked, and they are not*; they stand in such a slippery place that the least touch of trouble brings them down, like the apples of Sodom, which look fair, but touch them and they go to dust. 2. That the prosperity of the righteous has a good bottom and will endure. Death will remove them, but their *house shall stand*, their families shall be kept up, and the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

## **8 A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.**

We are here told whence to expect a good name. Reputation is what most have a high regard to and stand much upon. Now it is certain, 1. The best reputation is that which attends virtue and serious piety, and the prudent conduct of life: *A man shall be commended* by all that are wise and good, in conformity to the judgment of God himself, which we are sure is *according to truth*, not according to his riches or preferments, his craft and subtlety, but *according to his wisdom*, the honesty of his designs and the prudent choice of means to compass them. 2. The worst reproach is

that which follows wickedness and an opposition to that which is good: *He that is of a perverse heart*, that turns aside to crooked ways, and goes on frowardly in them, *shall be despised*. Providence will bring him to poverty and contempt, and all that have a true sense of honour will despise him as unworthy to be dealt with and unfit to be trusted, as a blemish and scandal to mankind.

**9 *He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.***

Note, 1. It is the folly of some that they covet to make a great figure abroad, take place, and take state, as persons of quality, and yet want necessities at home, and, if their debts were paid, would not be worth a morsel of bread, nay, perhaps, pinch their bellies to put it on their backs, that they may appear very gay, because fine feathers make fine birds. 2. The condition and character of those is every way better who content themselves in a lower sphere, where they are despised for the plainness of their dress and the meanness of their post, that they may be able to afford themselves, not only necessities, but conveniences, in their own houses, not only bread, but a servant to attend them and take some of their work off their hands. Those that contrive to live plentifully and comfortably at home are to be preferred before those that affect nothing so much as to appear splendid abroad, though they have not wherewithal to maintain their appearance, whose hearts are unhumbled when their condition is low.

**10 A righteous *man* regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked *are* cruel.**

See here, 1. To how great a degree a good man will be merciful; he has not only a compassion for the human nature under its greatest abasements, but he regards even *the life of his beast*, not only because it is his servant, but because it is God's creature, and in conformity to Providence, which *preserves man and beast*. The beasts that are under our care must be provided for, must have convenient food and rest, must in no case be abused or tyrannised over. Balaam was checked for beating his ass. The law took care for oxen. Those therefore are unrighteous men that are not just to the brute-creatures; those that are furious and barbarous to them evidence, and confirm in themselves, a habit of barbarity, and help to make the creation groan, Rom. viii. 22. 2. To how great a degree a wicked man will be unmerciful; even his *tender mercies* are *cruel*; that natural compassion which is in him, as a man, is lost, and, by the power of corruption, is turned into hard-heartedness; even that which they will have to pass for compassion is really cruel, as Pilate's resolution concerning Christ the

innocent, *I will chastise him and let him go*. Their pretended kindnesses are only a cover for purposed cruelties.

**11 He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain *persons* is void of understanding.**

Note, 1. It is men's wisdom to mind their business and follow an honest calling, for that is the way, by the blessing of God, to get a livelihood: *He that tills his land*, of which he is either the owner or the occupant, that keeps to his word and is willing to take pains, if he do not raise an estate by it (what need is there of that?), yet he *shall be satisfied with bread*, shall have food convenient for himself and his family, enough to bear his charges comfortably through the world. Even the

sentence of wrath has this mercy in it, Thou shalt *eat bread*, though it be *in the sweat of thy face*. Cain was denied this, Gen. iv. 12. Be busy, and that is the true way to be easy. Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee. *Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands*. 2. It is men's folly to neglect their business. Those are *void of understanding* that do so, for then they fall in with idle companions and follow them in their evil courses, and so come to want bread, at least bread of their own, and make themselves burdensome to others, eating the bread out of other people's mouths.

**12 The wicked desireth the net of evil *men*: but the root of the righteous yieldeth *fruit***

See here, 1. What is the care and aim of a wicked man; he would do mischief: He *desires the net of evil men*. "Oh that I were but as cunning as such a man, to make a hand of those I deal with, that I had but his art of over-reaching, that I could but take my revenge on one I have spite to as effectually as he can!" He desires the *strong-hold, or fortress*, of evil men (so some read it), to act securely in doing mischief, that it may not turn upon him. 2. What is the care and aim of a good man: His *root yields fruit*, and is his strength and stability, and that is it that he desires, to do good and to be fixed and confirmed in doing good. The wicked desires only a net

wherewith to fish for himself; the righteous desires to yield fruit for the benefit of others and God's glory, Rom. xiv. 6.

Truth and Falsehood.

### **13 The wicked is snared by the transgression of *his* lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.**

See here, 1. The wicked entangling themselves in trouble by their folly, when God in justice leaves them to themselves. They are often *snared by the transgression of their lips* and their throats are cut with their own tongues. By *speaking evil of dignities* they expose themselves to public justice; by giving ill language they become obnoxious to private resentments, are sued for defamation, and actions on the case for words are brought against them. Many a man has paid dearly in this world for the transgression of his lips, and has felt the lash on his back for want of a bridle upon his tongue, Ps. lxiv. 8. 2. The righteous extricating themselves out of trouble by their own wisdom, when God in mercy comes in for their succour: *The just shall come out* of such troubles as the wicked throw themselves headlong into. It is intimated that the just may perhaps come into trouble; but, *though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down*, Ps. xxxiv. 19.

### **14 A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of *his* mouth: and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.**

We are here assured, for our quickening to every good word and work, 1. That even good words will turn to a good account (v. 14): *A man shall be satisfied with good* (that is, he shall gain present comfort, that inward pleasure which is truly satisfying) *by the fruit of his mouth*, by the good he does with his pious discourse and prudent advice. While we are teaching others we may ourselves learn, and feed on the bread of life we break to others. 2. That good works, much more, will be abundantly rewarded: *The recompence of a man's hands* for all his work and labour of love, all he has done for the glory of God and the good of his generation, *shall be rendered unto him*, and he shall reap as he has sown. Or it may be understood of the

general rule of justice; God will *render to every man according to his work*, Rom. ii. 6.

## **15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.**

See here, 1. What it is that keeps a fool from being wise: *His way is right in his own eyes*; he thinks he is in the right in every thing he does, and *therefore* asks no advice, because he does not apprehend he needs it; he is confident he knows the way, and cannot miss it, and therefore never enquires the way. The rule he goes by is to do that which is *right in his own eyes*, to walk in the way of his heart. *Quicquid libet, licet*—*He makes his will his law*. He is a fool that is governed by his eye, and not by his conscience. 2. What it is that keeps a wise man from being a fool; he is willing to be advised, desires to have counsel given him, and *hearkens to counsel*, being diffident of his own judgment and having a value for the direction of those that are wise and good. He is wise (it is a sign he is so, and he is likely to continue so) whose ear is always open to good advice.

## **16 A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.**

Note, 1. Passion is folly: *A fool is known by his anger* (so some read it); not but that a wise man may be angry when there is just cause for it, but then he has his anger under check and direction, is *lord of his anger*, whereas a fool's anger lords it over him. He that, when he is provoked, breaks out into indecent expressions, in words or behaviour, whose passion alters his countenance, makes him outrageous, and leads him to forget himself, *Nabal* certainly is his name and *folly is with him*. *A fool's indignation is known in the day*; he proclaims it openly, whatever company he is in. Or it is known in the day he is provoked; he cannot defer showing his resentments. Those that are soon angry, that are quickly put into a flame by the least spark, have not that rule which they ought to have over their own spirits. 2. Meekness is wisdom: *A prudent man covers shame*. (1.) He covers the passion that is in his own breast; when his *spirit is stirred*, and his *heart hot within him*, he keeps his mouth as with a bridle, and suppresses his resentments, by smothering and stifling them. Anger is shame, and, though a wise man be

not perfectly free from it, yet he is ashamed of it, rebukes it, and suffers not the evil spirit to speak. (2.) He covers the provocation that is given him, the indignity that is done him, winks at it, covers it as much as may be from himself, that he may not carry his resentments of it too far. It is a kindness to ourselves, and contributes to the repose of our own minds, to extenuate and excuse the injuries and affronts that we receive, instead of aggravating them and making the worst of them, as we are apt to do.

**17    *He that*    speaketh    truth    sheweth    forth  
righteousness: but a false witness deceit.**

Here is, 1. A faithful witness commended for an honest man. *He that* makes conscience of *speaking truth*, and representing every thing fairly, to the best of his knowledge, whether in judgment or in common conversation, whether he be upon his oath or no, he *shows forth righteousness*; he makes it to appear that he is governed and actuated by the principles and laws of righteousness, and he promotes justice by doing honour to it and serving the administration of it. 2. A false witness condemned for a cheat; he *shows forth deceit*, not only how little conscience he makes of deceiving those he deals with, but how much pleasure he takes in it, and that he is possessed by a lying spirit, Jer. ix. 3-5. We are all concerned to possess ourselves with a dread and detestation of the sin of lying (Ps. cxix. 163) and with a reigning principle of honesty.

**18 There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.**

The tongue is death or life, poison or medicine, as it is used. 1. There are words that are cutting and killing, that are *like the piercings of a sword*. Opprobrious words grieve the spirits of those to whom they are spoken, and cut them to the heart. Slanders, like a sword, wound the reputation of those of whom they are uttered, and perhaps incurably. Whisperings and evil surmises, like a sword, divide and cut asunder the bounds of love and friendship, and separate those that have been dearest to each other. 2. There are words that are curing and healing: *The tongue of the wise is health*, closing up those wounds which the backbiting tongue had given, making all whole again, restoring peace, and accommodating matters in variance and



persuading to reconciliation. Wisdom will find out proper remedies against the mischiefs that are made by detraction and evil-speaking.

## **19 The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue *is* but for a moment.**

Be it observed, to the honour of truth, that sacred thing, 1. That, if truth be spoken, it will hold good, and, whoever may be disobliged by it and angry at it, yet it will keep its ground. Great is the truth and will prevail. What is true will be always true; we may abide by it, and need not fear being disproved and put to shame. 2. That, if truth be denied, yet in time it will transpire. A *lying tongue*, that puts false colours upon things, *is but for a moment*. The lie will be disproved. The liar, when he comes to be examined, will be found in several stories, and not consistent with himself as he is that speaks truth; and, when he is found in a lie, he cannot gain his point, nor will he afterwards be credited. Truth may be eclipsed, but it will come to light. Those therefore that make a lie their refuge will find it a refuge of lies.

Weighty Sayings.

## **20 Deceit *is* in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace *is* joy.**

Note, 1. Those that devise mischief contrive, for the accomplishing of it, how to impose upon others; but it will prove, in the end, that they deceive themselves. Those that *imagine evil*, under colour of friendship, have their hearts full of this and the other advantage and satisfaction which they shall gain by it, but it is all a cheat. Let them imagine it ever so artfully, deceivers will be deceived. 2. Those that consult the good of their neighbours, that study the things which make for peace and give peaceable advice, promote healing attempts and contrive healing methods, and, according as their sphere is, further the public welfare, will have not only the credit, but the comfort of it. They will have joy and success, perhaps beyond their expectation. *Blessed are the peace-makers*.

## **21 There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.**

Note, 1. Piety is a sure protection. If men be sincerely righteous, the righteous God has engaged that no evil shall happen to them. He will, by the power of his grace in them, that principle of justice, keep them from the evil of sin; so that, though they be tempted, yet they shall not be overcome by the temptation, and though they may come into trouble, into many troubles, yet to them those troubles shall have no evil in them, whatever they have to others (Ps. xci. 10), for they shall be overruled to work for their good. 2. Wickedness is as sure a destruction. Those that live in contempt of God and man, that are set on mischief, with mischief they *shall be filled*. They shall be more mischievous, shall be *filled with all unrighteousness*, Rom. i. 29. Or they shall be made

miserable with the mischiefs that shall come upon them. Those that delight in mischief shall have enough of it. Some read the whole verse thus, *There shall no evil happen to the just, though the wicked be filled with mischief* and spite against them. They shall be safe under the protection of Heaven, though hell itself break loose upon them.

## **22 Lying lips *are* abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly *are* his delight.**

We are here taught, 1. To hate lying, and to keep at the utmost distance from it, because it is an abomination to the Lord, and renders those abominable in his sight that allow themselves in it, not only because it is a breach of his law, but because it is destructive to human society. 2. To make conscience of truth, not only in our words, but in all our actions, because those that *deal truly* and sincerely in all their dealings are *his delight*, and he is well pleased with them. We delight to converse with, and make use of, those that are honest and that we may put a confidence in; such therefore let us be, that we may recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

## **23 A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.**

Note, 1. He that is wise does not affect to proclaim his wisdom, and it is his honour that he does not. He communicates his knowledge when it may turn to the edification of others, but he conceals it when the showing of it would only tend to his own commendation. Knowing men, if they be prudent men, will carefully avoid every thing that savours of ostentation, and not take all occasions to show their learning and reading, but only to use it for good purposes, and then let *their own works praise them*. *Ars est celare artem—The perfection of art is to conceal it*. 2. He that is foolish cannot avoid proclaiming his folly, and it is his shame that he cannot: *The heart of fools*, by their foolish words and actions, *proclaims foolishness*; either they do not desire to hide it, so little sense have they of good and evil, honour and dishonour, or they know not how to hide it, so little discretion have they in the management of themselves, Eccl. x. 3.

## **24 The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.**

Note, 1. Industry is the way to preferment. Solomon advanced Jeroboam because he saw that he was an industrious young man, and minded his business, 1 Kings xi. 28. Men that take pains in study and serviceableness will thereby gain such an interest and reputation as will give them a dominion over all about them, by which means many have risen strangely. He that has been *faithful in a few things* shall be made *ruler over many things*. The elders, that *labour in the word and doctrine*, are *worthy of double honour*; and those that are diligent when they are young will get that which will enable them to rule, and so to rest, when they are old. 2. Knavery is the way to slavery: *The slothful* and careless, or rather the *deceitful* (for so the word signifies), *shall be under tribute*. Those that, because they will not take pains in an honest calling, live by their shifts and arts of dishonesty, are paltry and beggarly, and will be kept under. Those that are diligent and honest when they are apprentices will come to be masters; but those that are otherwise are the fools who, all their days, must be *servants to the wise in heart*.

## **25 Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.**

Here is, 1. The cause and consequence of melancholy. It is *heaviness in the heart*; it is a load of care, and fear, and sorrow, upon the spirits, depressing them, and disabling them to exert

themselves with any vigour on what is to be done or fortitude in what is to borne; it makes them stoop, prostrates and sinks them. Those that are thus oppressed can neither do the duty nor take the comfort of any relation, condition, or conversation. Those therefore that are inclined to it should watch and pray against it. 2. The cure of it: *A good word* from God, applied by faith, *makes it glad*; such a word is that (says one of the rabbin), *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee*; the good word of God, particularly the gospel, is designed to make the hearts glad that are weary and heavy-laden, Matt. xi. 28. Ministers are to be helpers of this joy.

## **26 The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.**

See here, 1. That good men do well for themselves; for they have in themselves an excellent character, and they secure to themselves an excellent portion, and in both they excel other people: *The righteous is more abundant than his neighbour* (so the margin); he is richer, though not in this world's goods, yet in the graces and comforts of the Spirit, which are the true riches. There is a true excellency in religion; it ennobles men, inspires them with generous principles, makes them substantial; it is an excellency which is, in the sight of God, of great price, who is the true Judge of excellency. His neighbour may make a greater figure in the world, may be more applauded, but the righteous man has the intrinsic worth. 2. That wicked men do ill for themselves; they walk in a way which *seduces them*. It seems to them to be not only a pleasant way, but the right way; it is so agreeable to flesh and blood that they therefore flatter themselves with an opinion that it cannot be amiss, but they will not gain the point they aim at, nor enjoy the good they hope for. It is all a cheat; and therefore the righteous is wiser and happier than his neighbour, that yet despise him and trample upon him.

## **27 The slothful *man* roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is**

## precious.

Here is, 1. That which may make us hate slothfulness and deceit, for the word here, as before, signifies both: *The slothful* deceitful man has roast meat, but that which he roasts is not what he himself *took in hunting*, no, it is what others took pains for, and he lives upon the fruit of their labours, like the drones in the hive. Or, if slothful deceitful men have taken any thing by hunting (as sportsmen are seldom men of business), yet they do not roast it when they have taken it; they have no comfort in the enjoyment of it; perhaps God in his providence cuts them short of it. 2. That which may make us in love with industry and honesty, that the *substance of a diligent man*, though it be not great perhaps, *is yet precious*. It comes from the blessing of God; he has comfort in it; it does him good, and his family. It is his own daily bread, not bread out of other people's mouths, and therefore he sees God gives it to him in answer to his prayer.

## **28 In the way of righteousness is life; and *in* the pathway *thereof there* is no death.**

The way of religion is here recommended to us, 1. As a straight, plain, easy way; it is *the way of righteousness*. God's commands (the rule we are to walk by) are all holy, just, and good. Religion has right reason and equity on its side; it is a *path-way*, a way which God has cast up for us (Isa.

xxxv. 8); it is a highway, the king's highway, the King of kings' highway, a way which is tracked

before us by all the saints, the good old way, full of the footsteps of the flock. 2. As a safe, pleasant, comfortable way. (1.) There is not only life at the end, but there is life in the way; all true comfort and satisfaction. The favour of God, which is better than life; the Spirit, who is life. (2.) There is not only life in it, but so as that in it *there is no death*, none of that sorrow of the world which works death and is an allay to our present joy and life. There is no end of that life that is in the way of righteousness. Here there is life, but there is death too. *In the way of righteousness there is life, and no death*, life and immortality.

# PROVERBS

## CHAP. XIII.

### Moral Maxims.

**1 A wise son *heareth* his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.**

Among the children of the same parents it is no new thing for some to be hopeful and others the contrary; now here we are taught to distinguish. 1. There is great hope of those that have a reverence for their parents, and are willing to be advised and admonished by them. He is *a wise son*, and is in a far way to be wiser, that *hears his father's instruction*, desires to hear it, regards it, and complies with it, and does not merely give it the hearing. 2. There is little hope of those that will not so much as *hear rebuke* with any patience, but scorn to submit to government and scoff at those that deal faithfully with them. How can those mend a fault who will not be told of it, but count those their enemies who do them that kindness?

**2 A man shall eat good by the fruit of *his* mouth: but the soul of the transgressors *shall eat* violence.**

Note, 1. If that which comes from within, out of the heart, be good, and from a good treasure, it will return with advantage. Inward comfort and satisfaction will be daily bread; nay, it will be a continual feast to those who delight in that communication which is *to the use of edifying*. 2. Violence done will recoil in the face of him that does it: *The soul of the transgressors* that harbours and plots mischief, and vents it by word and deed, *shall eat violence*; they shall have their belly full of it. *Reward her as she has rewarded thee*, Rev. xviii. 6. Every man shall drink as he brews, eat as he speaks; for by our words we must be justified or condemned, Matt. xii. 37. As our fruit is, so will our food be, Rom. vi. 21, 22.

**3 He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: *but* he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.**

Note, 1. A guard upon the lips is a guard to the soul. He that is cautious, that thinks twice before he speaks once, that, if he have *thought evil*, lays *his hand upon his mouth* to suppress it, that keeps a strong bridle on his tongue and a strict hand on that bridle, he *keeps his soul* from a

great deal both of guilt and grief and saves himself the trouble of many bitter reflections on himself and reflections of others upon him. 2. There is many a one ruined by an ungoverned tongue: *He that opens widely his lips*, to let out *quod in buccam venerit*—*whatever comes uppermost*, that loves to bawl, and bluster, and make a noise, and affects such a liberty of speech as bids defiance both to God and man, he *shall have destruction*. it will be the destruction of his reputation, his interest, his comfort, and his soul for ever, Jam. iii. 6.

#### **4 The soul of the sluggard desireth, and *hath* nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.**

Here is, 1. The misery and shame of the slothful. See how foolish and absurd they are; they desire the gains which the diligent get, but they hate the pains which the diligent take; they covet every thing that is to be coveted, but will do nothing that is to be done; and therefore it follows, They have nothing; for he that will not labour let him hunger, and let him not *eat*, 2 Thess. iii. 10. *The desire of the slothful*, which should be his excitement, is his torment, which should make him busy, makes him always uneasy, and is really a greater toil to him than labour would be. 2. The happiness and honour of the diligent: Their *soul shall be made fat*; they shall have abundance, and shall have the comfortable enjoyment of it, and the more for its being the fruit of their diligence. This is especially true in spiritual affairs. Those that rest in idle wishes know not what the advantages of religion are; whereas those that take pains in the service of God find both the pleasure and profit of it.

The Righteous Exclusively Happy.

#### **5 A righteous *man* hateth lying: but a wicked *man* is loathsome, and cometh to shame.**

Note, 1. Where grace reigns sin is loathsome. It is the undoubted character of every *righteous man* that he *hates lying* (that is, all sin, for every sin is a lie, and particularly all fraud and falsehood in commerce and conversation), not only that he will not tell a lie, but he abhors lying, from a rooted reigning principle of love to truth and justice, and conformity to God. 2. Where sin reigns the *man is loathsome*. If his eyes were opened, and his conscience awakened, he would be so to himself, he would *abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes*; however, he is so to God and all good men; particularly, he makes himself so by lying, than which there is nothing more detestable. And, though he may think to face it out awhile, yet he will *come to shame* and contempt at last and will blush to show his face, Dan. xii. 2.

## **6 Righteousness keepeth *him that is upright in the way*: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.**

See here, 1. Saints secured from ruin. Those that are *upright in their way*, that mean honestly in all their actions, adhere conscientiously to the sacred and eternal rules of equity, and deal sincerely both with God and man, their integrity will keep them from the temptations of Satan, which shall not prevail over them, the reproaches and injuries of evil men, which shall not fasten upon them, to do them any real mischief, Ps. xxv. 21.

Hic murus aheneus esto, nil conscire sibi.

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,

Still to preserve thy conscious innocence.

2. Sinners secured for ruin. Those that are wicked, even their wickedness will be their overthrow at last, and they are held in the cords of it in the mean time. Are they corrected, destroyed? It is their own wickedness that corrects them, that destroys them; they alone shall bear it.

## **7 There is that maketh himself rich, yet *hath* nothing: *there is* that maketh himself poor, yet *hath* great riches.**



This observation is applicable,

I. To men's worldly estate. The world is a great cheat, not only the things of the world, but the men of the world. *All men are liars*. Here is an instance in two sore evils under the sun:—1. Some that are really poor would be thought to be rich and are thought to be so; they trade and spend as if they were rich, make a great bustle and a great show as if they had hidden treasures, when perhaps, if all their debts were paid, they are not worth a groat. This is sin, and will be shame; many a one hereby ruins his family and brings reproach upon his profession of religion. Those that thus live above what they have choose to be subject to their own pride rather than to God's providence, and it will end accordingly. 2. Some that are really rich would be thought to be poor, and are thought to be so, because they sordidly and meanly live below what God has given them, and choose rather to bury it than to use it, Eccl. vi. 1, 2. In this there is an ingratitude to God, injustice to the family and neighbourhood, and uncharitableness to the poor.

II. To their spiritual state. Grace is the riches of the soul; it is true riches; but men commonly misrepresent themselves, either designedly or through mistake and ignorance of themselves. 1. There are many presuming hypocrites, that are really poor and empty of grace and yet either think themselves rich, and will not be convinced of their poverty, or pretend themselves rich, and will not own their poverty. 2. There are many timorous trembling Christians, that are spiritually rich, and full of grace, and yet think themselves poor, and will not be persuaded that they are rich, or, at least, will not own it; by their doubts and fears, their complaints and griefs, they *make themselves poor*. The former mistake is destroying at last; this is disquieting in the mean time.

## **8 The ransom of a man's life *are* his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.**

We are apt to judge of men's blessedness, at least in this world, by their wealth, and that they are more or less happy accordingly as they have more or less of this world's goods; but Solomon here shows what a gross mistake it is, that we may be reconciled to a poor condition, and may neither covet riches ourselves nor envy those that have abundance. 1. Those that are rich,

if by some they are respected for their riches, yet, to balance that, by others they are envied and struck at, and brought in danger of their lives, which therefore they are forced to ransom with their riches. *Slay us not, for we have treasures in the field*, Jer. xli. 8. Under some tyrants, it has been crime enough to be rich; and how little is a man beholden to his wealth when it only serves to redeem that life which otherwise would not have been exposed! 2. Those that are poor, if by some, that should be their friends, they are despised and overlooked, yet, to balance that, they are also despised and overlooked by others that would be their enemies if they had any thing to lose: *The poor hear not rebuke*, are not censured, reproached, accused, nor brought into trouble, as the rich are; for

nobody thinks it worth while to take notice of them. When the rich Jews were carried captives to Babylon *the poor of the land were left*, 2 Kings xxv. 12. Welcome nothing, once in seven years. *Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator*—*When a traveller is met by a robber he will rejoice at not having much property about him.*

## **9 The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.**

Here is, 1. The comfort of good men flourishing and lasting: *The light of the righteous rejoices*, that is, it increases, and makes them glad. Even their outward prosperity is their joy, and much more those gifts, graces, and comforts, with which their souls are illuminated; these *shine more and more*, ch. iv. 18. The Spirit is their light, and he gives them a fulness of joy, and *rejoices to do them good*. 2. The comfort of bad men withering and dying: *The lamp of the wicked* burns dimly and faint; it looks melancholy, like a taper in an urn, and it will shortly *be put out* in utter darkness, Isa. l. 11. The light of the righteous is as that of the sun, which may be eclipsed and clouded, but will continue; that of the wicked is as a lamp of their own kindling, which will presently go out and is easily put out.

## **10 Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.**

Note, 1. Foolish pride is the great make-bate. Would you know *whence come wars and fightings*? They come from this root of bitterness. Whatever hand other lusts may have in contention (passion, envy, covetousness), pride has the great hand; it is its pride that it will itself sow discord and needs no help. Pride makes men impatient of contradiction in either their opinions or their desires, impatient of competition and rivalry, impatient of contempt, or any thing that looks like a slight, and impatient of concession, and receding, from a conceit of certain right and truth on their side; and hence arise quarrels among relations and neighbours, quarrels in states and kingdoms, in churches and Christian societies. Men will be revenged, will not forgive, because they are proud. 2. Those that are humble and peaceable are wise and *well advised*. Those that will ask and take advice, that will consult their own consciences, their Bibles, their ministers, their friends, and will do nothing rashly, are wise, as in other things, so in this, that they will humble themselves, will stoop and yield, to preserve quietness and prevent quarrels.

## **11 Wealth *gotten* by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.**

This shows that riches wear as they are won and woven. 1. That which is won ill will never wear well, for a curse attends it which will waste it, and the same corrupt dispositions which incline men to the sinful ways of getting well incline them to the like sinful ways of spending: *Wealth gotten by vanity* will be bestowed upon vanity, and then it *will be diminished*. That which is got by such employments as are not lawful, or not becoming Christians, such as only serve to feed pride and luxury, that which is got by gaming or by the stage, may as truly be said to be *gotten by vanity* as that which is got by fraud and lying, and *will be diminished*. *De male quæsitis vix gaudet tertius hæres*—*Ill-gotten wealth will scarcely be enjoyed by the third generation*. 2. That which is got by industry and honesty will grow more, instead of growing less; it will be a maintenance; it will be an inheritance; it will be an abundance. *He that labours, working with his hands, shall so increase*

as that he shall *have to give to him that needs* (Eph. iv. 28); and, when it comes to that, it will increase yet more and more.

## **12 Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but *when* the desire cometh, *it is* a tree of life.**

Note, 1. Nothing is more grievous than the disappointment of a raised expectation, though not in the thing itself by a denial, yet in the time of it by a delay: *Hope deferred makes the heart sick* and languishing, fretful and peevish; but hope quite dashed kills the heart, and the more high the expectation was raised the more cutting is the frustration of it. It is therefore our wisdom not to promise ourselves any great matters from the creature, not to feed ourselves with any vain hopes from this world, lest we lay up matter for our own vexation; and what we do hope for let us prepare to be disappointed in, that, if it should prove so, it may prove the easier; and let us not be hasty. 2. Nothing is more grateful than to enjoy that, at last, which we have long wished and waited for: *When the desire does come* it puts men into a sort of paradise, a garden of pleasure, for *it is a tree of life*. It will aggravate the eternal misery of the wicked that their hopes will be frustrated; and it will make the happiness of heaven the more welcome to the saints that it is what they have earnestly longed for as the crown of their hopes.

## **13 Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.**

Here is, 1. The character of one that is marked for ruin: He that *despises the word* of God, and has no regard to it, no veneration for it, nor will be ruled by it, certainly he *shall be destroyed*, for he slights that which is the only means of curing a destructive disease and makes himself obnoxious to that divine wrath which will certainly be his destruction. Those that prefer the rules of carnal policy before divine precepts, and the allurements of the world and the flesh before God's promises and comforts, despise his word, giving the preference to those things that stand in competition with it; and it is to their own just destruction: they would not take warning. 2. The character of one that is sure to be happy: *He that fears the commandment*, that stands in awe of God, pays a deference to his authority, has a reverence for his word, is afraid of displeasing God and incurring the penalties annexed to the commandment, shall not only escape destruction, but *shall*

*be rewarded for his godly fear. In keeping the commandment there is great reward.*

## **14 The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.**

By *the law of the wise* and righteous, here, we may understand either the principles and rules by which they govern themselves or (which comes all to one) the instructions which they give to others, which ought to be as a law to all about them; and if they be so, 1. They will be constant springs of comfort and satisfaction, as *a fountain of life*, sending forth streams of living water; the closer we keep to those rules the more effectually we secure our own peace. 2. They will be constant preservatives from the temptations of Satan. Those that follow the dictates of this law will keep at a distance from the snares of sin, and so escape *the snares of death* which those run into that forsake *the law of the wise*.

## **15 Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.**

If we compare not only the end, but the way, we shall find that religion has the advantage; for,

1. The way of saints is pleasant and agreeable: *Good understanding* gains *favour* with God and man; our Saviour grew in that favour when he *increased in wisdom*. Those that conduct themselves prudently, and order their conversation aright in every thing, that *serve Christ in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, are *accepted of God and approved of men*, Rom. xiv. 17, 18. And how comfortably will that man pass through the world who is well understood and is therefore well accepted! 2. The way of sinners is rough and uneasy, and, for *this* reason, unpleasant to themselves, because unacceptable to others. It is *hard*, hard upon others, who complain of it, hard to the sinner himself, who can have little enjoyment of himself while he is doing that which is disobliging to all mankind. The service of sin is perfect slavery, and the road to hell is strewed with the thorns and thistles that are the products of the curse. Sinners labour in the very fire.

## **16 Every prudent *man* dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open *his* folly.**

Note, 1. It is wisdom to be cautious. *Every prudent* discreet *man* does all *with knowledge* (considering with himself and consulting with others), acts with deliberation and is upon the reserve, is careful not to meddle with that which he has not some knowledge of, not to launch out into business which he has not acquainted himself with, will not *deal with* those that he has not some *knowledge* of, whether they may be confided in. He is still dealing in knowledge, that he may increase the stock he has. 2. It is folly to be rash, as the *fool* is, who is forward to talk of things he knows nothing of and undertake that which he is no way fit for, and so *lays open his folly* and makes himself ridiculous. He *began to build and was not able to finish*.

## **17 A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.**

Here we have, 1. The ill consequences of betraying a trust. *A wicked messenger*, who, being sent to negotiate any business, is false to him that employed him, divulges his counsels, and so defeats his designs, cannot expect to prosper, but will certainly *fall into* some *mischief* or other, will be discovered and punished, since nothing is more hateful to God and man than the treachery of those that have a confidence reposed in them. 2. The happy effects of fidelity: An *ambassador* who *faithfully* discharges his trust, and serves the interests of those who employ him, *is health*; he is health to those by whom and for whom he is employed, heals differences that are between them, and preserves a good understanding; he is health to himself, for he secures his own interest. This is applicable to ministers, Christ's messengers and ambassadors; those that are wicked and false to Christ and the souls of men do mischief and *fall into mischief*, but those that are faithful will find sound words to be healing words to others and themselves.

## **18 Poverty and shame *shall be to* him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.**

Note, 1. He that is so proud that he scorns to be taught will certainly be abased. He that *refuses* the good *instruction* offered him, as if it were a reflection upon his honour and an abridgment of his liberty, *poverty and shame shall be to him*: he will become a beggar and live and die in disgrace; every one will despise him as foolish, and stubborn, and ungovernable. 2. He that is so humble that he takes it well to be told of his faults shall certainly be exalted: *He that regards a reproof*, whoever

gives it to him, and will mend what is amiss when it is shown him, gains respect as wise and candid;

he avoids that which would be a disgrace to him and is in a fair way to make himself considerable.

## **19 The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but *it* is abomination to fools to depart from evil.**

This shows the folly of those that refuse instruction, for they might be happy and will not. 1. They might be happy. There are in man strong desires of happiness; God has provided for the accomplishment of those desires, and that would be *sweet to the soul*, whereas the pleasures of sense are grateful only to the carnal appetite. *The desire* of good men towards the favour of God and spiritual blessings brings that which *is sweet to their souls*; we know those that can say so by experience, Ps. iv. 6, 7. 2. Yet they will not be happy; for *it is an abomination to them to depart from evil*, which is necessary to their being happy. Never let those expect any thing truly sweet to their souls that will not be persuaded to leave their sins, but that roll them under their tongues as a sweet morsel.

## **20 He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.**

Note, 1. Those that would be good must keep good company, which is an evidence for them that they would be good (men's character is known by the company they choose) and will be a means of making them good, of showing them the way and of quickening and encouraging them in it. He that would be himself wise must walk with those that are so, must choose

such for his intimate acquaintance, and converse with them accordingly; must ask and receive instruction from them, and keep up pious and profitable talk with them. *Miss not the discourse of the elders, for they also learned of their fathers*, Ecclesiasticus viii. 9. And (Ecclesiasticus vi. 35), *Be willing to hear every godly discourse, and let not the parables of understanding escape thee*. 2. Multitudes are brought to ruin by bad company: *A companion of fools shall be broken* (so some), *shall be known* (so the LXX.), known to be a fool; *noscitur ex socio—he is known by his company*. He *will be like them* (so some), *will be made wicked* (so others); it comes all to one, for all those, and those only, that make themselves wicked, will *be destroyed*, and those that associate with evil-doers are debauched, and so undone, and at last ascribe their death to it.

## **21 Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.**

Here see, 1. How unavoidable the destruction of sinners is; the wrath of God pursues them, and all the terrors of that wrath: *Evil pursues* them closely wherever they go, as the avenger of blood pursued the manslayer, and they have no city of refuge to flee to; they attempt an escape, but in vain. Whom God pursues he is sure to overtake. They may prosper for a while and grow very secure, but their damnation slumbers not, though they do. 2. How indefeasible the happiness of the saints is; the God that cannot lie has engaged that *to the righteous good shall be repaid*. They shall be abundantly recompensed for all the good they have done, and all the ill they have suffered, in this world; so that, though many have been losers for their righteousness, they shall not be losers by it. Though the recompence do not come quickly, it will come in the day of payment, in the world of retribution; and it will be an abundant recompence.

## **22 A good *man* leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.**

See here, 1. How *a good man's* estate lasts: He *leaves an inheritance to his children's children*. It is part of his praise that he is thoughtful for posterity, that he does not lay all out upon himself, but is in care to do well for those



that come after him, not by withholding more than is meet, but by a prudent and decent frugality. He trains up his children to this, that they may leave it to their children; and especially he is careful, both by justice and charity, to obtain the blessing of God upon what he has, and to entail that blessing upon his children, without which the greatest industry and frugality will be in vain: *A good man*, by being good and doing good, by honouring the Lord with his substance and spending it in his service, secures it to his posterity; or, if he should not leave them much of this world's goods, his prayers, his instructions, his good example, will be the best entail, and the promises of the covenant will be an inheritance to his *children's children*, Ps. ciii. 17. 2. How it increases by the accession of *the wealth of the sinner* to it, for that *is laid up for the just*. If it be asked, How should good men grow so rich, who are not so eager upon the world as others are and who commonly suffer for their well-doing? It is here answered, God, in his providence, often brings into their hands that which wicked people had laid up for themselves. *The innocent shall divide the silver*, Job xxvii. 16, 17. The Israelites shall spoil the Egyptians (Exod.

xii. 36) and *eat the riches of the Gentiles*, Isa. lxi. 6.

### **23 Much food *is in* the tillage of the poor: but there is *that is* destroyed for want of judgment.**

See here, 1. How a small estate may be improved by industry, so that a man, by making the best of every thing, may live comfortably upon it: *Much food is in the tillage of the poor*; the poor farmers, that have but a little, but take pains with that little and husband it well. Many make it an excuse for their idleness that they have but a little to work on, a very little to be doing with; but the less compass the field is of the more let the skill and labour of the owner be employed about it, and it will turn to a very good account. Let him dig, and he needs not beg. 2. How a great estate may be ruined by indiscretion: *There is that* has a great deal, but it *is destroyed* and brought to nothing *for want of judgment*, that is, prudence in the management of it. Men over-build themselves or over-buy themselves, keep greater company, or a better table, or more servants, than they can afford, suffer what they have to go to decay and do not make the most of it; by taking up money

themselves, or being bound for others, their estates are sunk, their families reduced, and all *for want of judgment*.

## **24 He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.**

Note, 1. To the education of children in that which is good there is necessary a due correction of them for what is amiss; every child of ours is a child of Adam, and therefore has that foolishness bound up in its heart which calls for rebuke, more or less, the rod and reproof which give wisdom. Observe, It is *his* rod that must be used, the rod of a parent, directed by wisdom and love, and designed for good, not the rod of a servant. 2. It is good to begin betimes with the necessary restraints of children from that which is evil, before vicious habits are confirmed. The branch is easily bent when it is tender. 3. Those really hate their children, though they pretend to be fond of them, that

do not keep them under a strict discipline, and by all proper methods, severe ones when gentle ones will not serve, make them sensible of their faults and afraid of offending. They abandon them to their worst enemy, to the most dangerous disease, and therefore hate them. Let this reconcile children to the correction their good parents give them; it is from love, and for their good, Heb. xii. 7-9.

## **25 The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.**

Note, 1. It is the happiness of the righteous that they shall have enough and that they know when they have enough. They desire not to be surfeited, but, being moderate in their desires, they are soon satisfied. Nature is content with a little and grace with less; enough is as good as a feast. Those that feed on the bread of life, that feast on the promises, meet with abundant satisfaction of soul there, eat, and are filled. 2. It is the misery of the wicked that, through the insatiableness of their own desires, they are always needy; not only their souls shall not be satisfied with the world and the flesh, but even their *belly shall want*; their sensual appetite is always craving. In hell they shall be denied a drop of water.

# PROVERBS

## CHAP. XIV.

Wisdom and Folly.

### **1 Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.**

Note, 1. A good wife is a great blessing to a family. By a fruitful wife a family is multiplied and replenished with children, and so built up. But by a prudent wife, one that is pious, industrious, and considerate, the affairs of the family are made to prosper, debts are paid, portions raised, provision made, the children well educated and maintained, and the family has comfort within doors and credit without; thus is the house built. She looks upon it as her own to take care of, though she knows it is her husband's to bear rule in, Esth. i. 22. 2. Many a family is brought to ruin by ill housewifery, as well as by ill husbandry. A *foolish* woman, that has no fear of God nor regard to her business, that is wilful, and wasteful, and humoursome, that indulges her ease and appetite, and is all for jaunting and feasting, cards and the play-house, though she come to a plentiful estate, and to a family beforehand, she will impoverish and waste it, and will as certainly be the ruin of her house as if she *plucked it down with her hands*; and the husband himself, with all his care, can scarcely prevent it.

### **2 He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but *he that is* perverse in his ways despiseth him.**

Here are, 1. Grace and sin in their true colours. Grace reigning is a reverence of God, and gives honour to him who is infinitely great and high, and to whom all honour is due, than which what is more becoming or should be more pleasing to the rational creature? Sin reigning is no less than a

contempt of God. In *this*, more than in any thing, sin appears exceedingly sinful, that it despises God, whom angels adore. Those that despise God's precepts, and will not be ruled by them, his promises, and will not accept of

them, despise God himself and all his attributes. 2. Grace and sin in their true light. By this we may know a man that has grace, and the fear of God, reigning in him, *he walks in his uprightness*, he makes conscience of his actions, is faithful both to God and man, and every step he makes, as well as every step he takes, is by rule; here is one that honours God. But, on the contrary, *he that is perverse in his ways*, that wilfully follows his own appetites and passions, that is unjust and dishonest and contradicts his profession in his conversation, however he may pretend to devotion, he is a wicked man, and will be reckoned with as a despiser of God himself.

### **3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.**

See here, 1. A proud fool exposing himself. Where there is pride in the heart, and no wisdom in the head to suppress it, it commonly shows itself in the words: *In the mouth there is pride*, proud boasting, proud censuring, proud scorning, proud commanding and giving law; this is the *rod*, or branch, *of pride*; the word is used only here and Isa. xi. 1. It grows from that root of bitterness which is in the heart; it is a rod from that stem. The root must be plucked up, or we cannot conquer this branch, or it is meant of a smiting beating rod, a *rod of pride* which strikes others. The proud man with his tongue lays about him and deals blows at pleasure, but it will in the end be a rod to himself; the proud man shall come under an ignominious correction by the words of his own mouth, not cut as a soldier, but caned as a servant; and herein he will be beaten with his own rod, Ps. lxiv.

8. 2. A humble wise man saving himself and consulting his own good: *The lips of the wise shall preserve them* from doing that mischief to others which proud men do with their tongues, and from bringing that mischief on themselves which haughty scorers are often involved in.

### **4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.**

Note, 1. The neglect of husbandry is the way to poverty: *Where no oxen are*, to till the ground and tread out the corn, *the crib* is empty, *is clean*; there is no straw for the cattle, and consequently no bread for the service of

man. Scarcity is represented by *cleanness of teeth*, Amos iv. 6. *Where no oxen are* there is nothing to be done at the ground, and then nothing to be had out of it; *the crib* indeed *is clean* from dung, which pleases the neat and nice, that cannot endure husbandry because there is so much dirty work in it, and therefore will sell their oxen to keep the crib clean; but then not only the labour, but even the dung of the ox is wanted. This shows the folly of those who addict themselves to the pleasures of the country, but do not mind the business of it, who (as we say) keep more horses than kine, more dogs than swine; their families must needs suffer by it. 2. Those who take pains about their ground are likely to reap the profit of it. Those who keep that about them which is for use and service, not for state and show, more husbandmen than footmen, are likely to thrive. *Much increase is by the strength of the ox*; that is made for our service, and is profitable alive and dead.

## **5 A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.**

In the administration of justice much depends upon the witnesses, and therefore it is necessary to the common good that witnesses be principled as they ought to be; for, 1. A witness that is conscientious will not dare to give in a testimony that is in the least untrue, nor, for good-will or ill-will, represent a thing otherwise than according to the best of his knowledge, whoever is pleased or displeased, and then judgment runs down like a river. 2. But a witness that will be bribed, and biassed, and browbeaten, *will utter lies* (and not stick nor startle at it), with as much readiness and assurance as if what he said were all true.

## **6 A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *ndeth* it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.**

Note, 1. The reason why some people seek wisdom, and do not find it, is because they do not seek it from a right principle and in a right manner. They are scorers, and it is in scorn that they ask instruction, that they may ridicule what is told them and may cavil at it. Many put questions to Christ, tempting him, and that they might have whereof to accuse him, but they were never the wiser. No marvel if those who seek wisdom, as Simon

Magus sought the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to serve their pride and covetousness, do not find it, for they seek amiss. Herod desired to see a miracle, but he was a scorner, and therefore it was denied him, Luke xxiii. 8. Scorners speed not in prayer. 2. To those who understand aright, who *depart from evil* (for *that is understanding*), the *knowledge* of God and of his will *is easy*. The parables which harden scorners in their scorning, and make divine things more difficult to them, enlighten those who are willing to learn, and make the same things more plain, and intelligible, and familiar to them, Matt. xiii. 11, 15, 16. The same word which to the scornful *is a savour of death unto death* to the humble and serious *is a savour of life unto life*. He *that understands*, so as to *depart from evil* (for *that is understanding*), to quit his prejudices, to lay aside all corrupt dispositions and affections, will easily apprehend instruction and receive the impressions of it.

## **7 Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not *in him* the lips of knowledge.**

See here, 1. How we may discern a fool and discover him, a wicked man, for he is *a foolish man*. If we *perceive not in him the lips of knowledge*, if we find there is no relish or savour of piety in his discourse, that his communication is all corrupt and corrupting, and nothing in it *good and to the use of edifying*, we may conclude the treasure is bad. 2. How we must decline such a one and depart from him: *Go from his presence*, for *thou perceivest* there is no good to be gotten by his company, but danger of getting hurt by it. Sometimes the only way we have of reprovng wicked discourse and witnessing against it is by leaving the company and going out of the hearing of it.

## **8 The wisdom of the prudent *is* to understand his way: but the folly of fools *is* deceit.**

See here, 1. The good conduct of a wise and good man; he manages himself well. It is not the wisdom of the learned, which consists only in speculation, that is here recommended, but *the wisdom of the prudent*, which is practical, and is of use to direct our counsels and actions. Christian prudence consists in a right *understanding of our way*; for we are travellers, whose concern it

is, not to spy wonders, but to get forward towards their journey's end. It *is to understand our own way*, not to be

critics and busybodies in other men's matters, but to look well to ourselves and *ponder the path of our feet*, to understand the directions of our way, that we may observe them, the dangers of our way, that we may avoid them, the difficulties of our way, that we may break through them, and the advantages of our way, that we may improve them—to understand the rules we are to walk by and the ends we are to walk towards, and walk accordingly. 2. The bad conduct of a bad man; he puts a cheat upon himself. He does not rightly understand his way; he thinks he does, and so misses his way, and goes on in his mistake: *The folly of fools is deceit*; it cheats them into their own ruin. The folly of him that built on the sand was deceit.

## **9 Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous *there is favour*.**

See here, 1. How wicked people are hardened in their wickedness: they *make a mock at sin*. They make a laughing matter of the sins of others, making themselves and their companions merry with that for which they should mourn, and they make a light matter of their own sins, both when they are tempted to sin and when they have committed it; they *call evil good and good evil* (Isa. v.

20), turn it off with a jest, rush into sin (Jer. viii. 6) and say they shall have peace though they go on. They care not what mischief they do by their sins, and laugh at those that tell them of it. They are advocates for sin, and are ingenious at framing excuses for it. *Fools make a mock at the sin-offering* (so some); those that make light of sin make light of Christ. Those are fools that make light of sin, for they make light of that which God complains of (Amos ii. 13), which lay heavily upon Christ, and which they themselves will have other thoughts of shortly. 2. How good people are encouraged in their goodness: *Among the righteous there is favour*; if they in any thing offend, they presently repent and obtain the favour of God. They have a goodwill one to another; and among them, in their societies, there is mutual charity and compassion in cases of offences, and no mocking.

## **10 The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.**

This agrees with 1 Cor. ii. 11, *What man knows the things of a man*, and the changes of his temper, *save the spirit of a man*? 1. Every man feels most from his own burden, especially that which is a burden upon the spirits, for that is commonly concealed and the sufferer keeps it to himself. We must not censure the griefs of others, for we know not what they feel; their stroke perhaps is heavier than their groaning. 2. Many enjoy a secret pleasure, especially in divine consolations, which others are not aware of, much less are sharers in; and, as the sorrows of a penitent, so the joys of a believer are such as a *stranger does not intermeddle with* and therefore is no competent judge of.

## **11 The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.**

Note, 1. Sin is the ruin of great families: *The house of the wicked*, though built ever so strong and high, *shall be overthrown*, shall be brought to poverty and disgrace, and at length be extinct. His hope for heaven, the house on which he leans, shall not stand, but fail in the storm; the deluge that comes will sweep it away. 2. Righteousness is the rise and stability even of mean families: Even *the tabernacle of the upright*, though movable and despicable as a tent, *shall flourish*, in

outward prosperity if Infinite Wisdom see good, at all events in graces and comfort, which are true riches and honours.

## **12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.**



We have here an account of the way and end of a great many self-deluded souls. 1. Their way is seemingly fair: It *seems right* to themselves; they please themselves with a fancy that they are as they should be, that their opinions and practices are good, and such as will bear them out. The way of ignorance and carelessness, the way of worldliness and earthly-mindedness, the way of sensuality and flesh-pleasing, seem right to those that walk in them, much more the way of hypocrisy in religion, external performances, partial reformation, and blind zeal; this they imagine will bring them to heaven; they flatter themselves in their own eyes that all will be well at last. 2. Their end is really fearful, and the more so for their mistake: It is *the ways of death*, eternal death; their iniquity will certainly be their ruin, and they will perish with a lie in their right hand. Self-deceivers will prove in the end self-destroyers.

### **13 Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.**

This shows the vanity of carnal mirth, and proves what Solomon said of laughter, that *it is mad*; for, 1. There is sadness under it. Sometimes when sinners are under convictions, or some great trouble, they dissemble their grief by a forced mirth, and put a good face on it, because they will not seem to yield: they cry not when he binds them. Nay, when men really are merry, yet at the same time there is some alloy or other to their mirth, something that casts a damp upon it, which all their gaiety cannot keep from their heart. Their consciences tell them they have no reason to be merry (Hos. ix. 1); they cannot but see the vanity of it. Spiritual joy is seated in the soul; the joy of the hypocrite is but from the teeth outward. See John xvi. 22; 2 Cor. vi. 10. 2. There is worse after it: *The end of that mirth is heaviness*. It is soon over, like the crackling of thorns under a pot; and, if the conscience be awake, all sinful and profane mirth will be reflected upon with bitterness; if not, the heaviness will be so much the greater when *for all these things God shall bring the sinner into judgment*. The sorrows of the saints will end in everlasting joys (Ps. cxxvi. 5), but the laughter of fools will end in endless weeping and wailing.

**The Righteous and the Wicked Contrasted.**

## **14 The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man *shall be satisfied* from himself.**

Note, 1. The misery of sinners will be an eternal surfeit upon their sins: The *backslider in heart*, who for fear of suffering, or in hope of profit or pleasure, forsakes God and his duty, shall be *filled with his own ways*; God will give him enough of them. They would not leave their brutish lusts and passions, and therefore they shall stick by them, to their everlasting terror and torment. *He that is filthy shall be filthy still.* "Son, remember," shall *fill them with their own ways*, and set their sins in order before them. Backsliding begins in the heart; it is the evil heart of unbelief that departs from God; and of all sinners backsliders will have most terror when they reflect on *their own ways*, Luke xi. 26. 2. The happiness of the saints will be an eternal satisfaction in their graces,

as tokens of and qualifications for God's peculiar favour: *A good man shall be abundantly satisfied from himself*, from what God has wrought in him. He has *rejoicing in himself alone*, Gal. vi. 3. As sinners never think they have sin enough till it brings them to hell, so saints never think they have grace enough till it brings them to heaven.

## **15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going.**

Note, 1. It is folly to be credulous, to heed every flying report, to give ear to every man's story, though ever so improbable, to take things upon trust from common fame, to depend upon every man's profession of friendship and give credit to every one that will promise payment; those are *simple* who thus *believe every word*, forgetting that all men, in some sense, are liars in comparison with God, all whose words we are to believe with an implicit faith, for he cannot lie. 2. It is wisdom to be cautious: *The prudent man* will try before he trusts, will weigh both the credibility of the witness and the probability of the testimony, and then give judgment as the thing appears or suspend his judgment till it appears. *Prove all things, and believe not every spirit.*

## **16 A wise *man* feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.**

Note, 1. Holy fear is an excellent guard upon every holy thing, and against every thing that is unholy. It is wisdom to depart *from evil*, from the evil of sin, and thereby from all other evil; and therefore it is wisdom to fear, that is, to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, to keep up a dread of God's wrath, to be afraid of coming near the borders of sin or dallying with the beginnings of it. A wise man, for fear of harm, keeps out of harm's way, and starts back in a fright when he finds himself entering into temptation. 2. Presumption is folly. He who, when he is warned of his danger, *rages and is confident*, furiously pushes on, cannot bear to be checked, bids defiance to the wrath and curse of God, and, fearless of danger, persists in his rebellion, makes bold with the occasions of sin, and plays upon the precipice, he is a fool, for he acts against his reason and his interest, and his ruin will quickly be the proof of his folly.

## **17 He *that* is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.**

Note, 1. Passionate men are justly laughed at. Men who are peevish and touchy, and are *soon angry* upon every the least provocation, *deal foolishly*; they say and do that which is ridiculous, and so expose themselves to contempt; they themselves cannot but be ashamed of it when the heat is over. The consideration of this should engage those especially who are in reputation for wisdom and honour with the utmost care to bridle their passion. 2. Malicious men are justly dreaded and detested, for they are much more dangerous and mischievous to all societies: *A man of wicked devices*, who stifles his resentments till he has an opportunity of being revenged, and is secretly plotting how to wrong his neighbour and to do him an ill turn, as Cain to kill Abel, such a man as this is hated by all mankind. The character of an angry man is pitiable; through the surprise of a temptation he disturbs and disgraces himself, but it is soon over, and he is sorry for it. But that of a spiteful revengeful man is odious; there is no fence against him nor cure for him.

## **18 The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.**

Note, 1. Sin is the shame of sinners: *The simple*, who love simplicity, get nothing by it; they *inherit folly*. They have it *by inheritance*, so some. This corruption of nature is derived from our

first parents, and all the calamities that attend it we have by kind; it was the inheritance they transmitted to their degenerate race, an hereditary disease. They are as fond of it as a man of his inheritance, hold it as fast, and are as loth to part with it. What they value themselves upon is really foolish; and what will be the issue of their simplicity but folly? They will for ever rue their own foolish choice. 2. Wisdom is the honour of the wise: *The prudent crown themselves with knowledge*, they look upon it as their brightest ornament, and there is nothing they are so ambitious of; they bind it to their heads as a crown, which they will by no means part with; they press towards the top and perfection of knowledge, which will crown their beginnings and progress. They shall have the praise of it; wise heads shall be respected as if they were crowned heads. They *crown knowledge* (so some read it); they are a credit to their profession. Wisdom is not only justified, but glorified, of all her children.

## **19 The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.**

That is, 1. The wicked are oftentimes impoverished and brought low, so that they are forced to beg, their wickedness having reduced them to straits; while good men, by the blessing of God, are enriched, and enabled to give, and do give, even to the evil; for where God grants life we must not deny a livelihood. 2. Sometimes God extorts, even from bad men, an acknowledgement of the excellency of God's people. The evil ought always to *bow before the good*, and sometimes they are made to do it and *to know that God has loved them*, Rev. iii. 9. They desire their favour (Esth. vii.

7), their prayers, 2 Kings iii. 12. 3. There is a day coming when the upright shall have the dominion (Ps. xlix. 14), when the foolish virgins shall come begging to the wise for oil, and shall knock in vain at that gate of the Lord at which the righteous entered.

## **20 The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich *hath* many friends.**

This shows, not what should be, but what is the common way of the world—to be shy of the poor and fond of the rich. 1. Few will give countenance to those whom the world frowns upon, though otherwise worthy of respect: *The poor*, who should be pitied, and encouraged, and relieved, *is hated*, looked strange upon, and kept at a distance, even *by his own neighbour*, who, before he fell into disgrace, was intimate with him and pretended to have a kindness for him. Most are swallow-friends, that are gone in winter. It is good having God our friend, for he will not desert us when we are poor. 2. Every one will make court to those whom the world smiles upon, though otherwise unworthy: *The rich have many friends*, friends to their riches, in hope to get something out of them. There is little friendship in the world but what is governed by self-interest, which is no true friendship at all, nor what a wise man will either value himself on or put any confidence in. Those that make the world their God idolize those that have most of its good things, and seek their favour as if indeed they were Heaven's favourites.

## **21 He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.**

See here how men's character and condition are measured and judged of by their conduct towards their poor neighbours. 1. Those that look upon them with contempt have here assigned them a bad character, and their condition will be accordingly: *He that despises his neighbour*

because he is low in the world, because he is of a mean extraction, rustic education, and makes but a mean figure, that thinks it below him to take notice of him, converse with him, or concern himself about him, and sets him with the dogs of his flock, *is a sinner*, is guilty of a sin, is in the way to worse, and shall be dealt with as a sinner; unhappy is he. 2. Those that look upon them with compassion are here said to be in a good condition, according to their character: *He that has mercy on the poor*, is ready to do all the good offices he can to him, and thereby puts an honour upon him, *happy is he*; he does that which is pleasing to God, which he himself will afterwards reflect upon with great satisfaction, for which the loins of the

poor will bless him, and which will be abundantly recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

## **22 Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth *shall be* to them that devise good.**

See here, 1. How miserably mistaken those are that not only do evil, but devise it: *Do they not err?* Yes, certainly they do; every one knows it. They think that by sinning with craft and contrivance, and carrying on their intrigues with more plot and artifice than others, they shall make a better hand of their sins than others do, and come off better. But they are mistaken. God's justice cannot be out-witted. Those that devise evil against their neighbours greatly err, for it will certainly turn upon themselves and end in their own ruin, a fatal error! 2. How wisely those consult their own interest that not only do good but devise it: *Mercy and truth* shall be to them, not a reward of debt (they will own that they merit nothing), but a reward of mercy, mere mercy, mercy according to the promise, mercy and truth, to which God is pleased to make himself a debtor. Those that are so liberal as to devise liberal things, that seek opportunities of doing good, and contrive how to make their charity most extensive and most acceptable to those that need it, *by liberal things they shall stand*, Isa. xxxii. 8.

## **23 In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips *tendeth* only to penury.**

Note, 1. Working, without talking, will make men rich: *In all labour* of the head, or of the hand, *there is profit*; it will turn to some good account or other. Industrious people are generally thriving people, and where there is something done there is something to be had. *The stirring hand gets a penny*. It is good therefore to keep in business, and to keep in action, and what our hand finds to do to do it with all our might. 2. Talking, without working, will make men poor. Those that love to boast of their business and make a noise about it, and that waste their time in tittle-tattle, in telling and hearing new things, like the Athenians, and, under pretence of improving themselves by conversation, neglect the work of their place and day, they waste what they have, and the course they take *tends to penury*, and will end in it. It is true in the affairs of our souls; those that take pains in the

service of God, that strive earnestly in prayer, will find profit in it. But if men's religion runs all out in talk and noise, and their praying is only the labour of the lips, they will be spiritually poor, and come to nothing.

**24 The crown of the wise is their riches: *but* the foolishness of fools is folly.**

Observe, 1. If men be wise and good, riches make them so much the more honourable and useful: *The crown of the wise is their riches*; their riches make them to be so much the more respected, and give them the more authority and influence upon others. Those that have wealth,

and wisdom to use it, will have a great opportunity of honouring God and doing good in the world. *Wisdom is good without an inheritance*, but better *with* it. 2. If men be wicked and corrupt, their wealth will but the more expose them: *The foolishness of fools*, put them in what condition you will, *is folly*, and will show itself and shame them; if they have riches, they do mischief with them and are the more hardened in their foolish practices.

**25 A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.**

See here, 1. How much praise is due to a faithful witness: He *delivers the souls* of the innocent, who are falsely accused, and their good names, which are as dear to them as their lives. A man of integrity will venture the displeasure of the greatest, to bring truth to light and rescue those who are injured by falsehood. A faithful minister, who truly witnesses for God against sin, is thereby instrumental to deliver souls from eternal death. 2. How little regard is to be had to a false witness. He forges *lies*, and yet pours them out with the greatest assurance imaginable for the destruction of the innocent. It is therefore the interest of a nation by all means possible to detect and punish false-witness-bearing, yea, and lying in common conversation; for truth is the cement of society.

**26 In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. 27 The fear**

**of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.**

In these two verses we are invited and encouraged to live in the fear of God by the advantages which attend a religious life. The *fear of the Lord* is here put for all gracious principles, producing gracious practices. 1. Where this reigns it produces a holy security and serenity of mind. There is in it a *strong confidence*; it enables a man still to hold fast both his purity and his peace, whatever happens, and gives him boldness before God and the world. *I know that I shall be justified—None of these things move me*; such is the language of this confidence. 2. It entails a blessing upon posterity. The children of those that by faith make God their confidence shall be encouraged by the promise that God will be a God to believers and to their seed to flee to him as their refuge, and they shall find shelter in him. The children of religious parents often do the better for their parents' instructions and example and fare the better for their faith and prayers. "*Our fathers trusted in thee, therefore we will.*" 3. It is an over-flowing ever-flowing spring of comfort and joy; it is a *fountain of life*, yielding constant pleasure and satisfaction to the soul, joys that are pure and fresh, are life to the soul, and quench its thirst, and can never be drawn dry; it is a *well of living water*, that is springing up to, and is the earnest of, eternal life. 4. It is a sovereign antidote against sin and temptation. Those that have a true relish of the pleasures of serious godliness will not be allured by the baits of sin to swallow its hook; they know where to obtain better things than any it can pretend to offer, and therefore it is easy to them *to depart from the snares of death* and to keep their foot from being taken in them.

**28 In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.**

Here are two maxims in politics, which carry their own evidence with them:—1. That it is much for the honour of a king to have a populous kingdom; it is a sign that he rules well, since strangers are hereby invited to come and settle under his protection and his own subjects live

comfortably; it is a sign that he and his kingdom are under the blessing of God, the effect of which is being fruitful and multiplying. It is his strength,



and makes him considerable and formidable; happy is the king, the father of his country, who has his *quiver full of arrows*; he *shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with his enemy in the gate*, Ps. cxxvii. 4, 5. It is therefore the wisdom of princes, by a mild and gentle government, by encouraging trade and husbandry, and by making all easy under them, to promote the increase of their people. And let all that wish well to the kingdom of Christ, and to his honour, do what they can in their places that many may be added to his church.

2. That when the people are lessened the prince is weakened: *In the want of people is the leanness of the prince* (so some read it); trade lies dead, the ground lies untilld, the army wants to be recruited, the navy to be manned, and all because there are not hands sufficient. See how much the honour and safety of kings depend upon their people, which is a reason why they should rule by love, and not with rigour. Princes are corrected by those judgments which abate the number of the people, as we find, 2 Sam. xxiv. 13.

**29 *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.***

Note, 1. Meekness is wisdom. *He* rightly understands himself, and his duty and interest, the infirmities of human nature, and the constitution of human society, who *is slow to anger*; and knows how to excuse the faults of others as well as his own, how to adjourn his resentments, and moderate them, so as by no provocation to be put out of the possession of his own soul. A mild patient man is really to be accounted an intelligent man, one that learns of Christ, who is Wisdom itself. 2. Unbridled passion is folly proclaimed: *He that is hasty of spirit*, whose heart is tinder to every spark of provocation, that is all fire and tow, as we say, he thinks hereby to magnify himself and make those about stand in awe of him, whereas really he *exalts his own folly*; he makes it known, as that which is lifted up is visible to all, and he submits himself to it as to the government of one that is exalted.

**30 *A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.***

The foregoing verse showed how much our reputation, this how much our health, depends on the good government of our passions and the preserving of the temper of the mind. 1. A healing spirit, made up of love and meekness, a hearty, friendly, cheerful disposition, is *the life of the flesh*; it contributes to a good constitution of body; people grow fat with good humour. 2. A fretful, envious, discontented spirit, is its own punishment; it consumes the flesh, preys upon the animal spirits, makes the countenance pale, and is the *rottenness of the bones*. Those that see the prosperity of others and are grieved, let them *gnash with their teeth and melt away*, Ps. cxii. 10.

Rumpatur, quisquis rumpitur invidia.

Whoever bursts for envy, let him burst.

### **31 He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.**

God is here pleased to interest himself more than one would imagine in the treatment given to the poor. 1. He reckons himself affronted in the injuries that are done them. Whosoever he be that

wrongs a poor man, taking advantage against him because he is poor and cannot help himself, let him know that he puts an affront upon his Maker. God made him, and gave him his being, the same that is the author of our being; we have all one Father, one Maker; see how Job considered this, Job xxxi. 15. God made him poor, and appointed him his lot, so that, if we deal hardly with any because they are poor, we reflect upon God as dealing hardly with them in laying them low, that they might be trampled upon. 2. He reckons himself honoured in the kindnesses that are done them; he takes them as done to himself, and will show himself accordingly pleased with them. *I was hungry, and you gave me meat*. Those therefore that have any true honour for God will show it by compassion to the poor, whom he has undertaken in a special manner to protect and patronise.

### **32 The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.**

Here is, 1. The desperate condition of a wicked man when he goes out of the world: He *is driven away in his wickedness*. He cleaves so closely to the world that he cannot find in his heart to leave it, but is driven away out of it; his soul is required, is forced from him, And sin cleaves so closely to him that it is inseparable; it goes with him into another world; he *is driven away in his wickedness*, dies in his sins, under the guilt and power of them, unjustified, unsanctified. His wickedness is the storm in which he is hurried away, as chaff before the wind, chased out of the world. 2. The comfortable condition of a godly man when he finishes his course: He *has hope in his death* of a happiness on the other side death, of better things in another world than ever he had in this. *The righteous* then have the grace of hope in them; though they have pain, and some dread of death, yet they have hope. They have before them the good hoped for, even the blessed hope which God, who cannot lie, has promised.

### **33 Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but *that which* is in the midst of fools is made known.**

Observe, 1. Modesty is the badge of wisdom. He that is truly wise hides his treasure, so as not to boast of it (Matt. xiii. 44), though he does not hide his talent, so as not to trade with it. His *wisdom rests in his heart*; he digests what he knows, and has it ready to him, but does not unseasonably talk of it and make a noise with it. The heart is the seat of the affections, and there wisdom must rest in the practical love of it, and not swim in the head. 2. Openness and ostentation are a mark of folly. If fools have a little smattering of knowledge, they take all occasions, though very foreign, to produce it, and bring it in by head and shoulders. Or the folly that *is in the midst of fools is made known* by their forwardness to talk. Many a foolish man takes more pains to show his folly than a wise man thinks it worth his while to take to show his wisdom.

### **34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.**

Note, 1. Justice, reigning in a nation, puts an honour upon it. A righteous administration of the government, impartial equity between man and man,

public countenance given to religion, the general practice and profession of virtue, the protecting and preserving of virtuous men, charity and compassion to strangers (*alms* are sometimes called *righteousness*), these *exalt a nation*; they uphold the throne, elevate the people's minds, and qualify a nation for the favour of God, which will make them high, as a *holy nation*, Deut. xxvi. 19. 2. Vice, reigning in a nation, puts disgrace

upon it: *Sin is a reproach to any city or kingdom*, and renders them despicable among their neighbours. The people of Israel were often instances of both parts of this observation; they were great when they were good, but when they forsook God all about them insulted them and trampled on them. It is therefore the interest and duty of princes to use their power for the suppression of vice and support of virtue.

### **35 The king's favour *is* toward a wise servant: but his wrath is *against* him that causeth shame.**

This shows that in a well-ordered court and government smiles and favours are dispensed among those that are employed in public trusts according to their merits; Solomon lets them know he will go by that rule, 1. That those who behave themselves wisely shall be respected and preferred, whatever enemies they may have that seek to undermine them. No man's services shall be neglected to please a party or a favourite. 2. That those who are selfish and false, who betray their country, oppress the poor, and sow discord, and thus *cause shame*, shall be displaced and banished the court, whatever friends they may make to speak for them.

## **P R O V E R B S**

### **CHAP. XV.**

The Proper Use of the Tongue.

### **1 A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.**

Solomon, as conservator of the public peace, here tells us, 1. How the peace may be kept, that we may know how in our places to keep it; it is by soft words. If wrath be risen like a threatening cloud, pregnant with storms and thunder, *a soft answer* will disperse it and turn it away. When men are provoked, speak gently to them, and give them good words, and they will be pacified, as the Ephraimites were by Gideon's mildness (Judg. viii. 1-3); whereas, upon a like occasion, by Jephthah's roughness, they were exasperated, and the consequences were bad, Judg. xii. 1-3. Reason will be better spoken, and a righteous cause better pleaded, with meekness than with passion; hard arguments do best with soft words. 2. How the peace will be broken, that we, for our parts, may do nothing towards the breaking of it. Nothing stirs up anger, and sows discord, like *grievous words*, calling foul names, as *Raca*, and *Thou fool*, upbraiding men with their infirmities and infelicities, their extraction or education, or any thing that lessens them and makes them mean; scornful spiteful reflections, by which men affect to show their wit and malice, stir up the anger of others, which does but increase and inflame their own anger. Rather than lose a jest some will lose a friend and make an enemy.

## **2 The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.**

Note, 1. A good heart by the tongue becomes very useful. He that has knowledge is not only to enjoy it, for his own entertainment, but to use it, to use it aright, for the edification of others; and it is *the tongue* that must make use of it in pious profitable discourse, in giving suitable and seasonable instructions, counsels, and comforts, with all possible expressions of humility and love, and then *knowledge is used aright*; and to him that has, and thus uses what he has, more shall be given. 2. A wicked heart by the tongue becomes very hurtful; for *the mouth of fools belches out foolishness*, which is very offensive; and the corrupt communication which proceeds from an evil treasure within (the filthiness, and foolish talking, and jesting) corrupts the good manners of some and debauches them, and grieves the good hearts of others and disturbs them.

**The Righteous and the Wicked Contrasted.**

### **3 The eyes of the Lord *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good.**

The great truths of divinity are of great use to enforce the precepts of morality, and none more than this—That the eye of God is always upon the children of men. 1. An eye to discern all, not only from which nothing can be concealed, but by which every thing is actually inspected, and nothing overlooked or looked slightly upon: *The eyes of the Lord are in every place*; for he not only sees all from on high (Ps. xxxiii. 13), but he is every where present. Angels are *full of eyes* (Rev. iv. 8), but God is all eye. It denotes not only his omniscience, that he sees all, but his universal providence, that he upholds and governs all. Secret sins, services, and sorrows, are under his eye.

2. An eye to distinguish both persons and actions. He *beholds the evil and the good*, is displeased with the evil and approves of the good, and will judge men according to the sight of his eyes, Ps.

i. 6; xi. 4. The wicked shall not go unpunished, nor the righteous unrewarded, for God has his eye upon both and knows their true character; this speaks as much comfort to saints as terror to sinners.

### **4 A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.**

Note, 1. A good tongue is healing, healing to wounded consciences by comforting them, to sin-sick souls by convincing them, to peace and love when it is broken by accommodating differences, compromising matters in variance, and reconciling parties at variance; this is the healing of the tongue, which *is a tree of life*, the leaves of which have a sanative virtue, Rev. xxii. 2. He that knows how to discourse will make the place he lives in a paradise. 2. An evil tongue is wounding (*perverseness*, passion, falsehood, and filthiness *there, are a breach in the spirit*); it wounds the conscience of the evil speaker, and occasions either guilt or grief to the hearers, and both are to be reckoned *breaches in the spirit*. Hard words indeed break no bones, but many a heart has been broken by them.

## **5 A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.**

Hence, 1. Let superiors be admonished to give instruction and reproof to those that are under their charge, as they will answer it in the day of account. They must not only instruct with the light of knowledge, but reprove with the heat of zeal; and both these must be done with the authority and affection of a father, and must be continued, though the desired effect be not immediately perceived. If the instruction be despised, give reproof, and rebuke sharply. It is indeed against the grain with good-humoured men to find fault, and make those about them uneasy; but better so than

to suffer them to go on undisturbed in the way to ruin. 2. Let inferiors be admonished, not only to submit to instruction and reproof (even hardships must be submitted to), but to value them as favours and not despise them, to make use of them for their direction, and always to have a regard to them; this will be an evidence that they are wise and a means of making them so; whereas he that slights his good education is a fool and is likely to live and die one.

## **6 In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.**

Note, 1. Where righteousness is riches are, and the comforts of them: *In the house of the righteous is much treasure*. Religion teaches men to be diligent, temperate, and just, and by these means, ordinarily, the estate is increased. But that is not all: God *blesses the habitation of the just*, and that blessing makes rich without trouble. Or, if there be not much of this world's goods, yet where there is grace there is true treasure; and those who have but little, if they have a heart to be therewith content, and to enjoy the comfort of that little, it is enough; it is all riches. The righteous perhaps are not themselves enriched, but there is treasure in their house, a blessing in store, which their children after them may reap the benefit of. A wicked worldly man is only for having his belly filled with those treasures, his own sensual appetite gratified (Ps. xvii. 14); but a righteous man's first care is for his soul and then for his seed, to have treasure in his heart and then in his

house, which his relations and those about him may have the benefit of. 2. Where wickedness is, though there may be riches, yet there is vexation of spirit with them: *In the revenues of the wicked*, the great incomes they have, *there is trouble*; for there is guilt and a curse; there is pride and passion, and envy and contention; and those are troublesome lusts, which rob them of the joy of their revenues and make them troublesome to their neighbours.

## **7 The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish *doeth* not so.**

This is to the same purport with v. 2, and shows what a blessing a wise man is and what a burden a fool is to those about him. Only here observe further, 1. That we then use knowledge aright when we disperse it, not confine it to a few of our intimates, and grudge it to others who would make as good use of it, but *give a portion* of this spiritual alms *to seven and also to eight*, not only be communicative, but diffusive, of this good, with humility and prudence. We must take pains to spread and propagate useful knowledge, must teach some that they may teach others, and so it is dispersed. 2. That it is not only a fault to *pour out foolishness*, but it is a shame not to *disperse knowledge*, at least not to drop some wise word or other: *The heart of the foolish does not so*; it has nothing to disperse that is good, or, if it had, has neither skill nor will to do good with it and therefore is little worth.

## **8 The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright *is* his delight.**

Note, 1. God so hates wicked people, whose hearts are malicious and their lives mischievous, that even their *sacrifices are an abomination* to him. God has sacrifices brought him even by wicked men, to stop the mouth of conscience and to keep up their reputation in the world, as malefactors come to a sanctuary, not because it is a holy place, but because it shelters them from justice; but

their sacrifices, though ever so costly, are not accepted of God, because not offered in sincerity nor from a good principle; they dissemble with God, and in their conversations give the lie to their devotions, and for that reason they are *an abomination* to him, because they are made a cloak for sin, ch.



vii. 14. See Isa. i. 11. 2. God has such a love for upright good people that, though they are not at the expense of a sacrifice (he himself has provided that), their *prayer is a delight* to him. Praying graces are his own gift, and the work of his own Spirit in them, with which he is well pleased. He not only answers their prayers, but delights in their addresses to him, and in doing them good.

## **9 The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.**

This is a reason of what was said in the foregoing verse. 1. *The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to God*, not for want of some nice points of ceremony, but because *their way*, the whole course and tenour of their conversation, is wicked, and consequently an abomination to him. Sacrifices for sin were not accepted of those that resolved to go on in sin, and were to the highest degree abominable if intended to obtain a connivance at sin and a permission to go on in it. 2. Therefore *the prayer of the upright is his delight*, because he is a friend of God, and *he loves him who*, though he have not yet attained, is *following after righteousness*, aiming at it and pressing towards it, as St. Paul, Phil. iii. 13.

## **10 Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die.**

This shows that those who cannot bear to be corrected must expect to be destroyed. 1. It is common for those who have known the way of righteousness, but have forsaken it, to reckon it a great affront to be reproved and admonished. They are very uneasy at reproof; they cannot, they will not, bear it; nay, because they hate to be reformed, they hate to be reproved, and hate those who deal faithfully and kindly with them. Of all sinners, reproofs are worst resented by apostates.

2. It is certain that those who will not be reproved will be ruined: *He that hates reproof*, and hardens his heart against it, is joined to his idols; let him alone. He *shall die*, and perish for ever, in his sins, since he would not be parted from his sins. 2 Chron. xxv. 15, *I know that God has determined to*

*destroy thee*, because thou couldst not bear to be reprov'd; see also ch. xxix. 1.

## **11 Hell and destruction *are* before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?**

This confirms what was said (v. 3) concerning God's omnipresence, in order to his judging of evil and good. 1. God knows all things, even those things that are hidden from the eyes of all living: *Hell and destruction are before the Lord*, not only the centre of the earth, and its subterraneous caverns, but the grave, and all the dead bodies which are there buried out of our sight; they are all *before the Lord*, all under his eye, so that none of them can be lost or be to seek when they are to be raised again. He knows where every man lies buried, even Moses, even those that are buried in the greatest obscurity; nor needs he any monument with a *Hic jacet—Here he lies*, to direct him. The place of the damned in particular, and all their torments, which are inexpressible, the state of

separate souls in general, and all their circumstances, are under God's eye. The word here used for *destruction* is *Abaddon*, which is one of the devil's names, Rev. ix. 11. That destroyer, though he deceives us, cannot evade or elude the divine cognizance. God examines him whence he comes (Job i. 7), and sees through all his disguises though he is sly, and subtle, and swift, Job xxvi. 6. 2. He knows particularly *the hearts of the children of men*. If he sees through the depths and wiles of Satan himself, *much more* can he search men's hearts, though they be deceitful, since they learned all their fraudulent arts of Satan. *God is greater than our hearts*, and knows them better than we know them ourselves, and therefore is an infallible Judge of every man's character, Heb. iv. 13.

## **12 A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.**

A scorner is one that not only makes a jest of God and religion, but bids defiance to the methods employed for his conviction and reformation, and, as an evidence of that, 1. He cannot endure the checks of his own conscience, nor will he suffer it to deal plainly with him: *He loves not to*

*reprove him* (so some read it); he cannot endure to retire into his own heart and commune seriously with that, will not admit of any free thought or fair reasoning with himself, nor let his own heart smite him, if he can help it. That man's case is sad who is afraid of being acquainted and of arguing with himself. 2. He cannot endure the advice and admonitions of his friends: *He will not go unto the wise*, lest they should give him wise counsel. We ought not only to bid the wise welcome when they come to us, but to go to them, as beggars to the rich man's door for an alms; but this the scorner will not do, for fear of being told of his faults and prevailed upon to reform.

### **13 A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.**

Here, 1. Harmless mirth is recommended to us, as that which contributes to the health of the body, making men lively and fit for business, and to the acceptableness of the conversation, making the face to shine and rendering us pleasant one to another. A cheerful spirit, under the government of wisdom and grace, is a great ornament to religion, puts a further lustre upon the beauty of holiness, and makes men the more capable of doing good. 2. Hurtful melancholy is what we are cautioned against, as a great enemy to us, both in our devotion and in our conversation: *By sorrow of the heart*, when it has got dominion and plays the tyrant, as it will be apt to do it if be indulged awhile, *the spirit is broken* and sunk, and becomes unfit for the service of God. *The sorrow of the world works death*. Let us therefore *weep as though we wept not*, in justice to ourselves, as well as in conformity to God and his providence.

Wisdom and Folly.

### **14 The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.**

Here are two things to be wondered at:—1. A wise man not satisfied with his wisdom, but still seeking the increase of it; the more he has the more he would have: *The heart of him that has understanding*, rejoices so in the knowledge it has attained to that it is still coveting more, and in the use of

the means of knowledge is still labouring for more, *growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ. Si dixisti, Sufficit, periisti—If you say, I have enough, you are undone.* 2. A fool well

satisfied with his folly and not seeking the cure of it. While a good man hungers after the solid satisfactions of grace, a carnal mind feasts on the gratifications of appetite and fancy. Vain mirth and sensual pleasures are its delight, and with these it can rest contented, flattering itself in these foolish ways.

**15 All the days of the afflicted *are* evil: but he that is of a merry heart *hath* a continual feast.**

See here what a great difference there is between the condition and temper of some and others of the children of men. 1. Some are much in affliction, and of a sorrowful spirit, and all their days are evil days, like those of old age, and days of which they say they *have no pleasure in them*. They *eat in darkness* (Eccl. v. 17) and never *eat with pleasure*, Job xxi. 25. How many are the afflictions of the afflicted in this world! Such are not to be censured or despised, but pitied and prayed for, succoured and comforted. It might have been our own lot, or may be yet, merry as we are at present.

2. Others enjoy great prosperity and are of a cheerful spirit; and they have not only good days, but have *a continual feast*; and if in the abundance of all things they serve God with gladness of heart, and it is oil to the wheels of their obedience (all this, and heaven too), then they serve a good Master. But let not such feast without fear; a sudden change may come; therefore *rejoice with trembling*.

**16 Better *is* little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. 17 Better *is* a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.**

Solomon had said in the foregoing verse that he who has not a large estate, or a great income, but a cheerful spirit, has *a continual feast*; Christian contentment, and joy in God, make the life easy and pleasant; now here he

tells us what is necessary to that cheerfulness of spirit which will furnish a man with *a continual feast*, though he has but little in the world—holiness and love.

I. Holiness. *A little*, if we manage it and enjoy it in *the fear of the Lord*, if we keep a good conscience and go on in the way of duty, and serve God faithfully with the little we have, will be more comfortable, and turn to a better account, *than great treasure and trouble therewith*. Observe here, 1. It is often the lot of those that fear God to have but a little of this world. *The poor receive the gospel*, and poor they still are, Jam. ii. 5. 2. Those that have *great treasure* have often *great trouble therewith*; it is so far from making them easy that it increases their care and hurry. *The abundance of the rich will not suffer them to sleep*. 3. If great treasure bring trouble with it, it is for want of the fear of God. If those that have great estates would do their duty with them, and then trust God with them, their treasure would not have so much trouble attending it. 4. It is therefore far better, and more desirable, to have but a little of the world and to have it with a good conscience, to keep up communion with God, and enjoy him in it, and live by faith, than to have the greatest plenty and live without God in the world.

II. Love. Next to the fear of God, peace with all men is necessary to the comfort of this life.

1. If *brethren dwell together in unity*, if they are friendly, and hearty, and pleasant, both in their daily meals and in more solemn entertainments, that will make *a dinner of herbs* a feast sufficient; though the fare be coarse, and the estate so small that they can afford no better, yet love will sweeten it and they may be as merry over it as if they had all dainties. 2. If there be mutual enmity and strife,

though there be a whole ox for dinner, a fat ox, there can be no comfort in it; the leaven of malice, of hating and being hated, is enough to sour it all. Some refer it to him that makes the entertainment; better have a slender dinner and be heartily welcome than a table richly spread with a grudging evil eye.

Cum torvo vultu mihi conula nulla placebit,  
Cum placido vultu conula ulla placet.

The most sumptuous entertainment, presented with a sullen brow, would offend me; while the plainest repast, presented kindly, would delight me.

### **18 A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but *he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.***

Here is, 1. Passion the great make-bate. Thence *come wars and fightings*. Anger strikes the fire which sets cities and churches into a flame: *A wrathful man*, with his peevish passionate reflections, *stirs up strife*, and sets people together by the ears; he gives occasion to others to quarrel, and takes the occasion that others give, though ever so trifling. When men carry their resentments too far, one quarrel still produces another. 2. Meekness the great peace-maker: *He that is slow to anger* not only *prevents* strife, that it be not kindled, but *appeases* it if it be already kindled, brings water to the flame, unites those again that have fallen out, and by gentle methods brings them to mutual concessions for peace-sake.

### **19 The way of the slothful *man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.***

See here, 1. Whence those difficulties arise which men pretend to meet with in the way of their duty, and to be insuperable; they arise not from any thing in the nature of the duty, but from the slothfulness of those that have really no mind to it. Those that have no heart to their work pretend that their way is hedged up with thorns, and they cannot do their work at all (as if God were a hard Master, reaping where he had not sown), at least that their way is strewed with thorns, that they cannot do their work without a great deal of hardship and danger; and therefore they go about it with as much reluctance as if they were to go barefoot through a thorny hedge. 2. How these imaginary difficulties may be conquered. An honest desire and endeavour to do our duty will, by the grace of God, make it easy, and we shall find it strewed with roses: *The way of the righteous is made plain*; it is easy to be trodden and not rough, easy to be found, and not intricate.

### **20 A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother.**

Observe here, 1. To the praise of good children, that they are the joy of their parents, who ought to have joy of them, having taken so much care and pains about them. And it adds much to the satisfaction of those that are good if they have reason to think that they have been a comfort to their parents in their declining years, when evil days come. 2. To the shame of wicked children, that by their wickedness they put contempt upon their parents, slight their authority, and make an ill requital for their kindness: *A foolish son despises his mother*, that had most sorrow with him and perhaps had too much indulged him, which makes his sin in despising her the more sinful and her sorrow the more sorrowful.

## **21 Folly is joy to *him that is destitute of wisdom*: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.**

Note, 1. It is the character of a wicked man that he takes pleasure in sin; he has an appetite to the bait, and swallows it greedily, and has no dread of the hook, nor feels from it when he has swallowed it: *Folly is joy to him*; the folly of others is so, and his own much more. He sins, not only without regret, but with delight, not only repents not of it, but makes his boast of it. This is a certain sign of one that is graceless. 2. It is the character of a wise and good man that he makes conscience of his duty. A fool lives at large, walks at all adventures, by no rule, acts with no sincerity or steadiness; *but a man of understanding*, the eyes of whose understanding are enlightened by the Spirit (and those that have not a good understanding have no understanding), *walks uprightly*, lives a sober, orderly, regular life, and studies in every thing to conform himself to the will of God; and this is a constant pleasure and *joy to him*. But what foolishness remains in him, or proceeds from him at any time, is a grief to him, and he is ashamed of it. By these characters we may try ourselves.

## **22 Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.**

See here, 1. Of what ill consequence it is to be precipitate and rash, and to act without advice: Men's *purposes are disappointed*, their measures broken, and they come short of their point, gain not their end, because they would not ask counsel about the way. If men will not take time and pains to

deliberate with themselves, or are so confident of their own judgment that they scorn to consult with others, they are not likely to bring any thing considerable to pass; circumstances defeat them which, with a little consultation, might have been foreseen and obviated. It is a good rule, both in public and domestic affairs, to do nothing rashly and of one's own head. *Plus vident oculi quam oculus*—*Many eyes see more than one*. That often proves best which was least our own doing.

2. How much it will be for our advantage to ask the advice of our friends: *In the multitude of counsellors* (provided they be discreet and honest, and will not give counsel with a spirit of contradiction) *purposes are established*. Solomon's son made no good use of this proverb when he acquiesced not in the counsel of the old men, but because he would have a *multitude of counsellors*, regarding number more than weight, advised with the young men.

### **23 A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word *spoken* in due season, how good is it!**

Note, 1. We speak wisely when we speak seasonably: *The answer of the mouth* will be our credit and joy when it is pertinent and to the purpose, and is *spoken in due season*, when it is needed and will be regarded, and, as we say, hits the joint. Many a good word comes short of doing the good it might have done, for want of being well-timed. Nor is any thing more the beauty of discourse than to have a proper answer ready off-hand, just when there is occasion for it, and it comes in well. 2. If we speak wisely and well, it will redound to our own comfort and to the advantage of others: *A man has joy by the answer of his mouth*; he may take a pleasure, but may by no means take a pride, in having spoken so acceptably and well that the hearers admire him and say, "*How good is it, and how much good does it do!*"

### **24 The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.**

The way of wisdom and holiness is here recommended to us, 1. As very safe and comfortable: It is *the way of life*, the way that leads to eternal life, in which we shall find the joy and satisfaction which will be the life of the



soul, and at the end of which we shall find the perfection of blessedness. Be wise and live. It is the way to escape that misery which we cannot but see ourselves exposed to, and in danger of. It is to *depart from hell beneath*, from the snares of hell, the temptations of Satan, and all his wiles, from the pains of hell, that everlasting destruction which our sins have deserved. 2. As very sublime and honourable: *It is above*. A good man sets his *affections on things above*, and deals in those things. His *conversation is in heaven*; his way leads directly thither; there his treasure is, *above*, out of the reach of enemies, above the changes of this lower world. A good man is truly noble and great; his desires and designs are high, and he lives above the common rate of other men. It is above the capacity and out of the sight of foolish men.

The Righteous and the Wicked Contrasted.

## **25 The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.**

Note, 1. Those that are elevated God delights to abase, and commonly does it in the course of his providence: *The proud*, that magnify themselves, bid defiance to the God above them and trample on all about them, are such as God resists and *will destroy*, not them only, but *their houses*, which they are proud of and are confident of the continuance and perpetuity of. Pride is the ruin of multitudes. 2. Those that are dejected God delights to support, and often does it remarkably: *He will establish the border of the poor widow*, which proud injurious men break in upon, and which the poor widow is not herself able to defend and make good. It is the honour of God to protect the weak and appear for those that are oppressed.

## **26 The thoughts of the wicked *are* an abomination to the Lord: but *the words* of the pure *are* pleasant words.**

The former part of this verse speaks of thoughts, the latter of words, but they come all to one; for thoughts are words to God, and words are judged of by the thoughts from which they proceed, so that, 1. *The thoughts* and words *of the wicked*, which are, like themselves, wicked, which aim at mischief, and have some ill tendency or other, *are an abomination to the*

*Lord*; he is displeased at them and will reckon for them. The thoughts of wicked men, for the most part, are such as God hates, and are an offence to him, who not only knows the heart and all that passes and repasses there, but requires the innermost and uppermost place in it. 2. The thoughts and *words of the pure*, being pure like themselves, clean, honest, and sincere, are *pleasant words* and pleasant thoughts, well-pleasing to the holy God, who delights in purity. It may be understood both of their devotions to God (*the words of their mouth and the meditations of their heart*, in prayer and praise, are *acceptable to God*, Ps. xix. 14; lxix. 13) and of their discourses with men, tending to edification. Both are pleasant when they come from a pure, a purified, heart.

## **27 He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.**

Note, 1. Those that are covetous entail trouble upon their families: *He that is greedy of gain*, and therefore makes himself a slave to the world, rises up early, sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness, in pursuit of it—he that hurries, and puts himself and all about him upon the stretch, in business, frets and vexes at every loss and disappointment, and quarrels with every body that stands in the way of his profit—he *troubles his own house*, is a burden and vexation to his children and servants. He that, in his greediness of gain, takes bribes, and uses unlawful ways of getting money, leaves a curse with what he gets to those that come after him, which sooner or later will bring trouble into the house, Hab. ii. 9, 10. 2. Those that are generous as well as righteous entail a blessing upon their families: *He that hates gifts*, that shakes his hands from holding the bribes that are thrust into his hand to pervert justice and abhors all sinful indirect ways of getting money—that hates to be paltry and mercenary, and is willing, if there be occasion, to do good gratis—he shall live; he shall have the comfort of life, shall live in prosperity and reputation; his name and family shall live and continue.

## **28 The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.**

Here is, 1. A good man proved to be a wise man by this, that he governs his tongue well; he that does so *the same is a perfect man*, Jam. iii. 2. It is part

of the character of a righteous man that being convinced of the account he must give of his words, and of the good and bad influence of them upon others, he makes conscience of speaking truly (it is his *heart* that *answers*, that is, he speaks as he thinks, and dares not do otherwise, he *speaks the truth in his heart*, Ps. xv. 2), and of speaking pertinently and profitably, and therefore he *studies to answer*, that his speech may be with grace, Neh. ii. 4; v. 7. 2. A wicked man is proved to be a fool by this, that he never heeds what he says, but his *mouth pours out evil things*, to the dishonour of God and religion, his own reproach, and the hurt of others. Doubtless that is an evil heart which thus overflows with evil.

## **29 The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.**

Note, 1. God sets himself at a distance from those that set him at defiance: *The wicked say to the Almighty, Depart from us*, and he is, accordingly, *far from* them; he does not manifest himself to them, has no communion with them, will not hear them, will not help them, no, not in the time of their need. They shall be for ever banished from his presence and he will behold them afar off. *Depart from me, you cursed*. 2. He will draw nigh to those in a way of mercy who draw nigh to him in a way of duty: *He hears the prayer of the righteous*, accepts it, is well pleased with it, and will grant an answer of peace to it. It is *the prayer of a righteous man that avails much*, Jam. v. 16. *He is nigh to them*, a present help, *in all that they call upon him for*.

## **30 The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.**

Two things are here pronounced pleasant:— 1. It is pleasant to have a good prospect to see the light of the sun (Eccl. xi. 7) and by it to see the wonderful works of God, with which this lower world is beautified and enriched. Those that want the mercy know how to value it; how would *the light of the eyes rejoice their hearts*! The consideration of this should make us thankful for our eyesight. 2. It is more pleasant to have *a good name*, a name for good things with God and good

people; this *is as precious ointment*, Eccl. vii. 1. *It makes the bones fat*; it gives a secret pleasure, and that which is strengthening. It is also very comfortable to hear (as some understand it) *a good report* concerning others; a good man has no greater joy than to hear that his friends walk in the truth.

### **31 The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.**

Note, 1. It is the character of a wise man that he is very willing to be reproofed, and therefore chooses to converse with those that, both by their words and example, will show him what is amiss in him: *The ear that can take the reproof* will love the reprover. Faithful friendly reproofs are here called *the reproofs of life*, not only because they are to be given in a lively manner, and with a prudent zeal (and we must reprove by our lives as well as by our doctrine), but because, where they are well-taken, they are means of spiritual life, and lead to eternal life, and (as some think) to distinguish them from rebukes and reproaches for well-doing, which are rather reproofs of death, which we must not regard nor be influenced by. 2. Those that are so wise as to bear reproof well will hereby be *made wiser* (ch. ix. 9), and come at length to be numbered among the wise men of the age, and will have both ability and authority to reprove and instruct others. Those that learn well, and obey well, are likely in time to teach well and rule well.

### **32 He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.**

See here, 1. The folly of those that will not be taught, that *refuse instruction*, that will not heed it, but turn their backs upon it, or will not hear it, but turn their hearts against it. They *refuse correction* (margin); they will not *take it*, no, not from God himself, but kick against the pricks. Those that do so *despise their own souls*; they show that they have a low and mean opinion of them, and are in little care and concern about them, considered as rational and immortal, instruction being designed to cultivate reason and prepare for the immortal state. The fundamental error of sinners is undervaluing their own souls; therefore they neglect to provide for them,

abuse them, expose them, prefer the body before the soul, and wrong the soul to please the body. 2. The wisdom of those that are willing, not only to be taught, but to be reprov'd: *He that hears reproof*, and amends the faults he is reprov'd for, *gets understanding*, by which his soul is secured from bad ways and directed in good ways, and thereby he both evidences the value he has for his own soul and puts true honour upon it.

### **33 The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.**

See here how much it is our interest, as well as duty, 1. To submit to our God, and keep up a reverence for him: *The fear of the Lord*, as it is *the beginning of wisdom*, so it is *the instruction and correction of wisdom*; the principles of religion, closely adhered to, will improve our knowledge, rectify our mistakes, and be the best and surest guide of our way. An awe of God upon our spirits will put us upon the wisest counsels and chastise us when we say or do unwisely. 2. To stoop to our brethren, and keep up a respect for them. Where there is humility there is a happy presage of honour and preparative for it. Those that humble themselves shall be exalted here and hereafter.

## **P R O V E R B S**

### **CHAP. XVI.**

The Sovereignty of Divine Providence.

### **1 The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.**

As we read this, it teaches us a great truth, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to *think or speak any thing of ourselves* that is wise and good, but that all *our sufficiency is of God*, who is with the heart and with the mouth, and *works in us both to will and to do*, Phil. ii. 13; Ps. x. 17. But most read it otherwise: *The preparation of the heart is in man* (he may contrive and design this and the other) but *the answer of the tongue*, not only the delivering of what he designed to speak, but the issue and success of what

he designed to do, *is of the Lord*. That is, in short, 1. *Man purposes*. He has a freedom of thought and a freedom of will permitted him; let him form his projects, and lay his schemes, as he thinks best: but, after all, 2. *God disposes*. Man cannot go on with his business without the assistance and blessing of God, who *made man's mouth* and teaches us what we shall say. Nay, God easily can, and often does, cross men's purposes, and break their measures. It was a curse that was prepared in Balaam's heart, but the answer of the tongue was a blessing.

## **2 All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.**

Note, 1. We are all apt to be partial in judging of ourselves: *All the ways of a man*, all his designs, all his doings, *are clean in his own eyes*, and he sees nothing amiss in them, nothing for which to condemn himself, or which should make his projects prove otherwise than well; and therefore he is confident of success, and that the answer of the tongue shall be according to the expectations of the heart; but there is a great deal of pollution cleaving to our ways, which we are not aware of, or do not think so ill of as we ought. 2. The judgment of God concerning us, we are sure, is according to truth: He *weighs the spirits* in a just and unerring balance, knows what is in us, and passes a judgment upon us accordingly, writing *Tekel* upon that which passed our scale with approbation—*weighed in the balance and found wanting*; and by his judgment we must stand or fall. He not only sees men's ways but tries their spirits, and we are as our spirits are.

## **3 Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.**

Note, 1. It is a very desirable thing to have *our thoughts established*, and not tossed, and put into a hurry, by disquieting cares and fears,—to go on in an even steady course of honesty and piety, not disturbed, or put out of frame, by any event or change,—to be satisfied that all shall work for good and issue well at last, and therefore to be always easy and sedate. 2. The only way to have our *thoughts established* is to *commit our works to the Lord*. The great concerns of our souls must be committed to the grace of God, with a dependence upon and submission to the conduct of that grace

(2 Tim. i. 12); all our outward concerns must be committed to the providence of God, and to the sovereign, wise, and gracious disposal of that providence. *Roll thy works upon the Lord* (so the word is); roll the burden of thy care from thyself upon God. Lay the matter before him by prayer.

*Make known thy works unto the Lord* (so some read it), not only the works of thy hand, but the workings of thy heart; and then leave it with him, by faith and dependence upon him, submission and resignation to him. *The will of the Lord be done*. We may then be easy when we resolve that whatever pleases God shall please us.

#### **4 The Lord hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.**

Note, 1. That God is the first cause. He is the former of all things and all persons, the fountain of being; he gave every creature the being it has and appointed it its place. Even the wicked are his creatures, though they are rebels; he gave them those powers with which they fight against him, which aggravates their wickedness, that they will not let him that made them rule them, and therefore, though he made them, he will not save them. 2. That God is the last end. All is of him and from him, and therefore all is to him and for him. He made all according to his will and for his praise; he designed to serve his own purposes by all his creatures, and he will not fail of his designs; all are his servants. The wicked he is not glorified by, but he will be glorified upon. He makes no man wicked, but he made those who he foresaw would be wicked: yet he made them (Gen. vi. 6), because he knew how to *get himself honour upon them*. See Rom. ix. 22. Or (as some understand it) he made the wicked to be employed by him as the instruments of his wrath in the day of evil, when he brings judgments on the world. He makes some use even of wicked men, as of other things, to be his sword, his hand (Ps. xvii. 13, 14), *flagellum Dei—the scourge of God*. The king of Babylon is called his *servant*.

#### **5 Every one *that* is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: *though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished.**

Note, 1. The pride of sinners sets God against them. He that, being high in estate is proud in heart, whose spirit is elevated with his condition, so that he becomes insolent in his conduct towards God and man, let him know that though he admires himself, and others caress him, yet he is *an abomination to the Lord*. The great God despises him; the holy God detest him. 2. The power of sinners cannot secure them against God, though they strengthen themselves with body hands. Though they may strengthen one another with their confederacies and combinations, joining forces against God, they shall not escape his righteous judgment. *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker*, ch. xi. 21; Isa. xlv. 9.

## **6 By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord *men* depart from evil.**

See here, 1. How the guilt of sin is taken away from us—by the *mercy and truth* of God, mercy in promising, truth in performing, the mercy and truth which kiss each other in Jesus Christ the Mediator—by the covenant of grace, in which mercy and truth shine so brightly—by our mercy and truth, as the condition of the pardon and a necessary qualification for it—by these, and not by the legal sacrifices, Mic. vi. 7, 8. 2. How the power of sin is broken in us. By the principles of *mercy and truth* commanding in us the corrupt inclinations are purged out (so we may take the former part); however, *by the fear of the Lord*, and the influence of that fear, *men depart from evil*; those will not dare to sin against God who keep up in their minds a holy dread and reverence of him.

## **7 When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.**

Note, 1. God can turn foes into friends when he pleases. He that has all hearts in his hand has access to men's spirits and power over them, working insensibly, but irresistibly upon them, can make *a man's enemies to be at peace with him*, can change their minds, or force them into a feigned submission. He can slay all enemies, and bring those together that were at the greatest distance from each other. 2. He will do it for us when we please him. If we make it our care to be reconciled to God, and to keep ourselves in his love, he will incline those that have been envious towards us, and



vexatious to us, to entertain a good opinion of us and to become our friends. God made Esau to be at peace with Jacob, Abimelech with Isaac, and David's enemies to court his favour and desire a league with Israel. The image of God appearing upon the righteous, and his particular lovingkindness to them, are enough to recommend them to the respect of all, even of those that have been most prejudiced against them.

## **8 Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.**

Here, 1. It is supposed that an honest good man may have but a little of the wealth of this world (all the righteous are not rich),—that a man may have but little, and yet may be honest (though poverty is a temptation to dishonesty, ch. xxx. 9, yet not an invincible one),—and that a man may grow rich, for a while, by fraud and oppression, may have *great revenues*, and those got and kept *without right*, may have no good title to them nor make any good use of them. 2. It is maintained that a small estate, honestly come by, which a man is content with, enjoys comfortably, serves God with cheerfully, and puts to a right use, is much better and more valuable than a great estate ill-got, and then ill-kept or ill-spent. It carries with it more inward satisfaction, a better reputation with all that are wise and good; it will last longer, and will turn to a better account in the great day, when men will be judged, not according to what they had, but what they did.

## **9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.**

Man is here represented to us, 1. As a reasonable creature, that has the faculty of contriving for himself: *His heart devises his way*, designs an end, and projects ways and means leading to that end, which the inferior creatures, who are governed by sense and natural instinct, cannot do. The more shame for him if he do not devise the way how to please God and provide for his everlasting state. 2. But as a depending creature, that is subject to the direction and dominion of his Maker. If men *devise their way*, so as to make God's glory their end and his will their rule, they may expect that he will *direct their steps* by his Spirit and grace, so that they shall not miss their way nor come short of their end. But let men devise their worldly

affairs ever so politely, and with ever so great a probability of success, yet God has the ordering of the event, and sometimes *directs their steps* to that which they least intended. The design of this is to teach us to say, *If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that* (Jam. iv. 14, 15), and to have our eye to God, not only in the great turns of our lives, but in every step we take. *Lord, direct my way*, 1 Thess. iii. 11.

The Duties of Kings.

## **10 A divine sentence *is* in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment.**

We wish this were always true as a proposition, and we ought to make it our prayer for kings, and all in authority, that a *divine sentence* may be in their lips, both in giving orders, that they may do that in wisdom, and in giving sentence, that they may do that in equity, both which are included in *judgment*, and that in neither *their mouth may transgress*, 1 Tim. ii. 1. But it is often otherwise; and therefore, 1. It may be read as a precept to the kings and judges of the earth to be wise and instructed. Let them be just, and rule in the fear of God; let them act with such wisdom and conscience that there may appear a holy divination in all they say or do, and that they are guided by principles supernatural: let not their mouths transgress in judgment, for the judgment is God's.

2. It may be taken as a promise to all good kings, that if they sincerely aim at God's glory, and seek direction from him, he will qualify them with wisdom and grace above others, in proportion to the eminency of their station and the trusts lodged in their hands. When Saul himself was made king God gave him another spirit. 3. It was true concerning Solomon who wrote this; he had extraordinary wisdom, pursuant to the promise God made him, See 1 Kings iii. 28.

## **11 A just weight and balance *are* the Lord's: all the weights of the bag *are* his work.**

Note, 1. The administration of public justice by the magistrate is an ordinance of God; in it the scales are held, and ought to be held by a steady

and impartial hand; and we ought to submit to it, for the Lord's sake, and to see his authority in that of the magistrate, Rom. xiii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 13. 2. The observance of justice in commerce between man and man is likewise a divine appointment. He taught men discretion to make scales and weights for the adjusting of right exactly between buyer and seller, that neither may be wronged; and all other useful inventions for the preserving of right are from him. He has also appointed by his law that they be just. It is therefore a great affront to him, and to his government, to falsify, and so to do wrong under colour and pretence of doing right, which is *wickedness in the place of judgment*.

## **12 *It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.***

Here is, 1. The character of a good king, which Solomon intended not for his own praise, but for instruction to his successors, his neighbours, and the viceroys under him. A good king not only does justice, but it is *an abomination* to him to do otherwise. He hates the thought of doing wrong and perverting justice; he not only abhors the wickedness done by others, but abhors the wickedness done by others, but abhors to do any himself, though, having power, he might easily and safely do it. 2. The comfort of a good king: His *throne is established by righteousness*. He that makes conscience of using his power aright shall find that to be the best security of his government, both as it will oblige people, make them easy, and keep them in the interest of it, and as it will obtain the blessing of God, which will be a firm basis to the throne and a strong guard about it.

## **13 Righteous lips *are* the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.**

Here is a further character of good kings, that they *love* and *delight* in those that *speak right*.

1. They hate parasites and those that flatter them, and are very willing that all about them should deal faithfully with them and tell them that which is

true, whether it be pleasing or displeasing, both concerning persons and things, that every thing should be set in a true light and nothing

disguised, ch. xxix. 12. 2. They not only do righteousness themselves, but take care to employ those under them that do righteousness too, which is of great consequence to the people, who must be subject not only to the king as supreme, but to the governors sent by him, 1 Pet. ii. 14. A good king will therefore put those in power who are conscientious, and will say that which is righteous and discreet, and know how to speak aright and to the purpose.

**14 The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it. 15 In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.**

These two verses show the power of kings, which is every where great, but was especially so in those eastern countries, where they were absolute and arbitrary. Whom they would they slew and whom they would they kept alive. Their will was a law. We have reason to bless God for the happy constitution of the government we live under, which maintains the prerogative of the prince without any injury to the liberty of the subject. But here it is intimated, 1. How formidable *the wrath of a king is*: It is *as messengers of death*; the wrath of Ahasuerus was so to Haman. An angry word from an incensed prince has been to many a *messenger of death*, and has struck so great a terror upon some as if a sentence of death had been pronounced upon them. He must be a very *wise man* that knows how to *pacify* the wrath of a king with a word fitly spoken, as Jonathan once pacified his father's rage against David, 1 Sam. xix. 6. A prudent subject may sometimes suggest that to an angry prince which will cool his resentments. 2. How valuable and desirable the king's favour is to those that have incurred his displeasure; it is life from the dead if the king be reconciled to them. To others it is *as a cloud of the latter rain*, very refreshing to the ground. Solomon put his subjects in mind of this, that they might not do any thing to incur his wrath, but be careful to recommend themselves to his favour. We ought by it to be put in mind how much we are concerned to escape the wrath and obtain the favour of the King of kings. His frowns are worse than death, and his favour is better than life; and

therefore those are fools who to escape the wrath, and obtain the favour, of an earthly prince, will throw themselves out of God's favour, and make themselves obnoxious to his wrath.

Pride and Humility.

## **16 How much better *is it* to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!**

Solomon here not only asserts that it is better to get wisdom than gold (ch. iii. 14, viii. 19), but he speaks it with assurance, that it is much better, better beyond expression—with admiration (*How much better!*) as one amazed at the disproportion—with an appeal to men's consciences ("Judge in yourselves how much better it is" )—and with an addition to the same purport, that understanding is *rather to be chosen than silver* and all the treasures of kings and their favourites. Note, 1. Heavenly wisdom is better than worldly wealth, and to be preferred before it. Grace is more valuable than gold. Grace is the gift of God's peculiar favour; gold only of common providence. Grace is for ourselves; gold for others. Grace is for the soul and eternity; gold only for the body and time. Grace will stand us in stead in a dying hour, when gold will do us no good. 2. The getting of this heavenly wisdom is better than the getting of worldly wealth. Many take care and pains to get wealth, and

yet come short of it; but grace was never denied to any that sincerely sought it. There is vanity and vexation of spirit in getting wealth, but joy and satisfaction of spirit in getting wisdom. *Great peace have those that love it.*

## **17 The highway of the upright *is* to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.**

Note, 1. It is *the way of the upright* to avoid sin, and every thing that looks like it and leads towards it; and this is a highway marked out by authority, tracked by many that have gone before us, and in which we meet with many that keep company with us; it is easy to find and safe to be travelled in, like a highway, Isa. xxxv. 8. *To depart from evil is understanding.* 2. It is the care of the upright to preserve their own souls, that they be not polluted

with sin, and that by the troubles of the world they may not be put out of the possession of them, especially that they may not perish for ever, Matt. xvi. 26. And it is therefore their care to keep their way, and not turn aside out of it, on either hand, but to press towards perfection. Those that adhere to their duty secure their felicity. Keep thy way and God will keep thee.

## **18 Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.**

Note, 1. Pride will have a fall. Those that are of a *haughty spirit*, that think of themselves above what is meet, and look with contempt upon others, that with their pride affront God and disquiet others, will be brought down, either by repentance or by ruin. It is the honour of God to humble the proud, Job xl. 11, 12. It is the act of justice that those who have lifted up themselves should be laid low. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, were instances of this. Men cannot punish pride, but either admire it or fear it, and therefore God will take the punishing of it into his own hands. Let him alone to deal with proud men. 2. Proud men are frequently most proud, and insolent, and haughty, just before their destruction, so that it is a certain presage that they are upon the brink of it. When proud men set God's judgments at defiance, and think themselves at the greatest distance from them, it is a sign that they are at the door; witness the case of Benhadad and Herod. *While the word was in the king's mouth*, Dan. iv. 31. Therefore let us not fear the pride of others, but greatly fear pride in ourselves.

## **19 Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.**

This is a paradox which the children of this world cannot understand and will not subscribe to, that it is better to be poor and humble than to be rich and proud. 1. Those that *divide the spoil* are commonly proud; they value themselves and despise others, and their mind rises with their condition; those therefore that are *rich in this world* have need to be charged that they *be not high-minded*, 1 Tim. vi. 17. Those that are proud and will put forth themselves, that thrust, and shove, and scramble, for preferment, are the men that commonly *divide the spoil* and share it among them; they have the world at will and the ball at their foot. 2. It is upon all accounts better to

take our lot with those whose condition is low, and their minds brought to it, than to covet and aim to make a figure and a bustle in the world. Humility, though it should expose us to contempt in the world, yet while it recommends us to the favour of God, qualifies us for his gracious visits, prepares

us for his glory, secures us from many temptations, and preserves the quiet and repose of our own souls, is much better than that high-spiritedness which, though it carry away the honour and wealth of the world, makes God a man's enemy and the devil his master.

**Benefits of Wisdom.**

## **20 He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.**

Note, 1. Prudence gains men respect and success: *He that handles a matter wisely* (that is master of his trade and makes it to appear he understands what he undertakes, that is considerate in his affairs, and, when he speaks or writes on any subject, does it pertinently) shall *find good*, shall come into good repute, and perhaps may make a good hand of it. 2. But it is piety only that will secure men's true happiness: Those that *handle a matter wisely*, if they are proud and lean to their own understanding, though they may find some good, yet they will have no great satisfaction in it; but he that *trusts in the Lord*, and not in his own wisdom, *happy is he*, and shall speed better at last. Some read the former part of the verse so as to expound it of piety, which is indeed true wisdom: *He that attends to the word* (the word of God, ch. xiii. 13) shall *find good* in it and good by it. And whoso *trusts in the Lord*, in his word which he attends to, is happy.

## **21 The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.**

Note, 1. Those that have solid wisdom will have the credit of it; it will gain them reputation, and they *shall be called prudent* grave men, and a deference will be paid to their judgment. *Do that which is wise and good and thou shalt have the praise of the same*. 2. Those that with their wisdom have a happy elocution, that deliver their sentiments easily and with a good

grace, are communicative of their wisdom and have words at will, and good language as well as good sense, *increase learning*; they diffuse and propagate knowledge to others, and do good work with it, and by that means increase their own stock. They add doctrine, improve sciences, and do service to the commonwealth of learning. *To him that has*, and uses what he has, *more shall be given*.

## **22 Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.**

Note, 1. There is always some good to be gotten by a wise and good man: His *understanding is a well-spring of life to him*, which always flows and can never be drawn dry; he has something to say upon all occasions that is instructive, and of use to those that will make use of it, things new and old to bring out of his treasure; at least, his understanding is a *spring of life* to himself, yielding him abundant satisfaction; within his own thoughts he entertains and edifies himself, if not others.

2. There is nothing that is good to be gotten by a fool. Even his instruction, his set and solemn discourses, are but folly, like himself, and tending to make others like him. When he does his best it is but folly, in comparison even with the common talk of a wise man, who speaks better at table than a fool in Moses's seat.

## **23 The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.**

Solomon had commended eloquence, or *the sweetness of the lips* (v. 21), and seemed to prefer it before wisdom; but here he corrects himself, as it were, and shows that unless there be a good treasure within to support the eloquence it is worth little. Wisdom in *the heart* is the main matter.

1. It is this that directs us in speaking, that *teaches the mouth* what to speak, and when, and how, so that what is spoken may be proper, and pertinent, and seasonable; otherwise, though the language be ever so fine, it had better be unsaid. 2. It is this that gives weight to what we speak and *adds learning* to it, strength of reason and force of argument, without which, let a thing be



ever so well worded, it will be rejected, when it comes to be considered, as trifling. Quaint expressions please the ear, and humour the fancy, but it is learning in the lips that must convince the judgment, and sway that, to which wisdom in the heart is necessary.

## **24 Pleasant words *are as* an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.**

The *pleasant words* here commended must be those which *the heart of the wise teaches, and adds learning to* (v. 23), words of seasonable advice, instruction, and comfort, words taken from God's word, for that is it which Solomon had learned from his father to account *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*, Ps. xix. 10. These words, to those that know how to relish them, 1. Are pleasant. They are like the *honey-comb, sweet to the soul*, which tastes in them that *the Lord is gracious*; nothing more grateful and agreeable to the new man than the word of God, and those words which are borrowed from it, Ps. cxix. 103. 2. They are wholesome. Many things are pleasant that are not profitable, but these *pleasant words are health to the bones*, to the inward man, as well as *sweet to the soul*. They make *the bones*, which sin has broken and put out of joint, *to rejoice*. The bones are the strength of the body; and the good word of God is a means of spiritual strength, curing the diseases that weaken us.

Malice and Envy.

## **25 There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.**

This we had before (ch. xiv. 12), but here it is repeated, as that which is very necessary to be thought of, 1. By way of caution to us all to take heed of deceiving ourselves in the great concerns of our souls by resting in that which *seems right* and is not really so, and, for the preventing of a self-delusion, to be impartial in self-examination and keep up a jealousy over ourselves. 2. By way of terror to those whose way is not right, is not as it should be, however it may seem to themselves or others; the end of it will certainly be death; to that it has a direct and certain tendency.

## **26 He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.**

This is designed to engage us to diligence, and quicken us, *what our hand finds to do, to do it with all our might*, both in our worldly business and in the work of religion; for in the original it is, *The soul that labours labours for itself*. It is heart-work which is here intended, the labour of the soul, which is here recommended to us, 1. As that which will be absolutely needful. Our mouth is continually craving it of us; the necessities both of soul and body are pressing, and require constant relief, so that we must either work or starve. Both call for daily bread, and therefore there must be daily labour; for in the sweat of our face we must eat, 2 Thess. iii. 10. 2. As that which will be unspeakably gainful. We know on whose errand we go: *He that labours* shall reap the fruit of his

labour; it shall be *for himself*; he shall rejoice in his own work and *eat the labour of his hands*. If we make religion our business, God will make it our blessedness.

## **27 An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips *there is* as a burning fire. 28 A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.**

There are those that are not only vicious themselves, but spiteful and mischievous to others, and they are the worst of men; two sorts of such are here described:—1. Such as envy a man the honour of his good name, and do all they can to blast that by calumnies and misrepresentations: They *dig up evil*; they take a great deal of pains to find out something or other on which to ground a slander, or which may give some colour to it. If none appear above ground, rather than want it they will dig for it, by diving into what is secret, or looking a great way back, or by evil suspicions and surmises, and forced innuendos. In the lips of a slanderer and backbiter *there is as a fire*, not only to brand his neighbour's reputation, to smoke and sully it, but *as a burning fire* to consume it. And how great a matter does a little of this fire kindle, and how hardly is it extinguished! James

iii. 5, 6. 2. Such as envy a man the comfort of his friendship, and do all they can to break that, by suggesting that on both sides which will set those at variance that are most nearly related and have been long intimate, or at least cool and alienate their affections one from another: *A froward man*, that cannot find in his heart to love any body but himself, is vexed to see others live in love, and therefore makes it is his business to *sow strife*, by giving men base characters one of another, telling lies, and carrying ill-natured stories between *chief friends*, so as to *separate* them one from another, and make them angry at or at least suspicious of one another. Those are bad men, and bad women too, that do such ill offices; they are doing the devil's work, and his will their wages be.

**29 A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way *that is not good*.**

**30 He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.**

Here is another sort of evil men described to us, that we may neither do like them, nor have any thing to do with them. 1. Such as (like Satan) do all the mischief they can by force and violence, as roaring lions, and not only by fraud and insinuation, as subtle serpents: They are *violent men*, that do all by rapine and oppression, that *shut their eyes*, meditating with the closest intention and application of mind *to devise froward things*, to contrive how they may do the greatest mischief to their neighbour, to do it effectually and yet securely to themselves; and then *moving their lips*, giving the word of command to their agents, they *bring the evil to pass*, and accomplish the wicked device, *biting his lips* (so some read it) for vexation. When *the wicked plots against the just* he *gnasheth upon him with his teeth*. 2. Such as (like Satan still) do all they can to *entice* and draw in others to join with them in doing mischief, *leading them in a way that is not good*, that is not honest, nor honourable, nor safe, but offensive to God, and which will be in the end pernicious to the sinner. Thus he aims to ruin some in this world by bringing them into trouble, and others in the other world by bringing them into sin.

**The Sovereignty of Divine Providence.**

### **31 The hoary head *is* a crown of glory, *if* it be found in the way of righteousness.**

Note, 1. It ought to be the great care of old people to *be found in the way of righteousness*, the way of religion and serious godliness. Both God and man will look for them in that way; it will be expected that those that are old should be good, that the multitude of their years should teach them the best wisdom; let them therefore be found in that way. Death will come; the Judge is coming; *the Lord is at hand*. That they may *be found of him in peace*, let them *be found in the way of righteousness* (2 Pet. iii. 14), *found so doing*, Matt. xxiv. 46. Let old people be old disciples; let them persevere to the end *in the way of righteousness*, which they long since set out in, that they may then be found in it. 2. If old people *be found in the way of righteousness*, their age will be their honour. Old age, as such, is honourable, and commands respect (*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head*, Lev. xix. 32); but, if it be found in the way of wickedness, its honour is forfeited, its crown profaned and laid in the dust, Isa. lxv. 20. Old people therefore, if they would preserve their honour, must still hold fast their integrity, and then their gray hairs are indeed *a crown* to them; they are *worthy of double honour*. Grace is the glory of old age.

### **32 *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.***

This recommends the grace of meekness to us, which will well become us all, particularly *the hoary head*, v. 31. Observe, 1. The nature of it. It is to be *slow to anger*, not easily put into a passion, nor apt to resent provocation, taking time to consider before we suffer our passion to break out, that it may not transgress due bounds, so slow in our motions towards anger that we may be quickly stopped and pacified. It is to have the rule of our own spirits, our appetites and affections, and all our inclinations, but particularly our passions, our anger, keeping that under direction and check, and the strict government of religion and right reason. We must be *lords of our anger*, as God is, Nah. i. 3. *Æolus sis, affectuum tuorum—Rule your passions, as Æolus rules the winds*. 2. The honour of it. He that gets and keeps the mastery of his passions *is better than the mighty*, better than he that by a long siege *takes a city* or by a long war subdues a country. Behold,

a greater than Alexander or Cæsar is here. The conquest of ourselves, and our own unruly passions, requires more true wisdom, and a more steady, constant, and regular management, than the obtaining of a victory over the forces of an enemy. A rational conquest is more honourable to a rational creature than a brutal one. It is a victory that does nobody any harm; no lives or treasures are sacrificed to it, but only some base lusts. It is harder, and therefore more glorious, to quash an insurrection at home than to resist an invasion from a broad; nay, such are the gains of meekness that by it *we are more than conquerors*.

### **33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.**

Note, 1. The divine Providence orders and directs those things which to us are perfectly casual and fortuitous. Nothing comes to pass by chance, nor is an event determined by a blind fortune, but every thing by the will and counsel of God. What man has neither eye nor hand in God is intimately concerned in. 2. When solemn appeals are made to Providence by the casting of lots, for the deciding of that matter of moment which could not otherwise be at all, or not so well, decided, God must be eyed in it, by prayer, that it may be disposed aright (*Give a perfect lot*, 1 Sam. xiv.

41; Acts i. 24), and by acquiescing in it when it is disposed, being satisfied that the hand of God is in it and that hand directed by infinite wisdom. All the disposals of Providence concerning our affairs we must look upon to be the directing of our lot, the determining of what we referred to God, and must be reconciled to them accordingly.

## **P R O V E R B S**

### **CHAP. XVII.**

**Falsehood and Oppression Reproved.**

**1 Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices *with* strife.**

These words recommend family-love and peace, as conducing very much to the comfort of human life. 1. Those that live in unity and quietness, not only free from jealousies and animosities, but vying in mutual endearments, and obliging to one another, live very comfortably, though they are low in the world, work hard and fare hard, though they have but each of them *a morsel*, and that *a dry morsel*. There may be peace and quietness where there are not three meals a day, provided there be a joint satisfaction in God's providence and a mutual satisfaction in each other's prudence. Holy love may be found in a cottage. 2. Those that live in contention, that are always jarring and brawling, and reflecting upon one another, though they have plenty of dainties, *a house full of sacrifices*, live uncomfortably; they cannot expect the blessing of God upon them and what they have, nor can they have any true relish of their enjoyments, much less any peace in their own consciences. Love will sweeten a *dry morsel*, but strife will sour and embitter *a house full of sacrifices*. A little of the leaven of malice will leaven all the enjoyments.

## **2 A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.**

Note, 1. True merit does not go by dignity. All agree that the son in the family is more worthy than the servant (John viii. 35), and yet sometimes it so happens that the servant is wise, and a blessing and credit to the family, when the son is a fool, and a burden and shame to the family. Eliezer of Damascus, though Abram could not bear to think that he should be his heir, was a stay to the family, when he obtained a wife for Isaac; whereas Ishmael, a son, was a shame to it, when he mocked Isaac. 2. True dignity will go by merit. If a servant be wise, and manage things well, he shall be further trusted, and not only *have rule* with, but *rule over a son that causes shame*; for God and nature have designed that *the fool shall be servant to the wise in heart*. Nay, a prudent servant may perhaps come to have such an interest in his master as to be taken in for a child's share of the estate and to *have part of the inheritance among the brethren*.

## **3 The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts.**

Note, 1. The hearts of the children of men are subject, not only to God's view, but to his judgment: As *the fining-pot is for silver*, both to prove it and to improve it so *the Lord tries the hearts*; he searches whether they are standard or no, and those that are he refines and makes purer, Jer. xvii. 10. God tries the heart by affliction (Ps. lxvi. 10, 11), and often chooses his people in that furnace (Isa. xlvi. 10) and makes them choice. 2. It is God only that *tries the hearts*. Men may try their *silver* and *gold* with *the fining-pot* and *the furnace*, but they have no such way of trying one another's hearts; God only does that, who is both the searcher and the sovereign of the heart.

#### **4 A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; *and* a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.**

Note, 1. Those that design to do ill support themselves by falsehood and lying: *A wicked doer gives* ear, with a great deal of pleasure, *to false lips*, that will justify him in the ill he does, to those that aim to make public disturbances, catch greedily at libels, and false stories, that defame the government and the administration. 2. Those that take the liberty to tell lies take a pleasure in hearing them told: *A liar gives* heed to a malicious backbiting tongue, that he may have something to graft his lies upon, and with which to give them some colour of truth and so to support them. Sinners will strengthen one another's hands; and those show that they are bad themselves who court the acquaintance and need the assistance of those that are bad.

#### **5 Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: *and* he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.**

See here, 1. What a great sin those are guilty of who trample upon the poor, who ridicule their wants and the meanness of their appearance, upbraid them with their poverty, and take advantage from their weakness to be abusive and injurious to them. They *reproach their Maker*, put a great contempt and affront upon him, who allotted the poor to the condition they are in, owns them, and takes care of them, and can, when he pleases, reduce us to that condition. Let those that thus reproach their Maker know that they

shall be called to an account for it, Matt. xxv. 40, 41; Prov. xiv. 31. 2. What great danger those are in of falling into trouble themselves who are pleased to see and hear of the troubles of others: *He that is glad at calamities*, that he may be built up upon the ruins of others, and regales himself with the judgments of God when they are abroad, let him know that he *shall not go unpunished*; the cup shall be put into his hand, Ezek. xxv. 6, 7.

Common Truths.

## **6 Children's children *are* the crown of old men; and the glory of children *are* their fathers.**

They are so, that is, they should be so, and, if they conduct themselves worthily, they are so.

1. It is an honour to parents when they are old to leave children, and *children's children*, growing up, that tread in the steps of their virtues, and are likely to maintain and advance the reputation of their families. It is an honour to a man to live so long as to see his children's children (Ps. cxxviii. 6; Gen. 1. 23), to see his house built up in them, and to see them likely to serve their generation according to the will of God. This crowns and completes their comfort in this world. 2. It is an honour to children to have wise and godly parents, and to have them continued to them even after they have themselves grown up and settled in the world. Those are unnatural children who reckon their aged parents a burden to them, and think they live too long; whereas, if the children be wise

and good, it is as much their honour as can be that thereby they are comforts to their parents in the unpleasant days of their old age.

## **7 Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.**

Two things are here represented as very absurd: 1. That men of no repute should be dictators. What can be more unbecoming than for fools, who are known to have little sense and discretion, to pretend to that which is above them and which they were never cut out for? A fool, in Solomon's proverbs, signifies a wicked man, whom *excellent speech* does not become, because



his conversation gives the lie to his excellent speech. What have those to do to declare God's statutes who *hate instruction*? Ps. 1. 16. Christ would not suffer the unclean spirits to say that they knew him to be the Son of God. See Acts xvi. 17, 18. 2. That men of great repute should be deceivers. If it is unbecoming a despicable man to presume to speak as a philosopher or politician, and nobody heeds him, being prejudiced against his character, much more unbecoming is it for a prince, for a man of honour, to take advantage from his character and the confidence that is put in him to lie, and dissemble, and make no conscience of breaking his word. Lying ill becomes any man, but worst a prince, so corrupt is the modern policy, which insinuates that princes ought not to make themselves slaves to their words further than is for their interest, and *Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*—*He who knows not how to dissemble knows not how to reign*.

## **8 A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.**

The design of this observation is to show, 1. That those who have money in their hand think they can do any thing with it. Rich men value a little money as if it were a *precious stone*, and value themselves on it as if it gave them not only ornament, but power, and every one were bound to be at their beck, even justice itself. Whithersoever they turn this sparkling diamond they expect it should dazzle the eyes of all, and make them do just what they would have them do in hopes of it. The deepest bag will carry the cause. Fee high, and you may have what you will. 2. That those who have money in their eye, and set their hearts upon it, will do any thing for it: *A bribe is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that takes it*; it has a great influence upon him, and he will be sure to go the way that it leads him, hither and thither, though contrary to justice and not consistent with himself.

## **9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth *very* friends.**

Note, 1. The way to preserve peace among relations and neighbours is to make the best of every thing, not to tell others what has been said or done against them when it is not at all necessary to their safety, nor to take notice

of what has been said or done against them when it is not at all necessary to their safety, nor to take notice of what has been said or done against ourselves, but to excuse both, and put the best construction upon them. "It was an oversight; therefore overlook it. It was done through forgetfulness; therefore forget it. It perhaps made nothing of you; do you make nothing of it." 2. The ripping up of faults is the ripping out of love, and nothing tends more to the separating of friends, and setting them at variance, than the *repeating of matters* that have been in

variance; for they commonly lose nothing in the repetition, but the things themselves are aggravated and the passions about them revived and exasperated. The best method of peace is by an amnesty or act of oblivion.

## **10 A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.**

Note, 1. A word is enough to the wise. A gentle reproof will enter not only into the head, but into the heart of a wise man, so as to have a strong influence upon him; for, if but a hint be given to conscience, let it alone to carry it on and prosecute it. 2. Stripes are not enough for a fool, to make him sensible of his errors, that he may repent of them, and be more cautious for the future. He that is sottish and wilful is very rarely benefited by severity. David is softened with, *Thou art the man*; but Pharaoh remains hard under all the plagues of Egypt.

## **11 An evil *man* seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.**

Here is the sin and punishment of an evil man. 1. His sin. He is an evil man indeed that seeks all occasions to rebel against God, and the government God has set over him, and to contradict and quarrel with those about him. *Quærit jurgia—He picks quarrels*; so some. There are some that are actuated by a spirit of opposition, that will contradict for contradiction-sake, that will go on frowardly in their wicked ways in spite of all restraint and check. *A rebellious man seeks mischief* (so some read it), watches all opportunities to disturb the public peace. 2. His punishment. Because he will not be reclaimed by mild and gentle methods, *a cruel messenger shall*

*be sent against him*, some dreadful judgment or other, as a messenger from God. Angels, God's messengers, shall be employed as ministers of his justice against him, Ps. lxxviii. 49. Satan, the angel of death, shall be let loose upon him, and the *messengers* of Satan. His prince shall send a sergeant to arrest him, an executioner to cut him off. He that *kicks against the pricks* is waited for of the sword.

Weighty Sayings.

**12 Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man,  
rather than a fool in his folly.**

Note, 1. A passionate man is a brutish man. However at other times he may have some wisdom, take him in his passion ungoverned, and he is a *fool in his folly*; those are fools in whose bosom anger rests and in whose countenance anger rages. He has put off man, and is become like a bear, a raging bear, *a bear robbed of her whelps*; he is as fond of the gratifications of his lusts and passions as a bear of her whelps (which, though ugly, are her own), as eager in the pursuit of them as she is in quest of her whelps when they are missing, and as full of indignation if crossed in the pursuit.

2. He is a dangerous man, falls foul of every one that stands in his way, though innocent, though his friend, as a bear robbed of her whelps sets upon the first man she meets as the robber. *Ira furor brevis est—Anger is temporary madness*. One may more easily stop, escape, or guard against an enraged bear, than an outrageous angry man. Let us therefore watch over our own passions (lest they get head and do mischief) and so consult our own honour; and let us avoid the company of furious men, and get out of their way when they are in their fury, and so consult our own safety. *Currenti cede furori—Give place unto wrath*.

### **13 Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.**

A malicious mischievous man is here represented, 1. As ungrateful to his friends. He oftentimes is so absurd and insensible of kindnesses done him that he renders *evil for good*. David met with those that were his adversaries for his love, Ps. cix. 4. To render evil for evil is brutish, but to render evil for good is devilish. He is an ill-natured man who, because he is resolved not to return a kindness, will revenge it. 2. As therein unkind to his family, for he entails a curse upon it. This is a crime so heinous that it shall be punished, not only in his person, but in his posterity, for whom he thus treasures up wrath. *The sword shall not depart from David's house* because he rewarded Uriah with evil for his good services. The Jews stoned Christ for his good works; therefore is his blood upon them and upon their children.

**14 The beginning of strife is *as* when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.**

Here is, 1. The danger that there is in *the beginning of strife*. One hot word, one peevish reflection, one angry demand, one spiteful contradiction, begets another, and that a third, and so on, till it proves like the cutting of a dam; when the water has got a little passage it does itself widen the breach, bears down all before it, and there is then no stopping it, no reducing it. 2. A good caution inferred thence, to take heed of the first spark of contention and to put it out as soon as ever it appears. Dread the breaking of the ice, for, if once broken, it will break further; *therefore leave it off*, not only when you see the worst of it, for then it may be too late, but when you see the first of it. *Obsta principiis—Resist its earliest display*. Leave it off even *before it be meddled with*; leave it off, if it were possible, before you begin.

**15 He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both *are* abomination to the Lord.**

This shows what an offence it is to God, 1. When those that are entrusted with the administration of public justice, judges, juries, witnesses, prosecutors, counsel, do either acquit the guilty or condemn those that are not guilty, or in the least contribute to either; this defeats the end of government, which is to protect the good and punish the bad, Rom. xiii. 3, 4. It is equally provoking to God to *justify the wicked*, though it be in pity and *in favorem vitæ—to safe life*, as to *condemn the just*. 2. When any private persons plead for sin and sinners, palliate and excuse wickedness, or argue against virtue and piety, and so *pervert the right ways of the Lord* and confound the eternal distinctions between good and evil.

**16 Wherefore is *there* a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing *he hath* no heart to it?**

Two things are here spoken of with astonishment:—1. God's great goodness to foolish man, in putting *a price into his hand to get wisdom*, to get

knowledge and grace to fit him for both worlds. We have rational souls, the means of grace, the strivings of the Spirit, access to God by prayer; we have time and opportunity. He that has a good estate (so some understand it) has advantages thereby of getting wisdom by purchasing instruction. Good parents, relations, ministers, friends, are helps to get wisdom. It is *a price*, therefore of value, a talent. It is *a price in the hand*, in possession; *the word is nigh thee*. It is a price for getting; it is for our own advantage; it is for getting wisdom, the

very thing which, being fools, we have most need of. We have reason to wonder that God should so consider our necessity, and should entrust us with such advantages, though he foresaw we should not make a right improvement of them. 2. Man's great wickedness, his neglect of God's favour and his own interest, which is very absurd and unaccountable: *He has no heart to it*, not to the wisdom that is to be got, nor to the price in the use of which it may be got. *He has no heart*, no skill, nor will, nor courage, to improve his advantages. He has set his heart upon other things, so that he has no heart to his duty or the great concerns of his soul. Wherefore should a price be thrown away and lost upon one so undeserving of it?

True Friendship.

## **17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.**

This intimates the strength of those bonds by which we are bound to each other and which we ought to be sensible of. 1. Friends must be constant to each other *at all times*. That is not true friendship which is not constant; it will be so if it be sincere, and actuated by a good principle. Those that are fanciful or selfish in their friendship will love no longer than their humour is pleased and their interest served, and therefore their affections turn with the wind and change with the weather. Swallow-friends, that fly to you in summer, but are gone in winter; such friends there is no loss of. But if the friendship be prudent, generous, and cordial, if I love my friend because he is wise, and virtuous, and good, as long as he continues so, though he fall into poverty and disgrace, still I shall love him. Christ is a friend that loves at all times (John xiii. 1) and we must so love him, Rom. viii. 35. 2. Relations must in a special manner be careful and tender of one another in

affliction: *A brother is born* to succour a brother or sister in distress, to whom he is joined so closely by nature that he may the more sensibly feel from their burdens, and be the more strongly inclined and engaged, as it were by instinct, to help them. We must often consider what we were *born for*, not only as men, but as in such a station and relation. *Who knows but we came* into such a family *for such a time as this*? We do not answer the end of our relations if we do not do the duty of them. Some take it thus: *A friend that loves at all times is born* (that is, becomes) *a brother in adversity*, and is so to be valued.

### **18 A man void of understanding striketh hands, *and* becometh surety in the presence of his friend.**

Though Solomon had commended friendship in adversity (v. 17), yet let not any, under pretence of being generous to their friends, be unjust to their families and wrong them; one part of our duty must be made to consist with another. Note, 1. It is a piece of wisdom to keep out of debt as much as may be, especially to dread suretiship. There may be a just occasion for a man to pass his word for his friend in his absence, till he come to engage himself; but to be *surety in the presence of his friend*, when he is upon the spot, supposes that his own word will not be taken, he being deemed insolvent or dishonest, and then who can with safety pass his word for him? 2. Those that are *void of understanding* are commonly taken in this snare, to the prejudice of their families, and therefore ought not to be trusted too far with their own affairs, but to be under direction.

### **19 He loveth transgression that loveth strife: *and* he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.**

Note, 1. Those that are quarrelsome involve themselves in a great deal of guilt: *He that loves strife*, that in his worldly business loves to go to law, in religion loves controversies, and in common conversation loves to thwart and fall out, that is never well but when he is in the fire, *he loves transgression*; for a great deal of sin attends that sin, and the way of it is down-hill. He pretends to stand up for truth, and for his honour and right, but really he loves sin, which God hates. 2. Those that are ambitious and aspiring expose themselves to a great deal of trouble, such as often ends in

their ruin: *He that exalts his gate*, builds a stately house, at least a fine frontispiece, that he may overtop and outshine his neighbours, seeks his own destruction and takes a deal of pains to ruin himself; he makes his gate so large that his house and estate go out at it.

Folly and Wickedness.

## **20 He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.**

Note, 1. Framing ill designs will be of no advantage to us; there is nothing got by them: *He that has a froward heart*, that sows discord and is full of resentment, cannot promise himself to get by it sufficient to counterbalance the loss of his repose and reputation, nor can he take any rational satisfaction in it; he *finds no good*. 2. Giving ill language will be a great disadvantage to us: *He that has a perverse tongue*, spiteful and abusive, scurrilous or backbiting, *falls into one mischief* or other, loses his friends, provokes his enemies, and pulls trouble upon his own head. Many a one has paid dearly for an unbridled tongue.

## **21 He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.**

This expresses that very emphatically which many wise and good men feel very sensibly, what a grievous vexatious thing it is to have a foolish wicked child. See here, 1. How uncertain all our creature-comforts are, so that we are often not only disappointed in them, but that proves the greatest cross in which we promised ourselves most satisfaction. There was *joy when a man-child was born into the world*, and yet, if he prove vicious, his own father will wish he had never been born. The name of Absalom signifies his *father's peace*, but he was his greatest trouble. It should moderate the desire of having children, and the delights of their parents in them, that they may prove a grief to them; yet it should silence the murmurings of the afflicted father in that case that if his son be a fool he is a fool of his own begetting, and therefore he must make the best of him, and take it up as his cross, the rather because Adam begets a son in his own likeness. 2. How unwise we are in suffering one affliction (and that of an untoward child as likely as any other) to drown the sense of a thousand mercies: *The father of a fool* lays



that so much to heart that he *has no joy* of any thing else. For this he may thank himself; there are joys sufficient to counterbalance even that sorrow.

## **22 A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.**

Note, 1. It is healthful to be cheerful. The Lord is for the body, and has provided for it, not only meat, but medicine, and has here told us that the best medicine is *a merry heart*, not a heart addicted to vain, carnal, sensual mirth; Solomon himself said of that mirth, It is not medicine, but

madness; it is not food, but poison; *what doth it?* But he means a heart rejoicing in God, and serving him with gladness, and then taking the comfort of outward enjoyments and particularly that of pleasant conversation. It is a great mercy that God gives us leave to be cheerful and cause to be cheerful, especially if by his grace he gives us hearts to be cheerful. This *does good to a medicine* (so some read it); it will make physic more efficient. Or *it does good as a medicine* to the body, making it easy and fit for business. But, if mirth be a medicine (understand it of diversion and recreation), it must be used sparingly, only when there is occasion, not turned into food, and it must be used medicinally, *sub regimine*—*as a prescribed regimen*, and by rule. 2. The sorrows of the mind often contribute very much to the sickness of the body: *A broken spirit*, sunk by the burden of afflictions, and especially a conscience wounded with the sense of guilt and fear of wrath, *dries the bones*, wastes the radical moisture, exhausts the very marrow, and makes the body a mere skeleton. We should therefore watch and pray against all melancholy dispositions, for they lead us into trouble as well as into temptation.

## **23 A wicked *man* taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.**

See here, 1. What an evil thing bribery is: He is *a wicked man* that will *take a gift* to engage him to give a false testimony, verdict, or judgment; when he does it he is ashamed of it, for he takes it, with all the secresy imaginable, *out of the bosom* where he knows it is laid ready for him; it is industriously concealed, and so slyly that, if he could, he would hide it from his own

conscience. *A gift is taken out of the bosom of a wicked man* (so some read it); for he is a bad man that gives bribes, as well as he that takes them. 2. What a powerful thing it is. It is of such force that it *perverts the ways of judgment*. The course of justice is not only obstructed, but turned into injustice; and the greatest wrongs are done under colour of doing right.

## **24 Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool *are* in the ends of the earth.**

Note, 1. He is to be reckoned an intelligent man that not only has wisdom, but has it ready when he has occasion for it. He lays his *wisdom before him*, as his card and compass which he steers by, has his eye always upon it, as he that writes has on his copy; and then he has it *before him*; it is not to seek, but still at hand. 2. He that has a giddy head, a roving rambling fancy, will never be fit for any solid business. He is a fool, and good for nothing, whose *eyes are in the ends of the earth*, here, and there and every where, any where but where they should be, who cannot fix his thoughts to one subject nor pursue any one purpose with any thing of steadiness. When his mind should be applied to his study and business it is filled with a thousand things foreign and impertinent.

## **25 A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.**

Observe, 1. Wicked children are an affliction to both their parents. They are an occasion of *anger* to the father (so the word signifies), because they condemn his authority, but of sorrow and *bitterness* to the mother, because they abuse her tenderness. The parents, being joint-sufferers, should therefore bring mutual comfort to bear them up under it, and strive to make it as easy as they can, the mother to mollify the father's anger, the father to alleviate the mother's grief. 2. That

Solomon often repeats this remark, probably because it was his own case; however, it is a common case.

## **26 Also to punish the just is not good, *nor* to strike princes for equity.**

In differences that happen between magistrates and subjects, and such differences often arise,

1. Let magistrates see to it that they never *punish the just*, that they be in no case a *terror to good works*, for that is to abuse their power and betray that great trust which is reposed in them. It is *not good*, that is, it is a very evil thing, and will end ill, whatever end they may aim at in it. When princes become tyrants and persecutors their thrones will be neither easy nor firm.
2. Let subjects see to it that they do not find fault with the government for doing its duty, for it is a wicked thing *to strike princes for equity*, by defaming their administration or by any secret attempts against them to strike at them, as the ten tribes that revolted reflected upon Solomon for imposing necessary taxes. Some read it, *Nor to strike the ingenuous for equity*. Magistrates must take heed that none suffer under them for well doing; nor must parents *provoke their children to wrath* by unjust rebukes.

**27 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: *and* a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. 28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: *and* he that shutteth his lips is *esteemed* a man of understanding.**

Two ways a man may show himself to be a wise man:—1. By the good temper, the sweetness and the sedateness, of his mind: *A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit, a precious spirit* (so the word is); he is one that looks well to his spirit, that it be as it should be, and so keeps it in an even frame, easy to himself and pleasant to others. A gracious spirit is a precious spirit, and renders a man amiable and *more excellent than his neighbour*. He is of a *cool spirit* (so some read it), not heated with passion, nor put into any tumult or disorder by the *impetus* of any corrupt affection, but even and stayed. A cool head with a warm heart is an admirable composition. 2. By the good government of his tongue. (1.) A wise man will be *of few words*, as being afraid of speaking amiss: *He that has knowledge*, and aims to do good with it, is careful, when he does speak to speak to the purpose, and says little in order that he may take time to deliberate. He *s pares his words*, because they are better spared than ill-spent. (2.) This is generally taken for such a sure indication of wisdom that

a fool may gain the reputation of being a wise man if he have but wit enough to hold his tongue, to hear, and see, and say little. If a fool hold his peace, men of candour will think him wise, because nothing appears to the contrary, and because it will be thought that he is making observations on what others say, and gaining experience, and is consulting with himself what he shall say, that he may speak pertinently. See how easy it is to gain men's good opinion and to impose upon them. But when a *fool holds his peace* God knows his heart, and the folly that is bound up there; thoughts are words to him, and therefore he cannot be deceived in his judgment of men.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XVIII.

Wisdom and Folly.

**1 Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh *and* intermeddleth with all wisdom.**

The original here is difficult, and differently understood. 1. Some take it as a rebuke to an affected singularity. When men take a pride in *separating themselves* from the sentiments and society of others, in contradicting all that has been said before them and advancing new notions of their own, which, though ever so absurd, they are wedded to, it is to gratify a desire or lust of vain-glory, and they are seekers and meddlers with that which does not belong to them. He *seeks according to his desire, and intermeddles with every business*, pretends to pass a judgment upon every man's matter. He is morose and supercilious. Those generally are so that are opinionative and conceited, and they thus make themselves ridiculous, and are vexatious to others. 2. Our translation seems to take it as an excitement to diligence in the pursuit of wisdom. If we would get knowledge or grace, we must desire it, as that which we need and which will be of great advantage to us, 1 Cor. xii. 31. We must *separate ourselves* from all those things which would divert us from or retard us in the pursuit, retire out of the noise of this world's vanities, and then *seek and intermeddle with all* the means and instructions of *wisdom*, be willing to take pains and try all the methods of

improving ourselves, be acquainted with a variety of opinions, that we may prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

## **2 A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.**

A fool may pretend to understanding, and to seek and intermeddle with the means of it, but,

1. He has no true delight in it; it is only to please his friends or save his credit; he does not love his book, nor his business, nor his Bible, nor his prayers; he would rather be playing the fool with his sports. Those who take no pleasure in learning or religion will make nothing to purpose of either. No progress is made in them if they are a task and a drudgery. 2. He has no good design in it, only *that his heart may discover itself*, that he may have something to make a show with, something wherewith to varnish his folly, that that may pass off the better, because he loves to hear himself talk.

## **3 When the wicked cometh, *then* cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.**

This may include a double sense:—1. That wicked people are scornful people, and put *contempt* upon others. *When the wicked comes* into any company, comes into the schools of wisdom or into the assemblies for religious worship, *then comes contempt* of God, of his people and ministers, and of every thing that is said and done. You can expect no other from those that are profane than that they will be scoffers; they will be an *ignominy* and *reproach*; they will flout and jeer every thing that is serious and grave. But let not wise and good men regard it, for the proverb of the ancients says, such *wickedness proceeds from the wicked*. 2. That wicked people are shameful people, and bring *contempt* upon themselves, for God has said that those *who despise him shall be lightly esteemed*. As soon as ever sin entered shame followed it, and sinners make themselves despicable.

Nor do they only draw contempt upon themselves, but they bring *ignominy* and *reproach* upon their families, their friends, their ministers, and all that

are in any way related to them. Those therefore who would secure their honour must retain their virtue.

The Language of Folly.

#### **4 The words of a man's mouth *are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.***

The similitudes here seem to be elegantly transposed. 1. The *well-spring of wisdom is as deep waters*. An intelligent knowing man has in him a good treasure of useful things, which furnishes him with something to say upon all occasions that is pertinent and profitable. This is as *deep waters*, which make no noise, but never run dry. 2. The words of such *a man's mouth are as a flowing brook*. What he sees cause to speak flows naturally from him and with a great deal of ease, and freedom, and natural fluency; it is clean and fresh, it is cleansing and refreshing; from his *deep waters* there flows what there is occasion for, to water those about him, as the brooks do the low grounds.

#### **5 *It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.***

This justly condemns those who, being employed in the administration of justice, pervert judgment, 1. By conniving at men's crimes, and protecting and countenancing them in oppression and violence, because of their dignity, or wealth, or some personal kindness they have for them. Whatever excuses men may make for it, certainly *it is not good* thus to *accept the person of the wicked*; it is an offence to God, an affront to justice, a wrong to mankind, and a real service done to the kingdom of sin and Satan. The merits of the cause must be regarded, not the person. 2. By giving a cause against justice and equity, because the person is poor and low in the world, or not of the same party or persuasion, or a stranger of another country. This is *overthrowing the righteous in judgment*, who ought to be supported, and whom God will make to stand.

#### **6 A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.      7 A fool's mouth is his**

## **destruction, and his lips *are* the snare of his soul.**

Solomon has often shown what mischief bad men do to others with their ungoverned tongues; here he shows what mischief they do to themselves. 1. They embroil themselves in quarrels: *A fool's lips*, without any cause or call, *enter into contention*, by advancing foolish notions which others find themselves obliged to oppose, and so a quarrel is begun, or by giving provoking language, which will be resented, and satisfaction demanded, or by setting men at defiance, and bidding them *do if they dare*. Proud, and passionate men, and drunkards, are fools, whose lips *enter into contention*. A wise man may, against his will, be drawn into a quarrel, but he is a fool that of choice enters into it when he might avoid it, and he will repent it when it is too late. 2. They expose themselves to correction: The *fool's mouth* does, in effect, *call for strokes*; he has said that which deserves to be punished with strokes, and is still saying that which needs to be checked, and restrained with strokes, as Ananias unjustly commanded that Paul should be *smitten on the mouth*. 3. They involve themselves in ruin: *A fool's mouth*, which has been, or would have been, the destruction of others, proves at length *his own destruction*, perhaps from men. Shimei's mouth was his own destruction,

and Adonijah's, who spoke against his own head. And when a fool, by his foolish speaking, has run himself into a premunire, and thinks to bring himself off by justifying or excusing what he has said, his defence proves his offence, and his lips are still the snare of his soul, entangling him yet more and more. However, when men by their evil words shall be condemned at God's bar their mouths will be their destruction, and it will be such an aggravation of their ruin as will not admit one drop of water, one drop of comfort, to *cool their tongue*, which is their snare and will be their tormentor.

## **8 The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.**

Tale-bearers are those who secretly carry stories from house to house, which perhaps have some truth in them, but are secrets not fit to be told, or are basely misrepresented, and false colours put upon them, and are all told

with design to blast men's reputation, to break their friendship, to make mischief between relations and neighbours, and set them at variance. Now the words of such are here said to be, 1. *Like as when men are wounded* (so the margin reads it); they pretend to be very much affected with the miscarriages of such and such, and to be in pain for them, and pretend that it is with the greatest grief and reluctance imaginable that they speak of them. They look as if they themselves were wounded by it, whereas really they *rejoice in iniquity*, are fond of the story, and tell it with pride and pleasure. Thus their words seem; but they *go down as poison into the innermost parts of the belly*, the pill being thus gilded, thus sugared. 2. *As wounds* (so the text reads it), as deep wounds, deadly wounds, *wounds in the innermost parts of the belly*; the *venter medius vel infimus*—*the middle or lower belly*, the *thorax* or the *abdomen*, in either of which wounds are mortal. The words of the tale-bearer wound him of whom they are spoken, his credit and interest, and him to whom they are spoken, his love and charity. They occasion sin to him, which is a wound to the conscience. Perhaps he seems to slight them, but they would insensibly, by alienating his affections from one he ought to love.

Folly and Pride Exposed.

## **9 He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.**

Note, 1. Prodigality is very bad husbandry. Those are not only justly branded as fools among men, but will give an uncomfortable account to God of the talents they are entrusted with, who are wasters of their estates, who live above what they have, spend and give more than they can afford, and so, in effect, throw away what they have, and suffer it to run to waste. 2. Idleness is no better. He that is remiss in his work, whose *hands hang down* (so the word signifies), that stands, as we may, with his thumbs in his mouth, that neglects his business, does it not at all, or as if he did it not, he is own brother to him that is a prodigal, that is, he is as much a fool and in as sure and ready a way to poverty; one scatters what he has, the other lets it run through his fingers. The observation is too true in the affairs of religion; he that is trifling and careless in praying and hearing is brother to him that does not pray or hear at all; and omissions of duty and in duty are as fatal to the soul as commissions of sin.



## **10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.**

Here is, 1. God's sufficiency for the saints: His *name is a strong tower* for them, in which they may take rest when they are weary and take sanctuary when they are pursued, where they may be lifted up above their enemies and fortified against them. There is enough in God, and in the discoveries which he has made of himself to us, to make us easy at all times. The wealth laid up in this tower is enough to enrich them, to be a continual feast and a continuing treasure to them. The strength of this tower is enough to protect them; *the name of the Lord* is all that whereby he has made himself known as God, and our God, not only his titles and attributes, but his covenant and all the promises of it; these make up a tower, a strong tower, impenetrable, impregnable, for all God's people. 2. The saints' security in God. It is a strong tower to those who know how to make use of it as such. *The righteous*, by faith and prayer, devotion towards God and dependence on him, *run into it*, as their city of refuge. Having made sure their interest in God's name, they take the comfort and benefit of it; they go out of themselves, retire from the world, live above, dwell in God and God in them, and so they are safe, they think themselves so, and they shall find themselves so.

## **11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.**

Having described the firm and faithful defence of the righteous man (v. 10), Solomon here shows what is the false and deceitful defence of the rich man, that has his portion and treasure in the things of this world, and sets his heart upon them. His wealth is as much his confidence, and he expects as much from it, as a godly man from his God. See, 1. How he supports himself. He makes his *wealth his city*, where he dwells, where he rules, with a great deal of self-complacency, as if he had a whole city under his command. It *is his strong city*, in which he intrenches himself, and then sets danger at defiance, as if nothing could hurt him. *His scales are his pride*; his wealth is his wall in which he encloses himself, and he thinks it a *high wall*, which cannot be scaled or got over, Job xxxi. 24; Rev. xviii. 7. 2. How herein he cheats himself. It is a *strong city*, and a *high wall*, but it is so only

*in his own conceit*; it will not prove to be really so, but like the house built on the sand, which will fail the builder when he most needs it.

## **12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.**

Note, 1. Pride is the presage of ruin, and ruin will at last be the punishment of pride; for *before destruction* men are commonly so infatuated by the just judgment of God that they are more haughty than ever, that their ruin may be the sorer and the more surprising. Of, if that do not always hold, yet after the heart has been lifted up with pride, a fall comes, ch. xvi. 18. 2. Humility is the presage of honour and prepares men for it, and honour shall at length be the reward of humility, as he had said before, ch. xv. 33. That has need to be often said which men are so loth to believe.

## **13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth *it* it is folly and shame unto him.**

See here how men often expose themselves by that very thing by which they hope to gain applause. 1. Some take a pride in being quick. They *answer a matter before they hear it*, hear it out, nay, as soon as they but hear of it. They think it is their honour to take up a cause suddenly; and, when they have heard one side, they think the matter so plain that they need not trouble themselves to hear the other; they are already apprized of it, and masters of all the merits of the cause. Whereas, though a ready wit is an agreeable thing to play with, it is solid judgment and

sound wisdom that do business. 2. Those that take a pride in being quick commonly fall under the just reproach of being impertinent. It is folly for a man to go about to speak a thing which he does not understand, or to pass sentence upon a matter which he is not truly and fully informed of, and has not patience to make a strict enquiry into; and, if it be folly, it is and will be shame.

**Miscellaneous Maxims.**

## **14 The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?**

Note, 1. Outward grievances are tolerable as long as the mind enjoys itself and is at ease. Many infirmities, many calamities, we are liable to in this world, in body, name, and estate, which a man may bear, and bear up under, if he have but good conduct and courage, and be able to act with reason and resolution, especially if he have a good conscience, and the testimony of that be for him; and, if the *spirit of a man will sustain the infirmity*, much more will the spirit of a Christian, or rather the Spirit of God witnessing and working with our spirits in a day of trouble. 2. The grievances of the spirit are of all others most heavy, and hardly to be borne; these make sore the shoulders which should sustain the other infirmities. If the spirit be wounded by the disturbance of the reason, dejection under the trouble, whatever it is, and despair of relief, if the spirit be wounded by the amazing apprehensions of God's wrath for sin, and the fearful expectations of judgment and fiery indignation, *who can bear this?* Wounded spirits cannot help themselves, nor do others know how to help them. It is therefore wisdom to keep conscience void of offence.

## **15 The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.**

Note, 1. Those that are prudent will seek knowledge, and apply their ear and heart to the pursuit of it, their ear to attend to the means of knowledge and their heart to mix faith with what they hear and make a good improvement of it. Those that are prudent do not think they have prudence enough, but still see they have need of more; and the more prudent a man is the more inquisitive will he be after knowledge, the knowledge of God and his duty, and the way to heaven, for that is the best knowledge. 2. Those that prudently seek knowledge shall certainly get knowledge, for God never said to such, *Seek in vain*, but, *Seek and you shall find*. If the ear seeks it, the heart gets it, and keeps it, and is enriched by it. We must get knowledge, not only into our heads, but into our hearts, get the savour and relish of it, apply what we know to ourselves and experience the power and influence of it.

## **16 A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.**

Of what great force gifts (that is, bribes) are he had intimated before, ch. xvii. 8, 23. Here he shows the power of gifts, that is, presents made even by inferiors to those that are above them and have much more than they have. A good present will go far, 1. Towards a man's liberty: *A man's gift*, if he be in prison, may procure his enlargement; there are courtiers, who, if they use their interest even for oppressed innocency, expect to receive a gratuity for it. Or, if a mean man know not how to get access to a great man, he may do it by a fee to his servants or a present to himself; those will make room for him. 2. Towards his preferment. It will bring him to sit among *great men*, in honour and power. See how corrupt the world is when men's gifts will not do, though ever so great; nay, will gain that for them which they are unworthy of and unfit for; and no wonder that

those take bribes in their offices who gave bribes for them. *Vendere jura potest, emerat ille prius—He that bought law can sell it.*

## **17 He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.**

This shows that one tale is good till another is told. 1. He that speaks first will be sure to tell a straight story, and relate that only which makes for him, and put the best colour he can upon it, so that his cause shall appear good, whether it really be so or no. 2. The plaintiff having done his evidence, it is fit that the defendant should be heard, should have leave to confront the witnesses and cross-examine them, and show the falsehood and fallacy of what has been alleged, which perhaps may make the matter appear quite otherwise than it did. We must therefore remember that we have two ears, to hear both sides before we give judgment.

## **18 The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.**

Note, 1. Contentions commonly happen among the mighty, that are jealous for their honour and right and stand upon the punctilios of both, that are

confident of their being able to make their part good and therefore will hardly condescend to the necessary terms of an accommodation; whereas those that are poor are forced to be peaceable, and sit down losers. 2. Even the contentions of the mighty may be ended by lot if they cannot otherwise be compromised, and sometimes better so than by arguments which are endless, or concessions which they are loth to stoop to, whereas it is no disparagement to a man to acquiesce in the determination of the lot when once it is referred to that. To prevent quarrels Canaan was divided by lot; and, if lusory lots had not profaned this way of appeal to Providence, perhaps it might be very well used now for the deciding of many controversies, both to the honour of God and the satisfaction of the parties, provided it were done with prayer and due solemnity, this and some other scriptures seeming to direct to it, especially Acts i. 26. If the law be a lottery (as some have called it), it were as well that a lottery were the law.

**19 A brother offended is *harder to be won* than a strong city: and *their* contentions are like the bars of a castle.**

Note, 1. Great care must be taken to prevent quarrels among relations, and those that are under special obligation to each other, not only because they are most unnatural and unbecoming, but because between such things are commonly taken most unkindly, and resentments are apt to be carried too far. Wisdom and grace would indeed make it most easy to us to forgive our relations and friends if they offend us, but corruption makes it most difficult to forgive them; let us therefore take heed of disobliging a brother, or one that has been as a brother; ingratitude is very provoking.

2. Great pains must be taken to compromise matters in variance between relations, with all speed, because it is a work of so much difficulty, and consequently the more honourable if it be done. Esau was a *brother offended*, and seemed *harder to be won than a strong city*, yet by a work of God upon his heart, in answer to Jacob's prayer, he was won.

**20 A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; *and* with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.**

Note, 1. Our comfort depends very much upon the testimony of our own consciences, for us or against us. The *belly* is here put for the conscience, as ch. xx. 27. Now it is of great consequence to us whether that be satisfied, and what that is filled with, for, accordingly, will our satisfaction be and our inward peace. 2. The testimony of our consciences will be for us, or against us, according as we have or have not governed our tongues well. According as *the fruit of the mouth* is good or bad, unto iniquity or unto righteousness, so the character of the man is, and consequently the testimony of his conscience concerning him. "We ought to take as great care about the words we speak as we do about the fruit of our trees or the increase of the earth, which we are to eat; for, according as they are wholesome or unwholesome, so will the pleasure or the pain be wherewith we shall be filled." So bishop Patrick.

## **21 Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.**

Note, 1. A man may do a great deal of good, or a great deal of hurt, both to others and to himself, according to the use he makes of his tongue. Many a one has been his own death by a foul tongue, or the death of others by a false tongue; and, on the contrary, many a one has saved his own life, or procured the comfort of it, by a prudent gentle tongue, and saved the lives of others by a seasonable testimony or intercession for them. And, if by our words we must be justified or condemned, *death and life are*, no doubt, *in the power of the tongue*. Tongues were Æsop's best meat, and his worst. 2. Men's words will be judged of by the affections with which they speak; he that not only speaks aright (which a bad man may do to save his credit or please his company), but loves to speak so, speaks well of choice, and with delight, to him it will be life; and he that not only speaks amiss (which a good man may do through inadvertency), but loves to speak so (Ps. lii. 4), to him it will be death. As men *love it* they shall *eat the fruit of it*.

## **22 *Whoso* findeth a wife findeth a good *thing*, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.**

Note, 1. A good wife is a great blessing to a man. He that *finds a wife* (that is, a wife indeed; a bad wife does not deserve to be called by a name of so

much honour), that finds a help meet for him (that is a wife in the original acceptation of the word), that sought such a one with care and prayer and has found what he sought, he has found a *good thing*, a jewel of great value, a rare jewel; he has found that which will not only contribute more than any thing to his comfort in this life, but will forward him in the way to heaven. 2. God is to be acknowledged in it with thankfulness; it is a token of his favour, and a happy pledge of further favours; it is a sign that God delights in a man to do him good and has mercy in store for him; for this, therefore, God must be sought unto.

### **23 The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.**

Note, 1. Poverty, though many inconveniences to the body attend it, has often a good effect upon the spirit, for it makes men humble and submissive, and mortifies their pride. It teaches them to *use entreaties*. When necessity forces men to beg it tells them they must not prescribe or demand, but take what is given them and be thankful. At the throne of God's grace we are all poor, and must use entreaties, not answer, but make application, must sue *sub forma pauperis*—as a pauper. 2. A prosperous condition, though it has many advantages, has often this mischief attending it, that it

makes men proud, haughty, and imperious: *The rich answers the entreaties of the poor roughly*, as Nabal answered David's messengers with railing. It is a very foolish humour of some rich men, especially those who have risen from little, that they think their riches will warrant them to give hard words, and, even where they not design any rough dealing, that it becomes them to answer roughly, whereas gentlemen ought to be gentle, Jam. iii. 17.

### **24 A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that* sticketh closer than a brother.**

Solomon here recommends friendship to us, and shows, 1. What we must do that we may contract and cultivate friendship; we must *show ourselves friendly*. Would we have friends and keep them, we must not only not

affront them, or quarrel with them, but we must love them, and make it appear that we do so by all expressions that are endearing, by being free with them, pleasing to them, visiting them and bidding them welcome, and especially by doing all the good offices we can and serving them in every thing that lies in our power; that is *showing ourselves friendly*.

Si vis amari, ama—

If you wish to gain affection, bestow it.—Sen. Ut ameris, amabilis esto—

The way to be beloved is to be lovely.—Ovid.

2. That it is worth while to do so, for we may promise ourselves a great deal of comfort in a true friend. A *brother* indeed *is born for adversity*, as he had said, ch. xvii. 17. In our troubles we expect comfort and relief from our relations, but sometimes *there is a friend*, that is nothing akin to us, the bonds of whose esteem and love prove stronger than those of nature, and, when it comes to the trial, will do more for us than a brother will. Christ is a friend to all believers that *sticks closer than a brother*; to him therefore let them show themselves friendly.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XIX.

The Disadvantages of Poverty.

**1 Better *is* the poor that walketh in his integrity, than *he that is* perverse in his lips, and is a fool.**

Here see, 1. What will be the credit and comfort of a poor man, and make him more excellent than his neighbour, though his poverty may expose him to contempt and may dispirit him. Let him be honest and *walk in integrity*, let him keep a good conscience and make it appear that he does so, let him always speak and act with sincerity when he is under the greatest temptations to dissemble and break his word, and then let him value himself



upon that, for all wise and good men will value him. He is better, has a better character, is in a better condition, is better beloved, and lives to better

purpose, than many a one that looks great and makes a figure. 2. What will be the shame of a rich man, notwithstanding all his pomp. If he have a shallow head and an evil tongue, if he is *perverse in his lips and is a fool*, if he is a wicked man and gets what he has by fraud and oppression, he *is a fool*, and an honest poor man is to be preferred far before him.

## **2 Also, *that* the soul *be* without knowledge, *it* is not good; and he that hasteth with *his* feet sinneth.**

Two things are here declared to be of bad consequence:—1. Ignorance: *To be without the knowledge of the soul is not good*, so some read it. Know we not our own selves, our own hearts? *A soul without knowledge is not good*; it is a great privilege that we have souls, but, if these souls have not knowledge, what the better are we? If man *has not understanding, he is as the beasts*, Ps.

xlix. 20. An ignorant soul cannot be a good soul. That the soul be without knowledge is not safe, nor pleasant; what good can the soul do, of what is it good for, if it be without knowledge? 2. Rashness. *He that hastes with his feet* (that does things inconsiderately and with precipitation, and will not take time to ponder the path of his feet) *sins*; he cannot but often miss the mark and take many a false step, which those prevent that consider their ways. As good not know as not consider.

## **3 The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.**

We have here two instances of men's folly:—1. That they bring themselves into straits and troubles, and run themselves a-ground, and embarrass themselves: *The foolishness of man perverts his way*. Men meet with crosses and disappointments in their affairs, and things do not succeed as they expected and wished, and it is owing to themselves and their own folly; it is their own iniquity that corrects them. 2. That when they have done so they lay the blame upon God, and their hearts fret against him, as if

he had done them wrong, whereas really they wrong themselves. In fretting, we are enemies to our own peace, and become self-tormentors; in *fretting against the Lord* we affront him, his justice, goodness, and sovereignty; and it is very absurd to take occasion from the trouble which we pull upon our own heads by our wilfulness, or neglect, to quarrel with him, when we ought to blame ourselves, for it is our own doing. See Isa. 1. 1.

#### **4 Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.**

Here, 1. We may see how strong men's love of money is, that they will love any man, how undeserving soever he be otherwise, if he has but a deal of money and is free with it, so that they may hope to be the better for it. Wealth enables a man to send many presents, make many entertainments, and do many good offices, and so gains him many friends, who pretend to love him, for they flatter him and make their court to him, but really love what he has, or rather love themselves, hoping to get by him. 2. We may see how weak men's love of one another is. He who, while he prospered, was beloved and respected, if he fall into poverty is *separated from his neighbour*; is not owned nor looked upon, not visited nor regarded, is bidden to keep his distance and told he is troublesome. Even one that has been his neighbour and acquaintance will turn his face from him and pass by on the other side. Because men's consciences tell them they ought to relieve and succour such, they are willing to have this excuse, that they did not see them.

#### **5 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and *he that* speaketh lies shall not escape.**

Here we have, 1. The sins threatened—bearing *false witness* in judgment and *speaking lies* in common conversation. Men could not arrive at such a pitch of impiety as to bear false witness (where to the guilt of a lie is added that of perjury and injury) if they had not advanced to it by allowing themselves to speak untruths in jest and banter, or under pretence of doing good. Thus men *teach their tongues to speak lies*, Jer. ix. 5. Those that will take a liberty to tell lies in discourse are in a fair way to be guilty of the greater wickedness of false-witness-bearing, whenever they are tempted to

it, though they seemed to detest it. Those that can swallow a false word debase their consciences, so that a false oath will not choke them. 2. The threatening itself: They *shall not go unpunished; they shall not escape*. This intimates that that which emboldens them in the sin is the hope of impunity, it being a sin which commonly escapes punishment from men, though the law is strict, Deut. xix. 18, 19. But it *shall not escape* the righteous judgment of God, who is jealous, and will not suffer his name to be profaned; we know where all liars will have their everlasting portion.

**6 Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. 7 All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth *them with words, yet they are wanting to him.***

These two verses are a comment upon v. 4, and show, 1. How those that are rich and great are courted and caressed, and have suitors and servants in abundance. The prince that has power in his hand, and preferments at his disposal, has his gate and his ante-chamber thronged with petitioners, that are ready to adore him for what they can get. *Many will entreat his favour*, and think themselves happy in it. Even great men are humble suppliants to the prince. How earnest then should we be for the favour of God, which is far beyond that of any earthly prince. But, it should seem, liberality will go further than majesty itself to gain respect, for there are many that court the prince, but *every man is a friend to him that gives gifts*; not only those that have received, or do expect, gifts from him, will, as friends, be ready to serve him, but others also will, as friends, give him their good word. Prodigals, who are foolishly free of what they have, will have many hangers-on who will cry them up as long as it lasts, but will leave them when it is done. Those that are prudently generous make an interest by it which may stand them in good stead; those that are accounted benefactors exercise an authority which may give them an opportunity of doing good, Luke xxii. 25. 2. How those that are poor and low are slighted and despised. Men may, if they please, court the prince, and the princely, but they may not trample upon the poor and look at them with disdain. Yet so it often is: *All the brethren of the poor do hate him*; even his own relations are shy of him,

because he is needy and craving, and expects something from them, and because they look upon him as a blemish to their family; and then no marvel if others of his friends, that were nothing akin to him, *go far from him*, to get out of his way. *He pursues them with words*, hoping to prevail with them by his importunity to be kind to him, but all in vain; they have nothing for him. *They pursue him with words* (so some understand it), to excuse themselves from giving him any thing; they tell him that he is idle and impertinent, that he has brought himself into poverty, and therefore ought not to be relieved; as Nabal said to David's messengers: "*There are many servants now a days that run*

*away from their masters*; and how do I know but that David may be one of them?" Let poor people therefore make God their friend, pursue him with their prayers, and he will not be wanting to them.

Domestic Grievances.

## **8 He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.**

Those are here encouraged, 1. That take pains to *get wisdom*, to get knowledge, and grace, and acquaintance with God; those that do so show that they *love their own souls*, and will be found to have done themselves the greatest kindness imaginable. No man ever *hated his own flesh*, but loves that, yet many are wanting in love to their own souls, for only those love their souls, and consequently love themselves, aright, that *get wisdom*, true wisdom. 2. That take care to keep it when they have got it; it is health, and wealth, and honour, and all, to the soul, and therefore he that *keeps understanding*, as he shows that he *loves his own soul*, so he shall certainly *find good*, all good. He that retains the good lessons he has learnt, and orders his conversation according to them, shall find the benefit and comfort of it in his own soul and shall be happy here and for ever.

## **9 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and ~~he~~ that speaketh lies shall perish.**

Here is, 1. A repetition of what was said before (v. 5), for we have need to be again and again warned of the danger of the sin of lying and false-

witness-bearing, since nothing is of more fatal consequence. 2. An addition to it in one word; there it was said, *He that speaks lies shall not escape*, and intimated that he shall be punished. Here it is said, His punishment shall be such as will be his destruction: he *shall perish*; the lies he forged against others will be his own ruin. It is a damning destroying sin.

## **10 Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.**

Note, 1. Pleasure and liberty ill become a fool: *Delight is not seemly for* such a one. A man that has not wisdom and grace has no right nor title to true joy, and therefore it is unseemly. It ill becomes those that do not delight in God to delight in any thing, nor how to manage themselves, and therefore they do but expose themselves. It becomes ungracious fools to be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, not to laugh and be merry; rebukes are more proper for them than delights. Delight is seemly for a man of business, to refresh him when he is fatigued, but not *for a fool*, that lives an idle life and abuses his recreations. *The prosperity of fools* discovers their folly and *destroys them*.

2. Power and honour ill become a man of a servile spirit. Nothing is more unseemly than *for a servant to have rule over princes*; it is absurd in itself, and very preposterous, for none are so insolent and intolerable as a beggar on horseback, *a servant when he reigns*, ch. xxx. 22. It is very unseemly for one that is a servant to sin and his lusts to rule over and oppress those that are God's freemen and made kings and priests to him.

## **11 The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.**

A wise man will observe these two rules about his anger: 1. Not to be over-hasty in his resentments: *Discretion* teaches us to *defer our anger*, to defer the admission of it till we have thoroughly considered all the merits of the provocation, seen them in a true light and weighed them

in a just balance; and then to defer the prosecution of it till there be no danger of running into any indecencies. Plato said to his servant, "I would

beat thee, but that I am angry." Give it time, and it will cool. 2. Not to be over-critical in his resentments. Whereas it is commonly looked upon as a piece of ingenuity to apprehend an affront quickly, it is here made a man's *glory to pass over a transgression*, to appear as if he did not see it (Ps. xxxviii. 13), or, if he sees fit to take notice of it, yet to forgive it and meditate no revenge.

## **12 The king's wrath *is* as the roaring of a lion; but his favour *is* as dew upon the grass.**

This is to the same purport with what we had ch. xvi. 14, 15, and the design of it is, 1. To make kings wise and considerate in dispensing their frowns and smiles. They are not like those of common persons; their frowns are very terrible and their smiles very comfortable, and therefore it concerns them to be very careful that they never frighten a good man from doing well with their frowns, nor ever give countenance to a wicked man in doing ill with their smiles, for then they abuse their influence, Rom. xiii. 3. 2. To make subjects faithful and dutiful to their princes. Let them be restrained from all disloyalty by the consideration of the dreadful consequence of having the government against them; and let them be encouraged in all good services to the public by the hopes of the favour of their prince. Christ is a King whose wrath against his enemies will be *as the roaring of a lion* (Rev. x. 3) and his favour to his own people as the refreshing dew, Ps. lxxii. 6.

## **13 A foolish son *is* the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife *are* a continual dropping.**

It is an instance of the vanity of the world that we are liable to the greatest grief in those things wherein we promise ourselves the greatest comfort. It is as it proves. What greater temporal comfort can a man have than a good wife and good children? Yet, 1. *A foolish son is* a great affliction, and may make a man wish a thousand times he had been written childless. A son that will apply himself to no study or business, that will take no advice, that lives a lewd, loose, rakish life, and spends what he has extravagantly, games it away and wastes it in the excess of riot, or that is proud, foppish, and

conceited, such a one is the grief *of his father*, because he is the disgrace, and is likely to be the ruin, of his family. He hates all his labour, when he sees to whom he must leave the fruit of it.

2. A cross peevish wife is as great an affliction: Her *contentions are continual*; every day, and every hour in the day, she finds some occasion to make herself and those about her uneasy. Those that are accustomed to chide never want something or other to chide at; but it is *a continual dropping*, that is, a continual vexation, as it is to have a house so much out of repair that it rains in and a man cannot lie dry in it. That man has an uncomfortable life, and has need of a great deal of wisdom and grace to enable him to bear his affliction and do his duty, who has a sot for his son and a scold for his wife.

## **14 House and riches *are* the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife *is* from the Lord.**

Note, 1. A discreet and virtuous wife is a choice gift of God's providence to a man—a wife that is *prudent*, in opposition to one that is contentious, v. 13. For, though a wife that is continually finding fault may think it is her wit and wisdom to be so, it is really her folly; *a prudent wife* is meek and quiet, and makes the best of every thing. If a man has such a wife, let him not ascribe it

to the wisdom of his own choice or his own management (for the wisest have been deceived both in and by a woman), but let him ascribe it to the goodness of God, who made him a help meet for him, and perhaps by some hits and turns of providence that seemed casual brought her to him. Every creature is what he makes it. Happy marriages, we are sure, are made in heaven; Abraham's servant prayed in the belief of this, Gen. xxiv. 12. 2. It is a more valuable gift than *house and riches*, contributes more to the comfort and credit of a man's life and the welfare of his family, is a greater token of God's favour, and about which the divine providence is in a more especial manner conversant. A good estate may be *the inheritance of fathers*, which, by the common direction of Providence, comes in course to a man; but no man has a good wife by descent or entail. Parents that are worldly, in

disposing of their children, look no further than to match them to *house and riches*, but, if withal it be to *a prudent wife*, let God have the glory.

Circumspection and Charity.

## **15 Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.**

See here the evil of a sluggish slothful disposition. 1. It stupefies men, and makes them senseless, and mindless of their own affairs, as they were *cast into a deep sleep*, dreaming much, but doing nothing. Slothful people doze away their time, bury their talents, live a useless life, and are the unprofitable burdens of the earth; for any service they do when they are awake they might as well be always asleep. Even their souls are idle and lulled asleep, their rational powers chilled and frozen.

2. It impoverishes men and brings them to want. Those that will not labour cannot expect to eat, but must *suffer hunger*: *An idle soul*, one that is idle in the affairs of his soul, that takes no care or pains to work out his salvation, shall perish for want of that which is necessary to the life and happiness of the soul.

## **16 He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; *but* he that despiseth his ways shall die.**

Here is, 1. The happiness of those that walk circumspectly. Those that make conscience of *keeping the commandment* in every thing, that live by rule, as becomes servants and patients, *keep their own souls*; they secure their present peace and future bliss, and provide every way well for themselves. If we keep God's word, God's word will keep us from every thing really hurtful. 2. The misery of those that live at large and never mind what they do: Those *that despair their ways shall die*, shall perish eternally; they are in the high road to ruin. With respect to those that are careless about the end of their ways, and never consider whither they are going, and about the rule of their ways, that will walk in the way of their hearts and after the course of the world (Eccl. xi. 9), that never consider what they have done nor what they are concerned to do, but *walk at all adventures* (Lev. xxvi. 21), right or



wrong, it is all one to them—what can come of this but the greatest mischief?

**17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.**

Here is, I. The duty of charity described. It includes two things:—1. Compassion, which is the inward principle of charity in the heart; it is to *have pity on the poor*. Those that have not a penny for the poor, yet may have pity for them, a charitable concern and sympathy; and, if a man *give all*

*his goods to feed the poor* and have not this charity in his heart, *it is nothing*, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. We must *draw out our souls to the hungry*, Isa. lviii. 10. 2. Bounty and liberality. We must not only pity the poor, but give, according to their necessity and our ability, Jam. ii. 15, 16. *That which he has given*. Margin, *His deed*. It is charity to do for the poor, as well as to give; and thus, if they have their limbs and senses, they may be charitable to one another.

II. The encouragement of charity. 1. A very kind construction shall be put upon it. What is given to the poor, or done for them, God will place it to account as lent to him, *lent upon interest* (so the word signifies); he takes it kindly, as if it were done to himself, and he would have us take the comfort of it and to be as well pleased as ever any usurer was when he had let out a sum of money into good hands. 2. A very rich recompence shall be made for it: *He will pay him again*, in temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings. Almsgiving is the surest and safest way of thriving.

Miscellaneous Maxims.

**18 Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.**

Parents are here cautioned against a foolish indulgence of their children that are untoward and viciously inclined, and that discover such an ill temper of mind as is not likely to be cured but by severity. 1. Do not say that it is all in

good time to correct them; no, as soon as ever there appears a corrupt disposition in them check it immediately, before it gets head, and takes root, and is hardened into a habit: *Chasten thy son while there is hope*, for perhaps, if he be let alone awhile, he will be past hope, and a much greater chastening will not do that which now a less would effect. It is easiest plucking up weeds as soon as they spring up, and the bullock that is designed for the yoke should be betimes accustomed to it. 2. Do not say that it is a pity to correct them, and that, because they cry and beg to be forgiven, you cannot find in your heart to do it. If the point can be gained without correction, well and good; but if you find, as it often proves, that your forgiving them once, upon a dissembled repentance and promise of amendment, does but embolden them to offend again, especially if it be a thing that is in itself sinful (as lying, swearing, ribaldry, stealing, or the like), in such a case put on resolution, *and let not thy soul spare for his crying*. It is better that he should cry under thy rod than under the sword of the magistrate, or, which is more fearful, that of divine vengeance.

## **19 A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver *him*, yet thou must do it again.**

1. As we read this, it intimates, in short, that angry men never want woe. Those that are of strong, or rather headstrong, passions, commonly bring themselves and their families into trouble by vexatious suits and quarrels and the provocations they give; they are still smarting, in one instance or other, for their ungoverned heats; and, if their friends deliver them out of one trouble, they will quickly involve themselves in another, and they *must do it again*, all which troubles to themselves and others would be prevented if they would mortify their passions and get the rule of their own spirits. 2. It may as well be read, *He that is of great wrath* (meaning the child that is to be corrected and is impatient of rebuke, cries and makes a noise, even that wrath of his against the rod of correction) *deserves to be punished; for, if thou deliver him* for the sake of that, thou wilt be forced

to punish him so much the more next time. A stomachful high-spirited child must be subdued betimes, or it will be the worse for it.

## **20 Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.**

Note, 1. It is well with those that are *wise in their latter end*, wise for their latter end, for their future state, wise for another world, that are found wise when their latter end comes, wise virgins, wise builders, wise stewards, that are wise at length, and *understand the things that belong to their peace, before they be hidden from their eyes*. A carnal worldling *at his end shall be a fool* (Jer.

xvii. 11), but godliness will prove wisdom at last. 2. Those that would *be wise in their latter end* must *hear counsel* and *receive instruction*, in their beginnings must be willing to be taught and ruled, willing to be advised and reproved, when they are young. Those that would be stored in winter must gather in summer.

## **21 *There* are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.**

Here we have, 1. Men projecting. They keep their designs to themselves, but they cannot hide them from God; he knows the *many devices that are in men's hearts*,—devices against his counsels (as those, Ps. ii. 1-3; Micah iv. 11),— devices without his counsel (no regard had to his providence, as those Jam. iv. 13, this and the other they will do, and not take God along with them),—devices unlike God's counsels; men are wavering in their devices, and often absurd and unjust, but God's counsels are wise and holy, steady and uniform. 2. God overruling. Various men have various designs, according as their inclination or interest leads them, but *the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand*, whatever becomes of the devices of men. His counsel often breaks men's measures and baffles their devices; but their devices cannot in the least alter his counsel, not disturb the proceedings of it, nor put him upon new counsels, Isa. xiv. 24; xlvi. 11. What a check does this give to politic designing men, who think they can outwit all mankind, that there is a God in heaven that laughs at them! Ps. ii. 4. What comfort does this speak to all God's people, that all God's purposes, which we are sure are right and good, shall be accomplished in due time!

## **22 The desire of a man *is* his kindness: and a poor man *is* better than a liar.**

Note, 1. The honour of doing good is what we may laudably be ambitious of. It cannot but be *the desire of man*, if he have any spark of virtue in him, to be kind; one would not covet an estate for any thing so much as thereby to be put into a capacity of relieving the poor and obliging our friends. 2. It is far better to have a heart to do good and want ability for it than have ability for it and want a heart to it: *The desire of a man* to be kind, and charitable, and generous, *is his kindness*, and shall be so construed; both God and man will accept his good-will, *according to what he has*, and will not expect more. *A poor man*, who wishes you well, but can promise you nothing, because he has nothing to be kind with, *is better than a liar*; than a rich man who makes you believe he will do mighty things, but, when it comes to the setting to, will do nothing. The character of the men of low degree, that they *are vanity*, from whom nothing is expected, is better than that of men of high degree, that they *are a lie*, they deceive those whose expectations they raised.

## **23 The fear of the Lord *tendeth* to life: and *he that hath it* shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.**

See what those that get by it that live in the fear of God, and always make conscience of their duty to him. 1. Safety: They *shall not be visited with evil*; they may be visited with sickness or other afflictions, but there shall be no evil in them, nothing to hurt them, because nothing to separate them *from the love of God*, or hurt to the soul. 2. Satisfaction: They *shall abide satisfied*; they shall have those comforts which are satisfying, and shall have a constant contentment and complacency in them. It is a satisfaction which will abide, whereas all the satisfactions of sense are transient and soon gone. *Satur pernoctabit, non cubabit incoenatus*—*He shall not go supperless to bed*; he shall have that which will make him easy and be an entertainment to him in his silent and solitary hours, Ps. xvi. 6, 7. 3. True and complete happiness. Serious godliness has a direct tendency *to life*; to

all good, to eternal life; it is the sure and ready way to it; there is something in the nature of it fitting men for heaven and so leading them to it.

**24 A slothful *man* hideth his hand in *his* bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.**

A sluggard is here exposed as a fool, for, 1. All his care is to save himself from labour and cold. See his posture: He *hides his hand in his bosom*, pretends he is lame and cannot work; his hands are cold, and he must warm them in his bosom; and, when they are warm there, he must keep them so. He hugs himself in his own ease and is resolved against labour and hardship. Let those work that love it; for his part he thinks there is no such fine life as sitting still and doing nothing.

2. He will not be at the pains to feed himself, an elegant hyperbole; as we say, A man is so lazy that he would not shake fire off him, so here, He cannot find in his heart to take his hand out of his bosom, no, not to put meat into his own mouth. If the law be so that those that will not labour must not eat, he will rather starve than stir. Thus his sin is his punishment, and therefore is egregious folly.

**25 Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, *and* he will understand knowledge.**

Note, 1. The punishment of scorners will be a means of good to others. When men are so hardened in wickedness that they will not themselves be wrought upon by the severe methods that are used to reclaim and reform them, yet such methods must be used for the sake of others, that *they may hear and fear*; Deut. xix. 20. If the *scorner* will not be recovered from his sin, the disease being inveterate, yet *the simple will beware* of venturing upon the sin which exposes men thus. If it cure not the infected, it may prevent the spreading of the infection. 2. The reproof of wise men will be a means of good to themselves. They need not be smitten; a word to the wise is enough. Do but *reprove one that has understanding and he will* so far understand himself and his own interest that he will *understand knowledge* by it, and not miss it again through ignorance and inadvertency when once

he has been told of it; so kindly does he take reproof and so wisely improve it.

**26 He that wasteth *his* father, *and* chaseth away *his* mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.**

Here is, 1. The sin of a prodigal son. Besides the wrong he does to himself, he is injurious to his good parents, and basely ungrateful to those that were instruments of his being and have taken so much care and pains about him, which is a great aggravation of his sin and renders it exceedingly sinful in the eyes of God and man: *He wastes is father*; wastes his estate which he should have to support him in his old age, wastes his spirits, and breaks his heart, and brings his gray head *with sorrow to the grave*. He *chases away his mother*; alienates her affections from him, which cannot be done without a great deal of regret and uneasiness to her; he makes her weary of the house, with his rudeness and insolence, and glad to retire for a little quietness; and, when he has spent all, he turns her out of doors. 2. The shame of a prodigal son. It is a shame to himself that he should be so brutish and unnatural. He makes himself odious to all mankind. It is a shame to his parents and family, who are reflected upon, though, perhaps, without just cause, for teaching him no better, or being in some way wanting to him.

**27 Cease, my son, to hear the instruction *that causeth* to err from the words of knowledge.**

This is a good caution to those that have had a good education to take heed of hearkening to those who, under pretence of instructing them, draw them off from those good principles under the influence of which they were trained up. Observe, 1. There is that which seems designed for instruction, but really tends to the destruction of young men. The factors for vice will undertake to teach them free thoughts and a fashionable conversation, how to palliate the sins they have a mind to and stop the mouth of their own consciences, how to get clear of the restraints of their education and to set up for wits and beaux. This is *the instruction* which *causes to err from the* forms of sound words, which should be held fast in faith and love. 2. It is

the wisdom of young men to turn a deaf ear to such instructions, as the adder does to the charms that are designed to ensnare her. "Dread hearing such talk as tends to instil loose principles into the mind; and, if thou art linked in with such, break off from them; thou hast heard enough, or too much, and therefore hear no more of the evil communication which corrupts good manners."

## **28 An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.**

Here is a description of the worst of sinners, whose *hearts are fully set in them to do evil*. 1. They set that at defiance which would deter and detain them from sin: *An ungodly witness* is one that bears false witness against his neighbour, and will forswear himself to do another a mischief, in which there is not only great injustice, but great impiety; this is one of the worst of men. Or *an ungodly witness* is one that profanely and atheistically witnesses against religion and godliness, whose instructions seduce *from the words of knowledge* (v. 27); such a one *scorns judgment*, laughs at the terrors of the Lord, mocks at that fear, Job xv. 26. Tell him of law and equity, that the scriptures and an oath are sacred things, and not to be jested with, that there will come a reckoning day; he laughs at it all, and scorns to heed it. 2. They are greedy, and glad of that which gives them an opportunity to sin: *The mouth of the wicked eagerly devours iniquity, drinks it in like water*, Job

xv. 16.

## **29 Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools.**

Note, 1. Scorers are fools. Those that ridicule things sacred and serious do but make themselves ridiculous. *Their folly shall be manifest unto all men*. 2. Those that scorn judgments cannot escape them, v. 28. The unbelief of man shall not make God's threatenings of no effect; those that *devour iniquity* swallow the hook with the bait. The civil magistrate has *judgments prepared for scorers*, for otherwise he would *bear the sword in vain*; but if he be remiss, and connive at sin, yet God's judgments slumber not; they are prepared, Matt. xxv. 41.

# PROVERBS

## CHAP. XX.

### Miscellaneous Maxims.

#### **1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.**

Here is, 1. The mischief of drunkenness: *Wine is a mocker; strong drink is raging*. It is so to the sinner himself; it mocks him, makes a fool of him, promises him that satisfaction which it can never give him. It smiles upon him at first, but *at the last it bites*. In reflection upon it, it rages in his conscience. It is raging in the body, puts the humours into a ferment. *When the wine is in the wit is out*, and then the man, according as his natural temper is, either mocks like a fool or rages like a madman. Drunkenness, which pretends to be a sociable thing, renders men unfit for society, for it makes them abusive with their tongues and outrageous in their passions, ch. xxiii. 29. 2. The folly of drunkards is easily inferred thence. He that *is deceived thereby*, that suffers himself to be drawn into this sin when he is so plainly warned of the consequences of it, *is not wise*; he shows that he has no right sense or consideration of things; and not only so, but he renders himself incapable of getting wisdom; for it is a sin that infatuates and besots men, and takes away their heart. A drunkard is a fool, and a fool he is likely to be.

#### **2 The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: *whoso* provoketh him to anger sinneth *against* his own soul.**

See here, 1. How formidable kings are, and what a terror they strike upon those they are angry with. Their *fear*, with which (especially when they are absolute and their will is a law) they keep their subjects in awe, *is as the roaring of a lion*, which is very dreadful to the creatures he preys upon, and makes them tremble so that they cannot escape from him. Those princes that rule by wisdom and love rule like God himself, and bear his image; but those that rule merely by terror, and with a high hand, do but rule like a lion in the forest, with a brutal power. *Oderint, dum metuant*—*Let them hate,*



*provided they fear.* 2. How unwise therefore those are that quarrel with them, that are angry at them, and so *provoke them to anger.* They *sin against their own lives.* Much more do those do so that provoke the King of kings to anger. *Nemo me impune lacesset—No one shall provoke me with impunity.*

### **3 *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.***

This is designed to rectify men's mistakes concerning strife. 1. Men think it is their wisdom to engage in quarrels; whereas it is the greatest folly that can be. He thinks himself a wise man that is quick in resenting affronts, that stands upon every nicety of honour and right, and will not abate an ace of either, that prescribes, and imposes, and gives law, to every body; but he that thus meddles is a fool, and creates a great deal of needless vexation to himself. 2. Men think, when they are engaged in quarrels, that it would be a shame to them to go back and let fall the weapon; whereas really *it is an honour for a man to cease from strife*, an honour to withdraw an action, to drop a controversy, to forgive an injury, and to be friends with those that we have fallen out with. It is the honour of a man, a wise man, a man of spirit, to show the command he has of himself by *ceasing from strife*, yielding, and stooping, and receding from his just demands, for peace-sake, as Abraham, the better man, Gen. xiii. 8.

### **4 *The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.***

See here the evil of slothfulness and the love of ease. 1. It keeps men from the most necessary business, from ploughing and sowing when the season is: *The sluggard* has ground to occupy, and has ability for it; he can plough, but he *will not*; some excuse or other he has to shift it off, but the true reason is that it is *cold* weather. Though ploughing time is not in the depth of winter, it is in the borders of winter, when he thinks it too cold for him to be abroad. Those are scandalously sluggish who, in the way of their business, cannot find in their hearts to undergo so little toil as that of ploughing and so little hardship as that of a cold blast. Thus careless are many in the affairs of their souls; a trifling difficulty will frighten them

from the most important duty; but good soldiers must endure hardness. 2. Thereby it deprives them of the most necessary supports: Those that *will not plough* in seed-time cannot expect to reap in harvest; and therefore they must beg their bread with astonishment when the diligent are bringing home their sheaves with joy. He that will not submit to the labour of ploughing must submit to the shame of begging. They *shall beg in harvest, and yet have nothing*; no, not then when there is great plenty. Though it may be charity to relieve sluggards, yet a man may, in justice, not relieve them; they deserve to be left to starve. Those that would not provide oil in their vessels begged when the bridegroom came, and were denied.

## **5 Counsel in the heart of man is *like* deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.**

A man's wisdom is here said to be of use to him for the pumping of other people, and diving into them, 1. To get the knowledge of them. Though men's counsels and designs are ever so carefully concealed by them, so that they are as *deep water* which one cannot fathom, yet there are those who by sly insinuations, and questions that seem foreign, will get out of them both what they have done and what they intend to do. Those therefore who would keep counsel must not only put on resolution, but stand upon their guard. 2. To get knowledge by them. Some are very able and fit to give counsel, having an excellent faculty of cleaving a hair, hitting the joint of a difficulty, and advising pertinently, but they are modest, and reserved, and not communicative; they have a great

deal in them, but it is loth to come out. In such a case *a man of understanding will draw it out*, as wine out of a vessel. We lose the benefit we might have by the conversation of wise men for want of the art of being inquisitive.

## **6 Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?**

Note, 1. It is easy to find those that will pretend to be kind and liberal. Many a man will call himself a man of mercy, will boast what good he has done and what good he designs to do, or, at least, what an affection he has

to well-doing. Most men will talk a great deal of their charity, generosity, hospitality, and piety, will sound a trumpet to themselves, as the Pharisees, and what little goodness they have will proclaim it and make a mighty matter of it. 2. But it is hard to find those that really are kind and liberal, that have done and will do more than either they speak of or care to hear spoken of, that will be true friends in a strait; such a one as one may trust to is like a black swan.

## **7 The just *man* walketh in his integrity: his children *are* blessed after him.**

It is here observed to the honour of a good man, 1. That he does well for himself. He has a certain rule, which with an even steady hand he governs himself by: He *walks in his integrity*; he keeps good conscience, and he has the comfort of it, for *it is his rejoicing*. He is not liable to those uneasinesses, either in contriving what he shall do or reflecting on what he has done, which those are liable to that walk in deceit. 2. That he does well for his family: *His children are blessed after him*, and fare the better for his sake. God has mercy in store for the seed of the faithful.

## **8 A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.**

Here is, 1. The character of a good governor: He is *a king* that deserves to be called so who *sits in the throne*, not as a throne of honour, to take his ease, and take state upon him, and oblige men to keep their distance, but as *a throne of judgment*, that he may do justice, give redress to the injured and punish the injurious, who makes his business his delight and loves no pleasure comparably to it, who does not devolve the whole care and trouble upon others, but takes cognizance of affairs himself and sees with his own eyes as much as may be, 1 Kings x. 9. 2. The happy effect of a good government. The presence of the prince goes far towards the putting of wickedness out of countenance; if he inspect his affairs himself, those that are employed under him will be kept in awe and restrained from doing wrong. If great men be good men, and will use their power as they may and ought, what good may they do and what evil may they prevent!

## **9 Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?**

This question is not only a challenge to any man in the world to prove himself sinless, whatever he pretends, but a lamentation of the corruption of mankind, even that which remains in the best. Alas! *Who can say*, "I am sinless?" Observe, 1. Who the persons are that are excluded from these pretensions—all, one as well as another. Here, in this imperfect state, no person whatsoever can pretend to be without sin. Adam could say so in innocence, and saints can say so in heaven, but none in this life. Those that think themselves as good as they should be cannot, nay, and those that are really good will not, dare not, say this. 2. What the pretension is that is excluded. We cannot say, *We have made our hearts clean*. Though we can say, through grace, "We are cleaner than we

have been," yet we cannot say, "We are clean and pure from all remainders of sin." Or, though we are clean from the gross acts of sin, yet we cannot say, "Our hearts are clean." Or, though we are washed and cleansed, yet we cannot say, "We ourselves made our own hearts clean;" it was the work of the Spirit. Or, though we are pure from the sins of many others, yet we cannot say, "We are *pure from our sin, the sin that easily besets us*, the *body of death* which Paul complained of," Rom. vii. 24.

## **10 Divers weights, *and* divers measures, both of them *are* alike abomination to the Lord.**

See here, 1. The various arts of deceiving that men have, all which evils the *love of money* is the root of. In paying and receiving money, which was then commonly done by the scale, they had *divers weights*, an under-weight for what they paid and an over-weight for what they received; in delivering out and taking in goods they had *divers measures*, a scanty measure to sell by and a large measure to buy by. This was done wrong with plot and contrivance, and under colour of doing right. Under these is included all manner of fraud and deceit in commerce and trade. 2. The displeasure of God against them. Whether they be about the money or the goods, in the buyer or in the seller, they are all *alike an abomination to the Lord*. He will not prosper the trade that is thus driven, nor bless what is thus got. He hates

those that thus break the common faith by which justice is maintained, and will be *the avenger of all such*.

## **11 Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work *be* pure, and whether *it be* right.**

The tree is known by its fruits, a man *by his doings*, even a young tree by its first fruits, *a child by his* childish things, *whether his work be clean* only, appearing good (the word is used ch. xvi.

2), or *whether it be right*, that is, really good. This intimates, 1. That children will discover themselves. One may soon see what their temper is, and which way their inclination leads them, according as their constitution is. Children have not learned the art of dissembling and concealing their bent as grown people have. 2. That parents should observe their children, that they may discover their disposition and genius, and both manage and dispose of them accordingly, drive the nail that will go and draw out that which goes amiss. *Wisdom is herein profitable to direct*.

## **12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.**

Note, 1. God is the God of nature, and all the powers and faculties of nature are derived from him and depend upon him, and therefore are to be employed for him. It was he that *formed the eye* and *planted the ear* (Ps. xciv. 9), and the structure of both is admirable; and it is he that preserves to us the use of both; to his providence we owe it that our eyes are *seeing eyes* and our ears *hearing ears*. Hearing and seeing are the learning senses, and must particularly own God's goodness in them. 2. God is the God of grace. It is he that gives the ear that hears God's voice, the eye that sees his beauty, for it is he that opens the understanding.

## **13 Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, *and* thou shalt be satisfied with bread.**

Note, 1. Those that indulge themselves in their ease may expect to want necessities, which should have been gotten by honest labour. "Therefore,

though thou must sleep (nature requires it), yet *love not sleep*, as those do that hate business. Love not sleep for its own sake, but only as it fits

for further work. Love not much sleep, but rather grudge the time that is spent in it, and wish thou couldst live without it, that thou mightest always be employed in some good exercise." We must allow it to our bodies as men allow it to their servants, because they cannot help it and otherwise they shall have no good of them. Those that love sleep are likely to *come to poverty*, not only because they lose the time they spend in excess of sleep, but because they contract a listless careless disposition, and are still half asleep, never well awake. 2. Those that stir up themselves to their business may expect to have conveniences: "*Open thy eyes*, awake and shake off sleep, see how far in the day it is, how thy work wants thee, and how busy others are about thee! And, when thou art awake, look up, look to thy advantages, and do not let slip thy opportunities; apply thy mind closely to thy business and be in care about it. It is the easy condition of a great advantage: *Open thy eyes and thou shalt be satisfied with bread*; if thou dost not grow rich, yet thou shalt have enough, and that is as good as a feast."

#### **14 *It is naught, it is naught*, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.**

See here 1. What arts men use to get a good bargain and to buy cheap. They not only cheapen carelessly, as if they had no need, no mind for the commodity, when perhaps they cannot go without it (there may be prudence in that), but they vilify and run down that which yet they know to be of value; they cry, "*It is naught, it is naught*"; it has this and the other fault, or perhaps may have; it is not good of the sort; and it is too dear; we can have better and cheaper elsewhere, or have bought better and cheaper." This is the common way of dealing; and after all, it may be, they know the contrary of what they affirm; but the buyer, who may think he has no other way of being even with the seller, does as extravagantly commend his goods and justify the price he sets on them, and so there is a fault on both sides; whereas the bargain would be made every jot as well if both buyer and seller would be modest and speak as they think. 2. What pride and pleasure men take in a good bargain when they have got it, though therein they

contradict themselves, and own they dissembled when they were driving the bargain. When the buyer has beaten down the seller, who was content to lower his price rather than lose a customer (as many poor tradesmen are forced to do—small profit is better than none), then he goes his way, and boasts what excellent goods he has got at his own price, and takes it as an affront and a reflection upon his judgment if any body disparages his bargain. Perhaps he knew the worth of the good better than the seller himself did and knows how to get a great deal by them. See how apt men are to be pleased with their gettings and proud of their tricks; whereas a fraud and a lie are what a man ought to be ashamed of, though he have gained ever so much by them.

### **15 There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge *are* a precious jewel.**

The *lips of knowledge* (a good understanding to guide the lips and a good elocution to diffuse the knowledge) are to be preferred far before gold, and pearl, and rubies; for, 1. They are more rare in themselves, more scarce and hard to be got. *There is gold* in many a man's pocket that has no grace in his heart. In Solomon's time there was plenty of gold (1 Kings x. 21) and *abundance of rubies*; every body wore them; they were to be bought in every town. But wisdom is a rare thing, a precious jewel; few have it so as to do good with it, nor is it to be purchased of the merchants. 2.

They are more enriching to us and more adorning. They make us rich towards God, rich in good works, 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. Most people are fond of gold, and a ruby or two will not serve, they must have a multitude of them, a cabinet of jewels; but he that has the lips of knowledge despises these, because he knows and possesses better things.

### **16 Take his garment that is surety *for* a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.**

Two sorts of persons are here spoken of that are ruining their own estates, and will be beggars shortly, and therefore are not to be trusted with any good security:—1. Those that will be bound for any body that will ask them, that entangle themselves in rash suretiship to oblige their idle

companions; they will break at last, nay, they cannot hold out long; these waste by wholesale. 2. Those that are in league with abandoned women, that treat them, and court them, and keep company with them. They will be beggars in a little time; never give them credit without good pledge. Strange women have strange ways of impoverishing men to enrich themselves.

## **17 Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.**

Note, 1. Sin may possibly be pleasant in the commission: *Bread of deceit*, wealth gotten by fraud, by lying and oppression, may be *sweet to a man*, and the more sweet for its being ill-gotten, such pleasure does the carnal mind take in the success of its wicked projects. All the pleasures and profits of sin are *bread of deceit*. They are stolen, for they are forbidden fruit; and they will deceive men, for they are not what they promise. For a time, however, they are *rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel*, and the sinner blesses himself in them. But, 2. It will be bitter in reflection. Afterwards the sinner's *mouth shall be filled with gravel*. When his conscience is awakened, when he sees himself cheated, and becomes apprehensive of the wrath of God against him for his sin, how painful and uneasy then is the thought of it! The pleasures of sin are but for a season, and are succeeded with sorrow. Some nations have punished malefactors by mingling gravel with their bread.

## **18 Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.**

Note, 1. It is good in every thing to act with deliberation, and to consult with ourselves at least, and, in matters of moment, with our friends, too, before we determine, but especially to ask counsel of God, and beg direction from him, and observe the guidance of this eye. This is the way to have both our minds and our purposes established, and to succeed well in our affairs; whereas what is done hastily and with precipitation is repented of at leisure. Take time, and you will have done the sooner. *Deliberandum est diu, quod statuendum est semel*—*A final decision should be preceded by mature deliberation*. 2. It is especially our wisdom to be cautious in making war. Consider, and take advice, whether the war should be begun or no,



whether it be just, whether it be prudent, whether we be a match for the enemy, and able to carry it on when it is too late to retreat (Luke

xiv. 31); and, when it is begun, consider how and by what arts it may be prosecuted, for management is as necessary as courage. Going to law is a kind of going to war, and therefore must be done with good advice, Prov. xxv. 8. The rule among the Romans was *nec sequi bellum, nec fugere*—*neither to urge war nor yet to shun it*.

## **19 He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.**

Two sorts of people are dangerous to be conversed with:—1. Tale-bearers, though they are commonly flatterers, and by fair speeches insinuate themselves into men's acquaintance. Those are unprincipled people that go about carrying stories, that make mischief among neighbours and relations, that sow in the minds of people jealousies of their governors, of their ministers, and of one another, that reveal secrets which they are entrusted with or which by unfair means they come to the knowledge of, under pretence of guessing at men's thoughts and intentions, tell that of them which is really false. "Be not familiar with such; do not give them the hearing when they tell their tales and reveal secrets, for you may be sure that they will betray your secrets too and tell tales of you." 2. Flatterers, for they are commonly tale-bearers. If a man fawn upon you, compliment and commend you, suspect him to have some design upon you, and stand upon your guard; he would pick that out of you which will serve him to make a story of to somebody else to your prejudice; therefore *meddle not with him that flatters with his lips*. Those too dearly love, and too dearly buy, their own praise, that will put confidence in a man and trust him with a secret or business because he flatters them.

## **20 Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.**

Here is, 1. An undutiful child become very wicked by degrees. He began with despising his father and mother, slighting their instructions, disobeying

their commands, and raging at their rebukes, but at length he arrives at such a pitch of impudence and impiety as to curse them, to give them scurrilous and opprobrious language, and to wish mischief to those that were instruments of his being and have taken so much care and pains about him, and this in defiance of God and his law, which had made this a capital crime (Exod. xxi. 17, Matt. xv. 4), and in violation of all the bonds of duty, natural affection, and gratitude. 2. An undutiful child become very miserable at last: *His lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness*; all his honour shall be laid in the dust, and he shall for ever lose his reputation. Let him never expect any peace or comfort in his own mind, no, nor to prosper in this world. His days shall be shortened, and the lamp of his life extinguished, according to the reverse of the promise of the fifth commandment. His family shall be cut off and his posterity be a curse to him. And it will be his eternal ruin; the lamp of his happiness shall be *put out in the blackness of darkness* (so the word is), even that which is *for ever*; Jude 13, Matt. xxii. 13.

## **21 An inheritance *may* be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.**

Note, 1. It is possible that an estate may be suddenly raised. There are those that will be rich, by right or wrong, who make no conscience of what they say or do if they can but get money by it, who, when it is in their power, will cheat their own father, and who sordidly spare and hoard up what they get, grudging themselves and their families food convenient and thinking all lost but what they buy land with or put out to interest. By such ways as these a man may grow rich, may grow very rich, in a little time, at his first setting out. 2. An estate that is suddenly raised is often as suddenly ruined. It was raised hastily, but, not being raised honestly, it proves *soon ripe and*

*soon rotten*: *The end thereof shall not be blessed* of God, and, if he do not bless it, it can neither be comfortable nor of any continuance; so that he who got it at the end will be a fool. He had better have taken time and built firmly.

## **22 Say not thou, I will recompense evil; *but* wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee.**

Those that live in this world must expect to have injuries done them, affronts given them, and trouble wrongfully created them, for we dwell among briers. Now here we are told what to do when we have wrong done us. 1. We must not avenge ourselves, no, nor so much as think of revenge, or design it: "*Say not thou*, no, not in thy heart, *I will recompense evil* for evil. Do not please thyself with the thought that some time or other thou shalt have an opportunity of being quits with him. Do not wish revenge, or hope for it, much less resolve upon it, no, not when the injury is fresh and the resentment of it most deep. Never say that thou wilt do a think which thou canst not in faith pray to God to assist thee in, and *that* thou canst not do in mediating revenge." 2. We must refer ourselves to God, and leave it to him to plead our cause, to maintain our right, and reckon with those that do us wrong in such a way and manner as he thinks fit and in his own due time: "*Wait on the Lord*, and attend his pleasure, acquiesce in his will, and he does not say that he will punish him that has injured thee (instead of desiring that thou must forgive him and pray for him), but *he will save thee*, and that is enough. He will protect thee, so that thy passing by one injury shall not (as is commonly feared) expose thee to another; nay, he will recompense good to thee, to balance thy trouble and encourage thy patience," as David hoped, when Shimei cursed him, 2 Sam. xvi.

12.

**23 Divers weights *are* an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance *is* not good.**

This is to the same purport with what was said v. 20. 1. It is here repeated, because it is a sin that God doubly hates (as lying, which is of the same nature with this sin, is mentioned twice among the seven things that God hates, ch. vi. 17, 19), and because it was probably a sin very much practised at that time in Israel, and therefore made light of as if there were no harm in it, under pretence that, being commonly used, there was no trading without it. 2. It is here added, *A false balance is not good*, to intimate that it is not only abominable to God, but unprofitable to the sinner himself; there is really no good to be got by it, no, not a good bargain, for a bargain made by fraud will prove a losing bargain in the end.

## **24 Man's goings *are* of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?**

We are here taught that in all our affairs, 1. We have a necessary and constant dependence upon God. All our natural actions depend upon his providence, all our spiritual actions upon his grace. The best man is no better than God makes him; and every creature is that to us which it is the will of God that it should be. Our enterprises succeed, not as we desire and design, but as God directs and disposes. The goings even of a strong man (so the word signifies) *are of the Lord*, for his strength is weakness without God, nor is the battle always to the strong. 2. We have no foresight of future events, and therefore know not how to forecast for them: *How can a man understand his own way?* How can he tell what will befall him, since God's counsels concerning him are secret, and therefore how can he of himself contrive what to do without divine direction? We so little

understand our own way that we know not what is good for ourselves, and therefore we must make a virtue of necessity, and commit our way unto the Lord, in whose hand it is, follow the guidance and submit to the disposal of Providence.

## **25 *It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.***

Two things, by which God is greatly affronted, men are here said to be ensnared by, and entangled not only in guilt, but in trouble and ruin at length:—1. Sacrilege, men's alienating holy things and converting them to their own use, which is here called *devouring* them. What is devoted in any way to the service and honour of God, for the support of religion and divine worship or the relief of the poor, ought to be conscientiously preserved to the purposes designed; and those that directly or indirectly embezzle it, or defeat the purpose for which it was given, will have a great deal to answer for. *Will a man rob God in tithes and offerings?* Mal. iii. 8. Those that hurry over religious offices (their praying and preaching) and huddle them up in haste, as being impatient to get done, may be said to *devour that which is holy*. 2. Covenant-breaking. *It is a snare to a man, after he has made vows to God, to enquire* how he may evade them or get dispensed with, and to

contrive excuses for the violating of them. If the matter of them was doubtful, and the expressions were ambiguous, that was his fault; he should have made them with more caution and consideration, for it will involve his conscience (if it be tender) in great perplexities, if he be to enquire concerning them afterwards (Eccl. v. 6); for, when we have opened our mouth to the Lord, it is too late to think of going back, Acts v. 4.

## **26 A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.**

See here, 1. What is the business of magistrates. They are to be a terror to evil-doers. They must *scatter the wicked*, who are linked in confederacies to assist and embolden one another in doing mischief; and there is no doing this but by *bringing the wheel over them*, that is, putting the laws in execution against them, crushing their power and quashing their projects. Severity must sometimes be used to rid the country of those that are openly vicious and mischievous, debauched and debauching. 2. What is the qualification of magistrates, which is necessary in order to do this. They have need to be both pious and prudent, for it is the wise king, who is both religious and discreet, that is likely to effect the suppression of vice and reformation of manners.

## **27 The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.**

We have here the dignity of the soul, the great soul of man, that light which lighteth every man. 1. It is a divine light; it is the *candle of the Lord*, a candle of his lighting, for it is *the inspiration of the Almighty* that gives us understanding. He *forms the spirit of man within him*. It is after the image of God that man is created in knowledge. Conscience, that noble faculty, is God's deputy in the soul; it is a candle not only lighted by him, but lighted for him. The Father of spirits is therefore called the *Father of lights*. 2. It is a discovering light. By the help of reason we come to know men, to judge of their characters, and dive into their designs; by the help of conscience we come to know ourselves. The spirit of a man has a self-consciousness (1 Cor. ii. 11); it searches into the dispositions and affections of the soul, praises what is good, condemns what is otherwise, and judges of the

thoughts and intents of the heart. This is the office, this the power, of conscience, which we are therefore concerned to get rightly informed and to keep void of offence.

## **28 Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.**

Here we have, 1. The virtues of a good king. Those are *mercy and truth*, especially mercy, for that is mentioned twice here. He must be strictly faithful to his word, must be sincere, and abhor all dissimulation, must religiously discharge all the trusts reposed in him, must support and countenance truth. He must likewise rule with clemency, and by all acts of compassion gain the affections of his people. *Mercy and truth* are the glories of God's throne, and kings are called *gods*.

2. The advantages he gains thereby. These virtues will preserve his person and support his government, will make him easy and safe, beloved by his own people and feared by his enemies, if it be possible that he should have any.

## **29 The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.**

This shows that both young and old have their advantages, and therefore must each of them be, according to their capacities, serviceable to the public, and neither of them despise nor envy the other. 1. Let not old people despise the young, for they are strong and fit for action, able to go through business and break through difficulties, which the aged and weak cannot grapple with. The *glory of young men is their strength*, provided they use it well (in the service of God and their country, not of their lusts), and that they be not proud of it nor trust to it. 2. Let not young people despise the old, for they are grave, and fit for counsel, and, though they have not the strength that young men have, yet they have more wisdom and experience. *Juniores ad labores, seniores ad honores—Labour is for the young, honour for the aged*. God has put honour upon the old man; for his *gray head* is his beauty. See Dan. vii. 9.

### **30 The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.**

Note, 1. Many need severe rebukes. Some children are so obstinate that their parents can do no good with them without sharp correction; some criminals must feel the rigour of the law and public justice; gentle methods will not work upon them; they must be beaten black and blue. And the wise God sees that his own children sometimes need very sharp afflictions. 2. Severe rebukes sometimes do a great deal of good, as corrosives contribute to the cure of a wound, eating out the proud flesh. The rod drives out even that foolishness which was bound up in the heart, and cleanses away the evil there. 3. Frequently those that most need severe rebukes can worse bear them. Such is the corruption of nature that men are as loth to be rebuked sharply for their sins as to be beaten till their bones ache. *Correction is grievous to him that forsakes the way*, and yet it is good for him, Heb. xii. 11.

## **P R O V E R B S**

### **CHAP. XXI.**

#### **Miscellaneous Maxims.**

### **1 The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.**

Note, 1. Even the *hearts* of men are in God's hand, and not only their *goings*, as he had said, ch. xx. 24. God can change men's minds, can, by a powerful insensible operation under their spirits, turn them from that which they seemed most intent upon, and incline them to that which they seemed most averse to, as the husbandman, by canals and gutters, turns the water through his grounds as he pleases, which does not alter the nature of the water, nor put any force upon it, any more than God's providence does upon the native freedom of man's will, but directs the course of it to serve his own purpose. 2. Even kings' hearts are so, notwithstanding their powers and prerogatives, as much as the hearts of common persons. The *hearts of kings are unsearchable* to us, much more unmanageable by us; as they have their

*arcana imperii*—*state secrets*, so that they have great prerogatives of their crown; but the great God has them not only under his eye, but in his hand. Kings are what he makes them. Those that are most absolute are under God's government; he *puts things into their hearts*, Rev. xvii. 17; Ezra vii. 27.



## **2 Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.**

Note, 1. We are all apt to be partial in judging of ourselves and our own actions, and to think too favourably of our own character, as if there was nothing amiss in it: *Every way of a man*, even his by-way, *is right in his own eyes*. The proud heart is very ingenious in putting a fair face upon a foul matter, and in making that appear right to itself which is far from being so, to stop the mouth of conscience. 2. We are sure that the judgment of God concerning us is according to truth. Whatever our judgment is concerning ourselves, *the Lord ponders the heart*. God looks at the heart, and judges of men according to that, of their actions according to their principles and intentions; and his judgment of that is as exact as ours is of that which we ponder most, and more so; he weighs it in an unerring balance, ch. xvi. 2.

## **3 To do justice and judgment *is* more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.**

Here, 1. It is implied that many deceive themselves with a conceit that, if they offer sacrifice, that will excuse them from doing justice, and procure them a dispensation for their unrighteousness; and this makes their way *seem right*, v. 2. *We have fasted*, Isa. lviii. 3. *I have peace-offerings with me*, Prov. vii. 14. 2. It is plainly declared that living a good life (doing justly and loving mercy) is more pleasing to God than the most pompous and expensive instances of devotion. Sacrifices were of divine institution, and were acceptable to God if they were offered in faith and with repentance, otherwise not, Isa. i. 11, &c. But even then moral duties were preferred before them (1 Sam. xv.

22), which intimates that their excellency was not innate nor the obligation to them perpetual, Mic.

vi. 6-8. Much of religion lies in doing judgment and justice from a principle of duty to God, contempt of the world, and love to our neighbour; and this is more pleasing to God than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices, Mark xii. 33.

#### **4 An high look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked, *is* sin.**

This may be taken as showing us, 1. The marks of a wicked man. He that has a *high look and a proud heart*, that carries himself insolently and scornfully towards both God and man, and that is always ploughing and plotting, designing and devising some mischief or other, is indeed a wicked man. *The light of the wicked is sin. Sin is the pride, the ambition, the glory and joy, and the business of wicked men.* 2. The miseries of wicked man. His raised expectations, his high designs, and most elaborate contrivances and projects, are sin to him; he contracts guilt in them and so prepares trouble for himself. The very business of all wicked men, as well as their pleasure, is nothing but sin; so Bishop Patrick. They do all to serve their lusts, and have no regard to the glory of God in it, and therefore *their ploughing is sin*, and no marvel when their sacrificing is so, ch. xv. 8.

#### **5 The thoughts of the diligent *tend* only to plenteousness; but of every one *that is* hasty only to want.**

Here is, 1. The way to be rich. If we would live plentifully and comfortably in the world, we must be diligent in our business, and not shrink from the toil and trouble of it, but prosecute it closely, improving all advantages and opportunities for it, and doing what we do with all our might; yet we must not be hasty in it, nor hurry ourselves and others with it, but keep doing fair and softly, which, we say, goes far in a day. With diligence there must be contrivance. The *thoughts of the diligent* are as necessary as the hand of the diligent. Forecast is as good as work. Seest thou a man thus prudent and diligent? He will have enough to live on. 2. The way to be poor. Those that are hasty, that are rash and inconsiderate in their affairs, and will not take time to think, that are greedy of gain, by right or wrong, and make haste to be rich by unjust practices or unwise projects, are in the ready road to poverty. Their thoughts and contrivances, by which they hope to raise themselves, will ruin them.

## **6 The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.**

This shows the folly of those that hope to enrich themselves by dishonest practices, by oppressing and over-reaching those with whom they deal, by false-witness-bearing, or by fraudulent contracts, of those that make no scruples of lying when there is any thing to be got by it. They may perhaps heap up treasures by these means, that which they make their treasure; but, 1. They will not meet with the satisfaction they expect. It is a *vanity tossed to and fro*; it will be disappointment and vexation of spirit to them; they will not have the comfort of it, nor can they put any confidence in it, but will be perpetually uneasy. It will be *tossed to and fro* by their own consciences, and by the censures of men; let them expect to be in a constant hurry. 2. They will meet with destruction they do not expect. While they are seeking wealth by such unlawful practices they are really seeking death; they lay themselves open to the envy and ill-will of men by the treasures they get, and to the wrath and curse of God, by the lying tongue wherewith they get them, which he will make to fall upon themselves and sink them to hell.

## **7 The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.**

See here, 1. The nature of injustice. Getting money by lying (v. 6) is no better than downright robbery. Cheating is stealing; you might as well pick a man's pocket as impose upon him by a lie in making a bargain, which he had no fence against but by not believing you; and it will be no excuse from the guilt of robbery to say that he might choose whether he would believe you, for that is a debt we should owe to all men. 2. The cause of injustice. Men *refuse to do judgment*; they will not render to all their due, but withhold it, and omissions make way for commissions; they come at length to robbery itself. Those that refuse to do justice will choose to do wrong. 3. The effects of injustice; it will return upon the sinner's own head. The robbery of the wicked will *terrify them* (so some); their consciences will be filled with horror and amazement, will cut them, will *saw them asunder* (so others); it will *destroy them* here and for ever, therefore he had said (v. 6), *They seek death*.

## **8 The way of man *is* froward and strange: but *as for* the pure, his work *is* right.**

This shows that as men are so is their way. 1. Evil men have evil ways. If the man be *froward*, his way also is *strange*; and this is the way of most men, such is the general corruption of mankind. *They have all gone aside* (Ps. xiv. 2, 3); all flesh have perverted their way. But the froward man, the man of deceit, that acts by craft and trick in all he does, his way is strange, contrary to all the rules of honour and honesty. It is strange, for you know not where to find him nor when you have him; it is strange, for it is alienated from all good and estranges men from God and his favour. It is what he behold afar off, and so do all honest men. 2. Men that are pure are proved to be such by their work, for it *is right*, it is just and regular; and they are accepted of God and approved of men. The way of mankind in their apostasy is froward and strange; but as for the pure, those that by the grace of God are recovered out of that state, of which there is here and there one, *their work is right*, as Noah's was in the old world, Gen. vii. 1.

## **9 *It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.***

See here, 1. What a great affliction it is to a man to have a brawling scolding woman for his wife, who upon every occasion, and often upon no occasion, breaks out into a passion, and chides either him or those about her, is fretful to herself and furious to her children and servants, and, in both, vexatious to her husband. If a man has a wide house, spacious and pompous, this will embitter the comfort of it to him—a *house of society* (so the word is), in which a man may be sociable, and entertain his friends; this will make both him and his house unsociable, and unfit for enjoyments of true friendship. It makes a man ashamed of his choice and his management, and disturbs his company. 2. What many a man is forced to do under such an affliction. He cannot keep up his authority. He finds it to no purpose to contradict the most unreasonable passion, for it is unruly and rages so much the more; and his wisdom and grace will not suffer him to render railing for railing, nor his conjugal affection to use any severity, and therefore he finds it his best way to retire *into a corner of the house-top*, and sit alone there,

out of the hearing of her clamour; and if he employ himself well there, as he may do, it is the wisest course he can take. Better do so than quit the house, and go into bad company, for diversion, as many, who, like Adam, make their wife's sin the excuse of their own.

## **10 The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.**

See here the character of a very wicked man. 1. The strong inclination he has to do mischief. His very *soul desires evil*, desires that evil may be done and that he may have the pleasure, not only of seeing it, but of having a hand in it. The root of wickedness lies in the soul; the desire that men have to do evil, that is the lust which conceives and brings forth sin. 2. The strong aversion he has to do good: *His neighbour*, his friend, his nearest relation, *finds no favour in his eyes*, cannot gain from him the least kindness, though he be in the greatest need of it. And, when he is in the pursuit of the evil his heart is so much upon, he will spare no man that stands in his way; his next neighbour shall be used no better than a stranger, than an enemy.

## **11 When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.**

This we had before (ch. xix. 25), and it shows that there are two ways by which the simple may be made wise:—1. By the punishments that are inflicted on those that are incorrigibly wicked. Let the law be executed upon a scorner, and even he that is simple will be awakened and alarmed by it, and will discern, more than he did, the evil of sin, and will take warning by it and take heed.

2. By the instructions that are given to those that are wise and willing to be taught: *When the wise is instructed* by the preaching of the word *he* (not only the wise himself, but the simple that stands by) *receives knowledge*. It is no injustice at all to take a good lesson to ourselves which was designed for another.

## **12 The righteous *man* wisely considereth the house of the wicked: *but God* overthroweth the wicked for *their* wickedness.**

1. As we read this verse, it shows why good men, when they come to understand things aright, will not envy the prosperity of evil-doers. When they see *the house of the wicked*, how full it is perhaps of all the good things of this life, they are tempted to envy; but when they *wisely consider* it, when they look upon it with an eye of faith, when they see *God overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness*, that there is a curse upon their habitation which will certainly be the ruin of it ere long, they see more reason to despise them, or pity them, than to fear or envy them. 2. Some give another sense of it: *The righteous man* (the judge or magistrate, that is entrusted with the execution of justice, and the preservation of public peace) *examines the house of the wicked*, searches it for arms or for stolen goods, makes a diligent enquiry concerning his family and the characters of those about him, that he may by his power *overthrow the wicked for their wickedness* and prevent their doing any further mischief, that he may fire the nests where the birds of prey are harboured or the unclean birds.

## **13 Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.**

Here we have the description and doom of an uncharitable man. 1. His description: He *stops his ears at the cry of the poor*, at the cry of their wants and miseries (he resolves to take no

cognizance of them), at the cry of their requests and supplications—he resolves he will not so much as give them the hearing, turns them away from his door, and forbids them to come near him, or, if he cannot avoid hearing them, he will not need them, nor be moved by their complaints, nor be prevailed with by their importunities; he *shuts up the bowels of his compassion*, and that is equivalent to the stopping of his ears, Acts vii. 57. 2. His doom. He shall himself be reduced to straits, which will make him *cry*, and then *he shall not be heard*. Men will not hear him, but reward him as he has rewarded others. God will not hear him; for he that *showed no mercy shall have judgment without mercy* (Jam. ii. 13), and he that on earth

denied a crumb of bread in hell was denied a drop of water. God will be deaf to the prayers of those who are deaf to the cries of the poor, which, if they be not heard by us, will be heard against us, Exod. xxii. 23.

#### **14 A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.**

Here is, 1. The power that is commonly found to be in gifts. Nothing is more violent than *anger*. O the force of *strong wrath*! And yet a handsome present, prudently managed, will turn away some men's wrath when it seemed implacable, and disarm the keenest and most passionate resentments. Covetousness is commonly a master-sin and has the command of other lusts. *Pecuniæ obediunt omnia*—*Money commands all things*. Thus Jacob pacified Esau and Abigail David. 2. The policy that is commonly used in giving and receiving bribes. It must be a *gift in secret and a reward in the bosom*, for he that takes it would not be thought to covet it, nor known to receive it, nor would he willingly be beholden to him whom he has been offended with; but, if it be done privately, all is well. No man should be too open in giving any gift, nor boast of the presents he sends; but, if it be a bribe to pervert justice, that is so scandalous that those who are fond of it are ashamed of it.

#### **15 *It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.***

Note, 1. It is a pleasure and satisfaction to good men both to see justice administered by the government they live under, right taking place and iniquity suppressed, and also to practise it themselves, according as their sphere is. They not only do justice, but do it with pleasure, not only for fear of shame, but for love of virtue. 2. It is a terror to wicked men to see the laws put in execution against vice and profaneness. It is destruction to them; as it is also a vexation to them to be forced, either for the support of their credit or for fear of punishment, *to do judgment* themselves. Or, if we take it as we read it, the meaning is, There is true pleasure in the practice of religion, but certain destruction at the end of all vicious courses.

## **16 The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.**

Here is, 1. The sinner upon his ramble: He *wanders out of the way of understanding*, and when once he has left that good way he wanders endlessly. The way of religion is *the way of understanding*; those that are not truly pious are not truly intelligent; those *that wander out of this way* break the hedge which God has set, and follow the conduct of the world and the flesh; and they go astray like lost sheep. 2. The sinner at his rest, or rather his ruin: He *shall remain (quiescet—he shall rest, but not in pace—in peace) in the congregation of the giants*, the sinners

of the old world, that were swept away by the deluge; to that destruction the damnation of sinners is compared, as sometimes to the destruction of Sodom, when they are said to have their portion in fire and brimstone. Or *in the congregation of the damned*, that are under the power of the second death. There is a vast congregation of damned sinners, bound in bundles for the fire, and in that those shall remain, remain for ever, who are shut out from the congregation of the righteous. He that forsakes the way to heaven, if he return not to it, will certainly sink into the depths of hell.

## **17 He that loveth pleasure *shall* be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.**

Here is an argument against a voluptuous luxurious life, taken from the ruin it brings upon men's temporal interests. Here is 1. The description of an epicure: *He loves pleasure*. God allows us to use the delights of sense soberly and temperately, *wine to make glad the heart* and put vigour into the spirits, and *oil to make the face to shine* and beautify the countenance; but he that loves these, that sets his heart upon them, covets them earnestly, is solicitous to have all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable, is impatient of every thing that crosses him in his pleasures, relishes these as the best pleasures, and has his mouth by them put out of taste for spiritual delights, he is an epicure, 2 Tim. iii. 4. 2. The punishment of an epicure in this world: *He shall be a poor man*; for the lusts of sensuality are not maintained but at great expense, and there are



instances of those who want necessities, and live upon alms, who once could not live without dainties and varieties. Many a beau becomes a beggar.

## **18 The wicked *shall be* a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.**

This intimates, 1. What should be done by the justice of men: *The wicked*, that are the troublers of a land, ought to be punished, for the preventing and turning away of those national judgments which otherwise will be inflicted and in which even the righteous are many times involved. Thus when Achan was stoned he was *a ransom for the* camp of *righteous* Israel; and the seven sons of Saul, when they were hanged, were *a ransom for the* kingdom of *righteous* David. 2. What is often done by the providence of God: *The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked comes in his stead*, and so seems as if he were *a ransom for him*, ch. xi. 8. God will rather leave many wicked people to be cut off than abandon his own people. *I will give men for thee*, Isa. xliii. 3, 4.

## **19 *It is* better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.**

Note, 1. Unbridled passions embitter and spoil the comfort of all relations. A peevish angry wife makes her husband's life uneasy, to whom she should be a comfort and a meet help. Those cannot dwell in peace and happiness that cannot dwell in peace and love. Even those that are one flesh, if they be not withal one spirit, have no joy of their union. 2. It is better to have no company than bad company. The wife of thy covenant is thy companion, and yet, if she be peevish and provoking, *it is better to dwell in* a solitary *wilderness*, exposed to wind and weather, than in company with her. A man may better enjoy God and himself in a wilderness than among quarrelsome relations and neighbours. See v. 9.

## **20 *There is* treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.**

Note, 1. Those that are wise will increase what they have and live plentifully; their wisdom will teach them to proportion their expenses to their income and to lay up for hereafter; so that *there is a treasure of things to be desired*, and as much as needs be desired, a good stock of all things convenient, laid up in season, and particularly of *oil*, one of the staple commodities of Canaan, Deut. viii. 8. This is *in the habitation*, or cottage, *of the wise*; and it is better to have an old-fashioned house, and have it well furnished, than a fine modern one, with sorry housekeeping. God blesses the endeavors of the wise and then their houses are replenished. 2. Those that are foolish will misspend what they have upon their lusts, and so bring the stock they have to nothing. Those manage wretchedly that are in haste to spend what they had, but not in care which way to get more. Foolish children spend what their wise parents have laid up. *One sinner destroys much good*, as the prodigal son.

## **21 He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.**

See here, 1. What it is to make religion our business; it is to *follow after righteousness and mercy*, not to content ourselves with easy performances, but to do our duty with the utmost care and pains, as those that are pressing forward and in fear of coming short. We must both do justly and love mercy, and must proceed and persevere therein; and, though we cannot attain to perfection, yet it will be a comfort to us if we aim at it and follow after it. 2. What will be the advantage of doing so: Those that do *follow after righteousness* shall *find righteousness*; God will give them grace to do good, and they shall have the pleasure and comfort of doing it; those that make conscience of being just to others shall have the pleasure and comfort of doing it; those that make conscience of being just to others shall be justly dealt with by others and others shall be kind to them. The Jews *followed after righteousness*, and did not find it, because they sought amiss, Rom. ix. 31. Otherwise, *Seek and you shall find*, and with it shall find both *life and honour*, everlasting life and honour, the *crown of righteousness*.

## **22 A wise *man* scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.**

Note, 1. Those that have power are apt to promise themselves great things from their power. *The city of the mighty* thinks itself impregnable, and therefore its strength is *the confidence thereof*, what it boasts of and trust in, bidding defiance to danger. 2. Those that have wisdom, though they are so modest as not to promise much, often perform great things, even against those that are so confident of their strength, by their wisdom. Good conduct will go far even against great force; and a stratagem, well managed, may effectually *scale the city of the mighty and cast down the strength* it had such a confidence in. *A wise man* will gain upon the affections of people and conquer them by strength of reason, which is a more noble conquest than that obtained by strength of arms. Those that understand their interest will willingly submit themselves to a wise and good man, and the strongest walls shall not hold out against him.

## **23 Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.**

Note, 1. It is our great concern to keep our souls from straits, being entangled in snares and perplexities, and disquieted with troubles, that we may preserve the possession and enjoyment of

ourselves and that our souls may be in frame for the service of God. 2. Those that would keep their souls must keep a watch before the door of their lips, must *keep the mouth* by temperance, that no forbidden fruit go into it, no stolen waters, that nothing be eaten or drunk to excess; they must *keep the tongue* also, that no forbidden word go out of the door of the lips, no corrupt communication. By a constant watchfulness over our words we shall prevent abundance of mischiefs which an ungoverned tongue runs men into. Keep thy heart, and that will keep thy tongue from sin; keep thy tongue, and that will keep thy heart from trouble.

## **24 Proud *and* haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.**

See here the mischief of pride and haughtiness. 1. It exposes men to sin; it makes them passionate, and kindles in them the fire of *proud wrath*. They are continually dealing in it, as if it were their trade to be angry, and they

had nothing so much to do as to barter passions and exchange bitter words. Most of the wrath that inflames the spirits and societies of men is *proud wrath*. Men cannot bear the least slight, nor in any thing to be crossed or contradicted, but they are out of humour, nay, in a heat, immediately. It likewise makes them scornful when they are angry, very abusive with their tongues, insolent towards those above them and imperious towards all about them. *Only by pride* comes all this. 2. It exposes men to shame. They get a bad name by it, and every one calls them *proud and haughty scornors*, and therefore nobody cares for having any thing to do with them. If men would but consult their reputation a little and the credit of their profession, which suffers with it, they would not indulge their pride and passion as they do.

**25 The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. 26 He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.**

Here we have, 1. The miseries of the slothful, whose *hands refuse to labour* in an honest calling, by which they might get an honest livelihood. They are as fit for labour as other men, and business offers itself, to which they might lay their hands and apply their minds, but they will not; herein they fondly think they do well for themselves, see ch. xxvi. 16. *Soul, take thy ease*. But really they are enemies to themselves; for, besides that their slothfulness starves them, depriving them of their necessary supports, their desires at the same time stab them. Though their hands refuse to labour, their hearts cease not to covet riches, and pleasures, and honours, which yet cannot be obtained without labour. Their desires are impetuous and insatiable; they *covet greedily all the day long*, and cry, *Give, give*; they expect every body should do for them, though they will do nothing for themselves, much less for any body else. Now these *desires kill them*; they are a perpetual vexation to them, fret them to death, and perhaps put them upon such dangerous courses for the satisfying of their craving lusts as hasten them to an untimely end. Many that must have money with which to make provision for the flesh, and would not be at the pains to get it honestly, have turned highwaymen, and that has killed them. Those that are slothful in the affairs of their souls, and yet have desires towards that which would be the happiness of their souls, those *desires kill them*, will aggravate their condemnation and be witnesses against them that were convinced of the

worth of spiritual blessings, but refused to be at the pains that were necessary to the obtaining of them. 2. The honours of the honest and diligent. The righteous and industrious have their desires satisfied,

and enjoy not only that satisfaction, but the further satisfaction of doing good to others. The slothful are always craving and gaping to receive, *but the righteous* are always full and contriving to give; and *it is more blessed to give than to receive*. They *give and spare not*, give liberally and upbraid not; they *give a portion to seven and also to eight*, and do not spare for fear of wanting.

## **27 The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, *when* he bringeth it with a wicked mind?**

Sacrifices were of divine institution; and when they were offered in faith, and with repentance and reformation, God was greatly honoured by them and well-pleased in them. But they were often not only unacceptable, but an *abomination*, to God, and he declared so, which was an indication both that they were not required for their own sakes and that there were better things, and for effectual, in reserve, when sacrifice and offering should be done away. They were an *abomination*,

1. When they were brought by wicked men, who did not, according to the true intent and meaning of sacrificing, repent of their sins, mortify their lusts, and amend their lives. Cain brought his offering. Even wicked men may be found in the external performances of religious worship. Many can freely give God their beasts, their lips, their knees, who would not give him their hearts; the Pharisees gave alms. But when the person is an *abomination*, as every wicked man is to God, the performance cannot but be so; *even when he brings it diligently*; so some read the latter part of the verse. Though their offerings are continually before God (Ps. 1. 8), yet they are an abomination to him. 2. *Much more when* they were brought with *wicked minds*, when their sacrifices were made, not only consistent with, but serviceable to, their wickedness, as Absalom's vow, Jezebel's fast, and the Pharisees' long prayers. When men make a show of devotion, that they may the more easily and effectually compass some covetous or malicious

design, when holiness is pretended, but some wickedness intended, then especially the performance is an abomination, Isa. lxvi. 5.

## **28 A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.**

Here is, 1. The doom of a *false witness*. He who, for favour to one side or malice to the other, gives in a false evidence, or makes an affidavit of that which he knows to be false, or at least does not know to be true, if it be discovered, his reputation will be ruined. A man may tell a lie perhaps in his haste; but he that gives a false testimony does it with deliberation and solemnity, and it cannot but be a presumptuous sin, and a forfeiture of man's credit. But, though he should not be discovered, he himself shall be ruined; the vengeance he imprecated upon himself, when he took the false oath, will come upon him. 2. The praise of him that is conscientious: He *who hears* (that is, obeys) the command of God, which is to *speak every man truth with his neighbour*, he who testifies nothing but what he has heard and knows to be true, *speaks constantly* (that is, consistently with himself); he is always in the same story; he speaks *in finem—to the end*; people will give credit to him and hear him out; he speaks unto victory; he carries the cause, which the *false witness* shall lose; he shall speak to eternity. What is true is true eternally. *The lip of truth is established for ever.*

## **29 A wicked man hardeneth his face: but *as for* the upright, he directeth his way.**

Here is, 1. The presumption and impudence of a wicked man: He *hardens his face*—brazens it, that he may not blush—steels it, that he may not tremble when he commits the greatest crimes;

he bids defiance to the terrors of the law and the checks of his own conscience, the reproofs of the word and the rebukes of Providence; he will have his way and nothing shall hinder him, Isa. lvii.

17. 2. The caution and circumspection of a good man: *As for the upright*, he does not say, What *would* I do? What have I a mind to? and that will I have; but, What *should* I do? What does God require of me? What is duty? What

is prudence? What is for edification? And so he does not force his way, but *direct his way* by a safe and certain rule.

**30 *There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.* 31 *The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord.***

The designing busy part of mankind are directed, in all their counsels and undertakings, to have their eye to God, and to believe, 1. That there can be no success against God, and therefore they must never act in opposition to him, in contempt of his commands, or in contradiction to his counsels. Though they think they have *wisdom*, and *understanding*, and *counsel*, the best politics and politicians, on their side, yet, if it be *against the Lord*, it cannot prosper long; it shall not prevail at last. He that sits in heaven laughs at men's projects against him and his anointed, and will carry his point in spite of them, Ps. ii. 1-6. Those that fight against God are preparing shame and ruin for themselves; whoever *make war with the Lamb*, he will certainly *overcome them*, Rev. xvii. 14. 2. That there can be no success without God, and therefore they must never act but in dependence on him. Be the cause ever so good, and the patrons of it ever so strong, and wise, and faithful, and the means of carrying it on, and gaining the point, ever so probable, still they must acknowledge God and take him along with them. Means indeed are to be used; *the horse must be prepared against the day of battle*, and the foot too; they must be armed and disciplined. In Solomon's time even Israel's kings used horses in war, though they were forbidden to multiply them. *But*, after all, *safety and salvation are of the Lord*; he can save without armies, but armies cannot save without him; and therefore he must be sought to and trusted in for success, and when success is obtained he must have all the glory. When we are preparing for *the day of battle* our great concern must be to make God our friend and secure his favour.

## P R O V E R B S

### CHAP. XXII.

Miscellaneous Maxims.

## **1 A *good* name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.**

Here are two things which are more valuable and which we should covet more than great riches:—1. To be well spoken of: *A name* (that is, *a good name*, a name for good things with God and good people) *is rather to be chosen than great riches*; that is, we should be more careful to do

that by which we may get and keep a good name than that by which we may raise and increase a great estate. Great riches bring great cares with them, expose men to danger, and add no real value to a man. A fool and a knave may have *great riches*, but *a good name* makes a man easy and safe, supposes a man wise and honest, redounds to the glory of God, and gives a man a greater opportunity of doing good. By great riches we may relieve the bodily wants of others, but by a good name we may recommend religion to them. 2. To be well beloved, to have an interest in the esteem and affections of all about us; this is better *than silver and gold*. Christ has neither silver nor gold, but he *grew in favour with God and man*, Luke ii. 52. This should teach us to look with a holy contempt upon the wealth of this world, not to set our hearts upon that, but with all possible care to *think of those things that are lovely and of good report*, Phil. iv. 8.

## **2 The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.**

Note, 1. Among the children of men divine Providence has so ordered it that some are *rich* and others *poor*; and these are intermixed in societies: *The Lord is the Maker of both*, both the author of their being and the disposer of their lot. The greatest man in the world must acknowledge God to be his Maker, and is under the same obligations to be subject to him that the meanest is; and the poorest has the honour to be the work of God's hands as much as the greatest. *Have they not all one Father?* Mal. ii. 10; Job xxxi. 15. God makes some rich, that they may be charitable to the poor, and others poor, that they may be serviceable to the rich; and they have need of one another, 1 Cor. xii. 21. He make some poor, to exercise their patience, and contentment, and dependence upon God, and others rich, to exercise their thankfulness and beneficence. Even *the poor we have always*



*with us; they shall never cease out of the land, nor the rich neither. 2. Notwithstanding the distance that is in many respects between rich and poor; yet in most things they meet together; especially before the Lord, who is the Maker of them all, and regards not the rich more than the poor; Job xxxiv. 19. Rich and poor meet together at the bar of God's justice, all guilty before God, concluded under sin, and shapen in iniquity, the rich as much as the poor; and they meet at the throne of God's grace; the poor are as welcome there as the rich. There is the same Christ, the same scripture, the same Spirit, the same covenant of promises, for them both. There is the same heaven for poor saints that there is for rich: Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham. And there is the same hell for rich sinners that there is for poor. All stand upon the same level before God, as they do also in the grave. The small and great are there.*

### **3 A prudent *man* foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.**

See here, 1. The benefit of wisdom and consideration: *A prudent man*, by the help of his prudence, will *foresee an evil*, before it comes, *and hide himself*; he will be aware when he is entering into a temptation and will put on his armour and stand on his guard. When the clouds are gathering for a storm he takes the warning, and flies to the name of the Lord as his strong tower. Noah foresaw the deluge, Joseph the years of famine, and provided accordingly. 2. The mischief of rashness and inconsideration. *The simple*, who believe every word that flatters them, will believe none that warns them, and so they *pass on and are punished*. They venture upon sin, though they

are told what will be in the end thereof; they throw themselves into trouble, notwithstanding the fair warning given them, and they repent their presumption when it is too late. See an instance of both these, Exod. ix. 20, 21. Nothing is so fatal to precious souls as this, they will not take warning.

### **4 By humility *and* the fear of the Lord *are* riches, and honour, and life.**

See here, 1. Wherein religion does very much consist—in *humility and the fear of the Lord*; that is, walking humbly with God. We must so reverence God's majesty and authority as to submit with all humility to the commands of his word and the disposals of his providence. We must have such low thoughts of ourselves as to behave humbly towards God and man. Where the fear of God is there will be humility. 2. What is to be gotten by it—*riches, and honour*, and comfort, *and* long life, in this world, as far as God sees good, at least spiritual *riches and honour* in the favour of God, and the promises and privileges of the covenant of grace, *and* eternal *life* at last.

### **5 Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.**

Note 1. The way of sin is vexatious and dangerous: *In the way of the froward*, that crooked way, which is contrary to the will and word of God, *thorns and snares are* found, thorns of grief for past sins and snares entangling them in further sin. He that makes no conscience of what he says and does will find himself hampered by that imaginary liberty, and tormented by his pleasures. Froward people, who are soon angry, expose themselves to trouble at every step. Every thing will fret and vex him that will fret and vex at every thing. 2. The way of duty is safe and easy: *He that keeps his soul*, that watches carefully over his own heart and ways, is *far from* those *thorns and snares*, for his way is both plain and pleasant.

### **6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.**

Here is, 1. A great duty enjoined, particularly to those that are the parents and instructors of children, in order to the propagating of wisdom, that it may not die with them: *Train up children* in that age of vanity, to keep them from the sins and snares of it, in that learning age, to prepare them for what they are designed for. *Catechise* them; initiate them; keep them under discipline. *Train* them as soldiers, who are taught to handle their arms, keep rank, and observe the word of command. *Train* them up, not in the way they would go (the bias of their corrupt hearts would draw them aside), but *in the way they should go*, the way in which, if you love them, you would have them go. *Train up a child according as he is capable* (as some take it), with

a gentle hand, as nurses feed children, little and often, Deut. vi. 7. 2. A good reason for it, taken from the great advantage of this care and pains with children: When they *grow up*, when they *grow old*, it is to be hoped, they *will not depart from it*. Good impressions made upon them then will abide upon them all their days. Ordinarily the vessel retains the savour with which it was first seasoned. Many indeed have departed from the good way in which they were trained up; Solomon himself did so. But early training may be a means of their recovering themselves, as it is supposed Solomon did. At least the parents will have the comfort of having done their duty and used the means.

## **7 The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.**

He had said (v. 2.), *Rich and poor meet together*; but here he finds, here he shows, that, as to the things of this life, there is a great difference; for, 1. Those that have little will be in subjection to those that have much, because they have dependence upon them, they have received, and expect to receive, support from them: *The rich rule over the poor*, and too often more than becomes them, with pride and rigour, unlike to God, who, though he be great, yet despises not any. It is part of the affliction of the poor that they must expect to be trampled upon, and part of their duty to be serviceable, as far as they can, to those that are kind to them, and study to be grateful. 2. Those that are but going behindhand find themselves to lie much at the mercy of those that are before hand: *The borrower is servant to the lender*, is obliged to him, and must sometimes beg, *Have patience with me*. Therefore it is part of Israel's promised happiness that they should lend and borrow, Deut.

xxviii. 12. And it should be our endeavour to keep as much as may be out of debt. Some sell their liberty to gratify their luxury.

## **8 He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.**

Note, 1. Ill-gotten gains will not prosper: *He that sows iniquity*, that does an unjust thing in hopes to get by it, *shall reap vanity*; what he gets will never

do him any good nor give him any satisfaction. He will meet nothing but disappointment. Those that create trouble to others do but prepare trouble for themselves. Men shall reap as they sow. 2. Abused power will not last. If the rod of authority turn into a *rod of anger*; if men rule by passion instead of prudence, and, instead of the public welfare, aim at nothing so much as the gratifying of their own resentments, it *shall fail* and be broken, and their power shall not bear them out in their exorbitances, Isa. x. 24, 25.

## **9 He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.**

Here is, 1. The description of a charitable man; he has a *bountiful eye*, opposed to the evil eye (ch. xxiii. 6) and the same with the *single eye* (Matt. vi. 22),—an eye that seeks out objects of charity, besides those that offer themselves,—an eye that, upon the sight of one in want and misery, affects the heart with compassion,—an eye that with the alms gives a pleasant look, which makes the alms doubly acceptable. He has also a liberal hand: *He gives of his bread* to those that need—*his bread*, the bread appointed for his own eating. He will rather abridge himself than see the poor perish for want; yet he does not give all *his bread*, but *of his bread*; the poor shall have their share with his own family. 2. The blessedness of such a man. The loins of the poor will bless them, all about him will speak well of him, and God himself will bless him, in answer to many a good prayer put up for him, and he *shall be blessed*.

## **10 Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.**

See here, 1. What *the scorner* does. It is implied that he sows discord and makes mischief wherever he comes. Much of the *strife and contention* which disturb the peace of all societies is owing to *the evil interpreter* (as some read it), that construes every thing into the worst, to those that despise and deride every one that comes in their way and take a pride in bantering and abusing all mankind. 2. What is to be done with the scorner that will not be reclaimed: *Cast him out* of your society, as Ishmael, when he mocked Isaac, was thrust out of Abraham's family. Those that would secure the peace must exclude the scorner.

## **11 He that loveth pureness of heart, *for* the grace of his lips the king *shall be* his friend.**

Here is, 1. The qualification of an accomplished, a complete gentleman, that is fit to be employed in public business. He must be an honest man, a man *that loves pureness of heart* and hates all impurity, not only pure from all fleshly lusts, but from all deceit and dissimulation, from all selfishness and sinister designs, that takes care to approve himself a man of sincerity, is just and fair from principle, and delights in nothing more than in keeping his own conscience clean and void of offence. He must also be able to speak with a good grace, not to daub and flatter, but to deliver his sentiments decently and ingeniously, in language clean and smooth as his spirit. 2. The preferment such a man stands fair for: *The king*, if he be wise and good, and understand his own and his people's interest, *will be his friend*, will make him of his cabinet-council, as there was one in David's court, and another in Solomon's, that was called the *king's friend*; or, in any business that he has, the king will befriend him. Some understand it of the King of kings. A man *in whose spirit there is no guile*, and whose speech is always with grace, God will be his friend, Messiah, the Prince, will be his friend. *This honour have all the saints.*

## **12 The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.**

Here is, 1. The special care God takes to *preserve knowledge*, that is, to keep up religion in the world by keeping up among men the knowledge of himself and of good and evil, notwithstanding the corruption of mankind, and the artifices of Satan to blind men's minds and keep them in ignorance. It is a wonderful instance of the power and goodness of *the eyes of the Lord*, that is, his watchful providence. He preserves *men of knowledge*, wise and good men (2 Chron. xvi. 9), particularly faithful witnesses, who speak what they know; God protects such, and prospers their counsels. He does by his grace *preserve knowledge* in such, secures his own work and interest in them. See Prov. ii. 7, 8. 2. The just vengeance God takes on those that speak and act against knowledge and against the interests of knowledge and religion in the world: *He overthrows the words of the transgressor*, and

*preserves knowledge* in spite of him. He defeats all the counsels and designs of false and treacherous men, and turns them to their own confusion.

### **13 The slothful *man* saith, *There is a lion without*, I shall be slain in the streets.**

Note, 1. Those that have no love for their business will never want excuses to shake it off. Multitudes are ruined, both for soul and body, by their slothfulness, and yet still they have something or other to say for themselves, so ingenious are men in putting a cheat upon their own souls. And who, I pray, will be the gainer at last, when the pretences will be all rejected as vain and frivolous?

2. Many frighten themselves from real duties by imaginary difficulties: *The slothful man* has work to do *without* in the fields, but he fancies *there is a lion* there; nay, he pretends he dares not go along the streets for fear somebody or other should meet him and kill him. He does not himself think so; he only says so to those that call him up. He talks of *a lion without*, but considers not his real danger from the devil, that *roaring lion*, which is in bed with him, and from his own slothfulness, which kills him.

### **14 The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.**

This is designed to warn all young men against the lusts of uncleanness. As they regard the welfare of their souls, let them take heed of *strange women*, lewd women, whom they ought to be strange to, of *the mouth of strange women*, of the kisses of their lips (ch. vii. 13), of the words of their lips, their charms and enticements. Dread them; have nothing to do with them; for, 1. Those who abandon themselves to that sin give proof that they are abandoned of God: *it is a deep pit*, which those *fall* into that are *abhorred of the Lord*, who leaves them to themselves to enter into that temptation, and takes off the bridle of his restraining grace, to punish them for other sins. Value not thyself upon thy being in favour with such women, when it proclaims thee under the wrath of God. 2. It is seldom that they recover themselves, for *it is a deep pit*; it will be hard getting out of it, it so besots the mind and debauches the conscience, by pleasing the flesh.

**15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; *but* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.**

We have here two very sad considerations:— 1. That corruption is woven into our nature. Sin is *foolishness*; it is contrary both to our right reason and to our true interest. It *is in the heart*; there is an inward inclination to sin, to speak and act foolishly. It *is in the heart of children*; they bring it into the world with them; it is what they were shapen and conceived in. It is not only *found* there, but it is *bound* there; it is annexed to the heart (so some); vicious dispositions cleave closely to the soul, are bound to it as the cion to the stock into which it is grafted, which quite alters the property. There is a knot tied between the soul and sin, a true lover's knot; they two became one flesh. It is true of ourselves, it is true of our children, whom we have begotten in our own likeness. *O God! thou knowest this foolishness*. 2. That correction is necessary to the cure of it. It will not be got out by fair means and gentle methods; there must be strictness and severity, and that which will cause grief. Children need to be corrected, and kept under discipline, by their parents; and we all need to be corrected by our heavenly Father (Heb. xii. 6, 7), and under the correction we must stroke down folly and kiss the rod.

**16 He that oppresseth the poor to increase his *riches*, and he that giveth to the rich, *shall* surely come to want.**

This shows what evil courses rich men sometimes take, by which, in the end, they will impoverish themselves and provoke God, notwithstanding their abundance, to bring them to want; they *oppress the poor and give to the rich*. 1. They will not in charity relieve the poor, but withhold from them, that by saving that which is really the best, but which they think the most needless part of their expenses, they may *increase their riches*; but they will make presents *to the rich*, and give them great entertainments, either in pride and vain-glory, that they may look great, or in policy, that they may receive it again with advantage. Such *shall surely come to want*. Many have been beggared by a foolish generosity, but never any by a prudent charity. Christ bids us to invite the poor, Luke xiv. 12, 13. 2. They

not only will not relieve *the poor*, but they *oppress* them, rob the spital, extort from their poor tenants and neighbours, invade the rights of those who have not

wherewithal to defend themselves, and then *give* bribes *to the rich*, to protect and countenance them in it. But it is all in vain; they *shall come to want*. Those that rob God, and so make him the enemy, cannot secure themselves by *giving to the rich*, to make them their friends.

Serious Attention Inculcated.

**17 Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. 18 For *it* is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. 19 That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. 20 Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, 21 That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?**

Solomon here changes his style and manner of speaking. Hitherto, for the most part, since the beginning of ch. x., he had laid down doctrinal truths, and but now and then dropped a word of exhortation, leaving us to make the application as we went along; but here, to the end of ch. xxiv., he directs his speech to his son, his pupil, his reader, his hearer, speaking as to a particular person. Hitherto, for the most part, his sense was comprised in one verse, but here usually it is drawn out further. See how Wisdom tries variety of methods with us, lest we should be cloyed with any one. To awaken attention and to assist our application the method of direct address is here adopted. Ministers must not think it enough to preach before their hearers, but must preach to them, nor enough to preach to them all in general, but should address themselves to particular persons, as here: Do *thou* do so and so. Here is,



I. An earnest exhortation to get wisdom and grace, by attending to *the words of the wise men*, both written and preached, the words of the prophets and priests, and particularly to that *knowledge* which Solomon in this book gives men of good and evil, sin and duty, rewards and punishments. To these *words*, to this *knowledge*, the ear must be *bowed down* in humility and serious attention and the heart *applied* by faith, and love, and close consideration. The ear will not serve without the heart.

II. Arguments to enforce this exhortation. Consider, 1. The worth and weight of the things themselves which Solomon in this book gives us the *knowledge* of. They are not trivial things, for amusements and diversion, not jocular proverbs, to be repeated in sport and in order to pass away time. No; they are *excellent things*, which concern the glory of God, the holiness and happiness of our souls, the welfare of mankind and all communities; they are *princely things* (so the word is), fit for kings to speak and senates to hear; they are things that concern *counsels and knowledge*, that is, wise counsels, relating to the most important concerns; things which will not only make us knowing ourselves, but enable us to advise others.

2. The clearness of the discovery of these things and the directing of them to us in particular.

"They are *made known*, publicly known, that all may read,—plainly known, that he that runs may read,—*made known this day* more fully than ever before, in this day of light and knowledge,—*made known in this thy day*. But it is only a little while that this light is with thee; perhaps the things that

are *this day made known to thee*, if thou improve not the day of thy visitation, may, before to-morrow, be *hidden from thy eyes*. They are *written*, for the greater certainty, and that they may be received and the more safely transmitted pure and entire to posterity. But that which the emphasis is here most laid upon is that they are *made known to thee, even to thee*, and *written to thee*, as if it were a letter directed to thee by name. It is suited to thee and to thy case; thou mayest in this glass see thy own face; it is intended for thee, to be a rule to thee, and by it thou must be judged." We cannot say of these things, "They are good things, but they are nothing to us;" no, they are of the greatest concern imaginable to us.

3. The agreeableness of these things to us, in respect both of comfort and credit. (1.) If we hide them in our hearts, they will be very pleasing and yield us an abundant satisfaction (v. 18): "*It is a pleasant thing*, and will be thy constant entertainment, *if thou keep them within thee*; if thou digest them, and be actuated and governed by them, and delivered into them as into a mould." The form of godliness, when that is rested in, is but a force put upon a man, and he does but do penance in that white clothing; those only that submit to the power of godliness, and make heart-work of it, find the pleasure of it, ch. ii. 10. (2.) If we make use of them in our discourse, they will be very becoming, and gain us a good reputation. *They shall be fitted in thy lips*. "Speak of these things, and thou speakest like thyself, and as is fit for thee to speak considering thy character; thou wilt also have pleasure in speaking of these things as well as in thinking of them."

4. The advantage designed us by them. The *excellent things* which God has *written to us* are not like the commands which the master gives his servant, which are all intended for the benefit of the master, but like those which the master gives his scholar, which are all intended for the benefit of the scholar. These things must be kept by us, for they are written to us, (1.) That we may have a confidence in him and communion with him. *That thy trust may be in the Lord*, v. 19. We cannot trust in God except in the way of duty; we are *therefore* taught our duty, that we may have reason to trust in God. Nay, this is itself one great duty we are to learn, and a duty that is the foundation of all practical religion, to live a life of delight in God and dependence on him. (2.) That we may have a satisfaction in our own judgment: "*That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth*"; that thou mayest know what is truth, mayest plainly distinguish between it and falsehood, and mayest know upon what grounds thou receivest and believest the truths of God." Note, [1.] It is a desirable thing to know, not only *the words of truth*, but *the certainty of them*, that our faith may be intelligent and rational, and may grow up to a full assurance. [2.] The way to *know the certainty of the words of truth* is to make conscience of our duty; for, *if any man do his will, he shall know* for certain that the doctrine is of God, John vii. 17. (3.) That we may be useful and serviceable to others for their instruction: "*That thou mayest give a good account of the words of truth to those that send to thee to consult thee as an oracle*," or (as the margin reads it) "*to those that send thee, that employ thee as an agent or*

ambassador in any business." Knowledge is given us to do good with, that others may light their candle at our lamp, and that we may in our place serve our generation according to the will of God; and those who make conscience of keeping God's commandments will be best able to *give a reason of the hope that is in them*.

Caution against Oppressing the Poor.

**22 Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: 23 For the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.**

After this solemn preface, one would have expected something new and surprising; but no; here is a plain and common, but very needful caution against the barbarous and inhuman practices of oppressing poor people. Observe,

I. The sin itself, and that is *robbing the poor* and making them poorer, taking from those that have but little to lose and so leaving them nothing. It is bad to rob any man, but most absurd to rob the poor, whom we should relieve,—to squeeze those with our power whom we should water with our bounty,—*to oppress the afflicted*, and so to add affliction to them,—to give judgment against them, and so to patronise those that do rob them, which is as bad as if we robbed them ourselves. Rich men will not suffer themselves to be wronged; poor men cannot help themselves, and therefore we ought to be the more careful not to wrong them.

II. The aggravations of the sin. 1. If their inability, by reason of their poverty, to right themselves, embolden us to rob them, it is so much the worse; this is *robbing the poor because he is poor*; this is not only a base and cowardly thing, to take advantage against a man because he is helpless, but it is unnatural, and proves men worse than beasts. 2. Or, if it be done under the colour of law and justice, that is oppressing *the afflicted in the gate*, where they ought to be protected from wrong and to have justice done them against those that oppress them.

III. The danger that attends this sin. He that robs and oppresses the poor does it at his peril; for, 1. The oppressed will find God their powerful patron. He *will plead their cause*, and not suffer them to be run down and trampled upon. If men will not appear for them, God will. 2. The oppressors will find him a just avenger. He will make reprisals upon them, will *spoil the souls of those that spoil them*; he will repay them in spiritual judgments, in curses to their souls. He that robs the poor will be found in the end a murderer of himself.

Prudential Maxims.

**24 Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: 25 Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.**

Here is, 1. A good caution against being intimate with a passionate man. It is the law of friendship that we accommodate ourselves to our friends and be ready to serve them, and therefore we ought to be wise and wary in the choice of a friend, that we come not under the sacred tie to any one whom it would be our folly to accommodate ourselves to. Though we must be civil to all, yet we must be careful whom we lay in our bosoms and contract a familiarity with. And, among others, a man who is easily provoked, touchy, and apt to resent affronts, who, when he is in a passion, cares not what he says or does, but grows outrageous, such a one is not fit to be made a friend or companion, for he will be ever and anon angry with us and that will be our trouble, and he will expect that we should, like him, be angry with others, and that will be our sin. 2. Good cause given for this caution: *Lest thou learn his way*. Those we go with we are apt to grow like. Our

corrupt hearts have so much tinder in them that it is dangerous conversing with those that throw about the sparks of their passion. We shall thereby *get a snare to our souls*, for a disposition to anger is a great snare to any man, and an occasion of much sin. He does not say, "Lest thou have ill language given thee or get a broken head," but, which is much worse, "Lest thou imitate him, to humour him, and so contract an ill habit."

**26 Be not thou *one* of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. 27 If thou hast**

## **nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?**

We have here, as often before, a caution against suretiship, as a thing both imprudent and unjust. 1. We must not associate ourselves, nor contract an intimacy, with men of broken fortunes, and reputations, who need and will urge their friends to be bound for them, that they may cheat their neighbours to feed their lusts, and by keeping up a little longer may do the more damage at last to those that give them credit. Have nothing to do with such; be not thou among them. 2. We must not cheat people of their money, by *striking hands* ourselves, or *becoming surety for others*, when we *have not to pay*. If a man by the divine providence is disabled to pay his debts, he ought to be pitied and helped; but he that takes up money or goods himself, or is bound for another, when he knows that he has not wherewithal to pay, or that what he has is so settled that the creditors cannot come at it, does in effect pick his neighbour's pocket, and though, in all cases, compassion is to be used, yet he may thank himself if the law have its course and his *bed* be *taken from under him*, which might be taken for a pledge to secure a debt, Exod. xxii. 26, 27. For, if a man appeared to be so poor that he had nothing else to give for security, he ought to be relieved, and it was honestly done to own it; but, for the recovery of a debt, it seems it might be taken by the *summum jus—the strict operation of law*. 3. We must not ruin our own estates and families. Every man ought to be just to himself and to his wife and children; those are not so who live above what they have, who by the mismanagement of their own affairs, or by encumbering themselves with debts of others, waste what they have and bring themselves to poverty. We may *take joyfully the spoiling of our goods* if it be for the testimony of a good conscience; but, if be for our own rashness and folly, we cannot but take it heavily.

## **28 Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.**

1. We are here taught not to invade another man's right, though we can find ways of doing it ever so secretly and plausibly, clandestinely and by fraud, without any open force. Let not property in general be entrenched upon, by robbing men of their liberties and privileges, or of any just ways of

maintaining them. Let not the property of particular persons be encroached upon. The land-marks, or meer-stones, are standing witnesses to every man's right; let not those be removed quite away, for thence come wars, and fightings, and endless disputes; let them not be removed so as to take from thy neighbour's lot to thy own, for that is downright robbing him and entailing the fraud upon posterity. 2. We may infer hence that a deference is to be paid, in all civil matters, to usages that have prevailed time out of mind and the settled constitutions of government, in which it becomes us to acquiesce, lest an attempt to change it, under pretence of changing it for the better, prove of dangerous consequence.

**29 Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.**

Here is, 1. A plain intimation what a hard thing it is to find a truly ingenious industrious man: "*Seest thou a man diligent in his business?* Thou wilt not see many such, so epidemical are dulness and slothfulness." He is here commended who lays out himself to get business, though it be but in a very low and narrow sphere, and is not easy when he is out of business, who loves business, is quick and active in it, and goes through it, not only with constancy and resolution, but with dexterity and expedition, a man of despatch, who knows how to bring a deal of business into a little compass.

2. A moral prognostication of the preferment of such a man; though now he *stands before mean men*, is employed by them and attends upon them, yet he will rise, and is likely enough to *stand before kings*, as an ambassador to foreign kings or prime-minister of state to his own. *Seest thou a man diligent* in the business of religion? He is likely to excel in virtue, and shall stand before the King of kings.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XXIII.

Cautions against Luxury and Covetousness.

**1 When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: 2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou ~~be~~ a man given to appetite. 3 Be not desirous of his dainties: for they *are* deceitful meat.**

The sin we are here warned against is luxury and sensuality, and the indulgence of the appetite in eating and drinking, a sin that most easily besets us. 1. We are here told when we enter into temptation, and are in most danger of falling into this sin: "*When thou sittest to eat with a ruler* thou has great plenty before thee, varieties and dainties, such a table spread as thou has seldom seen; thou are ready to think, as Haman did, of nothing but the honour hereby done thee (Esth. v.

12), and the opportunity thou hast of pleasing thy palate, and forgettest that there is a snare laid for thee." Perhaps the temptation may be stronger, and more dangerous, to one that is not used to such entertainments, than to one that always sits down to a good table. 2. We are here directed to double our guard at such a time. We must, (1.) Apprehend ourselves to be in danger: "*Consider diligently what is before thee*, what meat and drink are before thee, that thou mayest choose that which is safest for thee and which thou art least likely to eat and drink of to excess. Consider what company is before thee, the ruler himself, who, if he be wise and good, will take it as an affront for any of his guests to disorder themselves at his table." And, if when we sit to eat with a ruler, much more when we sit to eat with the ruler of rulers at the Lord's table, must we *consider diligently what is before us*, that we may not in any respect *eat and drink unworthily*, unbecomingly, lest that table

become a snare. (2.) We must alarm ourselves into temperance and moderation: "*Put a knife to thy throat*, that is, restrain thyself, as it were with a sword hanging over thy head, from all excess. Let these words, *Take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day come upon you unawares*—or those, *For all these things, God shall bring thee into judgment*—or those, *Drunkards, shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, be a knife to the throat." The Latins

call luxury *gula*—*the throat*. "Take up arms against that sin. Rather be so abstemious that thy craving appetite will begin to think thy throat cut than indulge thyself in voluptuousness." We must never *feed ourselves without fear* (Jude 12), but we must in a special manner fear when temptation is before us. (3.) We must reason ourselves into a holy contempt of the gratifications of sense: "*If thou be a man given to appetite*, thou must, by a present solution, and an application of the terrors of the Lord, restrain thyself. When thou art in danger of falling into any excess *put a knife to thy throat*; that may serve for once. But that is not enough: lay the axe to the root; mortify that appetite which has such a power over thee: *Be not desirous of dainties*." Note, We ought to observe what is our own iniquity, and, if we find ourselves addicted to flesh-pleasing, we must not only stand upon our guard against temptations from without, but subdue the corruption within. Nature is desirous of food, and we are taught to pray for it, but it is lust that is desirous of dainties, and we cannot in faith pray for them, for frequently they are not food convenient for mind, body, or estate. They are deceitful meat, and therefore David, instead of praying for them, prays against them, Ps. cxli. 4. They are pleasant to the palate, but perhaps rise in the stomach, turn sour there, upbraid a man, and make him sick. They do not yield men the satisfaction they promised themselves from them; for those that are given to appetite, when they have that which is very dainty, are not pleased; they are soon weary of it; they must have something else more dainty. The more a luxurious appetite is humoured and indulged the more humour some and troublesome it grows, and the more hard to please; dainties will surfeit, but never satisfy. But especially they are upon *this* account deceitful meat, that, while they please the body, they prejudice the soul, they overcharge the heart, and unfit it for the service of God, nay, they take away the heart, and alienate the mind from spiritual delights, and spoil its relish of them. Why then should we covet that which will certainly cheat us?

**4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. 5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.**



As some are given to appetite (v. 2) so others to covetousness, and those Solomon here takes to task. Men cheat themselves as much by setting their hearts on money (though it seems most substantial) as by setting them on dainties. Observe,

I. How he dissuades the covetous man from toiling and tormenting himself (v. 4). "Do not *aim to be rich*, to raise an estate, and to make what thou hast in abundance more than it is." We must endeavor to live comfortably, and provide for our children and families, according as our rank and condition are, but we must not seek great things. Be not of those that will be rich, that desire it as their chief good and design it as their highest end, 1 Tim. vi. 9. Covetous men think it is their wisdom, imagining that if they be rich to such a degree they shall be completely happy. *Cease from*

*that wisdom*, for it is a mistake; *a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*, Luke xii. 15. 1. Those that aim at great things fill their hands with business more than they can grasp, so that their life is both a perfect drudgery and a perpetual hurry; but be not thou such a fool; *labour not to be rich*. What thou hast, or doest, be master of it, and not a slave to it as those that *rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness*, and all to be rich. Moderate labour, *that we may have to give*, is our wisdom and duty, Eph. iv. 28. Immoderate labour, that we may have to hoard, is our sin and folly. 2. They fill their heads with projects more than they understand, so that their life is a constant toss of care and fear; but do not thou thus vex thyself: *Cease from thy own wisdom*; go on quietly in the way of thy business, not contriving new ways and setting thy wits to work to find out new inventions. Acquiesce in God's wisdom, and cease from thy own, ch. iii. 5, 6.

II. How he dissuades the covetous man from cheating and deceiving himself by an inordinate love and pursuit of that which is vanity and vexation of spirit; for,

1. It is not substantial and satisfying: "*Wilt thou* be such a fool as to *set thy eyes*, to cause thy eyes to fly with eagerness and violence, *upon that which is not*?" Note, (1.) The things of this world are things that are not. They have a real existence in nature and are the real gifts of Providence, but in the kingdom of grace they are things that are not; they are not a happiness

and portion for a soul, are not what they promise to be nor what we expect them to be; they are a show, a shadow, a sham upon the soul that trusts to them. They are not, for in a little while they will not be, they will not be ours; they perish in the using; the fashion of them passes away. (2.) It is therefore folly for us to set our eyes upon them, to admire them as the best things, to appropriate them to ourselves as our good things, and to aim at them as our mark at which all our actions are levelled, to fly upon them as the eagle upon her prey. "Wilt thou do a thing so absurd in itself? What thou, a reasonable creature, wilt thou dote upon shadows? The eyes are put for rational and intellectual powers; wilt thou throw those away upon such undeserving objects? To set the hands and feet upon the world is well enough, but not the eyes, the eyes of the mind; those were made to contemplate better things. Wilt thou, my son, that professest religion, put such an affront upon God (towards whom the eyes should ever be) and such an abuse upon thy soul?"

2. It is not durable and abiding. Riches are very uncertain things; certainly they are so: *They make themselves wings, and fly away*. The more we cause our eyes to fly upon them the more likely they are to fly away from us. (1.) Riches will leave us. Those that hold them ever so fast cannot hold them long; either they must be taken from us or we must be taken from them. The goods are said to flow away as a stream (Job xx. 28), here to flee as a bird. (2.) Perhaps they may leave us suddenly, when we have taken a great deal of pains for them and begin to take a great deal of pride and pleasure in them. The covetous man sits hatching upon his wealth, and brooding over it, till it is fledged, as the young ones under the hen, and then it is gone. Or, as if a man should be fond of a flight of wild-fowl that light in his field, and call them his own because they are upon his ground, whereas, if he offers to come near them, they take wing immediately and are gone to another man's field. (3.) The wings they fly away upon are of their own making. They have in themselves the

principles of their own corruption, their own moth and rust. They are wasting in their own nature, and like a handful of dust, which, if it be grasped, slips through the fingers. Snow will last awhile, and look pretty, if it be left to lie on the ground where it fell, but, if gathered up and laid in the bosom, it is dissolved and gone immediately. (4.) They go irresistibly and

irrecoverably, as *an eagle toward heaven*, that flies strongly (there is no stopping her), and flies out of sight and out of call (there is no bringing her back); thus do riches leave men, and leave them in grief and vexation if they set their hearts upon them.

**6 Eat thou not the bread of *him that hath* an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: 7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee. 8 The morsel *which* thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.**

Those that are voluptuous and given to appetite (v. 2) are glad to be where there is good cheer stirring, and those that are covetous and saving, that they may spare at home, will be glad to get a dinner at another man's table; and therefore both are here advised not to be forward to accept of every man's invitation, but especially not to thrust themselves in uninvited. Observe, 1. There are those that pretend to bid their friends welcome that are not hearty and sincere in it. They have a fair tongue, and know what they should say: *Eat and drink, saith he*, because it is expected that the master of the feast should so compliment his guests; but they have *an evil eye*, and grudge their guests every bit they eat, especially if they eat freely. They would seem to be liberal in making the entertainment, and would have the credit of it, but they have so great a love to their money, and so little to their friends, that they cannot have the comfort of it, nor any enjoyment of themselves or their friends. The miser's feast is his penance. If a man be so very selfish, and sordid, and mean that he cannot find in his heart to bid his friends welcome to what he has, he ought not to add to that the guilt of dissimulation by inviting them, but let him own himself to be what he is, that *the vile person may not be called liberal nor the churl bountiful*, Isa. xxxii. 5. 2. One can have no comfort in accepting the entertainments that are given grudgingly: "*Eat not thou the bread* of such a man; let him keep it to himself. Do not sponge upon those that are bountiful, nor make thyself burdensome to any; but especially scorn to be beholden to those that are paltry and not sincere. Better have a dinner of herbs, and true welcome, than *dainty meats* without it. Therefore," (1.) "Judge of the man as his mind

is. Thou thinkest to pay thy respect to him as a friend, so thou takest him to be, because he compliments thee, but *as he thinks in his heart so is he*, not as he speaks with his tongue." We are that really, both to God and man, which we are inwardly; and neither religion nor friendship is worth any thing further than as it is sincere. (2.) "Judge of the meat as the digestion is and as it agrees with thee. He bids thee eat freely, but, first or last, he will discover his sordid covetous humour, and *as he thinks in his heart* so will he look, and give thee to understand that thou art not welcome, and then *the morsel thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up*; the very thought of that will make thee even to vomit the meat thou hast eaten, and eat the words thou has spoken in returning his compliments and giving him thanks for his civilities. Thou shalt *lose thy sweet words*, which he has given thee and thou has given him."

## **9 Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.**

We are here directed not to *cast pearls before swine* (Matt. vii. 6) and not to expose things sacred to the contempt and ridicule of profane scoffers. It is our duty to take all fit occasions to speak of divine things; but, 1. There are some that will make a jest of every thing, though it be ever so prudently and pertinently spoken, that will not only despise a wise man's words, but despise even the wisdom of them, that in them which is most improvable for their own edification; they will particularly reproach that, as if it had an ill design upon them, which they must guard against.

2. Those that do so forfeit the benefit of good advice and instruction, and a wise man is not only allowed, but advised, not to *speak in the ears* of such fools; let them be foolish still, and let not precious breath be thrown away upon them. If what a wise man says in his wisdom will not be heard, let him hold his peace, and try whether the wisdom of that will be regarded.

## **10 Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: 11 For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.**

Note, 1. The fatherless are taken under God's special protection; with him they not only find mercy shown to them (Hos. xiv. 3) but justice done for them. He is *their Redeemer*; their *Goël*, their near kinsman, that will take their part and stand up for them with jealousy, as taking himself affronted in the injuries done to them. As their Redeemer *he will plead their cause* against those that do them any injury, and, one way or other, will not only defend their right, and recover it for them, but avenge the wrongs done to them. And he *is mighty*, almighty; his omnipotence is engaged and employed for their protection, and their proudest and most powerful oppressors will not only find themselves an unequal match for this, but will find that it is at their peril to contend with it. 2. Every man therefore must be careful not to injure them in any thing, or to invade their rights, either by a clandestine removal of the old land-marks or by a forcible entry into their fields. Being fatherless, they have none to redress their wrongs, and, being in their childhood, they do not so much as apprehend the wrong that is done them. Sense of honour, and much more the fear of God, would restrain men from offering injury to children, especially fatherless children.

#### Parental Duties.

**12 Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge. 13 Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. 14 Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. 15 My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. 16 Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.**

Here is, 1. A parent instructing his child. He is here brought in persuading him to give his mind to his book, and especially to the scriptures and his catechism, to attend *to the words of knowledge*, by which he might come to know his duty, and danger, and interest, and not to think it enough to give them the hearing, but to apply his heart to them, to delight in them, and bow his will to the authority of them. The heart is *then* applied to the instruction when the instruction is applied to the heart. 2. A parent correcting his child. A tender parent can scarcely find in his heart to do this; it goes much

against the grain. But he finds it is necessary; it is his duty, and therefore he dares not

*withhold correction* when there is occasion for it (*spare the rod and spoil the child*); he *beats him with the rod*, gives him a gentle correction, the *stripes of the sons of men*, not such as we give to beasts. *Beat him with the rod and he shall not die*. The rod will not kill him; nay, it will prevent his killing himself by those vicious courses which the rod will be necessary to restrain him from. For the present *it is not joyous, but grievous*, both to the parent and to the child; but when it is given with wisdom, designed for good, accompanied with prayer, and blessed of God, it may prove a happy means of preventing his utter destruction and *delivering his soul from hell*. Our great care must be about our children's souls; we must not see them in danger of hell without using all possible means, with the utmost care and concern, to snatch them as brands out of everlasting burnings. Let the body smart, so that the spirit be *saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. 3. A parent encouraging his child, telling him, (1.) What was all he expected, nothing but what would be for his own good, that *his heart be wise* and that his *lips speak right things*, that he be under the government of good principles, and that by those principles he particularly maintain a good environment of his tongue. It is to be hoped that those will do *right things* when they grow up who learn to *speak right things* when they are young, and dare not speak any bad words. (2.) What a comfort it would be to him if herein he answered his expectation: "*If thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice*, shall rejoice in thee, *even mine*, who have taken so much care and pains about thee, my heart, that has many a time ached for thee, for which thou shouldst study thus to make a grateful requital." Note, The wisdom of children will be the joy of their parents and teachers, who have no greater joy than to see them *walk in the truth*, 3 John 4. "Children, if you be wise and good, devout and conscientious, God will be pleased with you, and that will be our joy: we shall think our labour in instructing you well bestowed; it will be a comfortable answer for the many prayers we have put up for you; we shall be eased of a great deal of care, shall not need to be so strict and severe in watching over you, and shall consequently be the easier both to you and to ourselves. We shall rejoice in hope that you will be a credit and comfort to us, if we should live to be old, that you will bear up the name of Christ in

your generation, that you will live comfortably in this world and happily in another."

Parental Advice.

**17 Let not thine heart envy sinners: but *be thou* in the fear of the Lord all the day long.**

**18 For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.**

Here is, 1. A necessary caution against entertaining any favourable thoughts of prospering profaneness: "*Let not thy heart envy sinners*"; do not grudge them either the liberty they take to sin or the success they are to be pitied rather than envied. Their prosperity is their portion (Ps. xii. 14), nay, it is their poison," Prov. i. 32. We must not harbour in our hearts any secret discontent at the providence of God, though it seem to smile upon them, nor wish ourselves in their condition. "*Let not thy heart imitate sinners*" (so some read it); do not as they do; walk not in the way with them; use not the methods they take to enrich themselves, though they thrive by them. 2. An excellent direction to maintain high thoughts of God in our minds at all times: *Be thou in the fear of the Lord* every day and *all the day long*. We must be in the fear of the Lord as in our employment, exercising ourselves in holy adorings of God, in subjection to his precepts, submission to his providences, and

a constant care to please him; we must be in it as in our element, taking a pleasure in contemplating God's glory and complying with his will. We must be *devoted to his fear* (Ps. cxix. 38); and governed by it as our commanding principle in all we say and do. All the days of our life we must constantly keep up an awe of God upon our spirits, must pay a deference to his authority, and have a dread of his wrath. We must be always so in his fear as never to be out of it. 3. A good reason for both of these (v. 18): *Surely there is an end*, an end and expectation, as Jer. xxix. 11. *There will be an end of the prosperity of the wicked*, therefore *do not envy them* (Ps. lxxiii. 17); there will be an end of thy afflictions, therefore be not weary of them, an end of thy services, thy work and warfare will be accomplished, *perfect love will shortly cast out fear*, and *thy expectation* of the reward not

only will be *not cut off*, or disappointed, but it will be infinitely outdone. The consideration of the end will help to reconcile us to all the difficulties and discouragements of the way.

**19 Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. 20 Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: 21 For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe *a man* with rags. 22 Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. 23 Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.**

**24 The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise *child* shall have joy of him. 25 Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice. 26 My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways. 27 For a whore *is* a deep ditch; and a strange woman *is* a narrow pit. 28 She also lieth in wait as *for* a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.**

Here is good advice for parents to give to their children; words are put into their mouths, that they may *train them up in the way they should go*. Here we have,

I. An earnest call to young people to attend to the advice of their godly parents, not only to this that is here given, but to all other profitable instructions: "*Here, my son, and be wise*, v. 19. This will be an evidence that thou art wise and a means to make thee wiser." Wisdom, as *faith, comes by hearing*. And again (v. 22): "*Hearken unto thy father who begot thee*, and who therefore has an authority over thee and an affection for thee, and, thou mayest be sure, can have no other design than thy own good." We ought to *give reverence to the fathers of our flesh*, who begot us, and were the instruments of our being; much more ought we to obey and be in subjection to the *Father of our spirits*, who made us and is the author of our



being. And since *the mother* also, from a sense of duty to God and from love to her child, gives him good instructions, let him not *despise her*, nor her advice, *when she is old*. When the mother was grown old we may suppose the children to be grown up; but let them not think themselves past being taught, even by her, but rather respect her the more for the multitude of her years and the wisdom which they teach. Scornful and insolent young men will make a jest, it may be, of the good advice of an aged mother, and think themselves not concerned to heed what an old woman says; but such will have a great deal to answer for another day, not only as having set at nought good counsel, but as having slighted and grieved a good mother, ch. xxx. 17.

II. An argument to enforce this call, taken from the great comfort which this will be to their parents, v. 24, 25. Note, 1. It is the duty of children to study how they may gladden the hearts of their good parents, and do it yet more and more, so that they may *greatly rejoice* in them, even when the *evil days come and the years of which they say they have no pleasure in them* but this, to see their children do well, as *Barzillai* to see *Chimham* preferred. 2. Children will be a joy to their parents if they be *righteous and wise*. Righteousness is true wisdom; those who do good so well for themselves. Those are completely such as they should be who are not only *wise* (that is, knowing and learned), but *righteous* (that is, honest and good), and not only *righteous* (that is, conscientious and well-meaning), but *wise* (that is, prudent and discreet) in the management of themselves. If such the children be, especially all the children, the father and mother will be glad, and think nothing too much that they have done, or do, for them; they will please themselves in them, and give God thanks for them; particularly she that bore them with pain, and nursed them with pains, will rejoice in them, and reckon herself well requited, and the sorrow more than forgotten, because a wise and good man is the product of it, who is a blessing to the world he was born into.

III. Some general precepts of wisdom and virtue.

1. *Guide thy heart in the way*, v. 19. It is the heart that must be taken care of and directed aright;

the motions and affections of the soul must be towards right objects and under a steady guidance. If the heart be guided in the way, the steps will be guided and the conversation well ordered.

2. *Buy the truth and sell it not*, v. 23. Truth is that by which the heart must be guided and governed, for without truth there is no goodness; no regular practices without right principles. It is by the power of truth, known and believed, that we must be kept back from sin and constrained to duty. The understanding must be well-informed with wisdom and instruction, and therefore, (1.) We must buy it, that is, be willing to part with any thing for it. He does not say at what rate we must buy it, because we cannot buy it too dear, but must have it at any rate; whatever it costs us, we shall not repent the bargain. When we are at expense for the means of knowledge, and resolved not to starve so good a cause, then we *buy the truth*. Riches should be employed for the getting of knowledge, rather than knowledge for the getting of riches. When we are at pains in searching after truth, that we may come to the knowledge of it and may distinguish between it and error, then we buy it. *Dii laboribus omnia vendunt—Heaven concedes every thing to the laborious*. When we choose rather to suffer loss in our temporal interest than to deny or neglect the truth they we buy it; and it is a pearl of such great price that we must be willing to part with all to purchase it, must make shipwreck of estate, trade, preferment, rather than of faith and a good conscience. (2.) We must not sell it. Do not part with it for pleasures, honours, riches, any things in this world. Do not neglect the study of it, nor throw off the profession of it, nor revolt from under the dominion of it, for the getting or saving of any secular interest whatsoever. *Hold fast the form of sound words*, and never let it go upon any terms.

3. *Give my thy heart*, v. 26. God in this exhortation, speaks to us as unto children: "Son, Daughter, *Give my thy heart*." The heart is that which the great God requires and calls for from every one of us; whatever we give, if we do not give him our hearts, it will not be accepted. We

must set our love upon him. Our thoughts must converse much with him, and on him, as our highest end. *The intents of our hearts* must be fastened. We must make it our own act and deed to devote ourselves to the Lord, and we must be free and cheerful in it. We must not think to divide the heart

between God and the world; he will have all or none. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.* To this call we must readily answer, "*My father, take my heart,* such as it is, and make it such as it should be; take possession of it, and set up thy throne in it."

4. *Let thy eyes observe my ways;* have an eye to the rule of God's word, the conduct of his providence, and the good examples of his people. Our eyes must observe these, as he that writes observes his copy, that we may keep in the right paths and may proceed and persevere in them.

IV. Some particular cautions against those sins which are, of all sins, the most destructive to the seeds of wisdom and grace in the soul, which impoverish and ruin it. 1. Gluttony and drunkenness, v. 20, 21. The world is full of examples of this sin and temptations to it, which all young people are concerned to stand upon their guard against and keep at a distance from *Be not a wine-bibber*; we are allowed to drink *a little wine* (1 Tim. v. 23), but not much, not to make a trade of it, never to drink to excess. *Be not a riotous eater of flesh*, as the Israelites were, who lusted exceedingly after it, saying, *Who will give us flesh to eat?* Whereas Paul, though he is free to eat flesh, yet resolves that *he will eat no flesh while the world stands rather than make his brother to offend*; so indifferent is he to it, 1 Cor. viii. 13. *Be not an excessive eater of flesh.* Intemperance must be avoided in meat as well as drink. *Be not a luxurious eater of flesh*, not pleased with any thing but what is very nice and delicate, savoury dishes, and forced meat. Some take not only a pleasure, but a pride, in being curious about their diet, and, as they call it, eating well; as if that were the ornament of a gentleman, which is really the shame of a Christian, making a God of the belly. "*Be not a wine bibber, and be not a riotous eater*; and therefore, *be not among wine-bibbers nor among riotous eaters*; do not give them countenance, lest thou learn their ways and insensibly fall into those sins, or at least lose the dread and detestation of them. They covet to have thee among them; for those that are debauched themselves are very desirous to debauch others; therefore do not gratify them, lest thou endanger thyself." He fetches an argument against this sin from the expensiveness of it and its tendency to impoverish men: and if men will not be deterred from it by the ruin it brings on their secular interests, which lie nearest their hearts, no marvel that they are not frightened from it by what they are told out of the word of God of the

mischief it does them in their spiritual and eternal concerns. *The drunkard and the glutton* hate to be reformed, though they are told they *shall come to poverty*, nay, though they are told they shall come to hell. Drunkenness is the cause of *drowsiness*; it stupefies men, and makes them inattentive to business, and then all goes to wreck and ruin: thus men that have lived creditably come to be *clothed with rags*. 2. Whoredom. This is another sin which *takes away the heart* that should be given to God, Hos. iv.

11. He shows the danger which attends that sin, v. 27, 28, (1.) It is a sin from which few recover themselves when once they are entangled in it. It is like *a deep ditch* and *a narrow pit*, which it is almost impossible to get out of; and therefore it is wisdom to keep far enough from the brink of it. Take heed of making any approaches towards this sin, because it is so hard to make a retreat from

it, conscience, which should head the retreat, being debauched by it, and divine grace forfeited.

(2.) It is a sin which bewitches men to their ruin: *The adulteress lies in wait as a robber*; pretending friendship, but designing the greatest mischief, to rob them of all they have that is valuable, to strip them both of their armour and of their ornaments. Even those who, being virtuously educated, endeavour to shun the adulteress, she will *lie in wait* for, that she may assault them when they are off their guard and she has them at an advantage. Let none therefore be at any time secure. (3.) It is a sin that contributes more than any other to the spreading of vice and immorality in a kingdom: *It increases the transgressors among men*. One adulteress may be the ruin of many a precious soul and may help to debauch a whole town. It increases the treacherous or perfidious ones; it not only occasions husbands to be false to their wives and servants to their masters, but many that have professed religion to throw off their profession and break their covenants with God. Houses of uncleanness are therefore such pest-houses as ought to be suppressed by those whose office it is to take care of the public welfare.

Cautions against Intemperance.

**29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds**

without cause? who hath redness of eyes? 30 They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. 31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. 32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. 33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. 35 They have stricken me, *shalt thou say, and* I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and* I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Solomon here gives fair warning against the sin of drunkenness, to confirm what he had said,

v. 20.

I. He cautions all people to keep out of the way of temptations to this sin (v. 31): *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red*. Red wine was in Canaan looked upon as the best wine, it is therefore called *the blood of the grape*. Critics judge of wine, among other indications, by the colour of it; some wine, they say, looks charmingly, looks so well that it even says, "Come and drink me;" *it moves itself aright*, goes down very smoothly, or perhaps the roughness of it is grateful. It is said of generous strong-bodied wine that it even *causes the lips of those that are asleep to speak*, Cant.

vii. 9. But *look not thou upon it*. 1. "Be not ruled by sense, but by reason and religion. Covet not that which pleases the eye, in hopes that it will please the taste; but let thy serious thoughts correct the errors of thy senses and convince thee that that which seems delightful is really hurtful, and resolve against it accordingly. Let not the heart walk after the eye, for it is a deceitful guide." 2. "Be not too bold with the charms of this or any other sin; *look not*, lest thou lust, lest thou take the forbidden fruit." Note Those that would be kept from any sin must keep themselves from all the

occasions and beginnings of it, and be afraid of coming within the reach of its allurements, lest they be overcome by them.

II. He shows the many pernicious consequences of the sin of drunkenness, for the enforcement of this caution. Take heed of the bait, for fear of the hook: *At the last it bites*, v. 32. All sin will be bitterness in the end, and this sin particularly. *It bites like a serpent*, when the drunkard is made sick by his surfeit, thrown by it into a dropsy or some fatal disease, beggared and ruined in his estate, especially when his conscience is awakened and he cannot reflect upon it without horror and indignation at himself, but worst of all, at last, when the cup of drunkenness shall be turned into a cup of trembling, the cup of the Lord's wrath, the dregs of which he must be for ever drinking, and shall not have a drop of water to cool his inflamed tongue. To take off the force of the temptation that there is in the pleasure of the sin, foresee the punishment of it, and what it will at last end in if repentance prevent not. In *its latter end it bites* (so the word is); think therefore what will be *in the end thereof*. But the inspired writer chooses to specify those pernicious consequences of this sin which are present and sensible.

1. It embroils men in quarrels, makes them quarrel with others, and say and do that which gives others occasion to quarrel with them, v. 29. He asks, *Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow?* Who has not, in this world? Many have woe and sorrow, and cannot help it; but drunkards wilfully create woe and sorrow to themselves. Those that have *contentions* have *woe and sorrow*; and drunkards are the fools whose *lips enter into contention*. When the wine is in the wit is out and the passions are up; and thence come drunken scuffles, and drunken frays, and drunken disputes over the cups; many a vexatious ruining law-suit has begun thus. There is *babbling*, quarrels in word and the exchanging of scurrilous language; yet it rests not there: you shall have *wounds without cause*, for causes are things which drunkards are in no capacity to judge of, and therefore they deal blows about without the least consideration why or wherefore, and must expect to be in like manner treated themselves. The wounds which men receive in defence of their country and its just rights are their honour; but *wounds without cause*, received in the service of their lusts, are marks of their infamy. Nay, drunkards wound themselves in a tender part, for they have *redness of eyes*,

symptoms of an inward inflammation; their sight is weakened by it, and their looks are deformed. This comes, (1.) Of drinking long, *tarrying long at the wine*, and spending that time in drunken company which should be spent in useful business, or in sleep, which should fit for business, v. 30. O the precious hours which thousands throw away thus, every one of which will be brought into the account at the great day! (2.) Of drinking that which is strong and intoxicating. *They go up and down to seek wine* that will please them; their great enquiry is, "Where is the best liquor?" *They seek mixed wine*, which is most palatable, but most heady, so willingly do they sacrifice their reason to please their palate!

2. It makes men impure and insolent, v. 33. (1.) The *eyes* grow unruly and *behold strange women* to lust after them, and so let in adultery into the heart. *Est Venus in vinis—Wine is oil to the fire of lust. Thy eyes shall behold strange things* (so some read it); when men are drunk the house turns round with them, and every thing looks strange to them, so that they cannot trust their own eyes. (2.) The tongue also grows unruly and talks extravagantly; by it the *heart utters perverse things*, things contrary to reason, religion, and common civility, which they would be ashamed to

speak if they were sober. What ridiculous incoherent nonsense men will talk when they are drunk who at another time will speak admirably well and to the purpose!

3. It stupefies and besots men, v. 34. When men are drunk they know not where they are nor what they say and do. (1.) Their heads are giddy, and when they lie down to sleep they are as if they were tossed by the rolling waves *of the sea*, or *upon the top of a mast*; hence they complain that their heads swim; their sleep is commonly unquiet and not refreshing, and their dreams are tumultuous. (2.) Their judgments are clouded, and they have no more steadiness and consistency than he that sleeps *upon the top of a mast*: they *drink and forget the law* (ch. xxxi. 5): *they err through wine* (Isa. xxviii. 7), and think as extravagantly as they talk. (3.) They are heedless and fearless of danger, and senseless of the rebukes they are under either from God or man. They are in imminent danger of death, of damnation, lie as much exposed as if they slept *upon the top of a mast*, and yet are secure and sleep on. They fear no peril when the terrors of the Lord are laid before

them; nay, they feel no pain when the judgments of God are actually upon them; they cry not when he binds them. Set a drunkard in the stocks, and he is not sensible of the punishment. *"They have stricken me, and I was not sick; I felt it not: it made no impression at all upon me."* Drunkenness turns me into stocks and stones; they are scarcely to be reckoned animals; they are dead while they live.

4. Worst of all, the heart is hardened in the sin, and the sinner, notwithstanding all these present mischiefs that attend it, obstinately persist in it, and hates to be reformed: *When shall I awake?* Much ado he has to shake off the chains of his drunken sleep; he can hardly get clear of the fumes of the wine, though he strives with them, that (being thirsty in the morning) he may return to it again. So perfectly lost is he to all sense of virtue and honour, and so wretchedly is his conscience seared, that he is not ashamed to say, *I will seek it yet again. There is no hope; no, they have loved drunkards, and after them they will go,* Jer. ii. 25. This is *adding drunkenness to thirst, and following strong drink*; those that do so may read their doom Deut. xxix. 19, 20, their *woe* Isa. v. 11, and, if this be the end of the sin, with good reason were we directed to stop at the beginning of it: *Look not upon the wine when it is red.*

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XXIV.

The Excellence of Wisdom.

**1 Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. 2 For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.**

Here, 1. The caution given is much the same with that which we had before (ch. xxiii. 17), not to envy sinners, not to think them happy, nor to wish ourselves in their condition, though they

prosper ever so much in this world, and are ever so marry and ever so secure. "Let not such a thought ever come into thy mind, O that I could shake off the restraints of religion and conscience, and take as great a



liberty to indulge the sensual appetite, as I see such and such do! No; *desire not to be with them*, to do as they do and fare as they fare, and to *cast in thy lot among them*." 2. Here is another reason given for this caution: "*Be not envious against them*, not only because their end will be had, but because their way is so, v. 2. Do not think with them, *for their heart studies destruction* to others, but it will prove destruction to themselves. Do not speak like them, *for their lips talk of their mischief*. All they say has an ill tendency, to dishonour God, reproach religion, or wrong their neighbour; but it will be mischief to themselves at last. It is therefore thy wisdom to have nothing to do with them. Nor hast thou any reason to look upon them with envy, but with pity rather, or a just indignation at their wicked practices."

**3 Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: 4 And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. 5 A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. 6 For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is safety*.**

We are tempted to envy those that grow rich, and raise their estates and families, by such unjust courses as our consciences will by no means suffer us to use. But, to set aside that temptation, Solomon here shows that a man, with prudent management, may raise his estate and family by lawful and honest means, with a good conscience, and a good name, and the blessing of God upon his industry; and, if the other be raised a little sooner, yet these will last a great deal longer. 1. That which is here recommended to us as having the best influence upon our outward prosperity is *wisdom*, and *understanding*, and *knowledge*; that is, both piety towards God (for that is true wisdom) and prudence in the management of our outward affairs. We must govern ourselves in every thing by the rules of religion first and then of discretion. Some that are truly pious do not thrive in the world, for want of prudence; and some that are prudent enough, yet do not prosper, because they lean to their own understanding and do not acknowledge God in their ways; therefore both must go together to complete a wise man. 2. That which is here set before us as the advantage of true wisdom is that it will

make men's outward affairs prosperous and successful. (1.) it will *build a house and establish it*, v. 3. Men may by unrighteous practices build their houses, but they cannot establish them, for the foundation is rotten (Hab. ii. 9, 10); whereas what is honestly got will wear like steel and be an inheritance to children's children. (2.) It will enrich a house and furnish it, v.

4. Those that manage their affairs with wisdom and equity, that are diligent in the use of lawful means for increasing what they have that spare from luxury and spend in charity, are in a fair way to have their shops, their warehouses, their *chambers, filled with all precious and pleasant riches*—*precious* because got by honest labour, and *the substance of a diligent man is precious*—*pleasant* because enjoyed with holy cheerfulness. Some think this is to be understood chiefly of spiritual riches. *By knowledge the chambers* of the soul are filled with the graces and comforts of the Spirit, those *precious and pleasant riches*; for the Spirit, by enlightening the understanding, performs all his other operations on the soul. (3.) It will fortify a house and turn it

into a castle: *Wisdom is better than weapons of war*, offensive or defensive. *A wise man is in strength*, is in a strong-hold, *yea, a man of knowledge strengthens might*, that is, increases it, v. 5. As we grow in knowledge we grow in all grace, 2 Pet. iii. 18. Those that *increase in wisdom* are *strengthened with all might*, Col. i. 9, 11. A wise man will compass that by his wisdom which a strong man cannot effect by force of arms. The spirit is strengthened both for the spiritual work and the spiritual warfare by true wisdom. (4.) It will govern a house and a kingdom too, and the affairs of both, v. 6. Wisdom will erect a college, or council of state. Wisdom will be of use, [1.] For the managing of the public quarrels, so as not to engage in them but for an honest cause and with some probability of success, and, when they are engaged in, to manage them well, and so as to make either an advantageous peace or an honourable retreat: *By wise counsel thou shalt make war*, which is a thing that may prove of ill consequence if not done by wise counsel. [2.] For the securing of the public peace: *In the multitude of counsellors there is safety*, for one may foresee the danger, and discern the advantages, which another cannot. In our spiritual conflicts we need wisdom, for our enemy is subtle.

**The Malicious and the Scornful.**

**7 Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate. 8 He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. 9 The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men.**

Here is the description, 1. Of a weak man: *Wisdom is too high* for him; he thinks it so, and therefore, despairing to attain it, he will take no pains in the pursuit of it, but sit down content without it. And really it is so; he has not capacity for it, and therefore the advantages he has for getting it are all in vain to him. It is no easy thing to get wisdom; those that have natural parts good enough, yet if they be foolish, that is, if they be slothful and will not take pains, if they be playful and trifling, and given to their pleasures, if they be viciously inclined and keep bad company, it *is too high* for them; they are not likely to reach it. And, for want of it, they are unfit for the service of their country: They *open not their mouth in the gate*; they are not admitted into the council or magistracy, or, if they are, they are dumb statues, and stand for cyphers; they say nothing, because they have nothing to say, and they know that if they should offer any thing it would not be heeded, nay, it would be hissed at. Let young men take pains to get wisdom, that they may be qualified for public business, and do it with reputation. 2. Of a wicked man, who is not only despised as a fool is, but detested. Two sorts of wicked men are so:—(1.) Such as are secretly malicious. Though they speak courteously and conduct themselves plausibly, they *devise to do evil*, are contriving to do an ill turn to those they bear a grudge to, or have an envious eye at. He that does so *shall be called a mischievous person*, or *a master of mischief*, which perhaps was then a common name of reproach; he shall be branded as an *inventor of evil things* (Rom. i. 30), or if any mischief be done, he shall be suspected as the author of it, or at least accessory to it. This *devising evil is the thought of foolishness*, v. 9. It is made light of, and turned off with a jest, as only a foolish thing, but really it *is sin*, it is exceedingly sinful; you cannot call it by a worse name than to call it *sin*. It is bad to do evil, but it is worse to devise it; for that has in it the subtlety and poison of the old serpent. But it

may be taken more generally. We contract guilt, not only by the act of foolishness, but by the thought of it, though it go no further; the first risings

of sin in the heart are sin, offensive to God, and must be repented of or we are undone. Not only malicious, unclean, proud thoughts, but even foolish thoughts, are sinful thoughts. If *vain thoughts lodge in the heart*, they defile it (Jer. iv. 14), which is a reason why we should *keep our hearts with all diligence*, and harbour no thoughts there which cannot give a good account of themselves, Gen. vi. 5. (2.) Such as are openly abusive: *The scorner*, who gives ill-language to every body, takes a pleasure in affronting people and reflecting upon them, *is an abomination to men*; none that have any sense of honour and virtue will care to keep company with him. *The seat of the scornful* is the *pestilential chair* (as the LXX. calls it, Ps.

i. 1), which no wise man will come near, for fear of taking the infection. Those that strive to make others odious do but make themselves so.

## **10 *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.***

Note, 1. In *the day of adversity* we are apt to *faint*, to droop and be discouraged, to desist from our work, and to despair of relief. Our spirits sink, and then our hands hang down and our knees grow feeble, and we become unfit for anything. And often those that are most cheerful when they are well droop most, and are most dejected, when any thing ails them. 2. This is an evidence that our *strength is small*, and is a means of weakening it more. "It is a sign that thou art not a man of any resolution, any firmness of thought, any consideration, any faith (for that is the strength of a soul), if thou canst not bear up under an afflictive change of thy condition." Some are so feeble that they can bear nothing; if a trouble does but *touch* them (Job iv. 5), nay, if it does but threaten them, they faint immediately and are ready to give up all for gone; and by this means they render themselves unfit to grapple with their trouble and unable to help themselves. *Be of good courage* therefore, *and God shall strengthen thy heart*.

Pleasure and Advantages of Wisdom.

**11 If thou forbear to deliver *them that are* drawn unto death, and *those that are* ready to be slain; 12 If thou**

**sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider *it?* and he that keepeth thy soul, doth *not* he know *it?* and shall *not* he render to *every* man according to his works?**

Here is, 1. A great duty required of us, and that is to appear for the relief of oppressed innocency. If we see the lives or livelihoods of any in danger of being taken away unjustly, we ought to bestir ourselves all we can to save them, by disproving the false accusations on which they are condemned and seeking out proofs of their innocency. Though the persons be not such as we are under any particular obligation to, we must help them, out of a general zeal for justice. If any be set upon by force and violence, and it be in our power to rescue them, we ought to do it. Nay, if we see any through ignorance exposing themselves to danger, or fallen in distress, as travellers upon the road, ships at sea, or any the like, it is our duty, though it be with peril to ourselves, to hasten with help to them and not *forbear to deliver them*, not to be slack, or remiss, or indifferent, in such a case. 2. An answer to the excuse that is commonly made for the omission of this duty. Thou wilt say,

"*Behold, we knew it not*; we were not aware of the imminency of the danger the person was in; we

could not be sure that he was innocent, nor did we know how to prove his innocence, nor which way to do any thing in favour of him, else we would have helped him." Now, (1.) It is easy to make such an excuse as this, sufficient to avoid the censures of men, for perhaps they cannot disprove us when we say, *We knew it not*, or, *We forgot*; and the temptation to tell a lie for the excusing of a fault is very strong when we know that it is impossible to be disproved, the truth lying wholly in our own breast, as when we say, *We thought so and so, and really designed it*, which no one is conscious of but ourselves. (2.) It is not so easy with such excuses to evade the judgment of God; and to the discovery of that we lie open and by the determination of that we must abide. Now, [1.] God *ponders the heart and keeps the soul*; he keeps an eye upon it, observes all the motions of it; its most secret thoughts and intents are all naked and open before him. It is his prerogative to do so, and that in which he glories. Jer. xvii. 10, *I the Lord search the heart*. He

*keeps the soul*, holds it in life. This is a good reason why we should be tender of the lives of others, and do all we can to preserve them, because our lives have been precious in the sight of God and he has graciously kept them. [2.] He knows and considers whether the excuse we make be true or no, whether it was because we did not know it or whether the true reason was not because we did not love our neighbour as we ought, but were selfish, and regardless both of God and man. Let this serve to silence all our frivolous pleas, by which we think to stop the mouth of conscience when it charges us with the omission of plain duty: *Does not he that ponders the heart consider it?* [3.] He will judge us accordingly. As his knowledge cannot be imposed upon, so his justice cannot be biassed, but he will *render to every man according to his works*, not only the commission of evil works, but the omission of good works.

**13 My son, eat thou honey, because *it* is good; and the honeycomb, *which* is sweet to thy taste: 14 So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* unto thy soul: when thou hast found *it* then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.**

We are here quickened to the study of wisdom by the consideration both of the pleasure and the profit of it. 1. It will be very pleasant. We *eat honey because it is sweet to the taste*, and upon that account we call it *good*, especially that which runs first from the *honey-comb*. Canaan was said to flow with milk and honey, and honey was the common food of the country (Luke xxiv. 41, 42), even for children, Isa. vii. 15. Thus should we feed upon wisdom, and relish the good instructions of it. Those that have tasted honey need no further proof that it is sweet, nor can they by any argument be convinced of the contrary; so those that have experienced the power of truth and godliness are abundantly satisfied of the pleasure of both; they have tasted the sweetness of them, and all the atheists in the world with their sophistry, and the profane with their banter, cannot alter their sentiments. 2. It will be very profitable. Honey may be *sweet to the taste* and yet not wholesome, but wisdom has a future recompence attending it, as well as a present sweetness in it. "Thou art permitted to *eat honey*, and the agreeableness of it to thy taste invites thee to it; but thou hast much

more reason to relish and digest the precepts *of wisdom*, for *when thou hast found that, there shall be a reward*; thou shalt be paid for thy pleasure, while the servants of sin pay dearly for their pains. Wisdom does indeed set thee to work, but *there shall be a reward*; it does indeed raise great

expectations in thee, but as thy labour, so thy hope, shall not be in vain; *thy expectation shall not be cut off* (ch. xxiii. 18), nay, it shall be infinitely outdone."

Cautions against Envy.

**15 Lay not wait, O wicked *man*, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place: 16 For a just *man* falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.**

This is spoken, not so much by way of counsel to wicked men (they will not receive instruction, ch. xxiii. 9), but rather in defiance of them, for the encouragement of good people that are threatened by them. See here, 1. The designs of the wicked against the righteous, and the success they promise themselves in those designs. The plot is laid deeply: They *lay wait against the dwelling of the righteous*, thinking to charge some iniquity upon it, or compass some design against it; they lie in wait at the door, to catch him when he stirs out, as David's persecutors, Ps. lix. *title*. The hope is raised high; they doubt not but to *spoil his dwelling-place* because he is weak and cannot support it, because his condition is low and distressed, and he is almost down already. All this is a fruit of the old enmity in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright*. 2. The folly and frustration of these designs (1.) The righteous man, whose ruin was expected, recovers himself. He *falls seven times* into trouble, but, by the blessing of God upon his wisdom and integrity, he *riseth again*, sees through his troubles and sees better times after them. The *just man falls*, sometimes *falls seven times* perhaps, into sin, sins of infirmity, through the surprise of temptation; but he *riseth again* by repentance, finds mercy with God, and regains his peace. (2.) *The wicked man*, who expected to see his ruin and to help it forward, is undone. He *falls into mischief*; his sins and his troubles are his utter destruction.

**17 Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: 18 Lest the Lord see *it* and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.**

Here, 1. The pleasure we are apt to take in the troubles of an enemy is forbidden us. If any have done us an ill turn, or if we bear them ill-will only because they stand in our light or in our way, when any damage comes to them (suppose they fall), or any danger (suppose they stumble), our corrupt hearts are too apt to conceive a secret delight and satisfaction in it—*Aha! so would we have it; they are entangled; the wilderness has shut them in*—or, as Tyrus said concerning Jerusalem (Ezek. xxvi. 2) *I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste*. "Men hope in the ruin of their enemies or rivals to wreak their revenge or to find their account; but be not thou so inhuman; *rejoice not when the worst enemy thou hast falls*." There may be a holy joy in the destruction of God's enemies, as it tends to the glory of God and the welfare of the church (Ps. lviii. 10); but in the ruin of our enemies, as such, we must by no means rejoice; on the contrary, we must weep even with them when they weep (as David, Ps. xxxv. 13, 14), and that in sincerity, not so much as letting our hearts be secretly glad at their calamities. 2. The provocation which that pleasure gives to God is assigned as the reason of that prohibition: *The Lord will see it*, though it be hidden in the heart only, *and it will displease him*, as it will displease a prudent father to see one child triumph in the correction of another, which he ought to tremble at, and take warning by, not knowing how soon it may be

his own case, he having so often deserved it. Solomon adds an argument *ad hominem*—*addressed to the individual*: "Thou canst not do a greater kindness to *thy enemy*, when he has fallen, than to rejoice in it; for them, to cross thee and vex thee, God will *turn his wrath from him*; for, as *the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God*, so the righteousness of God was never intended to gratify the wrath of man, and humour his foolish passions; rather than seem to do that he will adjourn the execution of his wrath: nay, it is implied that when he *turns his wrath from him* he will turn it against thee and the cup of trembling shall be put into thy hand."



**19 Fret not thyself because of evil *men*, neither be thou envious at the wicked; 20 For there shall be no reward to the evil *man*; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.**

Here, 1. He repeats the caution he had before given against envying the pleasures and successes of wicked man in their wicked ways. This he quotes from his father David, Ps. xxxvii. 1. We must not in any case *fret* ourselves, or make ourselves uneasy, whatever God does in his providence how disagreeable soever it is to our sentiments, interests, and expectations, we must acquiesce in it. Even that which grieves us must not *fret* us; nor must our eye be evil against any because God is good. Are we more wise or just than he? If wicked people prosper, we must not therefore incline to do as they do. 2. He gives a reason for this caution, taken from the end of that way which wicked man walk in. Envy not their prosperity; for, (1.) There is no true happiness in it: *Thee shall be no reward to the evil man*; his prosperity only serves for his present subsistence; these are all the good things he must ever expect: there is none intended him in the world of retribution. *He has his reward*, Matt. vi. 2. He shall have none. Those are not to be envied that have their portion in this life and must out-live it, Ps. xvii. 14. (2.) There is no continuance in it; their *candle* shines brightly, but it shall presently *be put out*, and a final period put to all their comforts, Job xxi. 14; Ps. xxxvii. 1, 2.

Counsel to Magistrates.

**21 My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: *and* meddle not with them that are given to change: 22 For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?**

Note, 1. Religion and loyalty must go together. As men, it is our duty to honour our Creator, to worship and reverence him, and to be always in his fear; as members of a community, incorporated for mutual benefit, it is our duty to be faithful and dutiful to the government God has set over us, Rom. xiii. 1, 2. Those that are truly religious will be loyal, in conscience towards God; the godly in the land will be the *quite in the land*; and those are not

truly loyal, or will be so no longer than is for their interest, that are not religious. How should he be true to his prince that is false to his God? And, if they come in competition, it is an adjudged case, we must *obey God rather than men*.

2. Innovations in both are to be dreaded. Have nothing to do, he does not say, with those that *change*, for there may be cause to change for the better, but *those that are given to change*, that affect change for change-sake, out of a peevish discontent with that which is and a fondness for novelty, or a desire to fish in troubled waters: *Meddle not with those that are given to change* either in religion or in a civil government; *come not into their secret*; join not with them in their cabals, nor enter into the mystery of their iniquity. 3. Those that are of restless, factious, turbulent spirits, commonly pull mischief upon their own heads ere they are aware: *Their calamity shall rise suddenly*. Though

they carry on their designs with the utmost secrecy, they will be discovered, and brought to condign punishment, when they little think of it. *Who knows* the time and manner of *the ruin* which both God and the king will bring on their contemners, *both* on them and those that meddle with them?

**23 These *things* also *belong* to the wise. *It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.* 24 He that saith unto the wicked, Thou *art* righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: 25 But to them that rebuke *him* shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. 26 *Every man* shall kiss *his* lips that giveth a right answer.**

Here are lessons for *wise* men, that is, judges and princes. As subjects must do their duty, and be obedient to magistrates, so magistrates must do their duty in administering justice to their subjects, both in pleas of the crown and causes between party and party. These are lessons for them. 1. They must always weigh the merits of a cause, and not be swayed by any regard, one way or other, to the parties concerned: *It is not good* in itself, nor can it ever do well, *to have respect of persons in judgment*; the consequences of it

cannot but be the perverting of justice and doing wrong under colour of law and equity. A good judge will know the truth, not know faces, so as to countenance a friend and help him out in a bad cause, or so much as omit any thing that can be said or done in favour of a righteous cause, when it is the cause of an enemy. 2. They must never connive at or encourage wicked people in their wicked practices. Magistrates in their places, and ministers in theirs, are to deal faithfully and the wicked man, though he be a great man or a particular friend, to convict him of his wickedness, to show him what will be in the end thereof, to discover him to others, that they may avoid him. But if those whose office it is thus to show people their transgressions palliate them and connive at them, if they excuse the wicked man, much more if they prefer him and associate with him (which is, in effect, to say, *Thou art righteous*), they shall justly be looked upon as enemies to the public peace and welfare, which they ought to advance, and *the people shall curse them* and cry out shame on them; and even those of other *nations shall abhor them*, as base betrayers of their trust. 3. They must discountenance and give check to all fraud, violence, injustice, and immorality; and, though thereby they may disoblige a particular person, yet they will recommend themselves to the favour of God and man. Let magistrates and ministers, and private persons too that are capable of doing it, *rebuke* the wicked, that they may bring them to repentance or put them to shame, and they shall have the comfort of it in their own bosoms: *To them shall be delight*, when their consciences witness for them that they have been witnesses for God; *and a good blessing shall come upon them*, the blessing of God and good men; they shall be deemed religion's patrons and their country's patriots. See ch. xxviii. 23. 4. They must always give judgment according to equity (v. 26); they must *give a right answer*; that is, give their opinion and pass sentence according to law and them true merits of the cause; and *every one shall kiss his lips that* does so, that is, shall love and honour him, and be subject to his orders, for there is a kiss of allegiance as well as of affection. He that in common conversation likewise speaks pertinently and with sincerity recommends himself to his company and is beloved and respected by all.

**27 Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.**

This is a rule of prudence in the management of household affairs; for all good men should be good husbands, and manage with discretion, which would prevent a great deal of sin, and trouble, and disgrace to their profession. 1. We must prefer necessities before conveniences, and not lay that out for show which should be expended for the support of the family. We must be contented with a mean cottage for a habitation, rather than want, or go in debt for, food convenient. 2. We must not think of building till we can afford it: "First apply thyself to *thy work without in the field*; let thy ground be put into good order; look after thy husbandry, for it is that by which thou must get; and, when thou hast got well by that, then, and not till then, thou mayest think of rebuilding and beautifying *thy house*, for that is it upon which, and in which, thou wilt have occasion to spend." Many have ruined their estates and families by laying out money on that which brings nothing in, beginning *to build* when they were *not able to finish*. Some understand it as advice to young men not to marry (for by that the house is built) till they have set up in the world, and not wherewith to maintain a wife and children comfortably. 3. When we have any great design on foot it is wisdom to take it before us, and make the necessary preparations, before we fall to work, that, when it is begun, it may not stand still for want of materials. Solomon observed this rule himself in building the house of God; all was made ready *before it was brought to the ground*, 1 Kings vi. 7.

**28 Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive *not* with thy lips.**

**29 Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.**

We are here forbidden to be in any thing injurious to our neighbour, particularly in and by the forms of law, either, 1. As *a witness*: "Never bear a testimony against any man *without cause*, unless what thou sayest thou knowest to be punctually true and thou hast a clear call to testify it. Never bear a false testimony against any one;" for it follows, "*Deceive not with thy lips*; deceive not the judge and jury, deceive not those whom thou conversest with, into an ill opinion of thy neighbour. When thou speakest of thy neighbour do not only speak that which is true, but take heed lest, in the manner of thy speaking, thou insinuate any thing that is otherwise and so

shouldst deceive by innuendos or hyperboles." Or, 2. As a plaintiff or prosecutor. If there be occasion to bring an action or information against thy neighbour, let it not be from a spirit of revenge. "*Say not, I am resolved I will be even with him: I will do so to him as he had done to me.*" Even a righteous cause becomes unrighteous when it is thus prosecuted with malice. *Say not, I will render to the man according to his work*, and make him pay dearly for it; for it is God's prerogative to do so, and we must leave it to him, and not step into his throne, or take his work out of his hands. If we will needs be our own carvers, and judges in our own cause, we forfeit the benefit of an appeal to God's tribunal; therefore we must not avenge ourselves, because he has said, *Vengeance is mine.*

The Vineyard of the Slothful.

**30 I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; 31 And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, *and* nettles had covered the face thereof, and**

**the stone wall thereof was broken down. 32 Then I saw, *and* considered *it* well: I looked upon *it* *and* received instruction. 33 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 34 So shall thy poverty come *as* one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.**

Here is, 1. The view which Solomon took of *the field and vineyard of the slothful* man. He did not go on purpose to see it, but, as he passed by, observing the fruitfulness of the ground, as it is very proper for travellers to do, and his subjects' management of their land, as it is very proper for magistrates to do, he cast his eye upon a *field* and a *vineyard* unlike all the rest; for, though the soil was good, yet there was nothing growing in them but *thorns and nettles*, not here and there one, but they were all overrun with weeds; and, if there had been any fruit, it would have been eaten up by the beasts, for there was no fence: *The stone-wall was broken down* See the effects of that curse upon the ground (Gen. iii. 18), "*Thorns and thistles*

*shall it bring forth unto thee*, and nothing else unless thou take pains with it." See what a blessing to the world the husbandman's calling is, and what a wilderness this earth, even Canaan itself, would be without it. *The king himself is served of the field*, but he would be ill served if God did not teach the husbandman discretion and diligence to clear the ground, plant it, sow it, and fence it. See what a great difference there is between some and others in the management even of their worldly affairs, and how little some consult their reputation, not caring though they proclaim their slothfulness, in the manifest effects of it, to all that pass by, shamed by their neighbour's diligence. 2. The reflections which he made upon it. He paused a little *and considered it, looked again upon it, and received instruction*. He did not break out into any passionate censures of the owner, did not call him any ill names, but he endeavoured himself to get good by the observation and to be quickened by it to diligence. Note, Those that are to give instruction to others must receive instruction themselves, and instruction may be received, not only from what we read and hear, but from what we see, not only from what we see of the works of God, but from what we see of the manners of man, not only from men's good manners, but from their evil manners. Plutarch relates a saying of Cato Major, "That wise men profit more by fools than fools by wise men; for wise men will avoid the faults of fools, but fools will not imitate the virtues of wise men." Solomon reckoned that he *received instruction* by this sight, though it did not suggest to him any new notion or lesson, but only put him in mind of an observation he himself had formerly made, both of the ridiculous folly of the sluggard (who, when he has needful work to do, lies dozing in bed and cries, *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber*, and still it will be a little more, till he has slept his eyes out, and, instead of being fitted by sleep for business, as wise men are, he is dulled, and stupefied, and made good for nothing) and of certain misery that attends him: his *poverty comes as one that travels*; it is constantly coming nearer and nearer to him, and will be upon him speedily, and want seizes him as irresistibly *as an armed man*, a highwayman that will strip him of all he has. Now this is applicable, not only to our worldly business, to show what a scandalous thing slothfulness in that is, and how injurious to the family, but to the affairs of our souls. Note, (1.) Our souls are our fields and vineyards, which we are every one of us to take care of, to dress, and to keep. They are capable of being improved with good husbandry; that may

be got out of them which will be fruit abounding to our account. We are charged with them, to occupy

them till our Lord come; and a great deal of care and pains it is requisite that we should take about them. (2.) These fields and vineyards are often in a very bad state, not only no fruit brought forth, but all overgrown with *thorns* and *nettles* (scratching, stinging, inordinate lusts and passions, pride, covetousness, sensuality, malice, those are the thorns and nettles, the wild grapes, which the unsanctified heart produces), no guard kept against the enemy, but the *stone-wall broken down*, and all lies in common, all exposed. (3.) Where it is thus it is owing to the sinner's own slothfulness and folly. He is a sluggard, loves sleep, hates labour; and he is void of understanding, understands neither his business nor his interest; he is perfectly besotted. (4.) The issue of it will certainly be the ruin of the soul and all its welfare. It is everlasting want that thus comes upon it as an armed man. We know the place assigned to the wicked and slothful servant.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XXV.

Pleasures and Advantages of Wisdom.

#### **1 These *are* also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.**

This verse is the title of this latter collection of Solomon's proverbs, for he *sought out and set in order many proverbs*, that by them he might be still *teaching the people knowledge*, Eccl. xii.

9. Observe, 1. The proverbs were Solomon's, who was divinely inspired to deliver, for the use of the church, these wise and weighty sentences; we have had many, but still there are more. Yet herein Christ is greater than Solomon, for if we had all upon record that Christ said, and did, that was instructive, *the world could not contain the books that would be written*, John xxi. 25. 2. The publishers were Hezekiah's servants, who, it is likely, herein acted as his servants, being appointed by him to do this good service

to the church, among other good offices that he did *in the law and in the commandments*, 2 Chron. xxxi. 21. Whether he employed the prophets in this work, as Isaiah, Hosea, or Micah, who lived in his time, or some that were trained up in the schools of the prophets, or some of the priests and Levites, to whom we find him giving a charge concerning divine things

(2 Chron. xxix. 4), or (as the Jews think) his princes and ministers of state, who were more properly called his *servants*, is not certain; if the work was done by Eliakim, and Joah, and Shebna, it was no diminution to their character. They copied out these proverbs from the records of Solomon's reign, and published them as an appendix to the former edition of this book. It may be a piece of very good service to the church to publish other man's works that have lain hidden in obscurity, perhaps a great while. Some think they culled these out of the 3000 proverbs which Solomon spoke (1 Kings iv. 32), leaving out those that were physical, and that pertained to natural philosophy, and

preserving such only as were divine and moral; and in this collection some observe that special regard was had to those observations which concern kings and their administration.

Prudential Maxims.

**2 *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.* 3 The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.**

Here is, 1. An instance given of the honour of God: *It is his glory to conceal a matter*. He needs not search into any thing, for he perfectly knows every thing by a clear and certain view, and nothing can be hidden from him; and yet his own *way is in the sea* and his *path in the great waters*. There is an unfathomable depth in his counsels, Rom. xi. 33. It is but a little portion that is heard of him. *Clouds and darkness are round about him*. We see what he does, but we know not the reasons. Some refer it to the sins of men; it is his glory to pardon sin, which is covering it, not remembering it, not mentioning it; his forbearance, which he exercises towards sinners, is



likewise his honour, in which he seems to keep silence and take no notice of the matter. 2. A double instance of the honour of kings:—(1.) It is God's glory that he needs not *search into a matter*; because he knows it without search; but it is the honour of kings, with a close application of mind, and by all the methods of enquiry, to search out the matters that are brought before them, to take pains in examining offenders, that they may discover their designs and bring to light the hidden works of darkness, not to give judgment hastily or till they have weighed things, nor to leave it wholly to others to examine things, but to see with their own eyes. (2.) It is God's glory that he cannot himself be found out by searching, and some of that honour is devolved upon kings, wise kings, that *search out matters*; their *hearts* are *unsearchable*, like the *height of heaven* or the *depth of the earth*, which we may guess at, but cannot measure. Princes have their *arcana imperii*—*state secrets*, designs which are kept private, and reasons of state, which private persons are not competent judges of, and therefore ought not to pry into. Wise princes, when they *search into a matter*, have reaches which one would not think of, as Solomon, when he called of a sword to divide the living child with, designing thereby to discover the true mother.

**4 Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. 5 Take away the wicked *from* before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.**

This shows that the vigorous endeavour of a prince to suppress vice, and reform the manners of his people, is the most effectual way to support his government. Observe, 1. What the duty of magistrates is: To *take away the wicked*, to use their power for the terror of evil works and evil workers, not only to banish those that are vicious and profane from their presence, and forbid them the court, but so to frighten them and restrain them that they may not spread the infection of their wickedness among their subjects. This is called *taking away the dross from the silver*, which is done by the force of fire. Wicked people are the dross of a nation, the scum of the country, and, as such, to be taken away. If men will not take them away, God will, Ps. cxix. 119. If the *wicked be taken away from before the king*, if he abandon them and show his detestation of their wicked courses, it will go far towards the disabling of them to do mischief. The reformation of the court

will promote the reformation of the kingdom, Ps. ci. 3, 8. 2. What the advantage will be of their doing this duty. (1.) It will be the bettering of the subjects; they shall be made like silver refined, fit to be made *vessels of honour*. (2.) It will be the settling of the prince. *His throne shall be established in this righteousness*, for God will bless his government, the people will be pliable to it, and so it will become durable.

**6 Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great *men*: 7 For better *it is* that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.**

Here we see, 1. That religion is so far from destroying good manners that it reaches us to behave ourselves lowly and reverently towards our superiors, to keep our distance, and give place to those to whom it belongs "*Put not forth thyself* rudely and carelessly *in the king's presence*, or in the presence of great men; do not *compare with them*" (so some understand it); "do not vie with them in apparel, furniture, gardens, house-keeping, or retinue, for that is an affront to them and will waste thy own estate." 2. That religion teaches us humility and self-denial, which is a better lesson than that of good manners: "Deny thyself the place thou art entitled to; covet not to

make a fair show, nor air at preferment, nor thrust thyself into the company of those that are above thee; be content in a low sphere if that is it which God has allotted to thee." The reason he gives is because this is really the way to advancement, as our Saviour shows in a parable that seems to be borrowed from this, Luke xiv. 9. Not that we must *therefore* pretend modesty and humility, and make a stratagem of it, for the courting of honour, but *therefore* we must really be modest and humble, because God will put honour on such and so will men too. It is better, more for a man's satisfaction and reputation, to be advanced above his pretensions and expectations, than to be thrust down below them, *in the presence of the prince*, whom it was a great piece of honour to be admitted to the sight of and a great piece of presumption to look upon without leave.

**8 Go not forth hastily to strive, lest *thou know not* what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. 9 Debate thy cause with thy neighbour *himself*; and discover not a secret to another: 10 Lest he that heareth *it* put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.**

I. Here is good counsel given about going to law:—1. "Be not hasty in bringing an action, before thou hast thyself considered it, and consulted with thy friends about it: *Go not forth hastily to strive*; do not send for a writ in a passion, or upon the first appearance of right on thy side, but weigh the matter deliberately, because we are apt to be partial in our own cause; consider the certainty of the expenses and the uncertainty of the success, how much care and vexation it will be the occasion of, and, after all, the cause may go against thee; surely then thou shouldst not *go forth hastily to strive*." 2. "Bring not an action before thou hast tried to end the matter amicably ( v. 9): *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour* privately, and perhaps you will understand one another better and see that there is no occasion to go to law." In public quarrels the war that must at length end might better have been prevented by a treaty of peace, and a great deal of blood and treasure spared. It is so in private quarrels: "Sue not thy neighbour as a *heathen man and a publican* until thou hast

told him his fault between thee and him alone, and he has refused to refer the matter, or to come to an accommodation. Perhaps the matter in variance is a secret, not fit to be divulged to any, much less to be brought upon the stage before the country; and therefore end it privately, that it may not be discovered." *Reveal not the secret of another*; so some read it. "Do not, in revenge, to disgrace thy adversary, disclose that which should be kept private and which does not at all belong to the cause."

II. Two reasons he gives why we should be thus cautious in going to law:—

1. "Because otherwise the cause will be in danger of going against thee, and thou wilt *not know what to do* when the defendant has justified himself in what thou didst charge upon him, and made it out that thy complaint was frivolous and vexatious and that thou hadst no just cause of action, and so *put thee to shame*, non-suit thee, and force thee to pay costs, all which might have been prevented by a little consideration." 2. "Because it will turn very much to thy reproach if thou fall under the character of being litigious. Not only the defendant himself (v. 8), but he that hears the cause tried will *put thee to shame*, will expose thee as a man of no principle, and *thy infamy will not turn away*; thou wilt never retrieve thy reputation."

Instructive Similes.

**11 A word fitly spoken is *like* apples of gold in pictures of silver. 12 As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.**

Solomon here shows how much it becomes a man, 1. To speak pertinently: *A word upon the wheels*, that runs well, is well-circumstanced, in proper time and place—instruction, advice, or comfort, given seasonably, and in apt expressions, adapted to the case of the person spoken to and agreeing with the character of the person speaking—is *like golden* balls resembling *apples*, or like true apples of a golden colour (golden rennets), or perhaps gilded, as sometimes we have gilded laurels, and those embossed *in pictures of silver*; or rather brought to table in a silver network basket, or in a silver box of that which we call *filigree*—work, through which the golden apples might be seen. Doubtless it was some ornament of the table, then

well known. As that was very pleasing to the eye, so is *a word fitly spoken* to the ear. 2. Especially to give a reproof with discretion, and so as to make it acceptable. If it be well given, by *a wise reprover*, and well taken, by an *obedient ear*, it is an *earring of gold* and an *ornament of fine gold*, very graceful and well becoming both the reprover and the reproofed; both will have their praise, the reprover for giving it so prudently and the reproofed for taking it so patiently and making a good use of it. Others will commend them both, and they will have satisfaction in each other; he who gave the reproof is pleased that it had the desired effect, and he to whom it was given has reason to be thankful for it as a kindness. *That is well given*, we say, *that is well taken*; yet it does not always prove that that is well taken which is well given. It were to be wished that a *wise reprover* should always meet with an *obedient ear*, but often it is not so.

### **13 As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.**

See here, 1. What ought to be the care of a servant, the meanest that is sent on an errand and entrusted with any business, much more the greatest, the agent and ambassador of a prince; he ought to be *faithful to him that sends him*, and to see to it that he do not, by mistake or with design, falsify his trust, and that he be in nothing that lies in his power wanting to his master's interest. Those that act as factors, by commission, ought to act as carefully as for themselves. 2. How much this will be the satisfaction of the master; it will *refresh his soul* as much as ever the *cold of snow* (which is hot countries they preserve by art all the year round) refreshed the labourers in the harvest, that *bore the burden and heat of the day*. The more important the affair was, and the more fear of its miscarrying, the more acceptable is the messenger, if he have managed it successfully and well. A faithful minister, Christ's messenger, should be thus acceptable to us (Job xxxiii. 23); however, he will be a *sweet savour to God*, 2 Cor. ii. 15.

### **14 Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.**

*He may be said to boast of a false gift, 1. Who pretends to have received or given that which he never had, which he never gave, makes a noise of his great accomplishments and his good services, but it is all false; he is not what he pretends to be. Or, 2. Who promises what he will give and what he will do, but performs nothing, who raises people's expectations of the mighty things he will do for his country, for his friends, what noble legacies he will leave, but either he has not wherewithal to do what he says or he never designs it. Such a one is like the morning-cloud, that passes away, and disappoints those who looked for rain from it to water the parched ground (Jude*

*12), clouds without water.*

**Miscellaneous Maxims.**

### **15 By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.**

Two things are here recommended to us, in dealing with others, as likely means to gain our point:—1. Patience, to bear a present heat without being put into a heat by it, and to wait for a fit opportunity to offer our reasons and to give persons time to consider them. By this means even a *prince* may be *persuaded* to do a thing which he seemed very averse to, much more a common person. That which is justice and reason now will be so another time, and therefore we need not urge them with violence now, but wait for a more convenient season. 2. Mildness, to speak without passion or provocation: *A soft tongue breaks the bone*; it mollifies the roughest spirits and overcomes those that are most morose, like lightning, which, they say, has sometimes broken the bone, and yet not pierced the flesh. Gideon with a soft tongue pacified the Ephraimites and Abigail turned away David's wrath. *Hard words*, we say, *break no bones*, and therefore we should bear them patiently; but, it seems, *soft words* do, and therefore we should, on all occasions, give them prudently.

### **16 Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.**

Here, 1. We are allowed a sober and moderate use of the delights of sense: *Hast thou found honey?* It is not forbidden fruit to thee, as it was to Jonathan; thou mayest eat of it with thanksgiving to God, who, having created things grateful to our senses, has given us leave to make use of them. *Eat as much as is sufficient*, and no more. *Enough is as good as a feast.* 2. We are cautioned to take

heed of excess. We must use all pleasures as we do honey, with a check upon our appetite, lest we take more than does us good and make ourselves sick with it. We are most in danger of surfeiting upon that which is most sweet, and therefore those that fare sumptuously every day have need to watch over themselves, *lest their hearts be at any time overcharged.* The pleasures of sense lose their sweetness by the excessive use of them and become nauseous, as honey, which turns sour in the stomach; it is therefore our interest, as well as our duty, to use them with sobriety.

## **17 Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.**

Here he mentions another pleasure which we must not take too much of, that of visiting our friends, the former for fear of surfeiting ourselves, this for fear of surfeiting our neighbour. 1. It is a piece of civility to visit our neighbours sometimes, to show our respect to them and concern for them, and to cultivate and improve mutual acquaintance and love, and that we may have both the satisfaction and advantage of their conversation. 2. It is wisdom, as well as good manners, not to be troublesome to our friends in our visiting them, not to visit too often, nor stay too long, nor contrive to come at meal-time, nor make ourselves busy in the affairs of their families; hereby we make ourselves cheap, mean, and burdensome. Thy neighbour, who is thus plagued and haunted with thy visits, will be *weary of thee and hate thee*, and *that* will be the destruction of friendship which should have been the improvement of it. *Post tres sæpe dies piscis vilescit et hospes—After the third day fish and company become distasteful.* Familiarity breeds contempt. *Nulli te facias nimis sodalem—Be not too intimate with any.* He that sponges upon his friend loses him. How much better a friend then is God than any other friend; for we need not withdraw our foot from his

house, the throne of his grace (ch. viii. 34); the oftener we come to him the better and the more welcome.

## **18 A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.**

Here, 1. The sin condemned is *bearing false witness against our neighbour*, either in judgment or in common conversation, contrary to the law of the ninth commandment. 2. That which it is here condemned for is the mischievousness of it; it is in its power to ruin not only men's reputation, but their lives, estates, families, all that is dear to them. A false testimony is every thing that is dangerous; it is *a maul* (or *club* to knock a man's brains out with), a flail, which there is no fence against; it is *a sword* to wound near at hand and a *sharp arrow* to wound at a distance; we have therefore need to pray, *Deliver my soul, O Lord! from lying lips*, Ps. cxx. 2.

## **19 Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.**

1. The *confidence of an unfaithful man* (so some read it) will be *like a broken tooth*; his policy, his power, his interest, all that which he trusted in to support him in his wickedness, will fail him in time of trouble, Ps. lii. 7. 2. *Confidence in an unfaithful man* (so we read it), in a man whom we thought trusty and therefore depended on, but who proves otherwise; it proves not only unserviceable, but painful and vexatious, like a *broken tooth, or a foot out of joint*, which, when we put any stress upon it, not only fails us, but makes us feel from it, especially *in time of trouble*, when we most

expect help from it; it is like a broken reed, Isa. xxxvi. 6. Confidence in a faithful God, in time of trouble, will not prove thus; on him we may rest and in him dwell at ease.

## **20 As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.**



1. The absurdity here censured is *singing songs to a heavy heart*. Those that are in great sorrow are to be comforted by sympathizing with them, condoling with them, and concurring in their lamentation. If we take that method, the *moving of our lips may assuage their grief* (Job xvi. 5); but we take a wrong course with them if we think to relieve them by being merry with them, and endeavouring to make them merry; for it adds to their grief to see their friends so little concerned for them; it puts them upon ripping up the causes of their grief, and aggravating them, and makes them harden themselves in sorrow against the assaults of mirth. 2. The absurdities this is compared to are, *taking away a garment* from a man in *cold weather*, which makes him colder, and pouring *vinegar upon nitre*, which, like water upon lime, puts it into a ferment; so improper, so incongruous, is it to sing pleasant songs to one that is of a sorrowful spirit. Some read it in a contrary sense: *As he that puts on a garment in cold weather* warms the body, or as *vinegar upon nitre* dissolves it, so he that *sings songs* of comfort to a person in sorrow refreshes him and dispels his grief.

Forgiveness of Enemies.

**21 If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: 22 For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.**

By this it appears that, however the scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the law, not only the commandment of loving our brethren, but even that of loving our enemies, was not only a new, but also an old commandment, an Old-Testament commandment, though our Saviour has given it to us with the new enforcement of his own great example in loving us when we were enemies. Observe, 1. How we must express our love to our enemies by the real offices of kindness, even those that are expensive to ourselves and most acceptable to them: "If they be *hungry* and *thirsty*, instead of pleasing thyself with their distress and contriving how to cut off supplies from them, relieve them, as Elisha did the Syrians that came to apprehend him," 2 King vi. 22. 2. What encouragement we have to do so. (1.) It will be a likely means to win upon them, and bring them over to be reconciled to us; we shall mollify them as the refiner melts the metal in the crucible, not only by putting it over the fire, but by heaping coals of fire upon it. The way to turn

an enemy into a friend is, to act towards him in a friendly manner. If it do not gain him, it will aggravate his sin and punishment, and heap the burning coals of God's wrath upon his head, as rejoicing in his calamity may be an occasion of God's turning his wrath from him, ch. xxiv. 17. (2.) However, we shall be no losers by our self-denial: "Whether he relent towards thee or no, *the Lord shall reward thee*; he shall forgive thee who thus showest thyself to be of a forgiving spirit. He shall provide for thee when thou art in distress (though thou hast been evil and ungrateful), as thou dost for thy enemy; at least it shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, when kindnesses done to our enemies shall be remembered as well as those shown to God's friends."

Miscellaneous Maxims.

## **23 The north wind driveth away rain: so *doth* an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.**

Here see, 1. How we must discourage sin and witness against it, and particularly the sin of slandering and backbiting; we must frown upon it, and, by giving it an angry countenance, endeavour to put it out of countenance. Slanders would not be so readily spoken as they are if they were not readily heard; but good manners would silence the slanderer if he saw that his tales displeased the company. We should show ourselves uneasy if we heard a dear friend, whom we value, evil-spoken of; the same dislike we should show of evil-speaking in general. If we cannot otherwise reprove, we may do it by our looks. 2. The good effect which this might probably have; who knows but it may silence and drive away a *backbiting tongue*? Sin, if it be countenanced, becomes daring, but, if it receive any check, it is so conscious of its own shame that it becomes cowardly, and this sin in particular, for many abuse those they speak of only in hopes to curry favour with those they speak to.

## **24 *It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.***

This is the same with what he had said, ch. xxi. 9. Observe, 1. How those are to be pitied that are unequally yoked, especially with such as are

brawling and contentious, whether husband or wife; for it is equally true of both. It is better to be alone than to be joined to one who, instead of being a meet-help, is a great hindrance to the comfort of life. 2. How those may sometimes be envied that live in solitude; as they want the comfort of society, so they are free from the vexation of it. And as there are cases which give occasion to say, "Blessed is the womb that has not borne," so there are which give occasion to say, "Blessed is the man who was never married, but who lies like a servant in *a corner of the house-top*."

## **25 *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.***

See here, 1. How natural it is to us to desire to hear good news from our friends, and concerning our affairs at a distance. It is sometimes with impatience that we expect to hear from abroad; our souls thirst after it. But we should check the inordinateness of that desire; if it be bad news, it will come too soon, if good, it will be welcome at any time. 2. How acceptable such good news will be when it does come, as refreshing as cold water to one that is thirsty. Solomon himself had much trading abroad, as well as correspondence by his ambassadors with foreign courts; and how pleasant it was to hear of the good success of his negotiations abroad he well knew by experience. Heaven is a country afar off; how refreshing is it to hear good news thence, both in the everlasting gospel, which signified glad tidings, and in the witness of the Spirit with our spirits that we are God's children.

## **26 *A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.***

It is here represented as a very lamentable thing, and a public grievance, and of ill consequence to many, like the *troubling* of a *fountain* and the *corrupting* of a *spring*, for the righteous to *fall down before the wicked*, that is, 1. For the righteous to fall into sin in the sight of the wicked—for

them to do any thing unbecoming their profession, which is *told in Gath*, and *published in the streets of Ashkelon*, and in which the *daughters of the Philistines rejoice*. For those that have been *in reputation for wisdom and honour* to fall from their excellency, this *troubles the fountains* by grieving

some, and *corrupts the springs* by infecting others and emboldening them to do likewise.

2. For the righteous to be oppressed, and run down, and trampled upon, by the violence or subtlety of evil men, to be displaced and thrust into obscurity, this is the troubling of the fountains of justice and corrupting the very springs of government, ch. xxviii. 12, 28; xxix. 2. 3. For the righteous to be cowardly, to truckle to the wicked, to be afraid of opposing his wickedness and basely to yield to him, this is a reflection upon religion, a discouragement to good men, and strengthens the hands of sinners in their sins, and so is like a *troubled fountain* and a *corrupt spring*.

## **27 *It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.***

I. Two things we must be graciously dead to:—1. To the pleasures of sense, for *it is not good to eat much honey*; though it pleases the taste, and, if eaten with moderation, is very wholesome, yet, if eaten to excess, it becomes nauseous, creates bile, and is the occasion of many diseases. It is true of all the delights of the children of men that they will surfeit, but never satisfy, and they are dangerous to those that allow themselves the liberal use of them. 2. To the praise of man. We must not be greedy of that any more than of pleasure, because, *for men to search their own glory*, to court applause and covet to make themselves popular, is not their glory, but their shame; every one will laugh at them for it; and the glory which is so courted *is not glory* when it is got, for it is really no true honour to a man.

II. Some give another sense of this verse: *To eat much honey is not good*, but to search into glorious and excellent things is a great commendation, it is true glory; we cannot therein offend by excess. Others thus: "As honey, though pleasant to the taste, if used immoderately, oppresses the stomach, so an over-curious search into things sublime and glorious, though pleasant to us, if we pry too far, will overwhelm our capacities with a greater glory and lustre than they can bear." Or thus: "You may be surfeited with eating too much honey, but the last of glory, of their glory, the glory of the blessed, is glory; it will be ever fresh, and never pall the appetite."

**28 He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit is *like* a city that is broken down, and without walls.**

Here is, 1. The good character of a wise and virtuous man implied. He is one that has *rule over his own spirit*; he maintains the government of himself, and of his own appetites and passions, and does not suffer them to rebel against reason and conscience. He has the rule of his own thoughts, his desires, his inclinations, his resentments, and keeps them all in good order. 2. The bad case of a vicious man, who has not this rule over his own spirit, who, when temptations to excess in eating or drinking are before him, has no government of himself, when he is provoked breaks out into exorbitant passions, such a one is *like a city that is broken down and without walls*. All that is good goes out, and forsakes him; all that is evil breaks in upon him. He lies exposed to all the temptations of Satan and becomes an easy prey to that enemy; he is also liable to many troubles and vexations; it is likewise as much a reproach to him as it is to a city to have its walls ruined, Neh. i. 3.

## **P R O V E R B S**

### **CHAP. XXVI.**

**Proper Treatment of Fools.**

**1 As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.**

Note, 1. It is too common a thing for honour to be given to fools, who are utterly unworthy of it and unfit for it. Bad men, who have neither wit nor grace, are sometimes preferred by princes, and applauded and cried up by the people. *Folly is set in great dignity*, as Solomon observed, Eccl.

x. 6. 2. It is very absurd and unbecoming when it is so. It is an incongruous *as snow in summer*, and as great a disorder in the commonwealth as that is in the course of nature and in the seasons of the year; nay, it is as injurious *as rain in harvest*, which hinders the labourers and spoils the fruits of the earth when they are ready to be gathered. When bad men are in power they

commonly abuse their power, in discouraging virtue, and giving countenance to wickedness, for want of wisdom to discern it and grace to detest it.

## **2 As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.**

Here is, 1. The folly of passion. It makes men scatter *causeless curses*, wishing ill to others upon presumption that they are bad and have done ill, when either they mistake the person or misunderstand the fact, or they call evil good and good evil. Give honour to a fool, and he thunders out his anathemas against all that he is disgusted with, right or wrong. Great men, when wicked, think they have a privilege to keep those about them in awe, by cursing them, and swearing at them, which yet is an expression of the most impotent malice and shows their weakness as much as their wickedness. 2. The safety of innocency. He that is cursed without cause, whether by furious imprecations or solemn anathemas, the curse shall do him no more harm than the bird that flies over his head, than Goliath's curses did to David, 1 Sam. xvii. 43. It will fly away like the sparrow or the wild dove, which go nobody knows where, till they return to their proper place, as the curse will at length return upon the head of him that uttered it.

## **3 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.**

Here, 1. Wicked men are compared to *the horse* and *the ass*, so brutish are they, so unreasonable, so unruly, and not to be governed but by force or fear, so low has sin sunk men, so much below themselves. Man indeed is *born like the wild ass's colt*, but as some by the grace of God are changed, and become rational, so others by custom in sin are hardened, and become more and more sottish, *as the horse and the mule*, Ps. xxxii. 9. 2. Direction is given to use them accordingly. Princes, instead of giving *honour to a fool* (v. 1), must put disgrace upon him—instead of putting power into his hand, must exercise power over him. A *horse* unbroken needs *a whip* for correction, and an *ass* *a bridle* for direction and to check him when he would turn out of the way; so a vicious man, who will not be under the guidance and restraint of religion and reason, ought to be whipped and

bridled, to be rebuked severely, and made to smart for what he has done amiss, and to be restrained from offending any more.

**4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.**

See here the noble security of the scripture-style, which seems to contradict itself, but really does not. Wise men have need to be directed how to deal with fools; and they have never more need of wisdom than in dealing with such, to know when to keep silence and when to speak, for there may be a time for both. 1. In some cases a wise man will not set his wit to that of a fool so far as to *answer him according to his folly* "If he boast of himself, do not answer him by boasting of thyself. If he rail and talk passionately, do not thou rail and talk passionately too. If he tell one great lie, do not thou tell another to match it. If he calumniate thy friends, do not thou calumniate his. If he banter, do not answer him in his own language, *lest thou be like him*, even thou, who knowest better things, who hast more sense, and hast been better taught." 2. Yet, in other cases, a wise man will use his wisdom for the conviction of a fool, when, by taking notice of what he says, there may be hopes of doing good, or at least preventing further, mischief, either to himself or others. "If thou have reason to think that thy silence will be deemed an evidence of the weakness of thy cause, or of thy own weakness, in such a case *answer him*, and let it be an answer *ad hominem—to the man*, beat him at his own weapons, and that will be an answer *ad rem—to the point*, or as good as one. If he offer any thing that looks like an argument, an answer that, and suit thy answer to his case. If he think, because thou dost not answer him, that what he says is unanswerable, then give him an answer, *lest he be wise in his own conceit* and boast of a victory." For (Luke vii. 35) Wisdom's children must justify her.

**6 He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, *and* drinketh damage. 7 The legs of the lame are not equal: so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools. 8 As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so *is* he that giveth honour to a fool. 9 *As* a thorn goeth up**

## **into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.**

To recommend wisdom to us, and to quicken us to the diligent use of all the means for the getting of wisdom, Solomon here shows that fools are fit for nothing; they are either sottish men, who will never think and design at all, or vicious men, who will never think and design well. 1. They are not fit to be entrusted with any business, not fit to go on an errand (v. 6): *He that does but send a message by the hand of a fool*, of a careless heedless person, one who is so full of his jests and so given to his pleasures that he cannot apply his mind to any thing that is serious, will find his message misunderstood, the one half of it forgotten, the rest awkwardly delivered, and so many blunders made about it that he might as well have *cut off his legs*, that is, never have sent him. Nay, he will *drink damage*; it will be very much to his prejudice to have employed such a one, who, instead of bringing him a good account of his affairs, will abuse him and put a trick upon him; for, in Solomon's language, a knave and a fool are of the same signification. It will turn much to a man's disgrace to make use of the service of a fool, for people will be apt to judge of the master by his messenger. 2. They are not fit to have any honour put upon them. He had said (v. 1), *Honour*

*is not seemly for a fool*; here he shows that it is lost and thrown away upon him, as if a man should throw a precious stone, or a stone fit to be used in weighing, into a heap of common stones, where it would be buried and of no use; it is as absurd as if a man should *dress up a stone in purple* (so others); nay, it is dangerous, it is like *a stone bound in a sling*, with which a man will be likely to do hurt. To *give honour to a fool* is to put a sword in a madman's hand, with which we know not what mischief he may do, even to those that put it into his hand. 3. They are not fit to deliver wise sayings, nor should they undertake to handle any matter of weight, though they should be instructed concerning it, and be able to say something to it. Wise sayings, as a foolish man delivers them and applies them (in such a manner that one may know he does not rightly understand them), lose their excellency and usefulness: *A parable in the mouth of fools* ceases to be a parable, and becomes a jest. If a man who lives a wicked life, yet speaks religiously and takes God's covenant into his mouth, (1.) He does but shame



himself and his profession: As *the legs of the lame are not equal*, by reason of which their going is unseemly, so unseemly is it for a fool to pretend to speak apophthegms, and give advice, and for a man to talk devoutly whose conversation is a constant contradiction to his talk and gives him the lie. His good words raise him up, but then his bad life takes him down, and so his *legs are not equal*. "A wise saying," (says bishop Patrick) "doth as ill become a fool as dancing doth a cripple; for, as his lameness never so much appears as when he would seem nimble, so the other's folly is never so ridiculous as when he would seem wise." As therefore it is best for a lame man to keep his seat, so it is best for a silly man, or a bad man, to hold his tongue. (2.) He does but do mischief with it to himself and others, as a drunkard does with a thorn, or any other sharp thing which he takes in his hand, with which he tears himself and those about him, because he knows not how to manage it. Those that talk well and do not live well, their good words will aggravate their own condemnation and others will be hardened by their inconsistency with themselves. Some give this sense of it: The sharpest saying, by which a sinner, one would think, should be pricked to the heart, makes no more impression upon a fool, no, though it come out of his own mouth, than the scratch of a thorn does upon the hand of a man when he is drunk, who then feels it not nor complains of it, ch. xxiii. 35.

The Conduct of Fools.

## **10 The great *God* that formed all *things* both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors.**

Our translation gives this verse a different reading in the text and in the margin; and accordingly it expresses either, 1. The equity of a good God. The *Master*, or *Lord* (so *Rab* signifies), or, as we read it, *The great God that formed all things* at first, and still governs them in infinite wisdom, renders to every man according to his work. He *rewards the fool*, who sinned through ignorance, *who knew not his Lord's will, with few stripes*; and he *rewards the transgressor*, who sinned presumptuously and with a high hand, *who knew his Lord's will and would not do it, with many stripes*. Some understand it of the goodness of God's common providence even to fools and transgressors, on whom *he causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall*.

Or, 2. The iniquity of a bad prince (so the margin reads it): *A great man grieves all, and he hires the fool; he hires also the*

*transgressors*. When a wicked man gets power in his hand, by himself, and by the fools and knaves whom he employs under him, whom he hires and chooses to make use of, he grieves all who are under him and is vexatious to them. We should therefore *pray for kings and all in authority*, that, under them, our lives may be quiet and peaceable.

## **11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.**

See here, 1. What an abominable thing sin is, and how hateful sometimes it is made to appear, even to the sinner himself. When his conscience is convinced, or he feels smart from his sin, he is sick of it, and vomits it up; he seems then to detest it and to be willing to part with it. It is in itself, and, first or last, will be to the sinner, more loathsome than the vomit of a dog, Ps. xxxvi. 2. 2. How apt sinners are to relapse into it notwithstanding. As the dog, after he has gained ease by vomiting that which burdened his stomach, yet goes and licks it up again, so sinners, who have been convinced only and not converted, return to sin again, forgetting how sick it made them. The apostle (2 Pet.

ii. 22) applies this proverb to those that *have known the way of righteousness* but are *turned from it*; but God will *spue them out of his mouth*, Rev. iii. 16.

## **12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.**

Here is, 1. A spiritual disease supposed, and that is self-conceit: *Seest thou a man?* Yes, we see many a one, *wise in his own conceit*, who has some little sense, but is proud of it, thinks it much more than it is, more than any of his neighbours, have, and enough, so that he needs no more, has such a conceit of his own abilities as makes him opinionative, dogmatical, and censorious; and all the use he makes of his knowledge is that it puffs him up. Or, if by a wise man we understand a religious man, it describes the

character of those who, making some show of religion, conclude their spiritual state to be good when really it is very bad, like Laodicea, Rev. iii. 17. 2. The danger of this disease. It is in a manner desperate: *There is more hope of a fool*, that knows and owns himself to be such, *than of* such a one. Solomon was not only a wise man himself, but a teacher of wisdom; and this observation he made upon his pupils, that he found his work most difficult and least successful with those that had a good opinion of themselves and were not sensible that they needed instruction. Therefore he that *seems* to himself *to be wise* must *become a fool*, that *he may be wise*, 1 Cor. iii. 18. There is more hope of a publican than of a proud Pharisee, Matt. xxi. 32. Many are hindered from being truly wise and religious by a false and groundless conceit that they are so, John ix. 40, 41.

The Disgrace of Slothfulness.

### **13 The slothful *man* saith, *There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.***

When a man talks foolishly we say, He talks idly; for none betray their folly more than those who are idle and go about to excuse themselves in their idleness. As men's folly makes them slothful, so their slothfulness makes them foolish. Observe, 1. What *the slothful man* really dreads. He dreads *the way, the streets*, the place where work is to be done and a journey to be gone; he hates business, hates every thing that requires care and labour. 2. What he dreams of, and pretends to dread—*a lion in the way*. When he is pressed to be diligent, either in his worldly affairs or in the business of religion, this is his excuse (and a sorry excuse it is, as bad as none), *There is a lion in the way*, some

insuperable difficulty or danger which he cannot pretend to grapple with. Lions frequent woods and deserts; and, in the day-time, when man has business to do, they are in their dens, Ps. civ. 22,

23. But the sluggard fancies, or rather pretends to fancy, *a lion in the streets*, whereas the lion is only in his own fancy, nor is he so fierce as he is painted. Note, It is a foolish thing to frighten ourselves from real duties by fancied difficulties, Eccl. xi. 4.

## **14 *As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed.***

Having seen the slothful man in fear of his work, here we find him in love with his ease; he lies in his bed on one side till he is weary of that, and then turns to the other, but still in his bed, when it is far in the day and work is to be done, as the door is moved, but not removed; and so his business is neglected and his opportunities are let slip. See the sluggard's character. 1. He is one that does not care to get out of his bed, but seems to be hung upon it, *as the door upon the hinges*. Bodily ease, too much consulted, is the sad occasion of many a spiritual disease. Those that love sleep will prove in the end to have loved death. 2. He does not care to get forward with his business; in that he stirs to and fro a little, but to no purpose; he is where he was. Slothful professors turn, in profession, like *the door upon the hinges*. The world and the flesh are the two hinges on which they are hung, and though they move in a course of external services, have got into road of duties, and tread around in them like the horse in the mill, yet they get no good, they get no ground, they are never the nearer heaven—sinners unchanged, saints unimproved.

## **15 The slothful hideth his hand in *his* bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.**

The sluggard has now, with much ado, got out of his bed, but he might as well have lain there still for any thing he is likely to bring to pass in his work, so awkwardly does he go about it. Observe,

1. The pretence he makes for his slothfulness: He *hides his hand in his bosom* for fear of cold; next to his warm bed in his warm bosom. Or he pretends that he is lame, as some do that make a trade of begging; something ails his hand; he would have it thought that it is blistered with yesterday's hard work. Or it intimates, in general, his aversion to business; he has tried, and his hands are not used to labour, and therefore he hugs himself in his own ease and cares for nobody. Note, It is common for those that will not do their duty to pretend they cannot. *I cannot dig*, Luke xvi. 3. 2. The prejudice he sustains by his slothfulness. He himself is the loser by it, for he starves himself: *It grieves him to bring his hand to his mouth*, that

is, he cannot find in his heart to feed himself, but dreads, as if it were a mighty toil, to lift his hand to his head. It is an elegant hyperbole, aggravating his sin, that he cannot endure to take the least pains, no, not for the greatest profit, and showing how his sin is his punishment. Those that are slothful in the business of religion will not be at the pains to feed their own souls with the word of God, the bread of life, nor to fetch in promised blessings by prayer, though they might have them for the fetching.

## **16 The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.**

Observe, 1. The high opinion which the sluggard has of himself, notwithstanding the gross absurdity and folly of his slothfulness: He thinks himself *wiser than seven men*, than seven wise men, for they are such as *can render a reason*. It is the wisdom of a man to be able to *render a reason*, of a good man to be able to give *a reason of the hope that is in him*, 1 Pet. iii. 15. What we

do we should be able to *render a reason* for, though perhaps we may not have wit enough to show the fallacy of every objection against it. He that takes pains in religion can render a good reason for it; he knows that he is working for a good Master and that *his labour shall not be in vain*. But *the sluggard* thinks himself *wiser than seven* such; for let seven such persuade him to be diligent, with all the reasons they can render for it, it is to no purpose; his own determination, he thinks, answer enough to them and all their reasons. 2. The reference that this has to his slothfulness. It is *the sluggard*, above all men, that is thus self-conceited; for, (1.) His good opinion of himself is the cause of his slothfulness; he will not take pains to get wisdom because he thinks he is wise enough already. A conceit of the sufficiency of our attainments is a great enemy to our improvement. (2.) His slothfulness is the cause of his good opinion of himself. If he would but take pains to examine himself, and compare himself with the laws of wisdom, he would have other thoughts of himself. Indulged slothfulness is at the bottom of prevailing self-conceitedness. Nay, (3.) So wretchedly besotted is he that he takes his slothfulness to be his wisdom; he thinks it is his wisdom to make much of himself, and take all the ease he can get, and do no more in religion than he needs must, to avoid suffering, to sit still and

see what other people do, that he may have the pleasure of finding fault with them. Of such sluggards, who are proud of that which is their shame, their is little hope,

v. 12.

Hatred and Strife.

**17 He that passeth by, *and* meddleth with strife *belonging* not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.**

1. That which is here condemned is *meddling with strife that belongs not to us*. If we must not be hasty to strive in our own cause (ch. xxv. 8), much less in other people's, especially theirs that we are no way related to or concerned in, but light on accidentally as we pass by. If we can be instrumental to make peace between those that are at variance we must do it, though we should thereby get the ill-will of both sides, at least while they are in their heat; but to make ourselves busy in other men's matters, and parties in other men's quarrels, is not only to court our own trouble, but to thrust ourselves into temptation. *Who made me a judge?* Let them end it, as they began it, between themselves. 2. We are cautioned against it because of the danger it exposes us to; it is like taking a snarling cur *by the ears*, that will snap at you and bite you; you had better have let him alone, for you cannot get clear of him when you would, and must thank yourselves if you come off with a wound and dishonour. He that has got *a dog by the ears*, if he lets him go he flies at him, if he keeps his hold, he has his hands full, and can do nothing else. Let every one *with quietness work and mind his own business*, and not with unquietness quarrel and meddle with other people's business.

**18 As a mad *man* who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, 19 So is the man *that* deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?**

See here, 1. How mischievous those are that make no scruple of *deceiving their neighbours*; they are *as madmen that cast firebrands, arrows, and*

*death*, so much hurt may they do by their deceits. They value themselves upon it as polite cunning men, but really they are *as madmen*. There is not a greater madness in the world than a wilful sin. It is not only the passionate furious man,

but the malicious deceitful man, that is *a madman*; he does in effect *cast fire-brands, arrows, and death*; he does more mischief than he can imagine. Fraud and falsehood burn like fire-brands, kill, even at a distance, like arrows. 2. See how frivolous the excuse is which men commonly make for the mischief they do, that they did it in a jest; with this they think to turn it off when they are reprov'd for it, *Am not I in sport?* But it will prove dangerous playing with fire and jesting with edge-tools. Not that those are to be commended who are captious, and can take no jest (those that themselves are *wise must suffer fools*, 2 Cor. xi. 19, 20), but those are certainly to be condemned who are any way abusive to their neighbours, impose upon their credulity, cheat them in their bargains with them, tell lies to them or tell lies of them, give them ill language, or sully their reputation, and then think to excuse it by saying that they did but jest. *Am not I in sport?* He that sins in jest must repent in earnest, or his sin will be his ruin. Truth is too valuable a thing to be sold for a jest, and so is the reputation of our neighbour. By lying and slandering in jest men learn themselves, and teach others, to lie and slander in earnest; and a false report, raised in mirth, may be spread in malice; besides, if a man may tell a lie to make himself merry, why not to make himself rich, and so *truth quite perishes*, and men *teach their tongues to tell lies*, Jer. ix. 5. If men would consider that a lie comes from the devil, and brings to hell-fire, surely that would spoil the sport of it; it is *casting arrows and death* to themselves.

**20 Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out: so where *there is* no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21 As coals *are* to burning coals, and wood to fire; so *is* a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.**

Contention is as a fire; it heats the spirit, burns up all that is good, and puts families and societies into a flame. Now here we are told how that fire is commonly kindled and kept burning, that we may avoid the occasions of strife and so prevent the mischievous consequences of it. If then we would keep the peace, 1. We must not give ear to *talebearers*, for they feed the fire of contention with fuel; nay, they spread it with combustible matter; the tales they carry are fireballs. Those who by insinuating base characters, revealing secrets, and misrepresenting words and actions, do what they can to make relations, friends, and neighbours, jealous one of another, to alienate them one from another, and sow discord among them, are to be banished out of families and all societies, and then strife will as surely cease as the fire will go out when it has no fuel; the contenders will better understand one another and come to a better temper; old stories will soon be forgotten when there are no new ones told to keep up the remembrance of them, and both sides will see how they have been imposed upon by a common enemy. Whisperers and backbiters are incendiaries not to be suffered. To illustrate this, he repeats (v. 22) what he had said before (ch. xviii. 8), that *the words of a tale-bearer are as wounds*, deep and dangerous wounds, wounds in the vitals. They wound the reputation of him who is belied, and perhaps the wound proves incurable, and even the plaster of a recantation (which yet can seldom be obtained) may not prove wide enough for it. They wound the love and charity which he to whom they are spoken ought to have for his neighbour and give a fatal stab to friendship and Christian fellowship. We must therefore not only not be tale-bearers

ourselves at any time, nor ever do any ill offices, but we should not give the least countenance to those that are. 2. We must not associate with peevish passionate people, that are exceptions, and apt to put the worst constructions upon everything, that pick quarrels upon the least occasion, and are quick, and high, and hot, in resenting affronts. These are *contentious men*, that *kindle strife*, v.

21. The less we have to do with such the better, for it will be very difficult to avoid quarrelling with those that are quarrelsome.

**23 Burning lips and a wicked heart *are like* a potsherd covered with silver dross.**



This may be meant either, 1. Of a *wicked heart* showing itself in *burning lips*, furious, passionate, outrageous words, burning in malice, and persecuting those to whom, or of whom, they are spoken; ill words and ill-will agree as well together as a *potsherd* and the *dross of silver*; which, now that the pot is broken and the dross separated from the silver, are fit to be thrown together to the dunghill. 2. Or of a *wicked heart* disguising itself with *burning lips*, burning with the professions of love and friendship, and even persecuting a man with flatteries; this is *like a potsherd covered with the scum or dross of silver*, with which one that is weak may be imposed upon, as if it were of some value, but a wise man is soon aware of the cheat. This sense agrees with the following verses.

**24 He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; 25 When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for *there are* seven abominations in his heart. 26 *Whose* hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the *whole* congregation.**

There is cause to complain, not only of the want of sincerity in men's profession of friendship, and that they do not love so well as they pretend nor will serve their friends so much as they promise, but, which is much worse, of wicked designs in the profession of friendship, and the making of it subservient to the most malicious intentions. This is here spoken of as a common thing (v. 24): *He that hates* his neighbour, and is contriving to do him a mischief, yet *dissembles with his lips*, professes to have a respect for him and to be ready to serve him, talks kindly with him, as Cain with Abel, asks, *Art thou in health, my brother?* as Joab to Amasa, that his malice may not be suspected and guarded against, and so he may have the fairer opportunity to execute the purposes of it, this man *lays up deceit within him*, that is, he keeps in his mind the mischief he intends to do his neighbour till he catches him at an advantage. This is malice which has no less of the subtlety than it has of the venom of the old serpent in it. Now, as to this matter, we are here cautioned, 1. Not to be so foolish as to suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the pretensions of friendship. Remember to distrust when a man *speaks fair*; be not too forward to *believe him* unless

you know him well, for it is possible there may be *seven abominations in his heart*, a great many projects of mischief against you, which he is labouring so industriously to conceal with his fair speech. Satan is an enemy that hates us, and yet in his temptations speaks fair, as he did to Eve, but it is madness to give credit to him, *for there are seven abominations in his heart; seven other spirits* does one unclean spirit bring *more wicked than himself*. 2. Not to be so wicked as to impose upon any with a profession of friendship; for, though the fraud may be carried on plausibly awhile, it will be brought to light, v. 26. He *whose hatred is covered by deceit* will one time or other be discovered,

and *his wickedness shown*, to his shame and confusion, *before the whole congregation*; and nothing will do more to make a man odious to all companies. Love (says one) is the best armour, but the worst cloak, and will serve dissemblers as the disguise which Ahab put on and perished in.

## **27 Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.**

See here, 1. What pains men take to do mischief to others. As they put a force upon themselves by concealing their design with a profession of friendship, so they put themselves to a great deal of labour to bring it about; it is *digging a pit*, it is *rolling a stone*, hard work, and yet men will not stick at it to gratify their passion and revenge. 2. What preparation they hereby make of mischief to themselves. Their violent dealing will return upon their own heads; they shall themselves *fall into the pit they digged*, and the stone they rolled *will return upon them*, Ps. vii. 15, 16; ix. 15, 16. The righteous God will take the wise, not only *in their own craftiness*, but in their own cruelty. It is the plotter's doom. Haman is hanged on a gallows of his own preparing.

—————*nec lex est justior ulla*

*Quam necis artifices arte perire sua*—

Nor is there any law more just than that the contrivers of destruction should perish by their own arts.

## **28 A lying tongue hateth *those that are* afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.**

There are two sorts of lies equally detestable:—1. A slandering lie, which avowedly hates those it is spoken of: *A lying tongue hates those that are afflicted by it*; it afflicts them by calumnies and reproaches because it hates them, and can thus smite them secretly where they are without defence; and it hates them because it has afflicted them and made them its enemies. The mischief of this is open and obvious; it afflicts, it hates, and owns it, and every body sees it. 2. A flattering lie, which secretly works the ruin of those it is spoken to. In the former the mischief is plain, and men guard against it as well as they can, but in this it is little suspected, and men betray themselves by being credulous of their own praises and the compliments that are passed upon them. A wise man therefore will be more afraid of a flatterer that kisses and kills than of a slanderer that proclaims war.

## **P R O V E R B S**

### **CHAP. XXVII.**

Miscellaneous Maxims.

### **1 Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.**

Here is, 1. A good caution against presuming upon time to come: *Boast not thyself*, no, not *of to-morrow*, much less of many days or years to come. This does not forbid preparing for to-morrow, but presuming upon to-morrow. We must not promise ourselves the continuance of our lives and comforts till to-morrow, but speak of it with submission to the will of God and as those who with good reason are kept at uncertainty about it. We must not *take thought for the morrow* (Matt. vi.

34), but we must cast our care concerning it upon God. See James iv. 13-15. We must not put off the great work of conversion, that one thing needful, till to-morrow, as if we were sure of it, *but to-day, while it is called to-day*, hear God's voice. 2. A good consideration, upon which this caution is

grounded: *We know not what a day may bring forth*, what event may be in the teeming womb, of time; it is a secret till it is born, Eccl. xi. 5. A little time may produce considerable changes, and such as we little think of. *We know not what the present day may bring forth*; the evening must commend it. *Nescis quid serus vesper vehat—Thou knowest not what the close of evening may bring with it*. God has wisely kept us in the dark concerning future events, and reserved to himself the knowledge of them, as a flower of the crown, that he may train us up in a dependence upon himself and a continued readiness for every event, Acts i. 7.

## **2 Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.**

Note, 1. We must do that which is commendable, for which even strangers may praise us. Our *light* must *shine before men*, and we must do good works that may be seen, though we must not do them on purpose that they may be seen. Let our own works be such as will praise us, even *in the gates*, Phil. iv. 8. 2. When we have done it we must not commend ourselves, for that is an evidence of pride, folly, and self-love, and a great lessening to a man's reputation. Every one will be forward to run him down that cries himself up. There may be a just occasion for us to vindicate ourselves, but it does not become us to applaud ourselves. *Proprio laus sordet in ore—Self-praise defiles the mouth*.

## **3 A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.**

## **4 Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?**

These two verses show the intolerable mischief, 1. Of ungoverned passion. The wrath of a fool, who when he is provoked cares not what he says and does, is more grievous than a great stone or a load of sand. It lies heavily upon himself. Those who have no command of their passions do themselves even sink under the load of them. The wrath of a fool lies heavily upon those he is enraged at, to whom, in his fury, he will be in danger of doing some mischief. It is therefore our wisdom not to give provocation to a fool,

but, if he be in a passion, to get out of his way. 2. Of rooted malice, which is as much worse than the former as coals of juniper are worse than a fire of thorns. *Wrath* (it is true) *is cruel*, and does many a barbarous thing, *and anger is outrageous*; but a secret enmity at the person of another, an envy at his prosperity, and a desire of revenge for some injury or affront, are much more mischievous. One may avoid a sudden heat, as David escaped Saul's javelin, but when it grows, as Saul's did, to a settled envy, there is no *standing before it*; it

will pursue; it will overtake. He that grieves at the good of another will be still contriving to do him hurt, and will keep his anger for ever.

**5 Open rebuke is better than secret love. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.**

Note, 1. It is good for us to be reproved, and told of our faults, by our friends. If true love in the heart has but zeal and courage enough to show itself in dealing plainly with our friends, and reproofing them for what they say and do amiss, this is really *better*, not only than secret hatred (as Lev. xix. 17), but *than secret love*, that love to our neighbours which does not show itself in this good fruit, which compliments them in their sins, to the prejudice of their souls. *Faithful are the reproofs of a friend*, though for the present they are painful as *wounds*. It is a sign that our friends are faithful indeed if, in love to our souls, they will not suffer sin upon us, nor let us alone in it. The physician's care is to cure the patient's disease, not to please his palate. 2. It is dangerous to be caressed and flattered by *an enemy*, whose *kisses are deceitful*. We can take no pleasure in them because we can put no confidence in them (Joab's kiss and Judas's were deceitful), and therefore we have need to stand upon our guard, that we be not deluded by them; they are to be deprecated. Some read it: *The Lord deliver us from an enemy's kisses, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue*.

**7 The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.**

Solomon here, as often in this book, shows that the poor have in some respects the advantage of the rich; for, 1. They have a better relish of their enjoyments than the rich have. Hunger is the best sauce. Coarse fare, with a good appetite to it has a sensible pleasantness in it, which those are strangers to whose hearts are *overcharged with surfeiting*. Those that fare sumptuously every day nauseate even delicate food, as the Israelites did the quails; whereas those that have no more than their necessary food, though it be such as *the full soul* would call *bitter*, to them it *is sweet*; they eat it with pleasure, digest it, and are refreshed by it. 2. They are more thankful for their enjoyments: *The hungry* will bless God for bread and water, while those that are *full* think the greatest dainties and varieties scarcely worth giving thanks for. The virgin Mary seems to refer to this when she says (Luke i. 53), *The hungry*, who know how to value God's blessings, *are filled with good things*, but *the rich*, who despise them, are justly *sent empty away*.

## **8 As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.**

Note, 1. There are many that do not know when they are well off, but are uneasy with their present condition, and given to change. God, in his providence, has appointed them a place fit for them and has made it comfortable to them; but they affect unsettledness; they love to wander; they are glad of a pretence to go abroad, and do not care for staying long at a place; they needlessly absent themselves from their own work and care, and meddle with that which belongs not to them.

2. Those that thus desert the post assigned to them are like *a bird that wanders from her nest*. It is an instance of their folly; they are like a silly bird; they are always wavering, like the wandering bird that hops from bough to bough and rests nowhere. It is unsafe; the bird that wanders is exposed; a man's place is his castle; he that quits it makes himself an easy prey to the fowler. When the bird

wanders from her nest the eggs and young ones there are neglected. Those that love to be abroad leave their work at home undone. *Let every man*

*therefore, in the calling wherein he is called, therein abide, therein abide with God.*

**9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so *doth* the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. 10 Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: *for* better is a neighbour *that* is near than a brother far off.**

Here is, 1. A charge given to be faithful and constant to our friends, our old friends, to keep up an intimacy with them, and to be ready to do them all the offices that lie in our power. It is good to have a friend, a bosom-friend, whom we can be free with, and with whom we may communicate counsels. It is not necessary that this friend should be a relation, or any way akin to us, though it is happiest when, among those who are so, we find one fit to make a friend of. Peter and Andrew were brethren, so were James and John; yet Solomon frequently distinguishes between a friend and a brother. But it is advisable to choose a friend among our neighbours who live near us, that acquaintance may be kept up and kindnesses the more frequently interchanged. It is good also to have a special respect to those who have been friends to our family: "*Thy own friend*, especially if he have been *thy father's friend*, *forsake not*; fail not both to serve him and to use him, as there is occasion. He is a tried friend; he knows thy affairs; he has a particular concern for thee; therefore be advised by him." It is a duty we owe to our parents, when they are gone, to love their friends and consult with them. Solomon's son undid himself by forsaking the counsel of his father's friends.

2. A good reason given why we should thus value true friendship and be choice of it. (1.) Because of the pleasure of it. There is a great deal of *sweetness* in conversing and consulting with a cordial friend. It is like *ointment and perfume*, which are very grateful to the smell, and exhilarate the spirits. It *rejoices the heart*; the burden of care is made lighter by unbosoming ourselves to our friend, and it is a great satisfaction to us to have his sentiments concerning our affairs. *The sweetness of friendship* lies not in hearty mirth, and hearty laughter, but in *hearty counsel*, faithful

advice, sincerely given and without flattery, *by counsel of the soul* (so the word is), counsel which reaches the case, and comes to the heart, counsel about soul-concerns, Ps. lxvi. 16. We should reckon that the most pleasant conversation which is about spiritual things, and promotes the prosperity of the soul. (2.) Because of the profit and advantage of it, especially in a *day of calamity*. We are here advised not to go into a *brother's house*, not to expect relief from a kinsman merely for kindred-sake, for the obligation of that commonly goes little further than calling cousin and fails when it comes to the trial of a real kindness, but rather to apply ourselves to our neighbours, who are at hand, and will be ready to help us at an exigence. It is wisdom to oblige them by being neighbourly, and we shall have the benefit of it in distress, by finding them so to us, ch. xviii. 24.

## **11 My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.**

Children are here exhorted to be wise and good, 1. That they may be a comfort to their parents and may *make their hearts glad*, even when *the evil days come*, and so recompense them for their care, ch. xxiii. 15. 2. That they may be a credit to them: "*That I may answer him that reproaches*

*me* with having been over-strict and severe in bringing up my children, and having taken a wrong method with them in restraining them from the liberties which other young people take. *My son, be wise*, and then it will appear, in the effect, that I went the wisest way to work with my children." Those that have been blessed with a religious education should in every thing conduct themselves so as to be a credit to their education and to silence those who say, *A young saint, an old devil*; and to prove the contrary, *A young saint, an old angel*.

## **12 A prudent *man* foreseeeth the evil, *and* hideth himself; *but* the simple pass on, *and* are punished.**

This we had before, ch. xxii. 3. Note, 1. Evil may be foreseen. Where there is temptation, it is easy to foresee that if we thrust ourselves into it there will be sin, and as easy to foresee that if we venture upon the evil of sin there will follow the evil of punishment; and, commonly, God warns before



he wounds, having *set watchmen over us*, Jer. vi. 17. 2. It will be well or ill with us according as we do or do not improve the foresight we have of evil before us: The *prudent man, foreseeing the evil*, forecasts accordingly, *and hides himself*, but the *simple* is either so dull that he does not foresee it or so wilful and slothful that he will take no care to avoid it, and so he *passes on* securely *and is punished*. We do well for ourselves when we provide for hereafter.

### **13 Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.**

This also we had before, ch. xx. 16. 1. It shows who those are that are hastening to poverty, those that have so little consideration as to be bound for every body that will ask them and those that are given to women. Such as these will take up money as far as ever their credit will go, but they will certainly cheat their creditors at last, nay, they are cheating them all along. An honest man may be made a beggar, but he is not honest that makes himself one. 2. It advises us to be so discreet in ordering our affairs as not to lend money to those who are manifestly wasting their estates, unless they give very good security for it. Foolish lending is injustice to our families. He does not say, "Get another to be bound with him," for he that makes himself a common voucher will have those to be his security who are as insolvent as himself; therefore *take his garment*.

### **14 He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.**

Note, 1. It is a great folly to be extravagant in praising even the best of our friends and benefactors. It is our duty to give every one his due praise, to applaud those who excel in knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, and to acknowledge the kindnesses we have received with thankfulness; but to do this *with a loud voice, rising early in the morning*, to be always harping on this string, in all companies, even to our friend's face, or so as that he may be sure to hear it, to do it studiously, as we do that which we rise early to, to magnify the merits of our friend above measure and with hyperboles, is fulsome, and nauseous, and savours of hypocrisy and design. Praising men

for what they have done is only to get more out of them; and every body concludes the parasite hopes to be well paid for his panegyric or epistle dedicatory. We must not give that praise to our friend which is due to God only, as some think is intimated in *rising early* to do it; for in the morning God is to

be praised. We must not *make too much haste to praise men* (so some understand it), not cry up men too soon for their abilities and performances, but let them first be proved; lest they be lifted up with pride, and laid to sleep in idleness. 2. It is a greater folly to be fond of being ourselves extravagantly praised. A wise man rather counts it *a curse*, and a reflection upon him, not only designed to pick his pocket, but which may really turn to his prejudice. Modest praises (as a great man observes) invite such as are present to add to the commendation, but immodest immoderate praises tempt them to detract rather, and to censure one that they hear over-commended. And, besides, over-praising a man makes him the object of envy; every man puts in for a share of reputation, and therefore reckons himself injured if another monopolize it or have more given him than his share. And the greatest danger of all is that it is a temptation to pride; men are apt to think of themselves above what is meet when others speak of them above what is meet. See how careful blessed Paul was not to be over-valued, 2 Cor. xii. 6.

**15 A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. 16 Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, *which* bewrayeth itself.**

Here, as before, Solomon laments the case of him that has a peevish passionate wife, that is continually chiding, and making herself and all about her uneasy. 1. It is a grievance that there is no avoiding, for it is like *a continual dropping in a very rainy day*. The contentions of a neighbour may be like a sharp shower, troublesome for the time, yet, while it lasts, one may take shelter; but *the contentions of a wife* are like a constant soaking rain, for which there is no remedy but patience See ch. xix. 13. 2. It is a grievance that there is no concealing. A wise man would hide it if he could, for the sake both of his own and his wife's reputation, but he cannot, any

more than he can conceal the noise of the wind when it blows or the smell of a strong perfume. Those that are froward and brawling will proclaim their own shame, even when their friends, in kindness to them, would cover it.

### **17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.**

This intimates both the pleasure and the advantage of conversation. One man is nobody; nor will poring upon a book in a corner accomplish a man as the reading and studying of men will. Wise and profitable discourse sharpens men's wits; and those that have ever so much knowledge may by conference have something added to them. It sharpens men's looks, and, by cheering the spirits, puts a briskness and liveliness into the countenance, and gives a man such an air as shows he is pleased himself and makes him pleasing to those about him. Good men's graces are sharpened by converse with those that are good, and bad men's lusts and passions are sharpened by converse with those that are bad, as iron is sharpened by its like, especially by the file. Men are filed, made smooth, and bright, and fit for business (who were rough, and dull, and inactive), by conversation. This is designed, 1. To recommend to us this expedient for sharpening ourselves, but with a caution to take heed whom we choose to converse with, because the influence upon us is so great either for the better or for the worse. 2. To direct us what we must have in our eye in conversation, namely

to improve both others and ourselves, not to pass away time or banter one another, but to *provoke one another to love and to good works* and so to make one another wiser and better.

### **18 Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.**

This is designed to encourage diligence, faithfulness, and constancy, even in mean employments. Though the calling be laborious and despicable, yet those who keep to it will find there is something to be got by it. 1. Let not a poor gardener, who *keeps the fig-tree*, be discouraged; though it require constant care and attendance to nurse up fig-trees, and, when they have

grown to maturity, to keep them in good order, and gather the figs in their season, yet he shall be paid for his pains: He *shall eat the fruit* of it, 1 Cor. ix. 7. 2. Nay, let not a poor servant think himself incapable of thriving and being preferred; for if he be diligent in *waiting on his master*, observant of him and obedient to him, if *he keep his master* (so the word is), if he do all he can for the securing of his person and reputation and take care that his estate be not wasted or damaged, such a one *shall be honoured*, shall not only get a good word, but be preferred and rewarded. God is a Master who has engaged to put an honour on those that serve him faithfully, John xii. 26.

## **19 As in water face *answereth* to face, so the heart of man to man.**

This shows us that there is a way, 1. Of knowing ourselves. As the water is a looking-glass in which we may see our faces by reflection, so there are mirrors by which the *heart of a man* is discovered to *a man*, that is, to himself. Let a man examine his own conscience, his thoughts, affections, and intentions. Let him behold his *natural face in the glass* of the divine law (Jam. i.

23), and he may discern what kind of man he is and what is his true character, which it will be of great use to every man rightly to know. 2. Of knowing one another by ourselves; for, as there is a similitude between the face of a man and the reflection of it in the water, so there is between one man's heart and another's for God has fashioned men's hearts alike; and in many cases we may judge of others by ourselves, which is one of the foundations on which that rule is built of doing to others as we would be done by, Exod. xxiii. 9. *Nihil est unum uni tam simile, tam par, quam omnes inter nosmet ipsos sumus. Sui nemo ipse tam similis quam omnes sunt omnium*—*No one thing is so like another as man is to man. No person is so like himself as each person is to all besides.* Cic. *de Legib. lib. 1.* One corrupt heart is like another, and so is one sanctified heart, for the former bears the same image of the earthy, the latter the same image of the heavenly.

## **20 Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.**

Two things are here said to be insatiable, and they are two things near of kin—death and sin.

1. Death is insatiable. The first death, the second death, both are so. The grave is not clogged with the multitude of dead bodies that are daily thrown into it, but is still an *open sepulchre*, and cries, *Give, give*. Hell also has enlarged itself, and still has room for the damned spirits that are committed to that prison. *Tophet is deep and large*, Isa. xxx. 33. 2. Sin is insatiable: *The eyes of man are never satisfied*, nor the appetites of the carnal mind towards profit or pleasure. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing*, nor is he that *loves silver satisfied with silver*. Men labour for that which surfeits, but satisfies not; nay, it is dissatisfying; but satisfies not; nay, it is dissatisfying; such a perpetual

uneasiness have men justly been doomed to ever since our first parents were not satisfied with all the trees of Eden, but they must meddle with the forbidden tree. Those whose eyes are ever toward the Lord in him are satisfied, and shall for ever be so.

## **21 As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.**

This gives us a touchstone by which we may try ourselves. Silver and gold are tried by putting them into the furnace and fining-pot; so is man tried by praising him. Let him be extolled and preferred, and then he will show himself what he is. 1. If a man be made, by the applause that is given him, proud, conceited, and scornful,—if he take the glory to himself which he should transmit to God, as Herod did,—if, the more he is praised, the more careless he is of what he says and does,—if he *lie in bed till noon* because *his name is up*, thereby it will appear that he is a vain foolish man, and a man who, though he be praised, has nothing in him truly praise-worthy. 2. If, on the contrary, a man is made by his praise more thankful to God, more respectful to his friends, more watchful against every thing that may blemish his reputation, more diligent to improve himself, and do good to

others, that he may answer the expectations of his friends from him, by this it will appear that he is a wise and good man. He has a good temper of mind who knows how to pass by evil report and good report, and is still the same, 2 Cor. vi. 8.

**22 Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, *yet* will not his foolishness depart from him.**

Solomon had said (ch. xxii. 15), *The foolishness which is bound in the heart of a child may be driven out by the rod of correction*, for then the mind is to be moulded, the vicious habits not having taken root; but here he shows that, if it be not done then, it will be next to impossible to do it afterwards; if the disease be inveterate, there is a danger of its being incurable. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* Observe, 1. Some are so bad that rough and severe methods must be used with them, after gentle means have been tried in vain; they must be *brayed in a mortar*. God will take this way with them by his judgments; the magistrates must take this way with them by the rigour of the law. Force must be used with those that will not be ruled by reason, and love, and their own interest. 2. Some are so incorrigibly bad that even those rough and severe methods do not answer the end, their *foolishness will not depart from them*, so fully are their *hearts set in them to do evil*; they are often under the rod and yet not humbled, in the furnace and yet not refined, but, like Ahaz, trespass yet more (2 Chron. xxviii. 22); and what remains then but that they should be rejected as reprobate silver?

The Reward of Prudence.

**23 Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, *and* look well to thy herds. 24 For riches *are* not for ever: and doth the crown *endure* to every generation? 25 The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. 26 The lambs *are* for thy clothing, and the goats *are* the price of the field. 27 And *thou shalt have* goats' milk**

**enough for thy food, for the food of thy household,  
and *for* the maintenance for thy maidens.**

Here is, I. A command given us to be diligent in our callings. It is directed to husbandmen and shepherds, and those that deal in cattle, but it is to be extended to all other lawful callings; whatever our business is, within doors or without, we must apply our minds to it. This command intimates,

1. That we ought to have some business to do in this world and not to live in idleness. 2. We ought rightly and fully to understand our business, and know what we have to do, and not meddle with that which we do not understand. 3. We ought to have an eye to it ourselves, and not turn over all the care of it to others. We should, with our own eyes, inspect the *state of our flocks*, it is the master's eye that makes them fat. 4. We must be discreet and considerate in the management of our business, *know the state* of things, and *look well* to them, that nothing may be lost, no opportunity let slip, but every thing done in proper time and order, and so as to turn to the best advantage. 5. We must be *diligent* and take pains; not only sit down and contrive, but be up and doing: "Set thy heart to thy herds, as one in care; lay thy hands, lay thy bones, to thy business."

II. The reasons to enforce this command. Consider, 1. The uncertainty of worldly wealth (v. 24): *Riches are not for ever*. (1.) Other riches are not so durable as these are: "*Look well to thy flocks and herds*, thy estate in the country and the stock upon that, for these are staple commodities, which, in a succession, will be for ever, whereas riches in trade and merchandise will not be so; the *crown* itself may perhaps not be so sure to thy family as thy flocks and herds." (2.) Even these riches will go to decay if they be not well looked after. If a man had *an abbey* (as we say), and were slothful and wasteful, he might make an end of it. Even the crown and the revenues of it, if care be not taken, will suffer damage, nor will it *continue to every generation* without very good management. Though David had the crown entailed on his family, yet he *looked well to his flocks*, 1 Chron. xxvii. 29, 31.

2. The bounty and liberality of nature, or rather of the God of nature, and his providence (v.

25): *The hay appears*. In taking care of the *flocks and herds*, (1.) "There needs no great labour, no ploughing or sowing; the food for them is the spontaneous product of the ground; thou hast nothing to do but to turn them into it in the summer, *when the grass shows itself*, and to *gather the herbs of the mountains* for them against winter. God has done his part; thou art ungrateful to him, and unjustly refusest to serve his providence, if thou dost not do thine." (2.) "There is an opportunity to be observed and improved, a time when *the hay appears*; but, if thou let slip that time, thy flocks and herds will fare the worse for it. As for ourselves, so for our cattle, we ought, with the ant, to provide meat in summer."

3. The profit of good husbandry in a family: "Keep thy sheep, and thy sheep will help to keep thee; thou shalt have food for thy children and servants, *goats' milk enough* (v. 27); and *enough is as good as a feast*. Thou shalt have raiment likewise: the *lambs' wool shall be for thy clothing*. Thou shalt have money to pay thy rent; the goats thou shalt have to sell shall be *the price of thy field*;" nay, as some understand it, "*Thou shalt become a purchaser*; and buy land to leave to thy children," (v. 26). Note, (1.) If we have food and raiment, and wherewithal to give every body his own, we have enough, and ought to be not only content, but thankful. (2.) Masters of families must provide not only for themselves, but for their families, and see that their servants have a fitting

maintenance. (3.) Plain food and plain clothing, if they be but competent, are all we should aim at.

"Reckon thyself well done to if thou be clothed with home-spun cloth with the fleece of thy own lambs, and fed with goats' milk; let that serve for thy food which serves for the *food of thy household and the maintenance of thy maidens*. Be not desirous of dainties, *far-fetched and dear-bought*."

(4.) This should encourage us to be careful and industrious about our business, that that will bring in a sufficient maintenance for our families; we shall *eat the labour of our hands*.

## PROVERBS



## CHAP. XXVIII.

### Miscellaneous Maxims.

#### **1 The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.**

See here, 1. What continual frights those are subject to that go on in wicked ways. Guilt in the conscience makes men a terror to themselves, so that they are ready *to flee when none pursues*; like one that absconds for debt, who thinks every one he meets a bailiff. Though they pretend to be easy, there are secret fears which haunt them wherever they go, so that they fear where no present or imminent danger is, Ps. liii. 5. Those that have made God their enemy, and know it, cannot but see the whole creation at war with them, and therefore can have no true enjoyment of themselves, no confidence, no courage, but a *fearful looking for of judgment*. Sin makes men cowards.

Degeneres animos timor arguit—

Fear argues a degenerate soul.

Virgil.

Quos diri conscia facti mens habet attonitos—

The consciousness of atrocious crimes astonishes and confounds.

Juvenal.

If they flee when none pursues, what will they do when they shall see God himself pursuing them with his armies? Job xx. 24; xv. 24. See Deut. xxviii. 25; Lev. xxvi. 36. 2. What a holy security and serenity of mind those enjoy who *keep conscience void of offence* and so keep themselves in the love of God: *The righteous are bold as a lion*, as a young lion; in the greatest dangers they have a God of almighty power to trust to. *Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed*. Whatever difficulties they meet with in the way of their duty, they are not daunted by them. *None of those things move me*.

Hic murus aheneus esto, nil conscire sibi—

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,  
Still to preserve thy conscious innocence.

Hor.

**2 For the transgression of a land many *are* the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding *and* knowledge the state *thereof* shall be prolonged.**

Note, 1. National sins bring national disorders and the disturbance of the public repose: *For the transgression of a land*, and a general defection from God and religion to idolatry, profaneness, or immorality, *many are the princes thereof*, many at the same time pretending to the sovereignty and contending for it, by which the people are crumbled into parties and factions, biting and devouring one another, or many successively, in a little time, one cutting off another, as 1 Kings

xvi. 8, &c., or soon cut off by the hand of God or of a foreign enemy, as 2 Kings xxiv. 5, &c. As the people suffer for the sins of the prince,

Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi—

Kings play the madmen, and their people suffer for it, so the government sometimes suffers for the sins of the people. 2. Wisdom will prevent or redress these grievances: *By a man*, that is, by a people, *of understanding*, that come again to themselves and their right mind, things are kept in a good order, or, if disturbed, brought back to the old channel again. Or, By a prince of *understanding and knowledge*, a privy-counsellor, or minister of state, that will restrain or suppress *the transgression of the land*, and take the right methods of healing the state thereof, the good estate of it will be prolonged. We cannot imagine what a great deal of service one wise man may do to a nation in a critical juncture.

**3 A poor man that oppresseth the poor *is like* a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.**

See here, 1. How hard-hearted poor people frequently are to one another, not only not doing such good offices as they might do one to another, but imposing upon and over-reaching one another. Those who know by experience the miseries of poverty should be compassionate to those who suffer the like, but they are inexcusably barbarous if they be injurious to them. 2. How imperious and griping those commonly are who, being indigent and necessitous, get into power. If a prince prefer a poor man, he forgets that ever he was poor, and none shall be so oppressive to the poor as he, nor squeeze them so cruelly. The hungry leech and the dry sponge suck most. *Set a beggar on horseback, and he will ride without mercy. He is like a sweeping rain*, which washes away the corn in the ground, and lays and beats out that which has grown, so that it *leaves no food*. Princes therefore ought not to put those into places of trust who are poor, and in debt, and behind-hand in the world, nor any who make it their main business to enrich themselves.

#### **4 They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.**

Note, 1. Those that *praise the wicked* make it to appear that they do themselves *forsake the law*, and go contrary to it, for that curses and condemns the wicked. Wicked people will speak well of one another, and so strengthen one another's hands in their wicked ways, hoping thereby to silence the clamours of their own consciences and to serve the interests of the devil's kingdom, which is not done by any thing so effectually as by keeping vice in reputation. 2. Those that do indeed make conscience of the law of God themselves will, in their places, vigorously oppose sin, and bear their testimony against it, and do what they can to shame and suppress it. They will reprove

the works of darkness, and silence the excuses which are made for those works, and do what they can to bring gross offenders to punishment, that others may hear and fear.

#### **5 Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all *things*.**

Note, I. As the prevalency of men's lusts is owing to the darkness of their understandings, so the darkness of their understandings is very much owing to the dominion of their lusts: *Men understand not judgment*, discern not between truth and falsehood, right and wrong; they understand not the law of God as the rule either of their duty or of their doom; and, 1. *Therefore* it is that they are *evil men*; their wickedness is the effect of their ignorance and error, Eph. iv. 18. 2. *Therefore they understand not judgment*, because they are *evil men*; their corruptions blind their eyes, and fill them with prejudices, and because they do evil they *hate the light*. It is just with God also to *give them up to strong delusions*.

II. As men's *seeking the Lord* is a good sign that they do understand much, so it is a good means of their understanding more, even of their understanding all things needful for them. Those that set God's glory before them as their end, his favour as their felicity, and his word as their rule, and apply to him upon all occasions by prayer, *they seek the Lord*, and he will give them the spirit of wisdom. If a man *do his will*, he shall *know his doctrine*, John vii. 17. *A good understanding those have*, and a better they shall have, that *do his commandments*, Ps. cxi. 10; 1 Cor. ii. 12, 15.

## **6 Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than *he that* is perverse in *his* ways, though he *be* rich.**

Here, 1. It is supposed that a man may *walk in his uprightness* and yet be poor in this world, which is a temptation to dishonesty, and yet may resist the temptation and continue to *walk in his uprightness*—also that a man may be *perverse in his ways*, injurious to God and man, and yet be rich, and prosper in the world, for a while, may be rich, and so lie under great obligations and have great opportunities to do good, and yet be *perverse in his ways* and do a great deal of hurt. 2. It is maintained as a paradox to a blind world that an honest, godly, poor man, is better than a wicked, ungodly, rich man, has a better character, is in a better condition, has more comfort in himself, is a greater blessing to the world, and is worthy of much more honour and respect. It is not only certain that his case will be better at death, but it is better in life. When Aristides was by a rich man upbraided with his poverty he answered, *Thy riches do thee more hurt than my poverty does me*.

## **7 Whoso keepeth the law *is* a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous *men* shameth his father.**

Note, 1. Religion is true wisdom, and it makes men wise in every relation. He that conscientiously *keeps the law* is wise, and he will be particularly *a wise son*, that is, will act discreetly towards his parents, for the law of God teaches him to do so. 2. Bad company is a great hindrance to religion. Those that are *companions of riotous men*, that choose such for their companions and delight in their conversation, will certainly be drawn from *keeping the law of God* and drawn to transgress it, Ps. cxix. 115. 3. Wickedness is not only a reproach to the sinner himself, but to all that are akin to him. He that keeps rakish company, and spends his time and money with them, not only grieves his parents, but shames them; it turns to their disrepute, as if they had not done their

duty to him. They are ashamed that a child of theirs should be scandalous and abusive to their neighbours.

## **8 He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.**

Note, 1. That which is ill-got, though it may increase much, will not last long. A man may perhaps raise a great estate, in a little time, by usury and extortion, fraud, and oppression of the poor, but it will not continue; he gathers it for himself, but it shall prove to have been gathered for somebody else that he has no kindness for. His estate shall go to decay, and another man's shall be raised out of the ruins of it. 2. Sometimes God in his providence so orders it that that which one got unjustly another uses charitably; it is strangely turned into the hands of one *that will pity the poor* and do good with it, and so cut off the entail of the curse which he brought upon it who got it by deceit and violence. Thus the same Providence that punishes the cruel, and disables them to do any more hurt, rewards the merciful, and enables them to do so much the more good. *To him that has the ten pounds give the pound* which the wicked servant *hid in the napkin*; for *to him that has*, and uses it well, more *shall be given*, Luke xix. 24. Thus the poor are repaid, the charitable are encouraged, and God is glorified.

**9 He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer *shall be* abomination.**

Note, 1. It is by the word and prayer that our communion with God is kept up. God speaks to us by his law, and expects we should hear him and heed him; *we* speak to him by prayer, to which we wait for an answer of peace. How reverent and serious should we be, whenever we are hearing from and speaking to the Lord of glory! 2. If God's word be not regarded by us, our prayers shall not only not be accepted of God, but they shall be an abomination to him, not only our sacrifices, which were ceremonial appointments, but even our prayers, which are moral duties, and which, when they are put up by the upright, are so much his delight. See Isa. i. 11, 15. The sinner whose prayers God is thus angry at is one who wilfully and obstinately refuses to obey God's commandments, who will not so much as give them the hearing, but causes his *ear to decline the law*, and refuses when God calls; God will therefore justly refuse him when he calls. See Prov. i. 24, 28.

**10 Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good *things* in possession.**

Here is, 1. The doom of seducers, who attempt to draw good people, or those who profess to be such, into sin and mischief, who take pride in *causing the righteous to go astray in an evil way*, in drawing them into a snare, that they may insult over them. They shall not gain their point; it is impossible to deceive the elect. But they shall *fall themselves into their own pit*; and having been not only sinners, but tempters, not only unrighteous, but enemies to the righteous, their condemnation will be so much the greater, Matt. xxiii. 14, 15. 2. The happiness of the sincere. They shall not only be preserved from the evil way which the wicked would decoy them into, but they shall *have good things*, the best things, *in possession*, the graces and comforts of God's Spirit, besides what they have in reversion.

**11 The rich man *is* wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.**

Note, 1. Those that are rich are apt to think themselves wise, because, whatever else they are ignorant of, they know how to get and save; and those that are purse-proud expect that all they say should be regarded as an oracle and a law, and that none should dare to contradict them, but every sheaf bow to theirs; this humour is fed by flatterers, who, because (like Jezebel's prophets) they are fed at their table, cry up their wisdom. 2. Those that are poor often prove themselves wiser than they: A *poor man*, who has taken pains to get wisdom, having no other way (as the rich man has) to get a reputation, *searches him out*, and makes it to appear that he is not such a scholar, nor such a politician, as he is taken to be. See how variously God dispenses his gifts; to some he gives wealth, to others wisdom, and it is easy to say which of these is the better gift, which we should *covet more earnestly*.

## **12 When righteous *men* do rejoice, *there* is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.**

Note, 1. The comfort of the people of God is the honour of the nation in which they live. There is a *great glory* dwelling in the land when *the righteous do rejoice*, when they have their liberty, the free exercise of their religion, and are not persecuted, when the government countenances them and speaks comfortably to them, when they prosper and grow rich, and, much more, when they are preferred and employed and have power put into their hands. 2. The advancement of the wicked is the eclipsing of the beauty of a nation: *When the wicked rise* and get head they make head against all that is sacred, and then *a man is hidden*, a good man is thrust into obscurity, is necessitated to abscond for his own safety; corruptions prevail so generally that, as in Elijah's time, there seem to be no good men left, the *wicked walk* so thickly *on every side*.

## **13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.**

Here is, 1. The folly of indulging sin, of palliating and excusing it, denying or extenuating it, diminishing it, dissembling it, or throwing the blame of it upon others: *He that thus covers his sins shall not prosper*, let him never

expect it. He shall not succeed in his endeavour to cover his sin, for it will be discovered, sooner or later. *There is nothing hid which shall not be revealed. A bird of the air shall carry the voice.* Murder will out, and so will other sins. He *shall not prosper*; that is, he shall not obtain the pardon of his sin, nor can he have any true peace of conscience. David owns himself to have been in a constant agitation while he *covered his sins*, Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. While the patient conceals his distemper he cannot expect a cure. 2. The benefit of parting with it, both by a penitent confession and a universal reformation: *He that confesses* his guilt to God, and is careful not to return to sin again, shall *find mercy* with God, and shall have the comfort of it in his own bosom. His conscience shall be eased and his ruin prevented. See 1 John i. 9; Jer. iii. 12, 13. When we set sin before our face (as David, *My sin is ever before me*) God casts it behind his back.

#### **14 Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.**

Here is, 1. The benefit of a holy caution. It sounds strangely, but it is very true: *Happy is the man that feareth always*. Most people think that those are happy who never fear; but there is a fear which is so far from having torment in it that it has in it the greatest satisfaction. Happy is the man who always keeps up in his mind a holy awe and reverence of God, his glory, goodness, and government, who is always afraid of offending God and incurring his displeasure, who keeps conscience tender and has a dread of the appearance of evil, who is always jealous of himself, distrustful of his own sufficiency, and lives in expectation of troubles and changes, so that, whenever they come, they are no surprise to him. He who keeps up such a fear as this will live a life of faith and watchfulness, and therefore happy is he, blessed and holy. 2. The danger of a sinful presumption: *He that hardens his heart*, that mocks at fear, and sets God and his judgments at defiance, and receives not the impressions of his word or rod, *shall fall into mischief*; his presumption will be his ruin, and whatever sin (which is the greatest mischief) he falls into it is owing to the hardness of his heart.

#### **15 As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.**



It is written indeed, *Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people*; but if he be a wicked ruler, that oppresses the people, especially the poor people, robbing them of the little they have and making a prey of them, whatever we may call him, this scripture calls him *a roaring lion and a ranging bear*. 1. In respect of his character. He is brutish, barbarous, and blood-thirsty; he is rather to be put among the beasts of prey, the wildest and most savage, than to be reckoned of that noble rank of beings whose glory is reason and humanity. 2. In respect of the mischief he does to his subjects. He is dreadful as the *roaring lion*, who makes the forest tremble; he is devouring as a hungry *bear*; and the more necessitous he is the more mischief he does and the more greedy of gain he is.

**16 The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: *but* he that hateth covetousness shall prolong *his* days.**

Two things are here intimated to be the causes of the mal-administration of princes:—1. The love of money, that *root of all evil*; for *hating covetousness* here stands opposed to *oppression*, according to Moses's character of good magistrates, *men fearing God and hating covetousness* (Exod. xviii. 21), not only not being covetous, but hating it, and shaking the hands from the holding of bribes. A ruler that is covetous will neither do justly nor love mercy, but the people under him shall be bought and sold. 2. Want of consideration: *He that hates covetousness shall prolong* his government and peace, shall be happy in the affections of his people and the blessing of his God. It is as much the interest as the duty of princes to reign in righteousness. Oppressors therefore and tyrants are the greatest fools in the world; they *want understanding*; they do not consult their own honour, ease, and safety, but sacrifice all to their ambition of an absolute and arbitrary power. They might be much happier in the hearts of their subjects than in their necks or estates.

**17 A man that doeth violence to the blood of *any* person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.**

This agrees with that ancient law, *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed* (Gen. ix. 6), and proclaims, 1. The doom of the shedder of blood. He that has committed murder, though he flees for his life, shall be continually haunted with terrors, shall himself *flee to the pit*, betray himself, and torment himself, like Cain, who, when he had killed his brother, became a fugitive and a vagabond, and trembled continually. 2. The duty of the avenger of blood, whether the magistrate or the next of kin, or whoever are concerned in making inquisition for blood, let them be close and vigorous in the prosecution, and let it not be bought off. Those that acquit the murderer, or do any thing to help him off, come in sharers in the guilt of blood; nor can the land be purged from blood but by the blood of him that shed it, Num. xxxv. 33.

**18 Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but *he that is perverse in his ways* shall fall at once.**

Note, 1. Those that are honest are always safe. He that acts with sincerity, that speaks as he thinks, has a single eye, in every thing, to the glory of God and the good of his brethren, that would not, for a world, do an unjust thing if he knew it, that in all manner of conversation *walks uprightly*, he *shall be saved* hereafter. We find a glorious company of those *in whose mouth was found no guile*, Rev. xiv. 5. They shall be safe now. Integrity and uprightness will preserve men, will give them a holy security in the worst of times; for it will preserve their comfort, their reputation, and all their interests. They may be injured, but they cannot be hurt. 2. Those that are false and dishonest are never safe: *He that is perverse in his ways*, that thinks to secure himself by fraudulent practices, by dissimulation and treachery, or by an estate ill-got, he *shall fall*, nay, he *shall fall at once*, not gradually, and with warning given, but suddenly, without previous notice, for he is least safe when he is most secure. He *falls at once*, and so has neither time to guard against his ruin nor to provide for it; and, being a surprise upon him, it will be so much the greater terror to him.

**19 He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain *persons* shall have poverty enough.**

Note, 1. Those that are diligent in their callings take the way to live comfortably: He that *tills his land*, and tends his shop, and minds his business, whatever it is, he *shall have plenty of bread*, of that which is necessary for himself and his family and with which he may be charitable to the poor; he shall *eat the labour of his hands*. 2. Those that are idle, and careless, and company-keepers, though they indulge themselves in living (as they think) easily and pleasantly, they take the way to live miserably. He that has land and values himself upon that, but does not till it, but *follows after vain persons*, drinks with them, joins with them in their frolics and vain sports, and idles away his time with him, he shall have *poverty enough*, shall be *satiated* or *replenished* with poverty (so the word is); he takes those courses which lead so directly to it that he seems to court it, and he shall have his fill of it.

## **20 A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.**

Here, 1. We are directed in the true way to be happy, and that is to be holy and honest. He that is *faithful* to God and man shall be blessed of the Lord, and he *shall abound with blessings* of the

upper and nether springs. Men shall praise him, and pray for him, and be ready to do him any kindness. He shall abound in doing good, and shall himself be a blessing to the place where he lives. Usefulness shall be the reward of faithfulness, and it is a good reward. 2. We are cautioned against a false and deceitful way to happiness, and that is, right or wrong, raising an estate suddenly. Say not, This is the way to *abound with blessings*, for *he that makes haste to be rich*, more haste than good speed, *shall not be innocent*; and, if he be not, he shall not be blessed of God, but rather bring a curse upon what he has; nor, if he be not innocent, can he long be easy to himself; he shall not be accounted innocent by his neighbours, but shall have their ill will and ill word. He does not say that he *cannot be innocent*, but there is all the probability in the world that he will not prove so: *He that hasteth with his feet sinneth, stumbleth, falleth. Sed quæ reverentia legum, quis metus, aut pudor, est unquam properantis avari?—What reverence for law, what fear, what shame, was ever indicated by an avaricious man hasting to be rich?*

## **21 To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread *that* man will transgress.**

Note, 1. It is a fundamental error in the administration of justice, and that which cannot but lead men to abundance of transgression, to consider the parties concerned more than the merits of the cause, so as to favour one because he is a gentleman, a scholar, my countryman, my old acquaintance, has formerly done me a kindness, or may do me one, or is of my party and persuasion, and to bear hard on the other party because he is a stranger, a poor man, has done me an ill turn, is or has been my rival, or is not of my mind, or has voted against me. Judgment is perverted when any consideration of this kind is admitted into the scale, any thing but pure right. 2. Those that are partial will be paltry. Those that have once broken through the bonds of equity, though, at first, it must be some great bribe, some noble present, that would bias them, yet, when they have debauched their consciences, they will, at length, be so sordid that *for a piece of bread* they will give judgment against their consciences; they will rather play at small game than sit out.

## **22 He that hasteth to be rich *hath* an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.**

Here again Solomon shows the sin and folly of those that will *be rich*; they are resolved that they will be so, *per fas, per nefas*—*right or wrong*; they will be so with all speed; they are getting hastily an estate. 1. They have no comfort in it: They *have an evil eye*, that is, they are always grieving at those that have more than they, and always grudging their necessary expenses, because they think the former keep them from seeming rich, the latter from being so, and between both they must needs be perpetually uneasy. 2. They have no assurance of the continuance of it, and yet take no thought to provide against the loss of it: *Poverty shall come upon* them, and the riches which they made wings for, that they might fly to them, will make themselves wings to fly from them; but they are secure and improvident, and do *not consider* this, that while they are making *haste to be rich* they are really making haste to be poor, else they would not *trust to uncertain riches*.

## **23 He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.**

Note, 1. Flatterers may please those for a time who, upon second thoughts, will detest and despise them. If ever they come to be convinced of the evil of those sinful courses they were flattered in, and to be ashamed of the pride and vanity which were humoured and gratified by those flatteries, they will hate the fawning flatterers as having had an ill design upon them, and the fulsome flatteries as having had an ill effect upon them and become nauseous. 2. Reprovers may displease those at first who yet afterwards, when the passion is over and the bitter physic begins to work well, will love and respect them. He that deals faithfully with his friend, in telling him of his faults, though he may put him into some heat for the present, and perhaps have hard words, instead of thanks, for his pains, yet afterwards he will not only have the comfort in his own bosom of having done his duty, but he also whom he reproveth will acknowledge that it was a kindness, will entertain a high opinion of his wisdom and faithfulness, and look upon him as fit to be a friend. He that cries out against his surgeon for hurting him when he is searching his wound will yet pay him well, and thank him too, when he has cured it.

## **24 Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, *It is no transgression*; the same is the companion of a destroyer.**

As Christ shows the absurdity and wickedness of those children who think it is no duty, in some cases, to maintain their parents (Matt. xv. 5), so Solomon here shows the absurdity and wickedness of those who think it is no sin to rob their parents, either by force or secretly, by wheedling them or threatening them, or by wasting what they have, and (which is no better than robbing them) running into debt and leaving them to pay it. Now, 1. This is commonly made light of by untoward children; they say, "*It is no transgression*, for it will be our own shortly, our parents can well enough spare it, we have occasion for it, we cannot live as gentlemen upon the allowance our parents give us, it is too strait for us." With such excuses as these they endeavour to shift off the conviction. But, 2. How lightly soever an ungoverned youth makes of it, it is really a very great sin; he that does it

*is the companion of a destroyer, no better than a robber on the highway. What wickedness will he scruple to commit who will rob his own parents?*

**25 He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat.**

Note, 1. Those make themselves lean, and continually unquiet, that are haughty and quarrelsome, for they are opposed to those that *shall be made fat: He that is of a proud heart*, that is conceited of himself and looks with a contempt upon all about him, that cannot bear either competition or contradiction, he *stirs up strife*, makes mischief, and creates disturbance to himself and every body else. 2. Those make themselves fat, and always easy, that live in a continual dependence upon God and his grace: *He who puts his trust in the Lord*, who, instead of struggling for himself, commits his cause to God, *shall be made fat*. He saves the money which others spend upon their pride and contentiousness; he enjoys himself, and has abundant satisfaction in his God; and thus his soul dwells at ease, and he is most likely to have plenty of outward good things. None live so easily, so pleasantly, as those who live by faith.

**26 He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.**

Here is, 1. The character of a fool: *He trusts to his own heart*, to his own wisdom and counsels, his own strength and sufficiency, his own merit and righteousness, and the good opinion he has of himself; he that does so *is a fool*, for he trusts to that, not only which *is deceitful above all things* (Jer. xvii. 9), but which has often deceived him. This implies that it is the character of a wise man (as before, v. 25) to *put his trust in the Lord*, and in his power and promise, and to follow his guidance, Prov. iii. 5, 6. 2. The comfort of a wise man: He that *walks wisely*, that trusts not to his own heart, but is humble and self-diffident, and goes on in the strength of the Lord God, *he shall be delivered*; when the fool, *that trusts in his own heart*, shall be destroyed.

**27 He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.**

Here is, 1. A promise to the charitable: *He that gives to the poor shall himself be never the poorer for so doing; he shall not lack.* If he have but little, and so be in danger of lacking, let him give out of his little, and that will prevent it from coming to nothing; as the bounty of the widow of Sarepta to Elijah (for whom she made a little cake first) saved what she had, when it was reduced to a handful of meal. If he have much, let him give much out of it, and that will prevent its growing less; he and his shall not want what is given in pious charity. What we gave we have. 2. A threatening to the uncharitable: *He that hides his eyes,* that he may not see the miseries of the poor nor read their petitions, lest his eye should affect his heart and extort some relief from him, *he shall have many a curse,* both from God and man, and neither causeless, and therefore they shall come. Woeful is the condition of that man who has the word of God and the prayers of the poor against him.

## **28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.**

This is to the same purport with what we had, v. 12. 1. When bad men are preferred, that which is good is clouded and run down. When power is put into the hands of *the wicked, men hide themselves;* wise men retire into privacy, and decline public business, not caring to be employed under them; rich men get out of the way, for fear of being squeezed for what they have; and, which is worst of all, good men abscond, despairing to do good and fearing to be persecuted and ill-treated.

2. When bad men are disgraced, degraded, and their power taken from them, then that which is good revives again, then *the righteous increase;* for, *when they perish,* good men will be put in their room, who will, by their example and interest, countenance religion and righteousness. It is well with a land when the number of good people increases in it; and it is therefore the policy of all princes, states, and potentates, to encourage them and to take special care of the good education of youth.

# **P R O V E R B S**

## **CHAP. XXIX.**

Miscellaneous Maxims.

**1 He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth *his* neck,  
shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without  
remedy.**



Here, 1. The obstinacy of many wicked people in a wicked way is to be greatly lamented. They are *often reprov'd* by parents and friends, by magistrates and ministers, by the providence of God and by their own consciences, have had their sins set in order before them and fair warning given them of the consequences of them, but all in vain; they *harden their necks*. Perhaps they fling away, and will not so much as give the reproof a patient hearing; or, if they do, yet they go on in the sins for which they are reprov'd; they will not bow their necks to the yoke, but are children of Belial; they refuse reproof (ch. x. 17), despise it (ch. v. 12), hate it, ch. xii. 1. 2. The issue of this obstinacy is to be greatly dreaded: Those that go on in sin, in spite of admonition, *shall be destroyed*; those that will not be reformed must expect to be ruined; if the rods answer not the end, expect the axes. They *shall be suddenly destroyed*, in the midst of their security, *and without remedy*; they have sinned against the preventing remedy, and therefore let them not expect any recovering remedy. Hell is remediless destruction. They *shall be destroyed, and no healing*, so the word is. If God wounds, who can heal?

## **2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.**

This is what was said before, ch. xxviii. 12, 28. 1. *The people* will have cause to *rejoice* or *mourn* according as their rulers are *righteous* or *wicked*; for, if *the righteous* be in *authority*, sin will be punished and restrained, religion and virtue will be supported and kept in reputation; *but*, if *the wicked* get power in their hands, wickedness will abound, religion and religious people will be persecuted, and so the ends of government will be perverted. 2. *The people* will actually *rejoice* or *mourn* according as their rulers are *righteous* or *wicked*. Such a conviction are even the common people under of the excellency of virtue and religion that they will rejoice when they see them preferred and countenanced; and, on the contrary, let men have ever so much honour or power, if they be wicked and vicious, and use it ill, they *make themselves contemptible and base before all the people* (as those priests, Mal. ii. 9) and subjects will think themselves miserable under such a government.

### **3 Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth *his* substance.**

Both the parts of this verse repeat what has been often said, but, on comparing them together, the sense of them will be enlarged from each other. 1. Be it observed, to the honour of a virtuous young man, that he *loves wisdom*, he is *a philosopher* (for that signifies *a lover of wisdom*), for religion is the best philosophy; he avoids bad company, and especially the company of lewd women. Hereby he *rejoices his* parents, and has the satisfaction of being a comfort to them, and increases his estate, and is likely to live comfortably. 2. Be it observed, to the reproach of a vicious young

man, that he hates *wisdom*; he *keeps company with* scandalous women, who will be his ruin, both in soul and body; he grieves his parents, and, like the prodigal son, devours their living *with harlots*. Nothing will beggar men sooner than the lusts of uncleanness; and the best preservative from those ruinous lusts is *wisdom*.

### **4 The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.**

Here is, 1. The happiness of a people under a good government. The care and business of a prince should be to *establish the land*, to maintain its fundamental laws, to settle the minds of his subjects and make them easy, to secure their liberties and properties from hostilities and for posterity, and to set in order the things that are wanting; this he must do *by judgment*, by wise counsels, and by the steady administration of justice, without respect of persons, which will have these good effects. 2. The misery of a people under a bad government: *A man of oblations* (so it is in the margin) *overthrows the land*; a man that is either sacrilegious or superstitious, or that invades the priest's office, as Saul and Uzziah—or a man that aims at nothing but getting money, and will, for a good bribe, connive at the most guilty, and, in hope of one, persecute the innocent—such governors as these will ruin a country.

## **5 A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.**

Those may be said to *flatter their neighbours* who commend and applaud that good in them (the good they do or the good they have) which really either is not or is not such as they represent it, and who profess that esteem and that affection for them which really they have not; these *spread a net for their feet*. 1. For their neighbours' feet, whom they *flatter*. They have an ill design in it; they would not praise them as they do but that they hope to make an advantage of them; and it is therefore wisdom to suspect those who flatter us, that they are secretly laying a snare for us, and to stand on our guard accordingly. Or it has an ill effect on those who are flattered; it puffs them up with pride, and makes them conceited and confident of themselves, and so proves a net that entangles them in sin. 2. For their own feet; so some understand it. He that flatters others, in expectation that they will return his compliments and flatter him, does but make himself ridiculous and odious even to those he flatters.

## **6 In the transgression of an evil man *there is a snare*: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.**

Here is, 1. The peril of a sinful way. There is not only a punishment at the end of it, but *a snare* in it. One sin is a temptation to another, and there are troubles which, as *a snare*, come suddenly upon evil men in the midst of their transgressions; nay, their transgression itself often involves them in vexations; their sin is their punishment, and they are *holden in the cords of their own iniquity*, ch. v. 22. 2. The pleasantness of the way of holiness. The snare that is *in the transgression of evil men* spoils all their mirth, *but righteous men* are kept from those snares, or delivered out of them; they walk at liberty, walk in safety, and therefore they *sing and rejoice*. Those that make God their chief joy have him for their exceeding joy, and it is their own fault if they do not *rejoice evermore*. If there be any true joy on this side heaven, doubtless those have it whose conversation is in heaven.

## **7 The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: *but the wicked regardeth not to know it***

It is a pity but that every one who sues *sub formâ pauperis*—as a pauper, should have an honest cause (they are of all others inexcusable if they have not), because the scripture has so well provided that it should have a fair hearing, and that the judge himself should be of counsel, as for the prisoner, so for the pauper. 1. It is here made the character of a *righteous* judge that he *considers the cause of the poor*. It is every man's duty to consider the poor (Ps. xli. 1), but the judgment of the poor is to be considered by those that sit in judgment; they must take as much pains to find out the right in a poor man's cause as in a rich man's. Sense of justice must make both judge and advocate as solicitous and industrious in the poor man's cause as if they hoped for the greatest advantage. 2. It is made the character of a *wicked* man that because it is a poor man's cause, which there is nothing to be got by, he *regards not to know it*, in the true state of it, for he cares not which way it goes, right or wrong. See Job xxix. 16.

## **8 Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise *men* turn away wrath.**

See here, 1. Who are the men that are dangerous to the public—*scornful men*. When such are employed in the business of the state they do things with precipitation, because they scorn to deliberate, and will not take time for consideration and consultation; they do things illegal and unjustifiable, because they scorn to be hampered by laws and constitutions; they break their faith, because they scorn to be bound by their word, and provoke the people, because they scorn to please them. Thus they *bring a city into a snare* by their ill conduct, or (as the margin reads it) they *set a city on fire*; they sow discord among the citizens and run them into confusion. Those are *scornful men* that mock at religion, the obligations of conscience, the fears of another world, and every thing that is sacred and serious. Such men are the plagues of their generation; they bring God's judgments upon a land, set men together by the ears, and so bring all to confusion. 2. Who are the men that are the blessings of a land—the *wise men* who by promoting religion, which is true wisdom, *turn away the wrath* of God, and who, by prudent counsels, reconcile contending parties and prevent the mischievous consequences of divisions. Proud and foolish men kindle the fires which wise and good men must extinguish.

## **9 *If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.***

A wise man is here advised not to set his wit to a fool's, not to dispute with him, or by contending with him to think either of fastening reason upon him or gaining right from him: *If a wise man contend with a wise man*, he may hope to be understood, and, as far as he has reason and equity on his side, to carry his point, at least to bring the controversy to a head and make it issue amicably; but, if he *contend with a foolish man, there is no rest*; he will see no end of it, nor will he have any satisfaction in it, but must expect to be always uneasy. 1. Whether the foolish man he contends with *rage or laugh*, whether he take angrily or scornfully what is said to him, whether he rail at it or mock at it, one of the two he will do, and so there will be *no rest*. However it is given, it will be ill-taken, and the wisest man must expect to be either scolded or ridiculed if he *contend with a fool*. He that fights with a dunghill, whether he be conqueror or conquered, is sure to be defiled. 2.

Whether the wise man himself *rage or laugh*, whether he take the serious or the jocular way of dealing with the fool, whether he be severe or pleasant with him, whether he come with a rod or with *the spirit of meekness* (1 Cor. iv. 21), it is all alike, no good is done. *We have piped unto you, and you have not danced, mourned unto you, and you have not lamented.*

## **10 The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.**

Note, 1. Bad men hate their best friends: *The blood-thirsty*, all the seed of the old serpent, who *was a murderer from the beginning*, all that inherit his enmity against the seed of the woman, *hate the upright*; they seek the ruin of good men because they condemn the wicked world and witness against it. Christ told his disciples that they should be *hated of all men*. Bloody men do especially *hate upright* magistrates, who would restrain and reform them, and put the laws in execution against them, and so really do them a kindness. 2. Good men love their worst enemies: *The just*, whom the bloody men hate, *seek their soul*, pray for their conversion, and would gladly do any thing for their salvation. This Christ taught us. *Father, forgive them. The just seek his soul*, that is, the soul of the upright, whom the bloody hate

(so it is commonly understood), seek to protect it from violence, and save it from, or avenge it at, the hands of *the blood-thirsty*.

## **11 A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise *man* keepeth it in till afterwards.**

Note, 1. It is a piece of weakness to be very open: He is *a fool* who *utters all his mind*,—who tells every thing he knows, and has in his mouth instantly whatever he has in his thoughts, and can keep no counsel,—who, whatever is started in discourse, quickly shoots his bolt,—who, when he is provoked, will say any thing that comes uppermost, whoever is reflected upon by it,—who, when he is to speak of any business, will say all he thinks, and yet never thinks he says enough, whether choice or refuse, corn or chaff, pertinent or impertinent, you shall have it all. 2. It is a piece of wisdom to be upon the reserve: *A wise man* will not *utter all his mind* at once, but will take time for a second thought, or reserve the present thought for a fitter time, when it will be more pertinent and likely to answer his intention; he will not deliver himself in a continued speech, or starched discourse, but with pauses, that he may hear what is to be objected and answer it. *Non minus interdum oratorium est tacere quam dicere*—*True oratory requires an occasional pause*. Plin. Ep.

7.6.

## **12 If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants *are* wicked.**

Note, 1. It is a great sin in any, especially in rulers, to *hearken to lies*; for thereby they not only give a wrong judgment themselves of persons and things, according to the lies they give credit to, but they encourage others to give wrong informations. Lies will be told to those that will hearken to them; but the receiver, in this case, is as bad as the thief. 2. Those that do so will have *all their servants wicked*. All their servants will appear wicked, for they will have lies told of them; and they will be wicked, for they will tell lies to them. All that have their ear will fill their ear with slanders and false characters and representations; and so if princes, as well as people, will be deceived, they shall be deceived, and, instead of devolving the guilt

of their own false judgments upon their servants that misinformed them, they must share in their servants' guilt, and on them

will much of the blame lie for encouraging such misinformations and giving countenance and ear to them.

### **13 The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the Lord lighteneth both their eyes.**

This shows how wisely the great God serves the designs of his providence by persons of very different tempers, capacities, and conditions in the world, even, 1. By those that are contrary the one to the other. Some are *poor* and forced to borrow; others are rich, have a great deal of *the mammon of unrighteousness* (*deceitful riches* they are called), and they are creditors, or *usurers*, as it is in the margin. Some are *poor*, and honest, and laborious; others are rich, slothful, and *deceitful*. They *meet together* in the business of this world, and have dealings with one another, and *the Lord enlightens both their eyes*; he causes his sun to shine upon both and gives them both the comforts of this life. To some of both sorts he gives his grace. He enlightens the eyes of the poor by giving them patience, and of the deceitful by giving them repentance, as Zaccheus. 2. By those that we think could best be spared. *The poor and the deceitful* we are ready to look upon as blemishes of Providence, but God makes even them to display the beauty of Providence; he has wise ends not only in leaving the poor always with us, but in permitting *the deceived and the deceiver*, for both *are his* (Job xii. 16) and turn to his praise.

### **14 The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever.**

Here is, 1. The duty of magistrates, and that is, to judge faithfully between man and man, and to determine all causes brought before them, according to truth and equity, particularly to take care of *the poor*; not to countenance them in an unjust cause for the sake of their poverty (Exod. xxiii.

3), but to see that their poverty do not turn to their prejudice if they have a just cause. The rich will look to themselves, but *the poor* and needy the prince must *defend* (Ps. lxxxii. 3) and plead for, Prov. xxxi. 9. 2. The

happiness of those magistrates that do their duty. Their *throne* of honour, their tribunal of judgment, *shall be established for ever*. This will secure to them the favour of God and strengthen their interest in the affections of their people, both which will be the establishment of their power, and help to transmit it to posterity and perpetuate it in the family.

Parental Discipline.

### **15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* bringeth his mother to shame.**

Parents, in educating their children, must consider, 1. The benefit of due correction. They must not only tell their children what is good and evil, but they must chide them, and correct them too, if need be, when they either neglect that which is good or do that which is evil. If a *reproof* will serve without *the rod*, it is well, but *the rod* must never be used without a rational and grave *reproof*; and then, though it may be a present uneasiness both to the father and to the child, yet it will *give wisdom*. *Vexatio dat intellectum—Vexation sharpens the intellect*. The child will take warning, and so will get *wisdom*. 2. The mischief of undue indulgence: *A child* that is not restrained or reproofed, but is *left to himself*, as Adonijah was, to follow his own inclinations, may do well if he will, but, if he take to ill courses, nobody will hinder him; it is a thousand to one but he proves a disgrace to

his family, and *brings his mother*, who fondled him and humoured him in his licentiousness, *to shame*, to poverty, to reproach, and perhaps will himself be abusive to her and give her ill language.

### **16 When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.**

Note, 1. The more sinners there are the more sin there is: *When the wicked*, being countenanced by authority, grow numerous, and walk on every side, no marvel if *transgression increases*, as a plague in the country is said to increase when still more and more are infected with it. *Transgression* grows more impudent and bold, more imperious and threatening, when there are many to keep it in countenance. In the old world, when *men began to*



*multiply*, they began to degenerate and corrupt themselves and one another. 2. The more sin there is the nearer is the ruin threatened. Let not *the righteous* have their faith and hope shocked by the increase of sin and sinners. Let them not say that they have *cleansed their hands in vain*, or that *God has forsaken the earth*, but wait with patience; the transgressors shall fall, the measure of their iniquity will be full, and then they shall fall from their dignity and power, and fall into disgrace and destruction, and *the righteous shall* have the satisfaction of *seeing their fall* (Ps. xxxvii. 34), perhaps in this world, certainly in the judgment of the great day, when the fall of God's implacable enemies will be the joy and triumph of glorified saints. See Isa. lxvi. 24; Gen. xix. 28.

### **17 Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.**

Note, 1. It is a very happy thing when children prove the comfort of their parents. Good children are so; they *give them rest*, make them easy, and free from the many cares they have had concerning them; *yea*, they *give delight unto their souls*. It is a pleasure to parents, which none know but those that are blessed with it, to see the happy fruit of the good education they have given their children, and to have a prospect of their well-doing for both worlds; it *gives delight* proportionable to the many thoughts of heart that have been concerning them. 2. In order to this, children must be trained up under a strict discipline, and not suffered to do what they will and to go without rebuke when they do amiss. The foolishness bound up in their hearts must by correction be driven out when they are young, or it will break out, to their own and their parents' shame, when they are grown up.

Miscellaneous Maxims.

### **18 Where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.**

See here, I. The misery of the people that want a settled ministry: *Where there is no vision*, no prophet to expound the law, no priest or Levite to teach the good knowledge of the Lord, no means of grace, the word of the Lord is scarce, there is *no open vision* (1 Sam. iii. 1), where it is so *the*

*people perish*; the word has many significations, any of which will apply here. 1. *The people are made naked*, stripped of their ornaments and so exposed to shame, stripped of their armour and so exposed to danger. How bare does a place look without Bibles and ministers, and what an easy prey is it to the enemy of souls! 2. *The people rebel*, not only against God, but against their prince; good preaching would make people good subjects, but, for want of it, they are turbulent and factious, and *despise dominions*, because they know no better. 3. *The people are idle*, or *they play*, as the scholars are apt to do when the master is absent; they do nothing to any good purpose, but stand

all the day idle, and sporting in the market-place, for want of instruction what to do and how to do it. 4. *They are scattered as sheep having no shepherd*, for want of the masters of assemblies to call them and keep them together, Mark vi. 34. They are scattered from God and their duty by apostasies, from one another by divisions; God is provoked to scatter them by his judgments, 2 Chron. xv. 3,

5. *They perish*; they are *destroyed for lack of knowledge*, Hos. iv. 6. See what reason we have to be thankful to God for the plenty of *open vision* which we enjoy.

II. The felicity of a people that have not only a settled, but a successful ministry among them, the people that hear and *keep the law*, among whom religion is uppermost; *happy* are such a people and every particular person among them. It is not having the law, but obeying it, and living up to it, that will entitle us to blessedness.

## **19 A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer.**

Here is the description of an unprofitable, slothful, wicked servant, a slave that serves not from conscience, or love, but purely from fear. Let those that have such servants put on patience to bear the vexation and not disturb themselves at it. See their character. 1. No rational words will work upon them; they *will not be corrected* and reformed, not brought to their business, nor cured of their idleness and laziness, by fair means, no, nor by foul words; even the most gentle master will be forced to use severity with

them; no reason will serve their turn, for they are unreasonable. 2. No rational words will be got from them. They are dogged and sullen; and, *though they understand* the questions you ask them, they *will not* give you an *answer*; though you make it ever so plain to them what you expect from them, they will not promise you to mend what is amiss nor to mind their business. See the folly of those servants whose mouth by their silence calls for strokes; they might *be corrected by words* and save blows, but they *will not*.

## **20 Seest thou a man *that is* hasty in his words? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.**

Solomon here shows that there is little hope of bringing a man to wisdom that is hasty either,

1. Through rashness and inconsideration: *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his matters*, that is of a light desultory wit, that seems to take a thing quickly, but takes it by the halves, gallops over a book or science, but takes no time to digest it, no time to pause or muse upon a business? *There is more hope of* making a scholar and a wise man of one that is dull and heavy, and slow in his studies, than of one that has such a mercurial genius and cannot fix. 2. Through pride and conceitedness: *Seest thou a man that is forward to speak to every matter that is started*, and affects to speak first to it, to open it, and speak last to it, to give judgment upon it, as if he were an oracle? *There is more hope of a modest fool*, who is sensible of his folly, than of such a self-conceited one.

## **21 He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become *his* son at the length.**

Note, 1. It is an imprudent thing in a master to be too fond of a servant, to advance him too fast, and admit him to be too familiar with him, to suffer him to be over-nice and curious in his diet, and clothing, and lodging, and so to bring him up delicately, because he is a favourite, and an agreeable servant; it should be remembered that he is a servant, and, by being thus indulged, will be spoiled for any other place. Servants must endure hardness. 2. It is an ungrateful thing in a

servant, but what is very common, to behave insolently because he has been used tenderly. The humble prodigal thinks himself unworthy *to be called a son*, and is content to be a servant; the pampered slave thinks himself too good to be called *a servant*, and will be *a son at the length*, will take his ease and liberty, will be on a par with his master, and perhaps pretend to the inheritance. Let masters *give their servants that which is equal* and fit for them, and neither more nor less. This is very applicable to the body, which is a servant to the soul; those that *delicately bring up* the body, that humour it, and are over-tender of it, will find that at length it will forget its place, and *become a son*, a master, a perfect tyrant.

## **22 An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.**

See here the mischief that flows from an angry, passionate, furious disposition. 1. It makes men provoking to one another: *An angry man stirs up strife*, is troublesome and quarrelsome in the family and in the neighbourhood, blows the coals, and even forces those to fall out with him that would live peaceable and quietly by him. 2. It makes men provoking to God: *A furious man*, who is wedded to his humours and passions, cannot but *abound in transgressions*. Undue anger is a sin which is the cause of many sins; it not only hinders men from calling upon God's name, but it occasions their swearing, and cursing, and profaning God's name.

## **23 A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.**

This agrees with what Christ said more than once, 1. That those who *exalt themselves shall be abased*. Those that think to gain respect by lifting up themselves above their rank, by looking high, talking big, appearing fine, and applauding themselves, will on the contrary expose themselves to contempt, lose their reputation, and provoke God by humbling providences to bring them down and lay them *low*. 2. That those who *humble themselves shall be exalted*, and shall be established in their dignity: *Honour shall uphold the humble in spirit*; their humility is their honour, and that shall make them truly and safely great, and recommend them to the esteem of all that are wise and good.

## **24 Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth *it* not.**

See here what sin and ruin those involve themselves in who are drawn away by the enticement of sinners. 1. They incur a great deal of guilt: *He* does so that goes *partner with* such as rob and defraud, and *casts in his lot among them*, ch. i. 11, &c. The receiver is as bad as the thief; and, being drawn in to join with him in the commission of the sin, he cannot escape joining with him in the concealment of it, though it be with the most horrid perjuries and execrations. They *hear cursing* when they are sworn to tell the whole truth, but they will not confess. 2. They hasten to utter ruin: They even *hate their own souls*, for they wilfully do that which will be the inevitable destruction of them. See the absurdities sinners are guilty of; they love death, than which nothing is more dreadful, and *hate their own souls*, than which nothing is more dear.

## **25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.**

Here, 1. We are cautioned not to dread the power of man, neither the power of a prince nor the power of the multitude; both are formidable enough, but the slavish fear of either *brings a snare*,

that is, exposes men to many insults (some take a pride in terrifying the timorous), or rather exposes men to many temptations. Abraham, for *fear of man*, denied his wife, and Peter his Master, and many a one his God and religion. We must not shrink from duty, nor commit sin, to avoid the wrath of man, nor, though we see it coming upon us, be disquieted with fear, Dan. iii. 16; Ps. cxviii. 6. He must himself die (Isa. li. 12) and can but kill our body, Luke xii. 5. 2. We are encouraged to depend upon the power of God, which would keep us from all that *fear of man* which has either torment or temptation in it. *Whoso puts his trust in the Lord*, for protection and supply in the way of duty, *shall be set on high*, above the power of man and above the fear of that power. A holy confidence in God makes a man both great and easy, and enables him to look with a gracious contempt upon the most formidable designs of hell and earth against him. If God be my salvation, *I will trust and not be afraid*.

## **26 Many seek the ruler's favour; but *every* man's judgment *cometh* from the Lord.**

See here, 1. What is the common course men take to advance and enrich themselves, and make themselves great: they *seek the ruler's favour*; and, as if all their judgment proceeded from him, to him they make all their court. Solomon was himself a *ruler*; and knew with what sedulity men made their application to him, some on one errand, others on another, but all for his *favour*. It is the way of the world to make interest with great men, and expect much from the smiles of second causes, which yet are uncertain, and frequently disappoint them. *Many* take a great deal of pains in seeking *the ruler's favour* and yet cannot have it; many have it for a little while, but they cannot keep themselves in it, by some little turn or other they are brought under his displeasure; many have it, and keep it, and yet it does not answer their expectation, they cannot make that hand of it that they promised themselves they should. Haman had *the ruler's favour*, and yet it availed him nothing. 2. What is the wisest course men can take to be happy. Let them look up to God, and seek the favour of the Ruler of rulers; for *every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord*. It is not with us as the ruler pleases; his favour cannot make us happy, his frowns cannot make us miserable. But it is as God pleases; every creature is that to us that God makes it to be, no more and no other. He is the first Cause, on which all second causes depend; if he help not, they cannot, 2 Kings vi. 27; Job

xxxiv. 29.

## **27 An unjust man *is* an abomination to the just: and *he that is upright in the way is* abomination to the wicked.**

This expresses not only the innate contrariety that there is between virtue and vice, as between light and darkness, fire and water, but the old enmity that has always been between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, Gen. iii. 15. 1. All that are sanctified have a rooted antipathy to wickedness and wicked people. They have a good will to the souls of all (God has, and would have none perish); but they hate the ways and

practices of those that are impious towards God and injurious towards men; they cannot hear of them nor speak of them without a holy indignation; they loathe the society of the ungodly and unjust, and dread the thought of giving them any countenance, but do all they can to bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end. Thus *an unjust* man makes himself odious *to the just*, and it is one part of his present shame and punishment that

good men cannot endure him. 2. All that are unsanctified have a like rooted antipathy to godliness and godly people: *He that is upright in the way*, that makes conscience of what he says and does, *is an abomination to the wicked*, whose wickedness is restrained perhaps and suppressed, or, at least, shamed and condemned, by the uprightness of the upright. Thus Cain did, who was *of his father the devil*. And this is not only the wickedness of the wicked, that they hate those whom God loves, but their misery too, that they hate those whom they shall shortly see in everlasting bliss and honour, and who shall have *dominion over them in the morning*, Ps. xlix. 14.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XXX.

This and the following chapter are an appendix to Solomon's proverbs; but they are both expressly called prophecies in the first verses of both, by which it appears that the penmen of them, whoever they were, were divinely inspired. This chapter was penned by one that bears the name of "Agur Ben Jakeh." What tribe he was of, or when he lived, we are not told; what he wrote, being indited by the Holy Ghost, is here kept upon record. We have here, I. His confession of faith, ver. 1-6. II. His prayer, ver. 7-9. III. A caution against wronging servants, ver. 10. IV. Four wicked generations, ver. 11-14. V. Four things insatiable (ver. 15, 16), to which is added fair warning to undutiful children, ver. 17. VI. Four things unsearchable, ver. 18-20. VII. Four things intolerable, ver. 21-23. VIII. Four things little and wise, ver. 24-28. IX. Four things stately, ver. 29 to the end.

**The Words of Agur.**

**1 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *even* the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, 2 Surely I *am* more brutish than *any* man, and have not the understanding of a man. 3 I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.**

**4 Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* his name, and what *is* his son's name, if thou canst tell? 5 Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. 6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.**

Some make *Agur* to be not the name of this author, but his character; he was a *collector* (so it signifies), a gatherer, one that did not compose things himself, but collected the wise sayings and observations of others, made abstracts of the writings of others, which some think is the reason why he says (v. 3), "*I have not learned wisdom* myself, but have been a scribe, or amanuensis, to other wise and learned men." Note, We must not bury our talent, though it be but one, but, as we have received the gift, so minister the same, if it be but to collect what others have written. But we rather suppose it to be his name, which, no doubt, was well known then, though not mentioned

elsewhere in scripture. *Ithiel and Ucal* are mentioned, either, 1. As the names of his pupils, whom he instructed, or who consulted him as an oracle, having a great opinion of his wisdom and goodness. Probably they wrote from him what he dictated, as Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah, and by their means it was preserved, as they were ready to attest it to be his, for it was spoken to them; they were two witnesses of it. Or, 2. As the subject of his discourse. *Ithiel* signifies *God with me*, the application of *Immanuel*, *God with us*. The word calls him *God with us*; faith appropriates this, and calls him "*God with me*, who loved me, and gave



himself for me, and into union and communion with whom I am admitted." *Ucal* signifies *the Mighty One*, for it is upon one that is mighty that help is laid for us. Many good interpreters therefore apply this to the Messiah, for to him all the prophecies bear witness, and why not this then? It is what Agur spoke concerning *Ithiel*, even concerning *Ithiel* (that is the name on which the stress is laid) *with us*, Isa. vii. 14.

Three things the prophet here aims at:—

I. To abase himself. Before he makes confession of his faith he makes confession of his folly and the weakness and deficiency of reason, which make it so necessary that we be guided and governed by faith. Before he speaks concerning the Saviour he speaks of himself as needing a Saviour, and as nothing without him; we must go out of ourselves before we go into Jesus Christ.

1. He speaks of himself as wanting a righteousness, and having done foolishly, very foolishly. When he reflects upon himself he owns, *Surely I am more brutish than any man. Every man has become brutish*, Jer. x. 14. But he that knows his own heart knows so much more evil of himself than he does of any other that he cries out, "*Surely I cannot but think that I am more brutish than any man; surely no man has such a corrupt deceitful heart as I have. I have acted as one that has not the understanding of Adam, as one that is wretchedly degenerated from the knowledge and righteousness in which man was at first created; nay, I have not the common sense and reason of a man, else I should not have done as I have done.*" Agur, when he was applied to by others as wiser than most, acknowledged himself more foolish than any. Whatever high opinion others may have of us, it becomes us to have low thoughts of ourselves. 2. He speaks of himself as wanting a revelation to guide him in the ways of truth and wisdom. He owns (v. 3) "*I neither learned wisdom by any power of my own (the depths of it cannot be fathomed by my line and plummet) nor know I the knowledge of the holy ones, the angels, our first parents in innocency, nor of the holy things of God; I can get no insight into them, nor make any judgment of them, further than God is pleased to make them known to me.*" The natural man, the natural powers, perceive not, nay, they *receive not, the things of the Spirit of God*. Some suppose Agur to be asked,

as Apollo's oracle was of old, *Who was the wisest man?* The answer is, *He that is sensible of his own ignorance*, especially in divine things. *Hoc tantum scio, me nihil scire—All that I know is that I know nothing.*

II. To advance Jesus Christ, and the Father in him (v. 4): *Who ascended up into heaven, &c.*

1. Some understand this of God and of his works, which are both incomparable and unsearchable. He challenges all mankind to give an account of the heavens above, of the winds, the waters, the earth: "Who can pretend to have *ascended up to heaven*, to take a view of the orbs above, and then to have descended, to give us a description of them? Who can pretend to have had the command

of the winds, to have grasped them in his hand and managed them, as God does, or to have bound the waves of the sea with a swaddling band, as God has done? Who has *established the ends of the earth*, or can describe the strength of its foundations or the extent of its limits? Tell me what is *the man's name* who can undertake to vie with God or to be of his cabinet-council, or, if he be dead, what is his name to whom he has bequeathed this great secret." 2. Others refer it to Christ, to Ithiel and Ucal, the Son of God, for it is the Son's name, as well as the Father's, that is here enquired after, and a challenge given to any to vie with him. We must now exalt Christ as one revealed; they then magnified him as one concealed, as one they had heard something of but had very dark and defective ideas of. *We have heard the fame of him with our ears*, but cannot describe him (Job xxviii. 22); certainly it is God that has *gathered the wind in his fists* and *bound the waters as in a garment*; but *what is his name?* It is, *I am that I am* (Exod. iii. 14), a name to be adored, not to be understood. What is *his Son's name*, by whom he does all these things? The Old-Testament saints expected the Messiah to be the *Son of the Blessed*, and he is here spoken of as a person distinct from the Father, but his name as yet secret. Note, The great Redeemer, in the glories of his providence and grace, can neither be paralleled nor found out to perfection. (1.) The glories of the kingdom of his grace are unsearchable and unparallelled; for who besides has *ascended into heaven and descended*? Who besides is perfectly acquainted with both worlds, and has himself a free correspondence with both, and is therefore fit

to settle a correspondence between them, as Mediator, as Jacob's ladder? He was *in heaven* in the *Father's bosom* (John i. 1, 18); thence he descended to take our nature upon him; and never was there such condescension. In that nature he again ascended (Eph. iv. 9), to receive the promised glories of his exalted state; and who besides has done this? Rom. x. 6. (2.) The glories of the kingdom of his providence are likewise unsearchable and unparalleled. The same that reconciles heaven and earth was the Creator of both and governs and disposes of all. His government of the three lower elements of *air, water, and earth*, is here particularized. [1.] The motions of the air are of his directing. Satan pretends to be *the prince of the power of the air*, but even there Christ has *all power*; he *rebuked the winds* and they obeyed him. [2.] The bounds of the water are of his appointing: He *binds the waters as in a garment; hitherto they shall come, and no further*, Job xxxviii. 9-11. [3.] The foundations of the earth are of his establishing. He founded it at first; he upholds it still. If Christ had not interposed, the foundations of the earth would have sunk under the load of the curse upon the ground, for man's sin. Who and what is the mighty He that does all this? We cannot *find out God*, nor the *Son of God, unto perfection. Oh the depth of that knowledge!*

III. To assure us of the truth of the word of God, and to recommend it to us, v. 5, 6. Agur's pupils expect to be instructed by him in the things of God. "Alas!" says he, "I cannot undertake to instruct you; go to the word of God; see what he has there revealed of himself, and of his mind and will; you need know no more than what that will teach you, and that you may rely upon as sure and sufficient. *Every word of God is pure*; there is not the least mixture of falsehood and corruption in it." The words of men are to be heard and read with jealousy and with allowance, but there is not the least ground to suspect any deficiency in the word of God; it is *as silver purified seven times*

(Ps. xii. 6), without the least dross or alloy. *Thy word is very pure*, Ps. cxix. 140. 1. It is sure, and therefore we must trust to it and venture our souls upon it. God in his word, God in his promise, is *a shield*, a sure protection, to all those that put themselves under his protection and *put their trust in him*. The word of God, applied by faith, will make us easy in the midst of the greatest dangers, Ps. xlv. 1, 2. 2. It is sufficient, and therefore we must

not add to it (v. 6): *Add thou not unto his words*, because they are pure and perfect. This forbids the advancing of any thing, not only in contradiction to the word of God, but in competition with it; though it be under the plausible pretence of explaining it, yet, if it pretend to be of equal authority with it, it is *adding to his words*, which is not only a reproach to them as insufficient, but opens a door to all manner of errors and corruptions; for, that one absurdity being granted, that the word of any man, or company of men, is to be received with the same faith and veneration as the word of God, a thousand follow. We must be content with what God has thought fit to make known to us of his mind, and not covet to be *wise above what is written*; for, (1.) God will resent it as a heinous affront: "*He will reprove thee*, will reckon with thee as a traitor against his crown and dignity, and lay thee under the heavy doom of those that add to his words, or diminish from them," Deut. iv. 2; xii. 32. (2.) We shall run ourselves into endless mistakes: "Thou wilt be found a liar, a corrupter of the word of truth, a broacher of heresies, and guilty of the worst of forgeries, counterfeiting the broad seal of heaven, and pretending a divine mission and inspiration, when it is all a cheat. Men may be thus deceived, but *God is not mocked*."

The Prayer of Agur.

**7 Two *things* have I required of thee; deny me *them* not before I die: 8 Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: 9 Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*.**

After Agur's confession and creed, here follows his litany, where we may observe,

I. The preface to his prayer: *Two things have I required* (that is, *requested*) of thee, O God!

Before we go to pray it is good to consider what we need, and what the things are which we have to ask of God.—What does our case require? What do our hearts desire? What would we that God should do for us?—

that we may not have to seek for our petition and request when we should be presenting it. He begs, *Deny me not before I die*. In praying, we should think of dying, and pray accordingly. "Lord, give me pardon, and peace, and grace, before I die, *before I go hence and be no more*; for, if I be not renewed and sanctified before I die, the work will not be done after; if I do not prevail in prayer before I die, prayers afterwards will not prevail, no, not *Lord, Lord*. There is none of this wisdom or working in the grave. *Deny me not thy grace*, for, if thou do, I die, I perish; if thou be silent to me, *I am like those that go down to the pit*, Ps. xxviii. 1. *Deny me not before I die*; as long as I continue in the land of the living, let me continue under the conduct of thy grace and good providence."

II. The prayer itself. The *two things* he requires are grace sufficient and food convenient. 1. Grace sufficient for his soul: "*Remove from me vanity and lies*; deliver me from sin, from all corrupt principles, practices, and affections, from error and mistake, which are at the bottom of all sin, from

the love of the world and the things of it, which are all *vanity and a lie*." Some understand it as a prayer for the pardon of sin, for, when God forgives sin, he removes it, he takes it away. Or, rather, it is a prayer of the same import with that, *Lead us not into temptation*. Nothing is more mischievous to us than sin, and therefore there is nothing which we should more earnestly pray against than that we may *do no evil*. 2. Food convenient for his body. Having prayed for the operations of divine grace, he here begs the favours of the divine Providence, but such as may tend to the good and not to the prejudice of the soul. (1.) He prays that of God's free gift he might receive a competent portion of the good things of this life: "*Feed me with the bread of my allowance*, such bread as thou thinkest fit to allow me." As to all the gifts of the divine Providence, we must refer ourselves to the divine wisdom. Or, "*the bread that is fit for me*, as a man, a master of a family, that which is agreeable to my rank and condition in the world." For *as is the man so is his competency*. Our Saviour seems to refer to this when he teaches us to pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*, as this seems to refer to Jacob's vow, in which he wished for no more than *bread to eat and raiment to put on*. Food convenient for us is what we ought to be content with, though we have not dainties, varieties, and superfluities—what is for necessity, though we have not for delight and ornament; and it is what we

may in faith pray for and depend upon God for. (2.) He prays that he may be kept from every condition of life that would be a temptation to him. [1.] He prays against the extremes of abundance and want: *Give me neither poverty nor riches*. He does not hereby prescribe to God, nor pretend to teach him what condition he shall allot to him, nor does he pray against poverty or riches absolutely, as in themselves evil, for either of them, by the grace of God, may be sanctified and be a means of good to us; but, *First*, He hereby intends to express the value which wise and good men have for a middle state of life, and, with submission to the will of God, desires that that might be his state, neither great honour nor great contempt. We must learn how to manage both (as St. Paul, Phil. iv. 12), but rather wish to be always between both. *Optimus pecuniæ modus qui nec in paupertatem cedit nec procul à paupertate discedit*—*The best condition is that which neither implies poverty nor yet recedes far from it*. Seneca. *Secondly*, He hereby intimates a holy jealousy he had of himself, that he could not keep his ground against the temptations either of an afflicted or a prosperous condition. Others may preserve their integrity in either, but he is afraid of both, and therefore grace teaches him to pray against riches as much as nature against poverty; but *the will of the Lord be done*. [2.] He gives a pious reason for his prayer, v. 9. He does not say, "*Lest I be rich*, and cumbered with care, and envied by my neighbours, and eaten up with a multitude of servants, or, *lest I be poor* and trampled on, and forced to work hard and fare hard;" but, "*Lest I be rich* and sin, or *poor* and sin." Sin is that which a good man is afraid of in every condition and under every event; witness Nehemiah (ch. vi. 13), *that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin*. *First*, He dreads the temptations of a prosperous condition, and therefore even deprecates that: *Lest I be full and deny thee* (as Jeshurun, who waxed fat and kicked, and forsook God who made him, Deut.

xxxii. 15), and say, as Pharaoh in his pride, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* Prosperity makes people proud and forgetful of God, as if they had no need of him and were therefore under no obligation to him. *What can the Almighty do for them?* Job xxii. 17. And therefore they will do

nothing for him. Even good men are afraid of the worst sins, so deceitful do they think their own hearts to be; and they know that the greatest gains of

the world will not balance the least guilt. *Secondly*, He dreads the temptations of a poor condition, and for that reason, and no other, deprecates that: *Lest I be poor and steal*. Poverty is a strong temptation to dishonesty, and such as many are overcome by, and they are ready to think it will be their excuse; but it will not bear them out at God's bar any more than at men's to say, "I stole because I was poor;" yet, if a man *steal for the satisfying of his soul when he is hungry*, it is a case of compassion (ch. vi. 30) and what even those that have some principles of honesty in them may be drawn to. But observe why Agur dreads this, not because he should endanger himself by it, "Lest I steal, and be hanged for it, whipped or put in the stocks, or sold for a bondman," as among the Jews poor thieves were, who had not wherewithal to make restitution; but lest he should dishonour God by it: "*Lest I should steal, and take the name of my God in vain*, that is, discredit my profession of religion by practices disagreeable to it." Or, "Lest I steal, and, when I am charged with it, forswear myself." He *therefore* dreads one sin, because it would draw on another, for the way of sin is downhill. Observe, He calls God *his God*, and *therefore* he is afraid of doing any thing to offend him because of the relation he stands in to him.

Four Wicked Generations.

**10 Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty. 11 *There is a generation that* curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. 12 *There is a generation that are* pure in their own eyes, and *yet* is not washed from their filthiness. 13 *There is a generation, O* how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. 14 *There is a generation, whose teeth are as* swords, and their jaw teeth *as* knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from *among* men.**

Here is, I. A caution not to abuse other people's servants any more than our own, nor to make mischief between them and their masters, for it is an ill office, invidious, and what will make a man odious, v. 10. Consider, 1. It is

an injury to the servant, whose poor condition makes him an object of pity, and therefore it is barbarous to add affliction to him that is afflicted: *Hurt not a servant with thy tongue* (so the margin reads it); for it argues a sordid disposition to smite any body secretly with the scourge of the tongue, especially a servant, who is not a match for us, and whom we should rather protect, if his master be severe with him, than exasperate him more. 2. "It will perhaps be an injury to thyself. If a servant be thus provoked, perhaps he will curse thee, will accuse thee and bring thee into trouble, or give thee an ill word and blemish thy reputation, or appeal to God against thee, and imprecate *his* wrath upon thee, who is the patron and protector of oppressed innocency."

II. An account, upon occasion of this caution, of some wicked generations of men, that are justly abominable to all that are virtuous and good. 1. Such as are abusive to their parents, give them bad language and wish them ill, call them bad names and actually injure them. *There is a generation* of such; young men of that black character commonly herd together, and irritate one another against their parents. *A generation of vipers* those are who curse their natural parents, or their magistrates, or their ministers, because they cannot endure the yoke; and those are near of kin to them who, though they have not yet arrived at such a pitch of wickedness as to curse their parents,

yet do not bless them, cannot give them a good word, and will not pray for them. 2. Such as are conceited of themselves, and, under a show and pretence of sanctity, hide from others, and perhaps from themselves too, abundance of reigning wickedness in secret (v. 12); they are *pure in their own eyes*, as if they were in all respects such as they should be. They have a very good opinion of themselves and their own character, that they are not only righteous, but *rich and increased with goods* (Rev. iii. 17), and yet *are not cleansed from their filthiness*, the filthiness of their hearts, which they pretend to be the best part of them. They are, it may be, swept and garnished, but they are not washed, nor sanctified; as the Pharisees that within were *full of all uncleanness*, Matt. xxiii. 25, 26. 3. Such as are haughty and scornful to those about them, v. 13. He speaks of them with amazement at their intolerable pride and insolence: "*Oh how lofty are their eyes!* With what disdain do they look upon their neighbours, as not worthy



to be set with the dogs of their flock! What a distance do they expect every body should keep; and, when they look upon themselves, how do they strut and vaunt like the peacock, thinking they make themselves illustrious when really they make themselves ridiculous!" There is a generation of such, on whom he that *resists the proud* will pour contempt. 4. Such as are cruel to the poor and barbarous to all that lie at their mercy (v. 14); their teeth are iron and steel, *swords and knives*, instruments of cruelty, with which they *devour the poor* with the greatest pleasure imaginable, and as greedily as hungry men cut their meat and eat it. God has so ordered it that the *poor we shall always have with us*, that they shall *never cease out of the land*; but there are those who, because they hate to relieve them, would, if they could, abolish them *from the earth, from among men*, especially God's poor. Some understand it of those who wound and ruin others by slanders and false accusations, and severe censures of their everlasting state; their tongues, and their teeth too (which are likewise organs of speech), are *as swords and knives*, Ps. lvii. 4.

Four Things Unsearchable.

**15 The horseleach hath two daughters, *crying*. Give, give. There are three *things that* are never satisfied, *yea*, four *things* say not, *It is* enough: 16 The grave; and the barren womb; the earth *that* is not filled with water; and the fire *that* saith not, *It is* enough. 17 The eye *that* mocketh at *his* father, and despiseth to obey *his* mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.**

He had spoken before of those that devoured the poor (v. 14), and had spoken of them last, as the worst of all the four generations there mentioned; now here he speaks of their insatiableness in doing this. The temper that puts them upon it is made up of cruelty and covetousness. Now those are *two daughters* of the *horse-leech*, its genuine offspring, that still cry, "*Give, give, give more blood, give more money*;" for the bloody are still blood-thirsty; being drunk with blood, they add thirst to their drunkenness, and will seek it yet again. Those also that *love silver* shall

never *be satisfied with silver*. Thus, while from these two principles they are devouring the poor, they are continually uneasy to themselves, as David's enemies, Ps. lix. 14, 15. Now, for the further illustration of this,

I. He specifies four other things which are insatiable, to which those devourers are compared, which say not, *It is enough*, or *It is wealth*. Those are never rich that are always coveting. Now these four things that are always craving are, 1. The grave, into which multitudes fall, and yet still more will fall, and it swallows them all up, and returns none, *Hell and destruction are never full*, ch. xxvii. 20. When it comes to our turn we shall find the grave ready for us, Job xvii. 1. 2. The *barren womb*, which is impatient of its affliction in being barren, and cries, as Rachel did, *Give me children*. 3. The *parched ground* in time of drought (especially in those hot countries), which still soaks in the rain that comes in abundance upon it and in a little time wants more. 4. The *fire*, which, when it has consumed abundance of fuel, yet still devours all the combustible matter that is thrown into it. So insatiable are the corrupt desires of sinners, and so little satisfaction have they even in the gratification of them.

II. He adds a terrible threatening to disobedient children (v. 17), for warning to the first of those four wicked generations, that curse their parents (v. 11), and shows here,

1. Who they are that belong to that generation, not only those that curse their parents in heat and passion, but, (1.) Those that *mock* at them, though it be but with a scornful eye, looking with disdain upon them because of their bodily infirmities, or looking sour or dogged at them when they instruct or command, impatient at their checks and angry at them. God takes notice with what eye children look upon their parents, and will reckon for the leering look and the casts of the evil eye as well as for the bad language given them. (2.) Those that *despise to obey* them, that think it a thing below them to be dutiful to their parents, especially to the *mother*; they scorn to be controlled by her; and thus she that bore them in sorrow in greater sorrow bears their manners.

2. What their doom will be. Those that dishonour their parents shall be set up as monuments of God's vengeance; they shall be hanged in chains, as it were, for the birds of prey to pick out their eyes, those eyes with which they

looked so scornfully on their good parents. The dead bodies of malefactors were not to hang all night, but before night the ravens would have picked out their eyes. If men do not punish undutiful children, God will, and will load those with the greatest infamy that conduct themselves haughtily towards their parents. Many who have come to an ignominious end have owned that the wicked courses that brought them to it began in a contempt of their parents' authority.

Four Things Little and Wise.

**18 There be three *things which* are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:**

**19 The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid. 20 Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. 21 For three *things* the earth is disquieted, and for four *which* it cannot bear: 22 For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; 23 For an odious *woman* when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.**

Here is, I. An account of four things that are unsearchable, *too wonderful* to be fully known. And here,

1. The first three are natural things, and are only designed as comparisons for the illustration of the last. We cannot trace, (1.) *An eagle in the air*. Which way she has flown cannot be discovered either by the footstep or by the scent, as the way of a beast may upon ground; nor can we account for the wonderful swiftness of her flight, how soon she has gone beyond our ken. (2.) *A serpent upon a rock*. The way of a serpent in the sand we may find by the track, but not of a serpent upon the hard rock; nor can we describe how a serpent will, without feet, in a little time creep to the top of

a rock. (3.) *A ship in the midst of the sea.* The leviathan indeed *makes a path to shine after him, one would think the deep to be hoary* (Job xli. 32), but a ship leaves no mark behind it, and sometimes it is so tossed upon the waves that one would wonder how it lives at sea and gains its point. The kingdom of nature is full of wonders, marvellous things which the God of nature does, *past finding out*.

2. The fourth is a mystery of iniquity, more unaccountable than any of these; it belongs to the depths of Satan, that deceitfulness and that desperate wickedness of the heart which none can know, Jer. xvii. 9. It is twofold:— (1.) The cursed arts which a vile adulterer has to debauch a maid, and to persuade her to yield to his wicked and abominable lust. This is what a wanton poet wrote a whole book of, long since, *De arte amandi—On the art of love*. By what pretensions and protestations of love, and all its powerful charms, promises of marriage, assurances of secrecy and reward, is many an unwary virgin brought to sell her virtue, and honour, and peace, and soul, and all to a base traitor; for so all sinful lust is in the kingdom of love. The more artfully the temptation is managed the more watchful and resolute ought every pure heart to be against it. (2.) The cursed arts which a vile adulteress has to conceal her wickedness, especially from her husband, from whom she treacherously departs; so close are her intrigues with her lewd companions, and so craftily disguised, that it is as impossible to discover her as to track an *eagle in the air*. She eats the forbidden fruit, after the similitude of Adam's transgression, and then *wipes her mouth*, that it may not betray itself, and with a bold and impudent face says, *I have done no wickedness*. [1.] To the world she denies the fact, and is ready to swear it that she is as chaste and modest as any woman, and never did the wickedness she is suspected of. Those are the works of darkness which are industriously kept from coming to the light. [2.] To her own conscience (if she have any left) she denies the fault, and will not own that that *great wickedness* is any wickedness at all, but an innocent entertainment. See Hos. xii. 7, 8. Thus multitudes ruin their souls by calling evil good and out-facing their convictions with a self-justification.

II. An account of four things that are intolerable, that is, four sorts of persons that are very troublesome to the places where they live and the relations and companies they are in; the earth is *disquieted for them*, and

groans under them as a burden it cannot bear, and they are all much alike:—

1. *A servant* when he is advanced, and entrusted with power, who is, of all others, most insolent and imperious; witness Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, Neh. ii. 10. 2. *A fool*, a silly, rude, boisterous, vicious man, who when he has grown rich, and is partaking of the pleasures of the table, will disturb all the company with his extravagant talk and the affronts he will put upon those about him. 3. An ill-natured, cross-grained, *woman*, when she gets a husband, one who, having

made herself odious by her pride and sourness, so that one would not have thought any body would ever love her, yet, if at last she be married, that honourable estate makes her more intolerably scornful and spiteful than ever. It is a pity that that which should sweeten the disposition should have a contrary effect. A gracious woman, when she is married, will be yet more obliging. 4. An old maid-servant that has prevailed with her mistress, by humouring her, and, as we say, getting the length of her foot, to leave her what she has, or is as dear to her as if she was to be her heir, such a one likewise will be intolerably proud and malicious, and think all too little that her mistress gives her, and herself wronged if any thing be left from her. Let those therefore whom Providence has advanced to honour from mean beginnings carefully watch against that sin which will most easily beset them, pride and haughtiness, which will in them, of all others, be most insufferable and inexcusable; and let them humble themselves with the remembrance of the rock out of which they were hewn.

Four Things Little and Wise.

**24 There be four *things which* are little upon the earth, but they *are* exceeding wise: 25 The ants *are* a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; 26 The conies *are but* a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; 27 The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; 28 The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.**

I. Agur, having specified four things that seem great and yet are really contemptible, here specifies four things that are little and yet are very admirable, great in miniature, in which, as bishop Patrick observes, he teaches us several good lessons; as, 1. Not to admire bodily bulk, or beauty, or strength, nor to value persons or think the better of them for such advantages, but to judge of men by their wisdom and conduct, their industry and application to business, which are characters that deserve respect. 2. To admire the wisdom and power of the Creator in the smallest and most despicable animals, in an ant as much as in an elephant. 3. To blame ourselves who do not act so much for our own true interest as the meanest creatures do for theirs. 4. Not to despise the weak things of the world; there are those that are *little upon the earth*, poor in the world and of small account, and yet *are exceedingly wise*, wise for their souls and another world, and those *are exceedingly wise, wiser than their neighbours*. Margin, *They are wise, made wise* by the special instinct of nature. All that are wise to salvation are made wise by the grace of God.

II. Those he specifies are, 1. The *ants*, minute animals and very weak, and yet they are very industrious in gathering proper food, and have a strange sagacity to do it in the summer, the proper time. This is so great a piece of wisdom that we may learn of them to be wise for futurity, ch. vi.

6. When the ravening *lions lack, and suffer hunger*, the laborious ants have plenty, and know no want. 2. The *conies*, or, as some rather understand it, the Arabian mice, field mice, weak creatures, and very timorous, yet they have so much wisdom as to *make their houses in the rocks*, where they are well guarded, and their feebleness makes them take shelter in those natural fastnesses and fortifications. Sense of our own indigence and weakness should drive us to him that is a *rock higher than we* for shelter and support; there let us make our habitation. 3. The *locusts*; they are little also,

and *have no king*, as the bees have, but *they go forth all of them by bands*, like an army in battle-array; and, observing such good order among themselves, it is not any inconvenience to them that they *have no king*. They are called God's *great army* (Joel ii. 25); for, when he pleases, he musters, he marshals them, and wages war by them, as he did upon Egypt. *They go forth all of them gathered together* (so the margin); sense of

weakness should engage us to keep together, that we may strengthen the hands of one another. 4. The *spider*, an insect, but as great an instance of industry in our houses as the ants are in the field. Spiders are very ingenious in weaving their webs with a fineness and exactness such as no art can pretend to come near: They *take hold with their hands*, and spin a fine thread out of their own bowels, with a great deal of art; and they are not only in poor men's cottages, but in *kings' palaces*, notwithstanding all the care that is there taken to destroy them. Providence wonderfully keeps up those kinds of creatures, not only which men provide not for, but which every man's hand is against and seeks the destruction of. Those that will mind their business, and *take hold* of it *with their hands*, shall be *in kings' palaces*; sooner or later, they will get preferment, and may go on with it, notwithstanding the difficulties and discouragements they meet with. If one well-spun web be swept away, it is but making another.

Four Things Majestic and Stately.

**29 There be three *things* which go well, yea, four are comely in going: 30 A lion *which* is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; 31 A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom *there* is no rising up. 32 If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, *lay* thine hand upon thy mouth. 33 Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.**

Here is, I. An enumeration of four things which are majestic and stately in their going, which look great:— 1. *A lion*, the king of beasts, because *strongest among beasts*. Among beasts it is strength that gives the pre-eminence, but it is a pity that it should do so among men, whose *wisdom* is their honour, not their *strength* and *force*. The lion *turns not away*, nor alters his pace, for fear of any pursuers, since he knows he is too hard for them. Herein *the righteous are bold as a lion*, that they *turn not away* from their duty for fear of any difficulty they meet with in it. 2. *A greyhound* that is

girt in the loins and fit for running; or (as the margin reads it) *a horse*, which ought not to be omitted among the creatures that *are comely in going*, for so he is, especially when he is dressed up in his harness or trappings. 3. *A he-goat*, the comeliness of whose going is when he goes first and leads the flock. It is the comeliness of a Christian's going to go first in a good work and to lead others in the right way. 4. *A king*, who, when he appears in his majesty, is looked upon with reverence and awe, and all agree that *there is no rising up against* him; none can vie with him, none can contend with him, whoever does it, it is at his peril. And, if *there is no rising up* against an earthly prince, *woe to him then that strives with his Maker*. It is intended that we should learn courage and fortitude in all virtuous actions from the *lion* and *not to turn away for any* difficulty we meet with; from the *greyhound* we may learn quickness and despatch, from the *he-goat* the care of our family and those under our charge, and from *a king* to have our children in subjection with all gravity, and

from them all to *go well*, and to order the steps of our conversation so as that we may not only be safe, but *comely, in going*.

II. A caution to us to keep our temper at all times and under all provocations, and to take heed of carrying our resentments too far upon any occasion, especially when there is *a king* in the case, *against whom there is no rising up*, when it is a ruler, or one much our superior, that is offended; nay, the rule is always the same.

1. We must bridle and suppress our own passion, and take shame to ourselves, whenever we are justly charged with a fault, and not insist upon our own innocency: If we have *lifted up ourselves*, either in a proud conceit of ourselves or a peevish opposition to those that are over us, if we have transgressed the laws of our place and station, we have therein *done foolishly*. Those that magnify themselves over others or against others, that are haughty and insolent, do but shame themselves and betray their own weakness. Nay, if we have but *thought evil*, if we are conscious to ourselves that we have harboured an ill design in our minds, or it has been suggested to us, we must *lay our hand upon our mouth*, that is, (1.) We must humble ourselves for what we have done amiss, and even lie in the dust before God, in sorrow for it, as Job did, when he repented of what he had said foolishly



(ch. xl. 4, *I will lay my hand upon my mouth*), and as the convicted leper, who *put a covering upon his upper lip*. If we have *done foolishly*, we must not stand to it before men, but by silence own our guilt, which will be the best way of appeasing those we have offended. 2. We must keep the evil thought we have conceived in our minds from breaking out in any evil speeches. Do not give the evil thought an *imprimatur*—a license; allow it not to be published; but *lay thy hand upon thy mouth*; use a holy violence with thyself, if need be, and enjoin thyself silence; as Christ *suffered not the evil spirits to speak*. It is bad to think ill, but it is much worse to speak it, for that implies a consent to the evil thought and a willingness to infect others with it.

2. We must not irritate the passions of others. Some are so very provoking in their words and conduct that they even *force wrath*, they make those about them angry whether they will or no, and put those into a passion who are not only not inclined to it, but resolved against it. Now this *forcing of wrath brings forth strife*, and where that *is there is confusion and every evil work*. As the violent agitation of the cream fetches all the good out of the milk, and the hard *wringing of the nose* will extort blood from it, so this *forcing of wrath* wastes both the body and spirits of a man, and robs him of all the good that is in him. Or, as it is in *the churning of milk and the wringing of the nose*, that is done by force which otherwise would not be done, so the spirit is heated by degrees with strong passions; one angry word begets another, and that a third; one passionate debate makes work for another, and so it goes on till it ends at length in irreconcilable feuds. Let nothing therefore be said or done with violence, but every thing with softness and calmness.

## PROVERBS

### CHAP. XXXI.

This chapter is added to Solomon's proverbs, some think because it is of the same author, supposing king Lemuel to be king Solomon; others only because it is of the same nature, though left in writing by another author, called Lemuel; however it be, it is a prophecy, and therefore given by inspiration and direction of God, which Lemuel was under in the writing of

it, and putting it into this form, as his mother was in dictating to him the matter of it. Here is, I. An exhortation to Lemuel, a young prince, to take heed of the sins he would be tempted to and to do the duties of the place he was called to, ver. 1-9. II. The description of a virtuous woman, especially in the relation of a wife and the mistress of a family, which Lemuel's mother drew up, not as an encomium of herself, though, no doubt, it was her own true picture, but either as an instruction to her daughters, as the foregoing verses were to her son, or as a direction to her son in the choice of a wife; she must be chaste and modest, diligent and frugal, dutiful to her husband, careful of her family, discreet in her discourse, and in the education of her children, and, above all, conscientious in her duty to God: such a one as this, if he can find her, will make him happy, ver. 10-31.

#### Maternal Counsels to King Lemuel.

**1 The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. 2 What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? 3 Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. 4 *It is* not for kings, O Lemuel, *it is* not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: 5 Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. 6 Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. 7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. 8 Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. 9 Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.**

Most interpreters are of opinion that Lemuel is Solomon; the name signifies one that is *for God*, or *devoted to God*; and so it agrees well enough with that honourable name which, by divine appointment, was given to Solomon ( 2 Sam. xii. 25), *Jedediah—beloved of the Lord*. Lemuel is supposed to be a pretty, fond, endearing name, by which his mother used to call him; and so much did he value himself upon the interest he had in his mother's

affections that he was not ashamed to call himself by it. One would the rather incline to think it is Solomon that here tells us what *his mother taught him* because he tells us (ch. iv. 4) what his father taught him. But some think (and the conjecture is not improbable) that Lemuel was a prince of some neighbouring country, whose mother was a daughter of Israel, perhaps of the house of David, and taught him these good lessons. Note, 1. It is the duty of mothers, as well as fathers, to teach their children what is good, that they may do it, and what is evil, that they may avoid it; when they are young and tender they are most under the mother's eye, and she has then an opportunity of moulding and fashioning their minds well, which she ought not to let slip. 2. Even kings must be catechised; the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God. 3. Those that have grown up to maturity should often call

to mind, and make mention of, the good instructions they received when they were children, for their own admonition, the edification of others, and the honour of those who were the guides of their youth.

Now, in this mother's (this queen mother's) catechism, observe,

I. Her expostulation with the young prince, by which she lays hold of him, claims an interest in him, and awakens his attention to what she is about to say (v. 2): "*What! my son? What shall I say to thee?*" She speaks as one considering what advice to give him, and choosing out words to reason with him; so full of concern is she for his welfare! Or, *What is it that thou doest?* It seems to be a chiding question. She observed, when he was young, that he was too much inclined to women and wine, and therefore she found it necessary to take him to task and deal roundly with him. "*What! my son? Is this the course of life thou intendest to lead? Have I taught thee no better than thus? I must reprove thee, and reprove thee sharply, and thou must take it well, for,*" 1. "*Thou art descended from me; thou art the son of my womb,* and therefore what I say comes from the authority and affection of a parent and cannot be suspected to come from any ill-will. Thou art a piece of myself. I bore thee with sorrow, and I expect no other return for all the pains I have taken with thee, and undergone for thee, than this, Be wise and good, and then I am well paid." 2. "*Thou art devoted to my God; thou art the son of my vows,* the son I prayed to God to give me and promised to

give back to God, and did so" (thus Samuel was the son of Hannah's vows); "Thou art the son I have often prayed to God to give his grace to (Ps. lxxii. 1), and shall a child of so many prayers miscarry? And shall all my hopes concerning thee be disappointed?" Our children that by baptism are dedicated to God, for whom and in whose name we covenanted with God, may well be called *the children of our vows*; and, as this may be made a good plea with God in our prayers for them, so it may be made a good plea with them in the instructions we give them; we may tell them they are baptized, are *the children of our vows*, and it is at their peril if they break those bonds in sunder which in their infancy they were solemnly brought under.

II. The caution she gives him against those two destroying sins of *uncleanness* and *drunkenness*, which, if he allowed himself in them, would certainly be his ruin. 1. Against uncleanness (v. 3): *Give not thy strength unto women*, unto strange women. He must not be soft and effeminate, nor spend that time in a vain conversation with the ladies which should be spent in getting knowledge and despatching business, nor employ that wit (which is the strength of the soul) in courting and complimenting them which he should employ about the affairs of his government. "Especially shun all adultery, fornication, and lasciviousness, which waste the strength of the body, and bring into it dangerous diseases. *Give not thy ways*, thy affections, thy conversation, *to that which destroys kings*, which has destroyed many, which gave such a shock to the kingdom even of David himself, in the matter of Uriah. Let the sufferings of others be thy warnings." It lessens the honour of kings and makes them mean. Are those fit to govern others that are themselves slaves to their own lusts? It makes them unfit for business, and fills their court with the basest and worst of animals. Kings lie exposed to temptations of this kind, having wherewith both to please the humours and to bear the charges of the sin, and therefore they ought to double their guard; and, if they would preserve

their people from the unclean spirit, they must themselves be patterns of purity. Meaner people may also apply it to themselves. Let none give their strength *to that which destroys souls*. 2. Against drunkenness, v. 4, 5. He must not *drink wine* or *strong drink* to excess; he must never sit to drink, as they used to do *in the day of their king*, when *the princes made him sick*

*with bottles of wine*, Hos. vii. 7. Whatever temptation he might be in from the excellency of the wine, or the charms of the company, he must deny himself, and be strictly sober, considering, (1.) The indecency of drunkenness in a king. However some may call it a fashionable accomplishment and entertainment, *it is not for kings, O Lemuel! it is not for kings, to allow themselves that liberty*; it is a disparagement to their dignity, and profanes their crown, by confusing the head that wears it; that which for the time unmans them does for the time unking them. Shall we say, *They are gods*? No, they are *worse than the beasts that perish*. All Christians are *made to our God kings and priests*, and must apply this to themselves. *It is not for Christians, it is not for Christians, to drink to excess*; they debase themselves if they do; it ill becomes the heirs of the kingdom and the spiritual priests, Lev. x. 9.

(2.) The ill consequences of it (v. 5): *Lest they drink away their understandings and memories, drink and forget the law* by which they are to govern; and so, instead of doing good with their power, do hurt with it, *and pervert or alter the judgment of all the sons of affliction*, and, when they should right them, wrong them, and add to their affliction. It is a sad complaint which is made of the priests and prophets (Isa. xxviii. 7), that *they have erred through wine, and through strong drink they are out of the way*; and the effect is as bad in kings, who when they are drunk, or intoxicated with the love of wine, cannot but stumble in judgment. Judges must have clear heads, which those cannot have who so often make themselves giddy, and incapacitate themselves to judge of the most common things.

III. The counsel she gives him to do good. 1. He must do good with his wealth. Great men must not think that they have their abundance only that out of it they may *made provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it*, and may the more freely indulge their own genius; no, but that with it they may relieve such as are in distress, v. 6, 7. "Thou hast wine or strong drink at command; instead of doing thyself hurt with it, do others good with it; let those have it that need it." Those that have wherewithal must not only give bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty, but they must *give strong drink to him that is ready to perish* through sickness or pain *and wine to those that are melancholy and of heavy heart*; for it was appointed to cheer and

revive the spirits, and *make glad the heart* (as it does where there is need of it), not to burden and oppress the spirits, as it does where there is no need of it. We must deny ourselves in the gratifications of sense, that we may have to spare for the relief of the miseries of others, and be glad to see our superfluities and dainties better bestowed upon those whom they will be a real kindness to than upon ourselves whom they will be a real injury to. Let those that are *ready to perish* drink soberly, and it will be a means so to revive their drooping spirits that they will *forget their poverty* for the time and *remember their misery no more*, and so they will be the better able to bear it. The Jews say that upon this was grounded the practice of giving a stupifying drink to condemned prisoners when they were going to execution, as they did to our Saviour. But the scope of the place is to show that wine is a cordial, and therefore

to be used for want and not for wantonness, by those only that need cordials, as Timothy, who is advised to *drink a little wine, only for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities*, 1 Tim. v. 23. 2. He must do good with his power, his knowledge, and interest, must administer justice with care, courage, and compassion, v. 8, 9. (1.) He must himself take cognizance of the causes his subjects have depending in his courts, and inspect what his judges and officers do, that he may support those that do their duty, and lay those aside that neglect it or are partial. (2.) He must, in all matters that come before him, *judge righteously*, and, without fear of the face of man, boldly pass sentence according to equity: *Open thy mouth*, which denotes the liberty of speech that princes and judges ought to use in passing sentence. Some observe that only wise men *open* their mouths, for fools have their mouths always open, are full of words. (3.) He must especially look upon himself as obliged to be the patron of oppressed innocency. The inferior magistrates perhaps had not zeal and tenderness enough to *plead the cause of the poor and needy*; therefore the king himself must interpose, and appear as an advocate, [1.] For those that were unjustly charged with capital crimes, as Naboth was, that were *appointed to destruction*, to gratify the malice either of a particular person or of a party. It is a case which it well befits a king to appear in, for the preserving of innocent blood. [2.] For those that had actions unjustly brought against them, to defraud them of their right, because they were *poor and needy*, and unable to defend it, not having wherewithal to fee counsel; in such a case

also kings must be advocates for the poor. Especially, [3.] For those that were *dumb*, and knew not how to speak for themselves, either through weakness or fear, or being over-talked by the prosecutor or over-awed by the court. It is generous to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves, that are absent, or have not words at command, or are timorous. Our law appoints the judge to be of counsel for the prisoner.

The Virtuous Woman.

**10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. 13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. 14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. 15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. 16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. 17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.**

**18 She perceiveth that her merchandise *is* good: her candle goeth not out by night. 19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. 20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. 22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. 24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. 25 Strength and honour**

*are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

**26** She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness. **27** She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread

of idleness. **28** Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. **29**

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. **30** Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. **31** Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

This description of the *virtuous woman* is designed to show what wives the women should make and what wives the men should choose; it consists of twenty-two verses, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, as some of the *Psalms*, which makes some think it was no part of the lesson which Lemuel's mother taught him, but a poem by itself, written by some other hand, and perhaps had been commonly repeated among the pious Jews, for the ease of which it was made alphabetical. We have the abridgment of it in the New Testament (1 Tim. ii. 9, 10; 1 Pet.

iii. 1-6), where the duty prescribed to wives agrees with this description of a good wife; and with good reason is so much stress laid upon it, since it contributes as much as any one thing to the keeping up of religion in families, and the entail of it upon posterity, that the mothers be wise and good; and of what consequence it is to the wealth and outward prosperity of a house every one is sensible. He that will thrive must ask his wife leave. Here is,

I. A general enquiry after such a one (v. 10), where observe, 1. The person enquired after, and that is *a virtuous woman—a woman of strength* (so the word is), though the weaker vessel, yet made strong by wisdom and grace, and the fear of God: it is the same word that is used in the character of good judges (Exod. xviii. 21), that they are *able men*, men qualified for the business to which they are called, *men of truth, fearing God*. So it follows,



*A virtuous woman* is a woman of spirit, who has the command of her own spirit and knows how to manage other people's, one that is pious and industrious, and a help meet for a man. In opposition to this strength, we read of the weakness of the heart of *an imperious whorish woman*, Ezek. xvi. 30. *A virtuous woman* is a woman of resolution, who, having espoused good principles, is firm and steady to them, and will not be frightened with winds and clouds from any part of her duty. 2. The difficulty of meeting with such a one: *Who can find her?* This intimates that good women are very scarce, and many that seem to be so do not prove so; he that thought he had found a *virtuous woman* was deceived; *Behold, it was Leah*, and not the Rachel he expected. But he that designs to marry ought to seek diligently for such a one, to have this principally in his eye, in all his enquiries, and to take heed that he be not biassed by beauty or gaiety, wealth or parentage, dressing well or dancing well; for all these may be and yet the woman not be virtuous, and there is many a woman truly virtuous who yet is not recommended by these advantages. 3. The unspeakable worth of such a one, and the value which he that has such a wife ought to put upon her, showing it by his thankfulness to God and his kindness and respect to her, whom he must never think he can do too much for. *Her price is far above rubies*, and all the rich ornaments with which vain women adorn themselves. The more rare such good wives are the more they are to be valued.

## II. A particular description of her and of her excellent qualifications.

1. She is very industrious to recommend herself to her husband's esteem and affection. Those that are good really will be good relatively. A good woman, if she be brought into the marriage

state, will be a good wife, and make it her business to *please her husband*, 1 Cor. vii. 34. Though she is a woman of spirit herself, yet *her desire is to her husband*, to know his mind, that she may accommodate herself to it, and she is willing that *he should rule over her*. (1.) She conducts herself so that he may repose an entire confidence in her. He trusts in her chastity, which she never gave him the least occasion to suspect or to entertain any jealousy of; she is not morose and reserved, but modest and grave, and has all the marks of virtue in her countenance and behaviour; her husband knows it,

and therefore his *heart doth safely trust in her*; he is easy, and makes her so. He trusts in her conduct, that she will speak in all companies, and act in all affairs, with prudence and discretion, so as not to occasion him either damage or reproach. He trusts in her fidelity to his interests, and that she will never betray his counsels nor have any interest separate from that of his family. When he goes abroad, to attend the concerns of the public, he can confide in her to order all his affairs at home, as well as if he himself were there. She is a good wife that is fit to be trusted, and he is a good husband that will leave it to such a wife to manage for him. (2.) She contributes so much to his content and satisfaction *that he shall have no need of spoil*; he needs not be griping and scraping abroad, as those must be whose wives are proud and wasteful at home. She manages his affairs so that he is always before-hand, has such plenty of his own that he is in no temptation to prey upon his neighbours. He thinks himself so happy in her that he envies not those who have most of the wealth of this world; he needs it not, he has enough, having such a wife. Happy the couple that have such a satisfaction as this in each other! (3.) She makes it her constant business to *do him good*, and is afraid of doing any thing, even through inadvertency, that may turn to his prejudice,

v. 12. She shows her love to him, not by a foolish fondness, but by prudent endearments, accommodating herself to his temper, and not crossing him, giving him good words, and not bad ones, no, not when he is out of humour, studying to make him easy, to provide what is fit for him both in health and sickness, and attending him with diligence and tenderness when any thing ails him; nor would she, no, not for the world, wilfully do any thing that might be a damage to his person, family, estate, or reputation. And this is her care *all the days of her life*; not at first only, or now and then, when she is in a good humour, but perpetually; and she is not weary of the good offices she does him: *She does him good*, not only all the days of *his* life, but *of her own* too; if she survive him, still she is doing him good in her care of his children, his estate, and good name, and all the concerns he left behind him. We read of kindness shown, not only *to the living*, but *to the dead*, Ruth ii. 20. (4.) She adds to his reputation in the world (v. 23): *Her husband is known in the gates*, known to have a good wife. By his wise counsels, and prudent management of affairs, it appears that he has a discreet companion in his bosom, by conversation with whom he improves

himself. By his cheerful countenance and pleasant humour it appears that he has an agreeable wife at home; for many that have not have their tempers strangely soured by it. Nay, by his appearing clean and neat in his dress, every thing about him decent and handsome, yet not gaudy, one may know he has a good wife at home, that takes care of his clothes.

2. She is one that takes pains in the duty of her place and takes pleasure in it. This part of her character is much enlarged upon here. (1.) She hates to sit still and do nothing: *She eats not the*

*bread of idleness*, v. 27. Though she needs not work for her bread (she has an estate to live upon), yet she will not eat it in idleness, because she knows that we were none of us sent into this world to be idle, that when we have nothing to do the devil will soon find us something to do, and that it is not fit that those who *will not labour* should *eat*. Some eat and drink because they can find themselves nothing else to do, and needless visits must be received with fashionable entertainments; these are eating the bread of idleness, which she has no relish for, for she neither gives nor receives idle visits nor idle talk. (2.) She is careful to fill up time, that none of that be lost. When day-light is done, she does not then think it time to lay by her work, as those are forced to do whose business lies abroad in the fields (Ps. civ. 23), but her business lying within-doors, and her work worth candle-light, with that she lengthens out the day; and *her candle goes not out by night*, v. 18. It is a mercy to have candle-light to supply the want of day-light, and a duty, having that advantage, to improve it. We say of an elaborate piece, It smells of the lamp. (3.) *She rises early, while it is yet night* (v. 15), to give her servants their breakfast, that they may be ready to go cheerfully about their work as soon as the day breaks. She is none of those who sit up playing at cards, or dancing, till midnight, till morning, and then lie in bed till noon. No; the *virtuous woman* loves her business better than her ease or her pleasure, is in care to be found in the way of her duty every hour of the day, and has more true satisfaction in having *given meat to her household* betimes in the morning than those can have in the money they have won, much more in what they have lost, who sat up all night at play. Those that have a family to take care of should not love their bed too well in a morning. (4.) She applies herself to the business that is proper for her. It is not in a scholar's business, or statesman's business, or

husbandman's business, that she employs herself, but in women's business: *She seeks wool and flax*, where she may have the best of each at the best hand, and cheapest; she has a stock of both by her, and every thing that is necessary to the carrying on both of the woollen and the linen manufacture (v. 13), and with this she does not only set the poor on work, which is a very good office, but does herself work, *and work willingly, with her hands*; she *works with the counsel or delight of her hands* (so the word is); she goes about it cheerfully and dexterously, lays not only her hand, but her mind to it, and goes on in it without weariness in well-doing. *She lays her own hands to the spindle*, or spinning-wheel, *and her hands hold the distaff* (v. 19), and she does not reckon it either an abridgment of her liberty or a disparagement to her dignity, or at all inconsistent with her repose. The spindle and the distaff are here mentioned as her honour, while the ornaments of the daughters of Zion are reckoned up to their reproach, Isa. ii. 18, &c. (5.) She does what she does with all her might, and does not trifle in it (v. 17); *She girds her loins with strength and strengthens her arms*; she does not employ herself in sitting work only, or in that which is only the nice performance of the fingers (there are works that are scarcely one remove from doing nothing); but, if there be occasion, she will go through with work that requires all the strength she has, which she will use as one that knows it is the way to have more.

3. She is one that makes what she does to turn to a good account, by her prudent management of it. She does not toil all night and catch nothing; no, she herself *perceives that her merchandise is good* (v. 18); she is sensible that *in all her labour there is profit*, and that encourages her to go

on in it. She perceives that she can make things herself better and cheaper than she can buy them; she finds by observation what branch of her employment brings in the best returns, and to that she applies herself most closely. (1.) She brings in provisions of all things necessary and convenient for her family, v. 14. No *merchants' ships*, no, not Solomon's navy, ever made a more advantageous return than her employments do. Do they bring in foreign commodities with the effects they export? So does she with the fruit of her labours. What her own ground does not produce she can furnish herself with, if she have occasion for it, by exchanging her own goods for it; and so *she brings her food from afar*. Not that she values things the more

for their being far-fetched, but, if they be ever so far off, if she must have them she knows how to come by them. (2.) She purchases lands, and enlarges the demesne of the family (v. 16): *She considers a field, and buys it*. She considers what an advantage it will be to the family and what a good account it will turn to, and therefore she buys it; or, rather, though she have ever so much mind to it she will not buy it till she has first considered it, whether it be worth her money, whether she can afford to take so much money out of her stock as must go to purchase it, whether the title be good, whether the ground will answer the character given of it, and whether she has money at command to pay for it. Many have undone themselves by buying without considering; but those who would make advantageous purchases must consider, and then buy. *She also plants a vineyard*, but it is *with the fruit of her hands*; she does not take up money, or run into debt, to do it, but she does it with what she can spare out of the gains of her own housewifery. Men should not lay out any thing upon superfluities, till, by the blessing of God upon their industry, they have got before-hand, and can afford it; and *then* the fruit of the vineyard is likely to be doubly sweet, when it is the fruit of honest industry. (3.) She furnishes her house well and has good clothing for herself and her family (v. 22): *She makes herself coverings of tapestry* to hang her rooms, and she may be allowed to use them when they are of her own making. *Her own clothing* is rich and fine: it is *silk and purple*, according to her place and rank. Though she is not so vain as to spend much time in dressing herself, nor makes the putting on of apparel her adorning, nor values herself upon it, yet she has rich clothes and puts them on well. The senator's robes which her husband wears are of her own spinning, and they look better and wear better than any that are bought. She also gets good warm clothing for her children, and her servants' liveries. She needs not fear the cold of the most pinching winter, for she and her family are well provided with clothes, sufficient to keep out cold, which is the end chiefly to be aimed at in clothing: *All her household are clothed in scarlet*, strong cloth and fit for winter, and yet rich and making a good appearance. They are *all double clothed* (so some read it), have change of raiment, a winter suit and a summer suit. (4.) She trades abroad. She makes more than she and her household have occasion for; and therefore, when she has sufficiently stocked her family, *she sells fine linen and girdles to the merchants* (v. 24), who carry them to Tyre, the mart of the nations, or some other trading city. Those families are likely to thrive that sell more than they

buy; as it is well with the kingdom when abundance of its home manufactures are exported. It is no disgrace to those of the best quality to sell what they can spare, nor to deal in trade and send ventures by sea. (5.) She lays up for hereafter: *She shall rejoice in time to come*, having laid in a good stock for her family, and having good

portions for her children. Those that take pains when they are in their prime will have the pleasure and joy of it when they are old, both in reflecting upon it and in reaping the benefit of it.

4. She takes care of her family and all the affairs of it, *gives meat to her household* (v. 15), to every one *his portion of meat in due season*, so that none of her servants have reason to complain of being kept short or faring hard. She gives also *a portion* (an allotment of work, as well as meat) *to her maidens*; they shall all of them know their business and have their task. *She looks well to the ways of her household* (v. 27); she inspects the manners of all her servants, that she may check what is amiss among them, and oblige them all to behave properly and do their duty to God and one another, as well as to her; as Job, who put away iniquity far from his tabernacle, and David, who would suffer no wicked thing in his house. She does not intermeddle in the concerns of other people's houses; she thinks it enough for her to look well to her own.

5. She is charitable *to the poor*; v. 20. She is as intent upon giving as she is upon getting; she often serves the poor with her own hand, and she does if freely, cheerfully, and very liberally, with an out-stretched hand. Nor does she relieve her poor neighbours only, and those that are nigh at hand, but *she reaches forth her hands to the needy* that are at a distance, seeking opportunities *to do good and to communicate*, which is as good housewifery as any thing she does.

6. She is discreet and obliging in all her discourse, not talkative, censorious, nor peevish, as some are, that know how to take pains; no, *she opens her mouth with wisdom*; when she does speak, it is with a great deal of prudence and very much to the purpose; you may perceive by every word she says how much she governs herself by the rules of wisdom. She not only takes prudent measures herself, but gives prudent advice to others; and this not as assuming the authority of a dictator, but with the affection of a

friend and an obliging air: *In her tongue is the law of kindness*; all she says is under the government of that law. The law of love and kindness is written in the heart, but it shows itself in the tongue; if we are *kindly affectioned one to another*, it will appear by affectionate expression. It is called a *law of kindness*, because it gives law to others, to all she converses with. Her wisdom and kindness together put a commanding power into all she says; they command respect, they command compliance. How forcible are right words! *In her tongue is the law of grace*, or *mercy* (so some read it), understanding it of the word and law of God, which she delights to talk of among her children and servants. She is full of pious religious discourse, and manages it prudently, which shows how full her heart is of another world even when her hands are most busy about this world.

7. That which completes and crowns her character is that she *fears the Lord*, v. 30. With all those good qualities she lacks not that *one thing needful*; she is truly pious, and, in all she does, is guided and governed by principles of conscience and a regard to God; this is that which is here preferred far before *beauty*; that *is vain and deceitful*; all that are wise and good account it so, and value neither themselves nor others on it. Beauty recommends none to God, nor is it any certain indication of wisdom and goodness, but it has deceived many a man who has made his choice of a wife by it. There may be an impure deformed soul lodged in a comely and beautiful body; nay, many have been exposed by their beauty to such temptations as have been the ruin of their virtue,

their honour, and their precious souls. It is a fading thing at the best, and therefore *vain and deceitful*. A fit of sickness will stain and sully it in a little time; a thousand accidents may blast this flower in its prime; old age will certainly wither it and death and the grave consume it. But the fear of God reigning in the heart is the beauty of the soul; it recommends those that have it to the favour of God, and is, in his sight, of great price; it will last for ever, and bid defiance to death itself, which consumes the beauty of the body, but consummates the beauty of the soul.

### III. The happiness of this virtuous woman.

1. She has the comfort and satisfaction of her virtue in her own mind (v. 25): *Strength and honour are her clothing*, in which she wraps herself, that

is, enjoys herself, and in which she appears to the world, and so recommends herself. She enjoys a firmness and constancy of mind, has spirit to bear up under the many crosses and disappointments which even the wise and virtuous must expect to meet with in this world; and this is her clothing, for defence as well as decency. She deals honourably with all, and she has the pleasure of doing so, *and shall rejoice in time to come*; she shall reflect upon it with comfort, when she comes to be old, that she was not idle or useless when she was young. In the day of death it will be a pleasure to her to think that she has lived to some good purpose. Nay, *she shall rejoice in an eternity to come*; she shall be recompensed for her goodness with *fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*.

2. She is a great blessing to her relations, v. 28. (1.) *Her children* grow up in her place, *and they call her blessed*. They give her their good word, they are themselves a commendation to her, and they are ready to give great commendations of her; they pray for her, and bless God that they had such a good mother. It is a debt which they owe her, a part of that honour which the fifth commandment requires to be paid to father and mother; and it is a double honour that is due to a good father and a good mother. (2.) *Her husband* thinks himself so happy in her that he takes all occasions to speak well of her, as one of the best of women. It is no indecency at all, but a laudable instance of conjugal love, for husbands and wives to give one another their due praises.

3. She gets the good word of all her neighbours, as Ruth did, whom *all the city of her people knew* to be *a virtuous woman*, Ruth iii. 11. Virtue will have its praise, Phil. iv. 8. A woman that fears the Lord, shall have praise *of God* (Rom. ii. 29) and of men too. It is here shown, (1.) That she shall be highly praised (v. 29): *Many have done virtuously*. Virtuous women, it seems, are precious jewels, but not such rare jewels as was represented v. 10. There have been many, but such a one as this cannot be paralleled. *Who can find her equal? She excels them all*. Note, Those that are good should aim and covet to excel in virtue. *Many daughters*, in their father's house, and in the single state, *have done virtuously*, but a good wife, if she be virtuous, *excels them all*, and does more good in her place than they can do in theirs. Or, as some explain it, A man cannot have his house so well kept by good daughters, as by a good wife. (2.) That she shall be incontestably



praised, without contradiction, v. 31. Some are praised above what is their due, but those that praise her do but *give her of the fruit of her hands*; they give her that which she has dearly earned and which is justly due to her; she is wronged if she have it not. Note, Those ought to be praised the fruit of whose hands is praise-worthy. The tree is known by its fruits, and therefore, if the fruit be good,

the tree must have our good word. If her children be dutiful and respectful to her, and conduct themselves as they ought, they then *give her the fruit of her hands*; she reaps the benefit of all the care she has taken of them, and thinks herself well paid. Children must thus study to *requite their parents*, and this is *showing piety at home*, 1 Tim. v. 4. But, if men be unjust, the thing will speak itself, *her own works* will *praise her in the gates*, openly before all the people. [1.] She leaves it to her own works to praise her, and does not court the applause of men. Those are none of the truly virtuous women that love to hear themselves commended. [2.] *Her own works* will *praise her*; if her relations and neighbours altogether hold their peace, her good works will proclaim her praise. The widows gave the best encomium of Dorcas when they *showed the coats and garments she had made for the poor*, Acts ix. 39. [3.] The least that can be expected from her neighbours is that they should *let her own works praise her*, and do nothing to hinder them. Those that *do that which is good*, let them *have praise of the same* (Rom. xiii. 3) and let us not enviously say, or do, any thing to the diminishing of it, but be provoked by it to a holy emulation. Let none have an ill report from us, that have *a good report even of the truth itself*. Thus is shut up this looking-glass for ladies, which they are desired to open and dress themselves by; and, if they do so, their adorning will be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Twenty chapters of the book of *Proverbs* (beginning with *ch. x.* and ending with *ch. xxix.*), consisting mostly of entire sentences in each verse, could not well be reduced to proper heads, and the contents of them gathered; I have therefore here put the contents of all these chapters together, which perhaps may be of some use to those who desire to see at once all that is said of any one head in these chapters. Some of the verses, perhaps, I have not put under the same heads that another would have put them under, but

the most of them fall (I hope) naturally enough to the places I have assigned them.

1. Of the comfort, or grief, parents have in their children, according as they are wise or foolish, godly or ungodly, ch. x. 1; xv. 20; xvii. 21, 25; xix. 13, 26; xxiii. 15, 16, 24, 25; xxvii. 11; xxix.

3.

2. Of the world's insufficiency, and religion's sufficiency, to make us happy (ch. x. 2, 3; xi. 4) and the preference to be therefore given to the gains of virtue above those of this world, ch. xv. 16, 17; xvi. 8, 16; xvii. 1; xix. 1; xxviii. 6, 11.

3. Of slothfulness and diligence, ch. x. 4, 26; xii. 11, 24, 27; xiii. 4, 23; xv. 19; xvi. 26; xviii. 9;

xix. 15, 24; xx. 4, 13; xxi. 5, 25, 26; xxii. 13, 29; xxiv. 30-34; xxvi. 13-16; xxvii. 18, 23, 27;

xxviii. 19. Particularly the improving or neglecting opportunities, ch. vi. 6; x. 5.

4. The happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked, ch. x. 6, 9, 16, 24, 25, 27-30; xi. 3, 5-8, 18-21, 31; xii. 2, 3, 7, 13, 14, 21, 26, 28; xiii. 6, 9, 14, 15, 21, 22, 25; xiv. 11, 14, 19, 32; xv. 6, 8, 9, 24, 26, 29; xx. 7; xxi. 12, 15, 16, 18, 21; xxii. 12; xxviii. 10, 18; xxix. 6.

5. Of honour and dishonour, ch. x. 7; xii. 8, 9; xviii. 3; xxvi. 1; xxvii. 21. And of vain-glory, ch.

xxv. 14, 27; xxvii. 2.

6. The wisdom of obedience, and folly of disobedience, ch. x. 8, 17; xii. 1, 15; xiii. 1, 13, 18; xv. 5, 10, 12, 31, 32; xix. 16; xxviii. 4, 7, 9.

7. Of mischievousness and usefulness, ch. x. 10, 23; xi. 9-11, 23, 27; xii. 5, 6, 12, 18, 20; xiii. 2;

xiv. 22; xvi. 29, 30; xvii. 11; xxi. 10; xxiv. 8; xxvi. 23, 27.

8. The praise of wise and good discourse, and the hurt and shame of an ungoverned tongue, ch.

x. 11, 13, 14, 20, 21, 31, 32; xi. 30; xiv. 3; xv. 2, 4, 7, 23, 28; xvi. 20, 23, 24; xvii. 7; xviii. 4, 7, 20, 21; xx. 15; xxi. 23; xxiii. 9; xxiv. 26; xxv. 11.

9. Of love and hatred, peaceableness and contention, ch. x. 12; xv. 17; xvii. 1, 9, 14, 19; xviii. 6, 17-19; xx. 3; xxv. 8; xxvi. 17, 21; xxix. 9.

10. Of the rich and poor, ch. x. 5, 22; xi. 28; xiii. 7, 8; xiv. 20, 24; xviii. 11, 23; xix. 1, 4, 7, 22;

xxii. 2, 7; xxviii. 6, 11; xxix. 13.

11. Of lying, fraud, and dissimulation, and of truth and sincerity, ch. x. 18; xii. 17, 19, 22; xiii. 5;

xvii. 4; xx. 14, 17; xxvi. 18, 19, 24-26, 28.

12. Of slandering, ch. x. 18; xvi. 27; xxv. 23.

13. Of talkativeness and silence, ch. x. 19; xi. 12; xii. 23; xiii. 3; xvii. 27, 28; xxix. 11, 20.

14. Of justice and injustice, ch. xi. 1; xiii. 16; xvi. 8, 11; xvii. 15, 26; xviii. 5; xx. 10, 23; xxii. 28; xxiii. 10, 11; xxix. 24.

15. Of pride and humility, ch. xi. 2; xiii. 10; xv. 25, 33; xvi. 5, 18, 19; xviii. 12; xxi. 4; xxv. 6, 7; xxviii. 25; xxix. 23.

16. Of despising and respecting others, ch. xi. 12; xiv. 21.

17. Of tale-bearing, ch. xi. 13; xvi. 28; xviii. 8; xx. 19; xxvi. 20, 22.

18. Of rashness and deliberation, ch. xi. 14; xv. 22; xviii. 13; xix. 2; xx. 5, 18; xxi. 29; xxii. 3; xxv. 8-10.

19. Of suretiship, ch. xi. 15; xvii. 18; xx. 16; xxii. 26, 27; xxvii. 13.

20. Of good and bad women, or wives, ch. xi. 16, 22; xii. 4; xiv. 1; xviii. 22; xix. 13, 14; xxi. 9, 19; xxv. 24; xxvii. 15, 16.

21. Of mercifulness and unmercifulness, ch. xi. 17; xii. 10; xiv. 21; xix. 17; xxi. 13.

22. Of charity to the poor, and uncharitableness, ch. xi. 24-26; xiv. 31; xvii. 5; xxii. 9, 16, 22, 23; xxviii. 27; xxix. 7.

23. Of covetousness and contentment, ch. xi. 29; xv. 16, 17, 27; xxiii. 4, 5.

24. Of anger and meekness, ch. xii. 16; xiv. 17, 29; xv. 1, 18; xvi. 32; xvii. 12, 26; xix. 11, 19; xxii. 24, 25; xxv. 15, 28; xxvi. 21; xxix. 22.

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