

Dedicated to Adeline “Cookie” Downing
Faithful and Loving Wife and Mother
for over fifty-five years

The
Back of the Bulletin

Volume Three: Job through Ecclesiastes

A series of short articles written for the back of
the weekly Church Bulletin

by

W. R. Downing

“The words of the wise *are* as goads...”

Eccl. 12:11

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Preface

This is the third and final volume in this series entitled *The Back of the Bulletin*. This series began several years ago at the suggestion of one of our deacons that we publish a very short article for the back page of our weekly church bulletin, as the page was blank. It is almost sinful to leave blank pages in any church bulletin when it can be filled with materials beneficial to God's people!

The first volume began with a variety of materials, then a commentary on the Pentateuch, with a short paragraph on a given passage of Scripture. Volume Two took us from Joshua through II Chronicles, and this last volume from Job through Ecclesiastes.

We trust that writing a short paragraph on a selected passage of Scripture, seeking to make spiritual and practical application, will continue to be blessed, as were the first two volumes. This has been the experience of this pastor in his final year in the pastoral ministry and first year in retirement.

— W. R. Downing

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Job

A Parent's Prayers

And it was so, when the days of *their* feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings *according* to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually. Job 1:5.

Prayer in itself is almost miraculous. It brings together in a wonderful way the world of sense and the spirit world. Prayer brings God down to human level to give ear to the ardent requests, groans and sighs as well as the thankfulness of His own. Through prayer may be accomplished what cannot be accomplished in any other way. The needs, tears and desires of the believer can be articulated in the presence of the most High God of heaven and earth—and he will be heard! Prayer can bring into motion the machinery and artillery of heaven. It can move upon hearts and minds as nothing else! Prayer can reach an erring and rebellious son or daughter. It can change a lion into a lamb, tame the most rebellious and change the heart of a sinful young man or woman. Prayer is the greatest weapon in a parent's armoury. It should not be the last resource, but the very first and the most continual. Do we want godly children, giving their lives in the service of Christ and honoring Him? Then let us pray!

The True Source

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made him hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath *is* in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:8–12.

Everything which happens in this busy world of sense and sound which we live finds its source in the spirit world. The Book of Job

als the grand, overall Divine providence, with its purpose and
ess. It also reveals the working of Satan and spirit activity. We
ld be bereft of much understanding of spiritual realities without
an insight as given here.

The Book of Job is in the form of a drama wherein Satan
llenges God with respect to Job and his faithfulness. Behind the
ies, the Lord sustains Job, whose faith is exceptional. What a
on for believers! The Lord can sustain us in the very greatest of
ls! May we pray for patience and faith, for perseverance and
ngth of heart for whatever may come to pass. We do not know
it forces may be at work or what testing the Lord has ordained.
at we do know is that He will never leave us nor forsake us!

Everything Belongs to God

n Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down
n the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my
er's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the
D hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job
ed not, nor charged God foolishly. Job 1:20–22

Job lost everything except his personal health and faith. He lost
possessions and his family. His wonderful reaction was to prostrate
self in worship! What a humble, uncomplaining believer! He
nowledged that he entered life with nothing and would exit life the
e. Everything had come from God and now God had taken
rything back.

Could any of us act as Job acted and speak as Job spoke? He had
Scripture to give him comfort, no believing brother or sister to
re his grief and pray with him. His wife would later abandon him in
bitterness. He was alone—yet he remained faithful and humbly
mitted himself to His God! Extraordinary! Almost beyond belief!
tainly behind the scenes, in his heart and soul, the Lord sustained
! Is Job's God our God? What will our attitude be and where will
strength come from should we suffer so? Job implied that God was
ugh. Should everything be taken away—and taken with violence
blood—yet he would submit to the Lord in humble faith. For Job,
I was enough—is God enough for us?

Satan's Weakness

And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. Job 2:2–3.

In the last chapter of Job, Satan had been at work to do what he had, under the Lord's permissive will, to destroy Job and get him to see God—and he failed. Note carefully Satan's evasive answer to the Lord's question. He avoids the issue of Job and his trials at the hands of Satan, and his continued faithfulness!

Satan's great sin was pride, and it comes to the surface here. He would not admit failure. He seeks to evade the question of God in his answer. So, the Lord interrogates him once again. Pride can do awful things. It led to the fall of Lucifer, and it leads to his initial defeat here. Satan is forced to avoid the issue and admit defeat. Do we understand the character of Satan at all? How wicked and evil he may act toward us; it is necessary for his design. He will avoid defeat and embarrassment at all costs! This means that he will do everything in his power to defeat, discourage and devastate the believer rather than allow him to escape. We must cast ourselves upon the Lord God, trust in His strength and hang on at all costs! Satan's defeat is our victory.

The Devil's Diagnosis

Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. Job. 1:11.

Here we have the devil's diagnosis of man under trial when his body is afflicted. There are several types of severe trials: some come to us as we dearly love in contrast to ourselves. Some trials concern our outward lives and belongings—and some touch our very bodies. Suffering is more trying and painful than bankruptcy. Satan is an acute student of human nature. He has been actively observing, evaluating and testing man since the Fall. Here was his assessment: Attack and torture the body with physical pain and the man will break. This is too often true—unless God miraculously sustains and grants grace in the crucial hour of trial. And prolonged diseases cause untold suffering, bringing one down physically, mentally and spiritually. Satan knows

also. What will happen to Job? He will be smitten with two terrible, horrible diseases; the very worst known to man, and we must believe that unseen to human eyes and unknown to human and scientific probing, the LORD God sustained our suffering friend.

The Devil's Worst

the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he *is* in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a hard to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Job 8.

With what diseases did the devil smite Job? If we carefully read through the book of Job and catch all of the horrible symptoms described, we can say that Job suffered from two of the most awful diseases ever known to man, and for such there was no cure, but either meant a horrible, drawn out, agonizing death—elephantiasis and ring leprosy. His features became distorted beyond recognition. His externals began to rot off, his flesh turned black and he became one of the living dead. He stunk with rotting flesh. He was cast out of society. He had to suffer such horrible, unspeakable pain and agony. His wife told him to curse God and die; she was being kind! His friends all forsook him, charging him with secret sin and being punished by God.

We must remember that Satan cannot go further than God allows, when God brings us to the brink of utter destruction and despair, He will support us and preserve us. God is our only hope. Whatever happens, we must lean upon Him and give ourselves entirely to him!

Job's Wife

Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. Job 2:9–10.

This seems to be an enigma. Did she help him or hinder him? Did she mean rebel against God and die, or did she mean that death would end his suffering in the mercy of God? Sadly, the former seems to be correct. What are we to do when the closest to us, those whom we love most in this world, turn against us or fail to uphold us? She wished Job dead and he had to severely correct her. Great trials bring out

er the best or the worst in us. May we not fail family or friend by cumbering to the trial ourselves. By God's grace, may we be enabled give comfort and show grace to those who suffer! This in itself is a , and ought to be the domain of the believer, who understands to ie degree the sustaining and enabling grace of God.

Consider what being a husband or wife may require. Marriage is the closest relationship for human beings. As such, it expresses itself the highest joys and satisfaction, but also reaches into the lowest depths of suffering and anguish. To observe our greatest loved one perishing and dying must be excruciating beyond measure. Death may be the only cessation to such anguish. This is almost unthinkable. Consider the martyrs who experienced this in seeing their loved ones perish in the flames. Their only mitigation was the hope of faith that their loved ones were brought into the glorious presence of the Lord to never more!

Failing Friends

even when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. Job

Job's friends came to comfort him, but changed their minds when they saw his grief and physical condition. Their speeches were ravaging and filled with hurtful insinuations. None of us would want to be "Job's comforters"! One of their common charges was that Job had sinned and God was judging him for his secret sins. Let us be careful when we seek to comfort others who are severely suffering. If we are godly people, we should seek to encourage them in God and His providence and care.

If there is sin in the life—no one is without sin, unless it is truly idolatrous—we should seek to be comforting and encouraging. And if sin is scandalous, open and known for a certainty, we can pray for the person and encourage him or her that God can and does forgive and restore. It is never our part to condemn but to encourage, the Lord God is a forgiving God who will restore upon repentance.

Let us never be "Job's comforters"! These will always exist as a part of fallen, sinful humanity. True, faithful friends are understanding

sympathetic, and these will be our strength in the trials of a friend.
—Pity!

Self-Pity

After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night *in which* I was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Job 3:1–4ff.

At one time or another, every one of us has been given to self-pity. The consequences of our actions or the sudden onset of some unusual sickness or ailment catches us in our weakness and we cry out about the unfairness of our circumstances. Of course, none of us has suffered as Job did. His case, from the standpoint of man, was irrevocable and terminal. If any one had reason to complain, it was Job!

The essence of the matter, however, was Job's faith in God and in His rule of this world. To complain about our circumstances is to complain against God—and this is the essence of Job's entire trial—lack of faith in God. When the trial is seen from this perspective—and we know this is the issue from the entire Book of Job—then our reaction may be very different. Thus, in any given trial or testing, crisis or onset of disease, if it is the trial of our faith which is the issue, we must cast ourselves upon the Lord and trust in Him. Faith ever sees great issues from this standpoint. Faith takes us from this life and its suffering into the very presence, strength and presence of our Lord!

Job a Hypocrite?

Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. *Is not this* thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Job 4:4–7.

It is one thing to seek to comfort another; it is quite a different thing to desperately need such comfort ourselves! In the first instance—seeking to comfort another—we may become less than helpful or even impatient if the sufferer does not receive our intended effort. After all, we have taken our time and energies, and perhaps, many prayers to minister to that person—only to fail or be refused. Is this kindness? Or are we somewhat offended that our comfort is

used? Consider this. The sufferer is completely self-centered by necessity, completely absorbed in his own pain and suffering. He may be able to receive anything from another. Hurt feelings do not probably characterize the attempted comforter. We do what we can; give what we can; we offer what we are able to. That is all we can—except pray with the sufferer, and perhaps this is the one thing which may prove effectual. The comforter should ask nothing in return, even understanding. True comfort is given without any thought of self or a return. Its very genuineness is revealed in its selflessness.

Trouble—Free?

Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. Job 5:7

Man by nature is fallen and sinful. He is a sinner by imputation, nature or inheritance, and by personal transgression. This is incapable. What do most want? Most instinctively want to escape this condition. They do not want deliverance through the gospel, but to escape ease and prosperity on their own. Their eschatology usually relates to success and retirement. Few think beyond to eternity. However, sinful mankind need the Gospel! Sadly, their sinful, rebellious nature includes an animosity against God and the truth. They hate and oppose the very truth which alone can set them free and give them life for eternity.

What is your answer to the sinfulness and trials of this present life? Do you seek ease and success? What is your hope for the future? Does your “future” extend well beyond retirement and old age? What about eternity? What a glorious blessing it is to turn to God’s Word and find the answer clearly laid out. Sin must be dealt with here and now. The life must be given to godliness and holiness. Heart-dedication to the Word of God means freedom and deliverance. Eternity is God’s domain, and the way of the cross—salvation by grace through faith—is the way to its gate.

Divine Correction

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: Job 5:17.

These words are those of Eliphaz the Temanite, not Job. Eliphaz alludes to the idea that Job has sinned and is under Divine judgment. Yet

statement here is true in itself and this is what we will consider. When the Lord corrects, He does not do so from ulterior motives or in sinful self-interest, or some reason not ultimately profitable to our own spiritual children. We can be assured that when the Lord chastens, He does so for our own good and for His glory. What a trusting and confidence we can have in our God! As a loving father corrects his son for his own good, the Lord graciously moves toward us, not seeking their harm, but their good. He always ultimately has His own glory in view and not just our good and maturity. Thus, when the Lord chastens or lovingly corrects His own, we must not misunderstand or think evil of our heavenly Father. He is ever merciful, and He seeks our spiritual maturity.

God never loses His temper with His own beloved children, as an earthly father may do. Human fathers are imperfect and may lose their tempers or act in anger, and their discipline might do more harm than good. It is not so with our Heavenly Father. We can have the utmost confidence in His love and discipline.

Enduring Chastening

In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and rebuke thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle *shall be* in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. Thou shalt know also that thy seed *shall be* great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth. Thou shalt come to *thy* grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season. Lo this, we have searched it, so it *is*; hear it, and know thou *it* for thy good. Job 5:20–27.

There are flaws in the philosophy of Eliphaz the Temanite. One is that the good shall never be chastened. Their sufferings shall be minimal, but they shall never suffer greatly as Job was suffering. He, and the other “comforters” believed that Job had sinned, and so was suffering for it. They were strangers to the ways of God in trying His people. Where is the great comfort if one is always delivered and will never experience great trial? God can and does grant the greatest deliverance, and apart from this, where would our confidence be? Both Eliphaz and Job had much to learn.

Tried Beyond Our Strength

But Job answered and said, Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty *are* within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Job 6:1–4.

There are times in our Christian experience when we may be tried and our strength and break down emotionally and even physically.

We do not know what trials are ahead of us or how we will be tested. But the Lord knows, and He has ordained the trial. He can enable us to stand when we would otherwise fall and fail. He can strengthen us when all human strength is gone and wasted. He did so in the case of Job, and He has done so in the dying experience of the martyrs. When we read of some of our forefathers in the faith and what they experienced and endured, we would be filled with disbelief if it were not that we are dealing with historic facts recorded by witnesses. The truth is, that God's strength and power far outweigh whatever we might be called upon to go through. This is a matter of faith, for the strength is His, not ours. We can expect sufficient grace in the most trying circumstances. This may be dying grace, but it is still grace!

Wanting to Die

Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant *me* the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that He would let loose his hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort; yea, I would harden myself in sorrow: let him not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One. What *is* my strength, that I should hope? and what *is* mine end, that I should prolong my life? Job 6:8–11.

Life and death are in the hands of God. This is a most agonizing mysterious matter and reality when considered in the context of a person who is suffering intensely. There have been many who have been in such excruciating pain and agony that they have wished to die.

The causes may be some dreaded terminal disease, injury from physical trauma or war wound. In ages past, those who have been physically tortured for their faith and left broken, racked with pain and slowly dying. The desire may stem from the mental anguish of remaining alive after other family members have perished in some tragic catastrophe. Finally, it may simply be that one despairs of life

wants to die rather than face the future. In such circumstances, the Lord may not give dying grace. One way or another, the Lord God has brought providential circumstances to this point. What is at stake may be more than the pain and suffering of the individual. It may be one's testimony for the faith, which means he or she may expect the sustaining grace of God to preserve or deliver either from or through the dreaded situation. Our God and Heavenly Father does grant dying grace. If the cause is merely physical, and not in the context of Divine suffering for one's faith, modern medicine can alleviate much of the pain.

One reality remains. If we suffer for the cause of Christ, or are persecuted for the faith, we may expect sustaining grace to minister to us to an extent that we can bear up as a witness and testimony to the cause for which we have been called to suffer. This is the testimony of glory.

When Human Comfort Fails

My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, *and* as the stream of brooks they pass away; Which are blackish by reason of the ice, *and* wherein the snow is hid. What time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place. The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish. Job 6:15–18.

The Lord God, our heavenly Father, is the Source of all good and blessing. To search for another source is to search in vain and experience great disappointment. When we rely on human faithfulness or consistency, sooner or later, we shall be disappointed.

The best man, even a believer, is yet a sinner and far from perfect. Perhaps the greatest comfort is when our friends admit their faults and weaknesses, and yet try to help and sympathize. When a believing brother expresses the lack and failure of mere human sympathy and admits his own weakness and inconsistency, then speaks of the faithfulness of God, and then prays with you and for you, you can take comfort that your friend is true and also that he will take up your cause with God. Such are few in number and yet precious in nature! Believers are the very best of friends because they can and will pray for one another, and prayer does what nothing else can do.

Sadly, the majority of our friends will fail, unless the trial strikes their own door and affects them directly. Such is human nature. If we truly understand this, we will not be disappointed when our own

nds fail us! One of our Lord's commands, perhaps the most serious difficult is that "we are to love our neighbors as ourselves." If so, we will persevere and remain steadfast—but does anyone truly live up to the Divine standard? Many may stand beside us and weep for us and be deeply moved at our calamity, but soon, due to humanity, even these begin to fall by the wayside. We should not expect friends to be more than human!

One Day at a Time

Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? *are not* his days also like the days of an hireling? As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for *the reward* of his work: So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. Job 7:1–4.

Time exists apart from you and me. God rules this universe and settled the hours of daylight and darkness. In our subjective experience, characterized by our emotions, expectations, trials and tribulations, the days may seem to drag on slowly, as we wish for the night and for rest. When we are enjoying the pleasures of life, friends and family, time seems to speed on and we wish for more time for enjoyment. Trials, sickness, pain and suffering seem to lengthen time. This is well-expressed by Job in his suffering.

Physical pain and suffering seem to cause time to slow down greatly. And Job was suffering greatly with his diseases and pain. Such suffering was wearing him down, sapping his strength and robbing him of the expectation of life itself. His great trials, aside from their probable terminal nature, were his inability to endure until he saw their end and could find rest. In such cases all we can do is cast ourselves in the Lord and cry out for His grace and mercy!

Facing Death

My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life *is* wind: mine eye shall no more see good. The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no *more*: thine eyes *are* upon me, and I *am* not. As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no *more*. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. Therefore I will not refrain my

nouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Job 7:5–11.

The conclusion of Job, after such suffering, and seeing the nature extent of his diseases—running leprosy and elephantiasis, is that he would certainly die—and die horribly in pain and deformity and alone. The only question was: how long would he have to wait?

He sat and scraped the maggots from his rotting flesh. His family perished suddenly, and those who had known him in prosperity fled from him. Only his wife remained and she had already given up. What an awful picture of a dying man without hope and in torment! Yet this is the spiritual state of man in his sins—what Job experienced physically, fallen, sinful man experiences spiritually. As he seeks to deny his spiritual state. It is only when awakened by Spirit and truth of God, and effectually convicted by the Spirit that he comes to terms with his awful condition and seeks deliverance from it through peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Spiritual darkness is much more powerful and deceitful than most can ever imagine!

No Respite

When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: So that my soul chooseth strangling, *and* death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity. Job 7:13–16.

This is the record of Job in his physical sufferings. He found no ease, no relief, no cessation, no escape through sleep. He was half asleep at night, but terrified through nightmares and pain. There was no relief.

Is there not some comparison, some parallel, some sense of continuity here between the physical sufferings of Job and the spiritual sufferings of the unbeliever under a saving conviction of sin? There is intermittent conviction of sin, which seems to come and go, occasionally aggravated by hearing a sermon or hearing the Scriptures read or overhearing a conversation about religious subjects, especially the gospel. But there is a saving conviction of sin that becomes persistent and increasing until at last relief is found in the saving grace of God. There seems to be so little if any repentance today because there is so little of the true Gospel preached. Most preaching asks for the hearers to make a religious “decision,” which can be

ely emotional or intellectual. But true, saving conviction of sin necessarily brings one to a true, thorough repentance and turning from as the ruling principle of the life. Saving faith is then fully, without reservation, laying hold of Christ Jesus with unreserved trust.

The Hypocrite

Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart? Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose rust shall be a spider's web. Job 8:10–14.

Hypocrisy is native to fallen, sinful mankind. It is natural for one believe that he or she is better than another, even if indulging in the same behavior. Every one of us has a private life—how we live in our family or with our close friends. We also each have a secret life, lived for ourselves. In this secret life, with our own thoughts, desires and fantasies, we are what we really are. It is here, in the most private realm, that our thoughts and desires are expressed. We may indulge ourselves in thoughts and fantasies which we would never divulge to anyone else. When such realities are exercised in the outward world of life, we play the hypocrite, and indulge in words, expressions or actions and activities which we condemn in others.

Religious hypocrisy is common. Many will condemn and sorely grieve in others sins and failings which they themselves commit. These forget that nothing can be hidden from God; He knows. Every secret is to Him an open book. And He judges righteously. What a madness to have a Savior and find in Him forgiveness for all and every sin! Only the blood of Christ can wash away the evil of hypocrisy!

The Great Question

...how should man be just with God?... Job 9:2.

Of all the subjects considered in the Book of Job, this is the most important. Indeed, it is one of the most important questions asked throughout both Testaments! It is the most basic question that can be asked concerning man's relationship to God! This question is centered in the truth and reality of salvation, specifically of justification, and so at the very foundation of sin, salvation, repentance, forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation.

“Justification by faith” forms the very heart of the gospel. It meets man’s most basic need—how to be right with God. The will of God determines the nature of being right in His sight. The most important issue is not love, but righteousness! While God manifests His love in the provisions of the gospel, it is righteousness—righteousness which God will accept—that forms the center and core of salvation. Man is unrighteous and thus utterly condemned before a righteous God. Man can neither come by it naturally, merit it, nor earn it. Righteousness must be received from an external source; it must be imputed to the believing sinner. The one righteousness God will accept is the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, received and imputed by faith alone. “Justification by faith” is the glory of the gospel, revealing the only means by which the sinner may be right with God.

Hardened Against God?

If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened *himself* against him, and hath prospered? Job 9:3–4.

At first glance, one may ask, “Who would contend against God, or defy Him?” However, this question is far from meaningless. The truth is, that countless are guilty of this very thing! Every human being who becomes settled in a false religion has set himself against the Most High. Everyone who rests himself in an empty profession of faith, those who profess to be believers, but live in unbelief, everyone who rests himself in some religious act or rite or ceremony has hardened himself against the Lord. Think of the countless multitudes who trust their salvation to the act of infant sprinkling [baptismal regeneration or presumptive regeneration]. Consider the multitudes who have made “religious decisions,” believing that signing a decision card and repeating a prayer after someone is salvation! And consider the vast multitudes who believe that natural goodness saves, and alleged “good works” are acceptable to God for saving grace.

All of these have completely missed the relative simplicity of the gospel: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” To believe, according to the Scriptures, implies the necessity of previous acquaintance, then a saving belief which lays hold of the person and work of the Lord Jesus in the context of His redemptive work and the

utation of His righteousness. Has your profession of faith resulted in a transformed life by the grace of God? A converted lifestyle is a living proof of saving faith!

Questioning God

Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou? Job 9:12.

The Book of Job is awesome in serious questions. Job's ancient "ends" and Job himself were all philosophers and wise men in their own right. Although they did not possess the Scriptures [The Book of Job probably written by Moses, and so existed before the Books of Moses were written], they evidently knew much from the knowledge passed down to them from their forefathers who lived before and immediately after the Flood. Although they were at times in error, they were also theologians and had a systematic belief in God and a knowledge of His creation. And they correctly viewed creation as natural revelation, i.e., God revealed in the created universe.

Questioning God. Who has not, at one time or another, dared to question God? In this world in which we live, filled with mysteries and unanswered happenings, have we not instinctively cried out to God for answers, being grieved at tragedies and left to wonder about circumstances far beyond our control? Fallen, sinful man by nature, being the image-bearer of God, has a *sensus divinitatus*, a sense of the divine, an instinct for God (Rom. 1:18–20; 2:14–16). This he might deny or avoid, but when overpowering circumstances force him to face problems far greater than he can cope with, he instinctively begins to question God. By God's grace, this may be the beginning of his search for the Almighty, and reconciliation through grace!

Our Daysman

Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, *that* might lay his hand upon us both. Job 9:33.

Job laments that there was no daysman—umpire, mediator, equitable judge—to come between him and God. He felt utterly at a loss and without hope. A daysman would equitably judge between two opposing persons and act with justice. The daysman would have to be completely trustworthy to judge equitably, to act justly and to know all the facts and the existing disparities. Therefore, this person would have to be accepted by both parties in his

l judgment. Where could such a person be found? Even among
1, such a task would prove formidable!

We have such a daysman! We have one who can be accepted by
1 parties, one who will judge righteously, one who knows
roughly all the issues and will do right. The gospel points to the
d Jesus Christ as the great and glorious daysman who alone can
g together the Lord God and the sinner (1 Tim. 2:5)! God has
epted Him and the sinner must accept Him. The Lord God demands
teousness; the Lord Jesus provides a perfect righteousness. He
wers every claim against us. He further pleads our cause before
l. His very own righteousness, imputed to us through faith, is
ied before God. Who and what Job lamented as missing, we have!

Personal Conviction

*My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will
speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn
me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee
that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of
thine hands... Job 10: 1–3.*

There is a general conviction of sin and there is a personal
viction of sin. A general conviction of sin may result from a
igent sermon and affect several or even many. The congregation
ls to be quiet for a time and affected with a sense of sin and
rtcomings.

A personal conviction of sin may exist and even be intense when
rs do not seem to be seriously affected. The reality of a sense of
exists and increases solely between the sinner and God. Everything
omes very subjective. Everything becomes sharply focused on
sonal sin and transgression under the awful and penetrating gaze of
rightly God, Who can and does see and know everything. God's
e, as it were, is focused upon one person—one sinner! He seems to
e been singled out, separated, and his sins magnified until they bear
down into the dust and weigh heavily upon his conscience. He is
aware of others, only of himself, his sins, his wickedness, is
ighteousness, his offences—and God! Everything is now intensely
sonal. Every sin and transgression points to him and becomes
scapable. He must confess his sin. He must admit every failing
ore God's Law. He must make full confession and empty himself—
st himself—of each and every sin which weighs him down to hell!

re is no escape now—only an awful, crushing, dark, sinister force pressing him down under the burden of his sin, his guilt. There is no hope. But light suddenly breaks and his mind's eye can gain a glimpse of the Lord Jesus, and see Him as never before! The heart and hand reach out and grasp the hem of His garment. Away with sin and its pollution and wickedness! Hope fills the soul and an indescribable peace begins to descend upon the heart and mind.

The Inescapable God

Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again? ¹Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. And these *things* hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this *is* with thee. If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity. Job 10:8–14.

Everywhere Job looked and considered, he sensed God. God was inescapable. And He dominated the physical, moral and spiritual realms! There is no place where God is not. Job spoke these words in the context of his suffering, which is extremely important. He was suffering from two fatal and deforming, painful diseases. The consciousness of God his Creator and Sustainer only served to aggravate his woes. Thoughts which would have been wondrous and welcome to a healthy person became loathsome and crushing to him in his condition—and he could think of no reason why God should put him through such agony!

Our concept of God and our awareness of His presence is very much translated by our circumstances. How necessary it is to keep our conscience before God and have no unconfessed sin to deceive and weigh us down in our suffering! A clear conscience is a blessed reality when considering Divine omnipotence and omnipresence!

The Sufferer

If I be wicked, woe unto me; and *if* I be righteous, *yet* will I not lift up my head. *I am* full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction; For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me. Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war *are* against me. Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me! I should have

seen as though I had not been; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave. *Are not my days few? cease then, and* let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, Before I go *whence* I shall not return, *even* to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; A land of darkness, as darkness *itself*; *and* of the shadow of death, without any order, and *where* the light *is* as darkness. Job 10:15–22.

In his intense suffering, Job ponders why God made him, and why caused him to suffer so. Job not only wished for death, but wished he had never been born! These are the thoughts and words of a *lover* who has reached the extent of human suffering. It could not be worse! He asks God to leave him alone and let him die. God would not answer the longing of his heart. Job's future would be *lighter* than his past—but Job knew it not. Let us remember, when we have truly tried, that being in God's hands is the very best, no matter how it seems. For the believer, his existence will and must end in glory!

The Comfortless Comforter

Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou scoffest, shall no man make thee ashamed? For thou hast said, My doctrine *is* pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that *they are* double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee *less* than thine iniquity *deserveth*. Job 11:1–6.

Zophar the Naamathite sought to comfort Job, but was drawn back from doing so. It was evident to Zophar that Job was hiding iniquity in his bosom and was covering secret sin. He was a hypocrite. Thus, Zophar spoke from this perspective. How cruel and misjudging can our hearts be when they judge by appearances and their own point of view! They utterly lack understanding and sympathy. They are not in the agony of suffering and so lack any sympathy at all! Those who have never needed comfort in suffering fail to give comfort to others. It is so easy to view others from our own perspective if we have never suffered for no apparent reason. Sympathy and understanding is born from one's need of such. A failure to understand and sympathize due to lack of personal experience is a common reason for misinterpreting the evidence of God in the suffering of others.

A Common Fault

Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty into perfection? Job 11:7.

A common fault of most religions is that they believe that God can be found by searching rather than by Divine revelation. There are several realities to consider: first, God is the God of Divine revelation. He cannot be discovered by fallen, sinful man's searching. Second, God has revealed Himself sufficiently to leave man without excuse for denying Him, but man has refused this Divine revelation (Rom. 1:18–

Third, the basis of all the error and misunderstanding in religion is that it is filled with man's ideas which have twisted and perverted God's truth (Rom. 21–25). Fourth, Satan uses fallen, sinful man's reasoning and superstition to conjure religion. Fifth, man seeks to add his own thoughts and give them equal standing with the Scriptures—this is the bane of religious tradition. Eve added “neither shall ye touch it...” (Gen. 3:3). Finally, fallen, sinful man seeks to add his own works to God's religion of grace (Eph. 2:8–10).

Have you examined your religion in the light of Scripture? How does it square with the Word of God? Does your religion stand in complete agreement with Scripture? Has anything been added, even from the very best of motives? Is your religion one of grace or an admixture of works? Does it stand in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ alone or is there a place for self-righteousness? Has any place been reserved for religious pride?

Superiority

And Job answered and said, No doubt but ye *are* the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I *am* not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these? Job 12:1–3.

There are always those who think that they are superior to others. They not only believe it to be so, but they usually let everyone else know it. These always have a comment, a judgment, even subtle suggestion to reveal their supposed superiority. All the while they squander with a thinly disguised humility. This is simply fallen, sinful human nature being demonstrated in a given situation in which there is opportunity for one to express his or her superiority and grasp the given situation with regard to a variety of subjects. Sadly, this is often the attitude when the ladies of the church get together. Self-

piety subtly manifests itself in the context of family, children, king, the husband's work, social standing, etc. There are some sins which are more particularly those of men and others which seem more prevalent among women. Over the years, we have witnessed much of this among the ladies of a church. This is often in relation to a false spirituality. Whereas men are more concerned with careers, social standing associated with one's work or financial situation, travel, property, etc., the ladies are concerned with things peculiar to the family and home. Often there is a division between the home schoolers and those who send their children to public schools. Pride can be very subtle, as it is native to fallen, sinful human nature. Scriptural teaching, godly fellowship, serious Bible studies and such things tend to wash away such subtle, sinful activities.

Self-Deception

The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth *abundantly*. Job 12:6.

Present prosperity can be a very great self-deceiver if it is not founded in the truth of God. Many are living in sin, but, because they presently prosper, they seem to think that God either approves their ways or He has prospered them. Pause and contemplate the situation: There is only one God. He is the God of truth and piety. He is a God Who is sworn to punish sin. And He is both powerful and everywhere present. How can we think that we will escape His judgment? Just because we seem to prosper in our sin does not mean that God has overlooked us or approved of our behavior. He has ordained a day of judgment and withholds His hand until the appointed time, as He is never impatient. Every hour, every day is an opportunity to repent, to turn from sin and seek Him. Do not misread the signs of Divine providence! Judgment awaits, and it must certainly come in its fullness. God is immutable; He does not change nor grow—nor does He forget. What impetus for repentance and reconciliation!

Alleged Superiority

What ye know, *the same* do I know also: I *am* not inferior unto you. Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God. But ye *are* forgers of lies, ye *are* all physicians of no value. O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom. Job 3:2–5.

Of all the types of alleged superiority among human beings, alleged religious superiority is the most despicable. Religious things, vitions, studies, and persuasion ought to be cloaked with humility, often are not. The very place where we would not suspect pride to be is often characteristically associated with pride! This usually results from a lack of grace. Grace stands opposed to human merit. It is a gift of God, and is exercised in humility. To view the Christian life lived in the context of Divine grace is certainly humbling! Pride stands opposed to grace, and discovers the hypocrite. To live with a consciousness of sins forgiven and to live aware of being sustained by enabling grace of God in daily life is certainly humbling! Grace should penetrate the life and behavior, should characterize the very core of the Christian life. Everything comes to us in our Christian pilgrimage as grace. All true grace leads to a true humility.

Complete Surrender

Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak, and let come on me what *will*. Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand? Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. Job 13:13–15.

Job had been sorely beset by his alleged “friends.” They came to comfort him, but were soon moved to mock him and charge him with sin and hypocrisy. Not one was sympathetic to him or sought to give him comfort. He was driven to extremes by the crassness of his accusers. How he suffered! He was in constant physical agony, and to this were added his mental grief and social persecution. Few have ever suffered as did Job! Even God seemed to stand against him through his physical diseases and agonies. He had no place to go, no place of comfort. Every conscious moment was one of extreme agony from which there was no release. Yet at times his faith struggled to utter itself through his parched and swollen lips. It does here, “Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him...!” This was not lightly spoken. This was uttered in agony. Could we say such? Does our faith permeate our living and extend beyond this life and experience? What a strange testimony, and what a great and awesome utterance from a man so close to death!

Sins Remembered

How many *are* mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest

ne for thine enemy? Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt thou pursue the dry stubble? For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth. Job 13:23–26.

When past sins are brought into our memory with a new freshness—especially if such sins have not been dealt with scripturally a heart-felt repentance and forsaking—they can and should be astating! Such hide the face of God from us, as it were, and He veils His presence, i.e., a consciousness of His presence with its blessed peace. Our supposed peace with God is suddenly shattered and we are brought to a painful conviction and overwhelming sense of sin. We sense our weakness and stupidity, our blindness and failure more than ever. Until such sin is fully and finally dealt with, we become in ourselves less than nothing, useless and aching in heart and mind. Such an experience is not that of an unconverted person, but of a child of God in the throes of a full and awful repentance. How the Lord veils His own face from a light view of sin through such experiences! May we never take sin lightly or presume upon God to think of some sins as trivial or of no consequence!

Human Frailty

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. Job 14:1–4.

Human life, when viewed from the aspect of our frailty and troubles, may seem short and full of trouble. It may seem cut off before it reaches its fullness and ripeness. And to consider beyond life's shortness and troubles the fact that God brings man into judgment seems almost unjust and unfair. Yet we know instinctively from the Scriptures that Divine judgment follows this life—and that judgment will be just. To the sufferer, it is crushing to contemplate the shortness of life and its inequities—and then the judgment of God. He is liable to cry out that everything is unfair and unjust, as Job does here. But one's feelings and suffering do not negate reality—and Divine judgment still awaits!

Man and a Tree

Seeing his days *are* determined, the number of his months *are* with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? Job 14:5–10.

Job in his suffering, and overcome with the finality of life in death without hope of experiencing a renewal of life, laments his loss as he compares himself with a tree. A tree will begin to live again, even after experiencing drought, becoming a mere stump and having only roots.

A man will not. He will simply grow old and die. Job here loses sight of the resurrection, which he will once again think upon and gain strength and faith. Intense suffering can and does play tricks upon the mind and may well cause the sufferer to lose sight of blessings promised in God's Word. Though we will not sprout again as does the tree after being cut down, we will live again with the newness of life through the blessing in the resurrection, far superior to the tree. Man, the image-bearer of God, stands before God and in His purpose far higher than the mightiest oak or cedar.

A Hope

If a man die, shall he live *again*? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Job 14:14.

In his suffering, Job still clings to the hope of the resurrection. It becomes a faint hope because of its remoteness in Job's time of great physical agony. Sadly, during times of great trial and suffering, the human mind becomes limited and the truths and promises of God's Word tend to become more remote from our circumstances. Often the glorious promises of God's Word are cast into the shadow through the trial, and we are robbed of their richness by present and confusing experiences. But, remember, Job never possessed the Scriptures! He lived before there was a Bible. His source of truth was divine and antediluvian revelation. Yet he grasped what he had and sought to be comforted by it. Underlying his suffering and throughout his trials, the Word of God, though not inscripturated, was still a truth which brought him comfort in the hour of trial. And if this were so for Job, what of us who have the entirety of God's Word before us?

The Believer Knows

hast thou heard the secret of God? and dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself? What knowest thou, that we know not? *what* understandest thou, which *is* not in us? Job.15:8–9.

Eliphaz the Temanite mocks Job, as Job seems to claim for himself an insight and wisdom hidden from his friends. He did. Job knew from Divine revelation, which the others seem to have denied, the truth as it is, aside or found contrary to their belief system. Although suffering intensely, Job's concept of reality reflected to a great degree Divine revelation—natural and personal revelation. The same could be said of believers, who have the Word of God—special revelation—so they have a different view of reality. What a blessed difference is the effect system and wisdom of the true believer from the man of the world! His whole World-and-Life-View is grounded in Scripture, not in his imagination, tradition, or unregenerate speculation! How tragic when a person seeks to find the utmost comfort in myth, imagination, tradition or speculation! To turn from the Word of God is to turn from reality and hope! When true comfort is sought and longed for, there is no substitute for the clear revelation of God's truth.

Impatience

Then Job answered and said, I have heard many such things: miserable comforters *are* ye all. Job 16:1–2.

Job reaches the limits of his patience. How his friends have afflicted him, and charged him with all sorts of unbelief, mistakes, falsehood and covering his secret sins. He goes on to say that if they were in his place and circumstances, they would not attack him, but would be understanding. In this sinful world in which we must live, there will always be much misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Some of it ignorantly and some willfully. The human race is fragmented and every man is right in his own eyes. Strange are the answers given to some of life's questions and challenges! We, as Job, may become impatient and have our very sanity put to the test! We must remember that unconverted people seek to live in their own world and are blind to the world of spiritual reality. It is this spiritual world which gives meaning and understanding to this world of sense in which we live. As believers, we have an altogether different perspective—a spiritual perspective and we have the Scriptures to help us understand what others do not. Our World-and-Life-View is

erent at any given point. By God's grace we can be patient and n kind and forbearing when others are exasperated because we e an insight into the truth. Let us therefore pray for patience in such umstances.

Shut Up To God

My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids *is* the shadow of leath; Not for *any* injustice in mine hands: also my prayer *is* pure. O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place. Also now, behold, my witness *is* in heaven, and my record *is* on high. My friends scorn me: *but* mine eye poureth out *tears* unto God. O that one night plead for a man with God, as a man *pleadeth* for his neighbour! Job 16:16–21.

In everything in this earthly life, we are shut up to God. God ws. God governs. God has the final word. Nothing escapes Him. many, even most, live and die without any serious thought toward l unless forced to do so. Blessed, indeed, is the man whom God kens and brings to his mind a God-consciousness! Within this kening are glorious truths. His knows the heart. Nothing is hidden n Him. The awakened one knows that his record is with God, Who ws him through and through. He may be scorned by his fellow 1, but God knows him and receives him, listens to him. What an peakable thing to be known of God and have God give ear to one's yers and longings! His is the one who can plead for his neighbor 1 God. He cannot only pray for himself, but such a standing before l that he can pray and intercede for others! It is almost beyond yprehension tat we can go to God in prayer and be heard! That the l of this universe takes note of us! And even more amazing is that l will hear us when we intercede for others! Blessed is the man 1 can so pray—and blessed is the man so prayed for!

Thoughts of Death

My days are past, my purposes are broken off, *even* the thoughts of ny heart. They change the night into day: the light *is* short because of larkness. If I wait, the grave *is* mine house: I have made my bed in the larkness. I have said to corruption, Thou *art* my father: to the worm, *Thou art* my mother, and my sister. And where *is* now my hope? as for ny hope, who shall see it? They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when *our* rest together *is* in the dust. Job 17:11–16.

Death is the great enemy. It is the last enemy that shall be royed. It is a terror to man by nature. It marks a change that cannot

turned away. What a dread contemplation when considered apart from the truth and glory of the believer's resurrection! Job is overcome contemplating the horrors of death from the perspective of this life, from the physical aspect, apart from the glorious anticipation of resurrection. Surely this is depressing! What hope can the unregenerate man have? He cannot anticipate the glory and blessing of resurrection! And when the believer, as Job, considers the prospect of death in itself, without the hope of eternal glory, he can be overcome with fear. Remember, Job did not have the Scriptures for comfort and expectation. Occasionally, he would rise to great heights of faith, but mostly was given to the grim expectation of the cessation of life and the onset of death with its physical state.

We must give ourselves to the Scriptures! To consider anything apart from the Word of God might lead us to depression. It puts us on the level of the unregenerate, leaving us without the hope of future life and eternal life. The Scriptures alone give us a complete and assured hope, not only concerning death, but concerning all things!

A Godless Future

Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long *will it be* ere ye make an end of words? mark, and afterwards we will speak. Wherefore are we counted as beasts, *and* reputed vile in your sight? He teareth himself in his anger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place? Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare. The gin shall take *him* by the heel, *and* the obber shall prevail against him. 1 The snare *is* laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way. Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet. His strength shall be ungerbitten, and destruction *shall be* ready at his side. It shall devour the strength of his skin: *even* the firstborn of death shall devour his strength. His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors. Job 18:1–14.

Bildad the Shuhite had the philosophy of many—a universe where man was punished by the laws of nature, where retribution ruled as a principle: the wicked were always punished and by the law of nature; righteous shall be rewarded and the wicked punished by the laws of nature. But is this true? Is such judgment always just? Man wants justice, but he does not want the God of justice. A law or principle he

ht be able to face, but not the one true God, the righteous God, the God whose judgment is complete and inescapable. Man as a sinner a great aversion to God. He cannot bring himself to acknowledge the God of this universe. His philosophy is a subtle way of rmining his own justice and righteousness. Mere moralism is not religion, but a substitute for a right relationship to God.

Job's Complaint

Then Job answered and said, How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed *that* ye make yourselves strange to me. And be it indeed *that* I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself. If indeed ye will magnify *yourselves* against me, and plead against me my reproach: Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but *here is* no judgment. He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown *from* my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree. He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as *one of* his enemies. Job 19:1–11.

There may be times when we utter all our hearts before men, concerning our experience in God's dealings with us. God understands; men do not. Our souls may cry out in extreme pain and grief. We do not, we dare not unjustly charge God, although our bodies are racked with pain and our souls are sorely grieved. We are at great loss as to why the Lord is dealing with us as He seems to be. Our question is out of ignorance and grief, not out of anger. But will anyone truly understand? Will man have the patience of God? Will not our best and closest friends comprehend the Divine plan and purpose? Job's faith is all but gone. How he must watch his lips, even before his closest friends. If he fails to understand, certainly his friends will fail. Sometimes the most intense suffering must be borne alone. Faith understands what nothing else can. Faith reaches out into the unknown and trusts God because it knows God, if not His actions.

Faith Breaks Through

Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And *though* after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and

nine eyes shall behold, and not another; *though* my reins be consumed within me. Job 19:23–27.

In the midst of intense suffering, of sore testing which has no power except in the good pleasure of God, no peace except by faith, no hope except in seeking to understand the nature of God and His consistency, a ray of light shines through the gloom and darkness. There is hope! And such hope rests in the far distant future. It is eschatological, not present; it is theological, not experimental. Thus, it is the sole property of the earnest believer, not the merely religious person. Here, one finds the high standard of true faith. Job's present circumstances are awful. They are personal, devastating, physical, mental, moral and spiritual. His soul is severely tried—yet he rises for a moment above all his suffering and fears and finds ultimate comfort in truth which is spiritual and pertains to the far distant future—truth which only a true believer can grasp and rejoice in! Such is the nature of true faith!

The Root of the Matter

But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? Job 19:28.

Taking these words of Job out of their context of suffering and experience of grief, and giving them a significance in the matter of salvation, we see in this passage what many have preached on—the root of the matter concerning a saving relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. In this sense, the root of the matter concerns the nature of true, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the essence of salvation. Such faith is coupled with saving repentance and not separated from it. Faith without repentance is a false faith. The sinner must not only believe, he must turn from sin—all sin—as the ruling principle of his life. Such faith also grasps the Lord Jesus Christ alone, not to be received with a partial trust in good works, religious rituals and ceremonies: faith plus baptism, faith plus church membership, faith plus rededication, etc. Partial trust in Christ is not saving faith. Is the root of the matter found in you? A repentance which has caused you to turn from all and every sin? A faith which goes to Jesus Christ and receives His imputed righteousness as one's standing before God as a justified sinner?

An Empty Hope

Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for *this* I make haste. I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer. Knowest thou *not* this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked *is* short, and the joy of the hypocrite *but* for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish or ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. Job 20:1–8.

Zophar the Naamathite expresses in this chapter the philosophy of *man*—human goodness as the ground of acceptance with God. Such a philosophy, although passing muster among men, is an abomination to God. Why? Because it sets aside the grace of God, which is the *only* path to reconciliation and salvation. This chapter reveals that Zophar believed if a man does good in the eyes of man, he will fare well, and be counted as righteous. But nothing could be further from the truth. Man's standard, man's judgment, man's thoughts, man's king, man's standard—these mean nothing before God, Who has previously set forth His gospel or good news of salvation before all men. From the *Protevangelium* of Genesis 3:14–15 to the Person and work of our Lord Jesus revealed prophetically, actually and essentially in the Gospel record, there has been and is but one way of salvation for sinners—not the goodness of man, but the goodness of God. Not the work of man, but the work of God. Not the thinking of man, but the purpose of God. The path of grace to salvation and reconciliation is through the Lord Jesus Christ, through His redemptive work, through the cross, through His vicarious suffering and death, through His glorious resurrection. The religion of Zophar will never save you.

Complaint

As for me, *is* my complaint to man? and if *it were so*, why should not my spirit be troubled? Job 21:4.

These are the words of Job. In answer to his “friends” who have treated him unfairly and without sympathy, Job answers that his complaint is to God, not man. Now, such complaint may be justified or unjustified. It may be with or without a foundation. The point is, if and when we have a complaint, do we simply complain to our

How man or do we seek our God and direct our complaint to Him. Complaint itself usually reveals dissatisfaction with our state and condition, for all want protection, ease and blessing, whether it is in context of blessing and grace or not. We may complain about the suffering which we feel is undeserved and for some secret reason, as though the Lord owed us something and was obligated to satisfy us. The truly godly man directs his prayer to God, who alone directs all things for His glory and our good. If we feel that the Lord is unjust, we must come to Him in faith and if we could but understand, better yet, if we had the faith to endure and leave all in God's hand, a different would be our attitude. Unknown reason makes such a trial much more aggravating and grievous. There is no escaping a humble, submissive faith which clings to God no matter what the cause or result of such trials.

Attitude of the Wicked

Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? Job 21:7–15.

The life men live in this world of time and sense determines their attitude toward God and religion, God and goodness, and God, sin and blessing. The wicked seem at peace with God. They enjoy His blessing rather than let it lead them to repentance, it causes them to blaspheme His name, as they take it all for granted and sin against every providence of God. The Lord must bring great adversity into their experience to attract their attention and bring them a concern which might be life-changing. Those who prosper in this world and live without thought of God are very much like the beasts which perish. They live in presumption and take everything for granted. And they are often the first to complain when their providential blessings are taken from them. In such a state and to such people, trials may come as a blessing awakening—if they are brought close to God to think upon Him His providential government and dealings with mankind. To see

hand of God at work, to view the realities of God may be the first step to repentance and conversion. How important it is to keep the gospel before such persons, that they might have God in their thoughts as such trials confront them!

The Inequalities of Life

Shall *any* teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are *right*. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. Job. 21:22–25.

Fallen, sinful man carries with him a sense of inequality unless he has tasted the good things of life. But such are the inequities of this earthly existence. Some die in the very zenith of their strength and advantages. Others pass away without having enjoyed any the things we call good. Yet both die and enter eternity to await judgment. It is without saying that God owes nothing to the sinner. We may grow as men and sinners that some have never had the opportunities afforded to some, and others have been cut off in the midst of their years while being able to embrace great opportunities. This is the king of the world, which gauges everything by the world's standards. Simply because one enjoys the good things of life and the other does not, does this make the life of one more valuable and the other less valuable? They shall both perish and enter into judgment to merit eternal punishment. We must never be caught in the world's way of thinking. It is false. All men who died apart from the saving work of the Lord, regardless of their experiences in this short, earthly life, died under judgment. A short season of enjoyment means nothing, nor does being bereft of enjoyment if all end the same way. Let us never fall into the pattern of the world's thinking.

Speculative Theology

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? *Is it* any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? *or is it* gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? Will he reprove thee for fear of thee? will he enter with thee into judgment? *Is not* thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? Job 22:1–5.

Eliphaz the Temanite wrestles with the philosophical and religious questions of man's relation to God. Does God find man profitable, as

igh He needs man as man needs God? Verse 3 reveals that Eliphaz ignorant of saving truth, as it is a pleasure to God if a man is truly piteous in the full gospel sense. God is glorified and takes pleasure in the fulfillment of His saving purpose. The next thought, is God full of man? This must be answered in the negative. Man is a mere creature; God is Governor and Lord of all. The final issues are judicial: Eliphaz questions that God will enter into judgment with him, and then he assumes that what he has surmised is actually true of God. How wrong we may be concerning our thoughts of God and of ourselves! There is a subtlety in humanizing God and deifying man. This proceeds from one's imagination, not God's Word. See how wrong a man may be if he considers Divine realities without the Divine revelation of Scripture! How do we evaluate? What is our standard? We approach such theological speculation from the perspective of divine revelation or from the ignorance of our own thinking?

Sinfulness Assumed

For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped him naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry. But *as for* the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. Therefore snares *are* round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee; Job 22:6–10.

Eliphaz the Temanite was a master at assuming the guilt of others! He imagined that Job was guilty of various sins, and such sins as would reveal the plain meanness and destructiveness of Job. Have you ever been surprised and angered by the accusations others have made against you? Is this what they really think about you? And you have called them “friends”?! But this has been and maybe yet may be so. It is the evil-mindedness of some. Without a shred of evidence, they have imagined the very worse about another. What is the source of such thinking? Is it because these see the depravity of man as others do not? Is it because they are possessed of a greater insight than others, or is it because these have minds which are far more given to sin than others? May such thoughts be in great error and may they stem from the hearts of the accusers and never once from the heart or mind of the accused! What a great blessing it is to have a clear conscience before God and all men!

The Antedeluvian World

Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden?
Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with
a flood: Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the
Almighty do for them? Job 22: 15–17.

Eliphaz considers the state of man during the Antedeluvian Era. In this era just before the Flood, God saw the wickedness of man on earth, that the human race had corrupted itself to such an extent it had to be destroyed. It had become wicked beyond measure and divine intervention and judgment were necessary. What a picture of antedeluvian society! Whatever we think of the world today, it must have been even more evil in Noah's day! God promised that He would once again wipe out the human race as He had done, so there is no way to legitimately weigh the wickedness of man then and compare it to the wickedness of man today. The wickedness of Noah's day was an extreme in its pervasiveness and its intensity. And now, the world is in a state of expectation of future and final judgment by the same God! Oh, how wicked men presume upon God! Let us be absolutely certain that we have been reconciled to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ and His imputed righteousness! This remains the only hope for sinful mankind. Is this your case?

Misunderstanding Suffering

When Job answered and said, Even to day *is* my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him! *that* I might come *even* to his seat! I would order *my* cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words *which* he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with *his* great power? No; but he would put *strength* in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be able. Behold, I go forward, but he *is* not *there*; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold *him*: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see *him*: But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary *food*. Job 23:1–12.

The state of the true child of God is unique. He may suffer greatly but does not know why. This is the underlying situation with Job in his affliction: grief and sorrow, pain and unending agony. Why?! And when he

ght God, God seemed to hide Himself from the sufferer. At one
it Job argues his innocence and goodness, but receives no answer.

must submit and endure! No one can argue against God's
ipline or question His loving kindness, even when grief and
ering strike. The Lord does as He wills—but He always has a good
sufficient reason—and such reason will sooner or later be revealed
His loved one—not, perhaps until the final judgment.

End of the Wicked

Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know
him not see his days? Job 24:1.

The 24th chapter of Job is concerned with the wicked among men
to live in sin and violence, yet never seem to be judged in this life.

but judgment does await after death comes and they enter into the
eternal state. The soul is not destroyed at death, rather, its eternal state is
determined. There will be a future day of judgment from which no one will
be able to escape. God has ordained this. He has settled the time and
place of this final judgment. God has done so because He is just.
There is no escaping His justice. Do we grieve over the wicked that
they seem to live and even die without justice being dispensed. Fear

No one will escape. It is our lot to see the wicked in his power and
restrained evil, living and acting without the fear of God, seemingly
immune from Divine judgment. But, be not deceived! Judgment is
coming. Rather rejoice that for believers, judgment is already passed.
Our sins have been judged by God and we have been acquitted through
the blood and imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus. We must
remember that we do not limit our thinking to this life, but embrace
eternity in our thinking! This is “thinking God’s thoughts after Him,”
giving the same meaning to everything that God has given to it. This
gives comfort in evil times, confidence in uncertain times and faith
through the end of time. This is a true biblical perspective of time!

A Fatal Ignorance

Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, Dominion and fear *are*
with him, he maketh peace in his high places. Is there any number of
his armies? and upon whom doth not his light arise? How then can
man be justified with God? or how can he be clean *that is* born of a
woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars
are not pure in his sight. How much less man, *that is* a worm? and the
son of man, *which is* a worm? Job 25:1–6.

Poor Bildad! This ancient sage was wholly ignorant of justifying faith—the faith which brings the poor, fallen sinner to God in faith, resting in the imputed righteousness of the promised Redeemer. All he said about God is true, but his question set aside the provision which God has made in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. From the time of the Fall (Gen. 3:1–15), the promise of a coming Redeemer was given to sustain man in hope of reconciliation to God and peace with the Most High—The *Protevangelium*, or first promise of the gospel. This was given as a challenge to the serpent and a gracious promise to Fallen, sinful mankind. It answers the question as to how a man can be just with God (Job 9:2). Prefigured by animal sacrifices, anticipated in every promise and shed blood for sin, true and actual salvation has been generously provided by God! Now, the message of the gospel is known and gloriously revealed in and through the blood wounds of Calvary!

The Power of God

And, these *are* parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of his power who can understand? Job 26:14.

God is omnipotent. But what does this mean? He is all-powerful in every sphere. When we think of the power and sovereign prerogative of the Most High, we usually think in a given sphere or aspect, not inclusively, as our minds are limited by an aspect of what we are considering in a given conversation. This short chapter attempts to speak of Divine power in a pervasive sense, and is left in awe.

It is good at times to sit under the starry sky at night and contemplate the greatness of God. Although this is only one aspect of His greatness, it is an impressive one and often leads to a temptation of others. Eventually, we begin to include ourselves in the context of Almighty God, and an overwhelming sense of His sovereign power over the entire universe. We are overcome with the majesty of God until our troubles shrink, until we are almost ashamed! Such times tend to calm the soul and lift the spirit—and, although seemingly impersonal on our part, strangely minister to our particular needs. Blessed sense of God's greatness as creation witnesses and fulfills its appointed duty! (Rom. 1:18–20).

Faithfulness in Trial

Moreover Job continued his parable, and said, *As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my*

soul; All the while my breath *is* in me, and the spirit of God *is* in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. Job 27:1–4.

Job was being sorely tried, and he did not understand why he was undergoing this awful season of suffering. His body was being consumed with disease, his wife wanted him to curse God and die, his only child had been killed, society spurned him, and now his friends had turned against him. He was abandoned, misunderstood and persecuted. No one among the sons of men had suffered as did Job. Yet through all this, he retained his righteousness before God! What a man! What a hero! What else had he left but his integrity? Deep down inside, he trusted God, though God Himself seemed to be destroying him. How do we have such faith? How frail and weak we are when a cross word or some opposition from man causes us great grief! Job lived in a time when he had no insurance, no medical doctors, no pastoral oversight or help. Yet he persevered! Let us rejoice that we can never be in such a state! We have the Scriptures, pastoral help, medical advantages, and—what is blessed—the promises and enablement of our heavenly Father to sustain us!

The Search for Wisdom

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom; and to depart from evil *is* understanding. Job 28:28

The entirety of chapter 28 is given to the search for true wisdom. The answer is only given in the closing verse. Strange it is when men search for wisdom. They are usually seeking for other things; wisdom is not first on their list of precious and valuable things. Man by nature seeks wealth and riches. He sets his heart on tangible things. If pressed and turned toward things other than the material, he may seek longevity and health. If pressed to the utmost, he may seek wisdom, but it cannot be purchased, and it is prized only when man has reached his limits in other areas. The spiritual is usually last. Man avoids spiritual realities until he is forced to weight the things of this life and leave earth and seek God. The reverse ought to be true. Only then will everything assume its proper place! Oh, that we should come to the knowledge of the Lord and true wisdom and not waste our time and resources on that which does not profit!

Presumption

When the ear heard *me*, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw *me*, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and he fatherless, and *him that had* none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet *was* I to the lame. I *was* a father to the poor: and the cause *which* I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply *my* days as the sand. Job 29:11–18.

This chapter is given over to the remembrance of Job to his past—past rich with popularity, good works, fame, kindness, and presumption. It is presumptuous to think or to say that as the past, so the future. We are creatures living in a changing world; sinful creatures in a fallen world; who are not in control of either our circumstances or our future. Although Job was a good man, and bent on doing good to all, he presumed that as it was, so would it be—and was sadly mistaken! The God Who enabled him to do much good / marked him for suffering and bereft of the means and motivation once enjoyed. And those he once helped now turned against him in appointment and even disgust. He was alone. No one came to him to give him comfort or to help in his great hour of need. His alleged supporters charged him with sin and wrong-doing. What awful, bitter appointment and suffering! This is the world in which we live—not only an imperfect world, but a bitterly disappointing world! If we do not have God as our refuge and hope, how could we cope? But the good God is our refuge and our hope, and so in Him we find solace and the expectation of glory.

Abandoned

They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face. Job 30:10.

This world is cursed and sinful; it wreaks with the evil of hatred, sin, and violence. How complete was the Fall of our first parents! Everything has become tainted with sin and unspeakable depravity (m. 1:21–31). And what is the attitude of many against the believer against the truth of the gospel? Men are not crying out to or for Him. They do not want reconciliation with Him. They hate Him. The power of sin is so strong that they are completely captivated by it and

/ love or magnify those who are more wicked than they are (Rom. 2). Job now saw what he could not even imagine before—the wickedness of sinful man without the restraint of Divine grace. This is the world that our Lord came to redeem! Think of the awful sinfulness of mankind and the price paid by our Lord’s suffering and death on the cross! How horrible the suffering! How glorious the power! The power of the gospel is an awesome commentary on the magnitude of Divine grace!

Sickness

My bowels boiled, and rested not: the days of affliction prevented me. I went mourning without the sun: I stood up, *and* I cried in the congregation. I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat. My harp also is *turned* to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep. Job. 30: 27–31.

Some sickness is discomfiting. Some sickness is utterly agonizing and fatal. The latter was Job’s lot. He was suffering from running sores and elephantiasis, two of the most horrendous diseases known to mankind, both incurable, and both distorting and nauseating to view. His limbs were swollen and horribly distended. He was unrecognizable. His skin had turned black with leprosy and was itching—a living death filled with stench. He could not sleep for pain and agony. Nothing could be done but wait for death—an agonizing, itching, feverish death! All sickness became a reality with the Fall of man in sin and his rebellion against God. When we see sickness in all its forms, we must primarily think of man’s Fall into sin in his rebellion against God. Be it mild or life-threatening, all sickness is the result of sin. The Fall made man liable to sickness, disease and death. When we think seriously and with disgust or sorrow concerning sickness, let us never forget that our Lord came to abolish sin by His life’s blood. Indeed, anything which reminds us of man’s Fall, ought to also remind us that the Lord God sent His Son to fully and finally deal with sin!

Self-Defense

Forasmuch as I have made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid? Job 31:1.

In this chapter, Job is forced to maintain his moral purity. Some might say this is all self-righteousness. It is never self-righteous to maintain

al purity! But such a defense ought to be attributed to the
 aining, enabling grace of God, not to one's own convictions. How
 it is when men seek to find the cause of all suffering to be
 ulness and moral impurity. If anything contrary happens there are
 ays those who attribute such suffering to sin in the life. The Book
 ob is situated in the very center of our Scriptures to teach us that
 is not necessarily true. The answers are always negative and evil
 n men search their own hearts and think upon their own secrets.
 , as the entire Book of Job reveals, God brings some into the realm
 ickness and worse for His own glory and their testing, that they
 ht see their own hearts and cast themselves upon the Lord—and
 rs may be rebuked and corrected. Every man has within him the
 ntial for great evil, but grace can keep a person faithful even under
 most severe trials and temptations. The comfort of the Book of Job
 great and many-sided! It comforts the sinner with hope of
 iveness, it comforts the innocent with hope of restoration. Our
 s and individual circumstances are all in the hands of God. In tis
 , we are never safe from the onslaughts of accusers, but there is a
 gment when all things will be finally and fully revealed and
 pletely settled.

Age, Youth and Truth

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he *was* righteous
 n his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of
 Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath
 indled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his
 three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no
 answer, and yet had condemned Job. Now Elihu had waited till Job
 had spoken, because they *were* elder than he. When Elihu saw that
here was no answer in the mouth of *these* three men, then his wrath
 was kindled. Job 32:1–5.

Truth is not always with the older generation, nor with the
 nger. The younger generation is still radical, often times its ideas
 relatively new and untried. And it lacks the maturity to remain
 nt with its untried answers. The older generation has grown old
 n time-worn theories. Just because something has existed for a long
 e doesn't make it right or true. When divorced from the Word of
 l, both young and old fail miserably. Neither innovation nor
 ition has the answers man needs. In this chapter, Elihu, a younger
 n than the others sees things differently. He sees the alleged self-
 teousness of Job who has had to defend himself against the

itionalists and so has sought to justify his attitude and actions. He humble and yet his words carry much weight. Self-defense can be easily misunderstood! He also notes the misunderstandings of the r ones. When we are judged by others, we must be certain that we grounded solidly in the Scriptures, whatever others may think ut us. God knows, and He is the final judge. Blessed is the man se God is the Lord and blessed is he whose defense is grounded in Word of God!

Truth and Testing

Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be eavy upon thee. Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have eard the voice of *thy* words, *saying*, I am clean without transgression, *am* innocent; neither *is there* iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth ccasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, He putteth my eet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. Behold, *in* this thou art not ust: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou rive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters. Job 13:7–13.

Elihu at first seems to sympathize with Job. He understood that knew not why he had to suffer so. But he also knew that God does have to answer man or give a reason for the trials and suffering plague the human plight. What place does faith have in our trials suffering? The great Object of our faith must be God—the God of Bible—not the “god” of our own imagination. The God of the le has revealed Himself in His Word, and thus we have a great ght into His actions and our circumstances. Had Job the Scriptures, state would have been understood from the beginning. God does it He pleases. He always has His reasons. Not every instance of or suffering is because of sin. God controls both the suffering and amount of suffering. God sustains through the trial. God loves His dren and the end will be blessing—if not in this life, then in that ch follows. Suffering often remains a mystery, but it never inates God’s love or purpose for those whom He loves.

Ignorance in Trial

-his flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of is youth: He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: ind he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his ighteousness. He looketh upon men, and *if any* say, I have sinned, ind perverted *that which was* right, and it profited me not; He will eliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

...o, all these *things* worketh God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. Job 33:25–32.

The words of Elihu may be misunderstood. The basic issue and painful circumstances of Job are that He was suffering intensely, ready to die, and yet he found no cause of his suffering or imminent death. He kept asking and inferring “Why?” He had no answer. His friends proposed it was hidden sin and so accused him. This made his suffering worse. Elihu perceives this. His approach is that this suffering is a mystery, and that God does not have to answer to man. Then there is a possibility of change; Job may recover. Are there lessons for us here? Yes. God does not have to answer to us for our trials and suffering. These are for His glory. It may be as a witness to His sustaining grace and humble submission. That He always has a purpose we admit, but we may never understand. It is our part to remain faithful and submissive, and seek to give Him all the glory. Only the Lord can sustain us in such trials and suffering, and hence our testimony to His sustaining grace and granting us faith to believe and persevere.

Taught by the Heavens

Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds *which* are higher than thou. Job 35:5.

In times of contemplation and prayer, it is often edifying to look up into the heavens. This is especially true of the night skies when the stars declare the glory of God (read Psa. 19). But even on a day when the clouds rule the skies, the greatness of our God is impressive. Finding time to contemplate God’s greatness in the natural world often causes us to lift our minds to consider His power in every sphere. Much of the time, we rush into prayer, more taken up with our needs than with His power and greatness. This robs us of the attitude of faith and trust that help us in prayer. We have to fight the tendency for prayer to become rote and simply words spoken unless we are filled with a sense of God’s greatness and power. May we always consciously come into His presence prepared, especially filled with a sense of His power, majesty and glory!

Songs in the Night

Where *is* God my maker, who giveth songs in the night...? Job 35:10.

There are three thoughts in this question which form its significance. First, God. He is considered here as one's Maker. This emphasizes His power in creation and providence. Second, it is night, which affects us differently than day. The night with its dark shadows and unseen dangers brings us to thoughts of God as our Protector. Third, God can give us songs in the night, implying thoughts of God as protector and benefactor. A long day of labor and toil is usually concluded with a time for food and rest, and also a time for prayer, as we usually summarize our day with prayer when work is not pressing. This short statement reveals much! Songs in the night imply a consciousness of God and His care and provisions, of answers to prayer. We sing. We give vent to praises and hymns because of God's ongoing care for another day. May we close each day with a hymn upon our lips and a song in our hearts! Praise to God at the end of the day is a manifestation of a right relationship with the God of our salvation!

Speaking for God

Elihu also proceeded, and said, Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that *I have* yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker. For truly my words *shall not be* false: he that is perfect in knowledge *is* with thee. Behold, God *is* mighty, and despiseth not *any*: *he is* mighty in strength and wisdom. Job 36:1–5.

Elihu intended to speak on God's behalf. What a challenge! The Bible had not yet been written. Scripture was non-existent. Where would Elihu find and from whence would he communicate the Word of God? —and who would agree with him that it was God's word he was speaking? Elihu was limited to two sources: the witness and Word of natural revelation and, second, the scope of ancient revelation handed down from the antediluvian era. Such had become common knowledge in a traditional sense. Contrast this state with the glorious state of believers today, who possess the entirety of God's inspired revelation! You and I can faithfully and fully speak on God's behalf, as we have His Word in its completeness. Such an awesome responsibility must not be taken lightly and care must be taken to speak the words the Lord would have us speak. Yet even now, we must exercise great care to interpret the Word in the proper context, with the right meaning and from the proper perspective! There was never a time when those who dare to speak on God's behalf could afford to be contrary.

Obedience and Blessing

He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve *him*, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge. But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them. They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean. He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression. Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait *into* a broad place, where *there is* no straitness; and that which should be set on thy table *should be* full of fatness. But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold *on thee*. Because *there is* wrath, *beware* lest he take thee away with *his* stroke: when a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Job 36:10–18.

Some truths are forever. Some principles are unchanging. Spiritual principles are both and more! Obedience leads to blessing is a principle found in both the Old Testament and Covenant and in the Gospel of New Covenant. This principle stands against sinful humanity, which wants its own way and desires blessing without obedience. Why do men want blessing without obedience? Why do they kick at submission to the Word of God? What do they seek their own way and find fault with God when they must suffer for their relief and disobedience? The difference today is between religion and the gospel of grace. Religion is often the ideas of man; gospel and the New Covenant derive from God. The principles of religion are inequitable, often being the ideas of fallen, sinful man; the principles of the gospel of grace are established by God, gracious, but alterable. Thus, sinning against the grace of God is rebellion and excusable.

God in a Thunderstorm

At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place. Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound *that* goeth out of his mouth. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend. Job 37:1–5.

When the normal working of nature is interrupted by an external force which is breathtaking or mind and heart-stopping, such as a violent thunderstorm or an earthquake, We instinctively think of God. In fallen, sinful man has a *sensus divinitatis*, a sense of the Divine

an instinct for God which is inescapable (Rom. 1:18–20). For a moment, at least, man becomes conscious of the presence and power of God. The ungodly suppress this; the godly may rejoice in the midst of the storm, though probably not in the earthquake! We experience the great power of God first-hand; the power is far beyond us and beyond our control. God reminds man of what he actually is—a frail, fragile creature—and man needs such experiences lest he becomes self-centered and prideful. Do we often think about God, His presence and power, without such a phenomenon? This is one of the great differences between the believer and unbeliever. The believer is conscious of God during his usual daily activities; the unconverted, however, only when forced to by unusual circumstances of an alarming nature. How do we keep our minds lifted up to a God-consciousness as a normal part of our daily lives?

God and Creation

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or *who* shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? Job 38:1–8.

In these chapters (Job 38–41) God enters into conversation with Job. Thus far, He had remained silent and allowed Job to speculate on everything. He allowed Job's "friends" to speculate on Job's condition and the reasons for it. Now, He thoroughly explains to Job His absolute sovereignty over His creation and reveals to Job that he, as God's creature, has no right to question His dealings. Job is greatly humbled and ashamed. This truth is extremely difficult, if not impossible to receive! We want to know! We would demand an answer! Are we not God's children? Does He not love us? Surely He will reveal to us the "Why" of things! But He may not. We may have to face the unknown as we must live the rest of our lives—by faith alone! Have we not said, "If I only knew why God is doing this, then I would take it!" But this is just the point—we find that walking by faith, especially in suffering, is the greatest test of faith! However we might glory in our knowledge of "walking by faith" as God's children, when called to

so without God revealing why, is the greatest trial and most will cry for an answer—Job did. To continue to suffer silently, with our trust placed in God, whatever He may be doing, is faith refined and tried.

Do Angels Sing?

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job 38:7.

Unless the “morning stars” refer poetically to angelic beings, the answer remains: Angels do not sing! Of course, this is immediately objected to. Did not angels sing at the birth of our Lord? No. All the Christmas traditions and religious records have angels “saying,” not singing. Study closely the entirety of Scripture and you will find no reference to angels singing. We see how tradition has set aside the word of God in many instances, and how our hymns have been in error! There is, however, a positive truth revealed here. Only man, who is made in the image of God, has been given the gift of song. The redeemed can and do sing—and will sing in eternity. What a unique privilege to hymn the greatness and glory of God and to praise Him for His great redemption! The Apostle Paul implies that believers ought to be singing much of the time, occupying our minds with voices with hymns of praise—worshipping informally at the personal level (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). And believers have much to sing out, do we not? It is the subject of redemption—salvation—which is set forth in all our songs. This is the greatest means of self-edification that God has ordained along with prayer.

God of the Goats

Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve? Canst thou number the months *that* they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? Job. 39:1–2.

The Lord educates Job. Job has poured out his heart to God, coming convinced that God had forgotten him or ignored him, that he could find no reason why the Lord should leave him to suffer, and pain hidden from him, despite his crying out. In the closing chapters, the Lord finally answers Job. The reference in the text above concerns the wild goats. Had Job ever considered the wild goats? The timing of their pregnancies? When they gave birth to their calves?

God does. He cares for brute creation, the bringing forth of its

ng—indeed, He cares for all of His creation, even those creatures one else cares about or questions. Every creature in God’s vast verse is cared for by its Creator—God. God refers to the wild goats because of their wild and independent nature. It is in the nature of l to care for His creation. Such truth should sustain Job and give comfort. And such should comfort us as well! It is edifying to ly and see the great variety of animal life God describes—and He s for them all! In a different and much higher sense, God cares for 1. We should remember this when we see any animal or bird. He s for all, but for man He is also Savior and Redeemer!

A Lesson Learned

Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct *him*? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. Then Job answered the LORD, and said, ⁴Behold, I am vile; what shall answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further. Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou into me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, hat thou mayest be righteous? Job 40:1–8.

How does the Lord deal with Job? Job complained that God did answer him in his suffering and agony. He cried out in his diseased dition, but the Lord was silent. He was forsaken by man and even wife. The Lord did not answer. His friends came and charged him 1 secret sin, and he sought to justify himself—and the Lord did not wer—until now. Job sought to call God into account. He perately wanted to know why. Are we different? Were we to suffer icutely as did Job, would we not want an answer? Faith is content emain without an answer if need be. This is a very hard matter! We it to know. Yet the Lord’s silence was the same as “Wait upon ” This was as agonizing as no answer at all. The Lord did not wer Job until the trial with all its suffering was almost over and at nd. Can we wait? Faith tested is a subject of the greatest concern. longer one waits, the weaker faith may become. Surely the Lord ld give an answer if He loved Job and designed his faith to be kept ng! But, no! This was the trial of trials. And Job was left to cast self upon God alone. Finally, when the Lord confronts Job, he is with his hand upon his mouth without a thing to say. He was en—the great, awful trial had done its work.

Blessed Repentance

Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no thought can be withholden from thee. Who *is* he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:1–6.

Job is finally brought to the end of himself in every way. He had been speaking about things too high and profound for him. God was absolutely sovereign and freely exercised His rights over His creation without hindrance. Job had questioned God's power, His motive and purpose. Now, he was through. It is one of the most difficult things—to let God be God and not question Him or his motives and purpose. We may have supposed that if He loved us, we would suffer no others, or that His lovingkindness would prohibit such suffering. Surely His children would not be treated as such—but this is not true!

Even great suffering does not change God toward His own! His love is immutable and He will not be questioned. Job stands in scripture as the great example of suffering, and he would not be so if God did not allow His children to undergo such. Nothing can separate them from His love, even the greatest of trials and suffering! Herein is confidence and assurance.

The Trials End

And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning... Job 42:10–12.

Every trial and every crisis has an end. We will either find solace and healing in this life and recover, or we will rest in the presence of the Lord with all suffering past and rest in glory. In the case of Job, we see that the Lord may deliver the godly out of the very worst situations and conditions. He is sovereign over sickness, even of the very worst cases. The result must be left with God. He is Lord over both health and sickness, over both recovery and being taken to

himself in loving kindness. Death for the believer is passed. We pass from this life to the next, from suffering to glory and from trials to glory. Nothing can set this aside if we belong to the Lord. Are we content? Do we have true, saving faith? Do we have the witness of the Spirit? Does our experience mirror that of Scripture? Then we have much, much more than did Job to sustain us!

Only our gracious God and Heavenly Father can make the greatest blessing a gain! Job had twice as much as before! Do we believe this? The Scripture reveals it to be so. May the case of Job encourage us in our season of grief and sorrow! God's children are His beloved and unique in a world of sin and suffering. He has and He can once again double our blessings!

Psalms

A Contrast in Character

Blessed is the man... his delight is in the law of the LORD... The ungodly are not so... Psa. 1.

David begins the Psalter with a masterful statement—a contrast between the godly and the ungodly. This is a fitting statement for the entire Psalter. Much is expressed in a few words, yet these words state the matter both concisely and clearly. There is no mistake or confusion. At the center of the matter is the place the Word of God or Law of the LORD occupies in the life and character of the godly.

The blessed or godly man does not merely read the Scriptures; he is a man who is never made better by such activity. He deals with God's truth in depth; He feeds upon God's truth as a hungry man feeds upon bread. He finds the greatest delight in it. It gives him the greatest pleasure in the highest sense [Heb.]. It determines his morality and becomes the determining thrust of his life. It indelibly marks his character and activities. It separates him once and for all from the ungodly. The two can never be confused or mistaken one from the other.

The description of the Blessed or godly man is much more extensive than that of the ungodly. The reasons may be varied. The godly man stands uniquely alone. He is the rare individual, whereas the ungodly fits the description of the common man whose life is lived without reference to and under the controlling influence of Divine truth. The ungodly man may even be religious, but his religion is

ely outward and formal. It is destitute of a vital, personal relationship with God and His Word.

Study this opening Psalm carefully. Find its key and unlock its es. How do you fit into this Psalm? With the godly man or the odly? What place does the Word of God occupy in your life and erience? How is it manifest in your life?

The Outward and Inward Life

Oh the utter blessedness of the man!But if he has any delight at all s in the Law of the LORD..." Psa. 1 [Heb.].

The first two verses on Psa. 1 are a contrast between the outward inner life of the godly man. The Hebrew in v. 1 begins with an lamation. His outward life is described in terms of what he does not or never has done. V. 2 reveals the secret by describing his inner

He derives his utmost pleasure and satisfaction from meditating n and memorizing the Law of God. It is in his heart and on his lips tinually. This illustrates the great reality that the inner life controls determines the outward life and activity. The Scripture gives him ntense and unparalleled pleasure [Heb.]!

V. 3 proceeds to describe his outward life in a positive way as V. id in a negative way. What a picture of Divine grace! He shall be a tree transplanted [Heb.] to a place with perfect water and soil ditions. This explains his consistency. He does not vary as others whose lives are relative to their circumstances. What a blessed ure of Divine grace! Transplanted! Pulled from the old soil, which been shaken off, and placed in a spiritually nutritious environment. his not a picture of Divine grace? Have we been transplanted by and sovereign grace into God's kingdom of grace and Divine blement?

A Tragic, Brief Description

Not so the ungodly, but if the are like anything at all, they are like the :haff which the wind bloweth away...Psa. 1:4.

This verse is abbreviated in the Hebrew. It contains a *kee iym* st. "But if..." What a contrast with the transplanted tree! What is life worth? What effect has our religion made upon our character behavior? Has our claim to be religious been merely traditional external, or has it been heart and life-changing? The future is

aled concerning the ungodly in v. 5–6. It is tragic! Nothing saps life out of a man like false religion, or true religion falsely held.

Oh, the energy often expended, the time given and the effort put h to prove to one's self and to others that one is in the Kingdom of ! Living a lie religiously is ardent work! It is also contradictory. ry word must be watched. The tongue must be kept under control. ry action must be weighed carefully—if one is to keep up the squerade. Yet, in the end it proves to be futile! There are slips of the gue, outbursts of anger and even rage, all of which betray an egenerate heart.

But do not even believers sin? Sadly, Yes. But such is out of racter with the tenor of their lives and their repentance is evable—and it is evident that the reigning power of sin has been ken in the life by the grace of God. There is a distinct difference veen a sinning saint and a supposedly saintly sinner!

Kiss The Son

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish *from* the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him. *Psa. 2:12.*

This Psalm is prophetic of our Lord's exaltation and glorious n. It commences with the rebellion of mankind against its Creator Sovereign Ruler. Man as fallen and sinful, hates God. He does not e the "god" of his own imagination, but he does hate the God Who eveled in Scripture.

Man's rebellion against the one true God is laughable in the most ous and awful sense. Who does fallen, sinful man think he is?! Can puny creature succeed in his rebellion against the omnipotent ereign Ruler of the universe?! This only reveals that man in his state condition has no true or real knowledge of the Most High. He lently cannot escape the caricature of God he has conjured in his 1 thinking. This is revealed in *Rom. 1:18–25*. Lost, undone mankind simply cannot escape its perverted concept of the one true l. He seeks to create in his thinking a "god" after his own image likeness.

The Psalmist exhorts man the apostate and rebel to "kiss the Son," come and be reconciled to the King of heaven and earth. Blessed those who have been so reconciled by the kiss of faith and truth of pture!

Is God Our Shield?

...But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me...Psa. 3:3

The term “shield” [Heb. *magen*] in our text denotes a small shield held by a warrior with one hand. This could be easily manipulated in any direction or angle for close defense. Further, this was the shield a soldier kept with him in his battle array; it was not a large, heavy shield that he might set aside. Because of its closeness and utility, it comes a fit idea of our God, Who is a God near at hand, who can protect us from any angle. We would naturally think of a large shield for its protection which we can hide behind, but the Psalmist’s idea of God is quite different! How rich are the Scriptures, deserving our close study, even in the pictures which are drawn figuratively! Here, it is the nearness of our God and His presence and protection when troubles come from any given direction. No study of the languages or history in Scripture is a waste of time—all may prove edifying!

Greatly Outnumbered

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about. Psa. 3:6.

The language here is an exaggerated hyperbole. It matters not how many are our enemies, the Lord enables us to overcome them and gain victory. The believer has not only many enemies, but very powerful spiritual forces oppose him. Observe very carefully the language of Eph. 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this darkness [Gk.], against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Our enemies are very powerful demonic forces, not merely other humans who oppose the gospel! The battle by its very nature is spiritual, and thus necessitates spiritual preparation and spiritual perseverance! Mere intellectual preparation is insufficient. Such must be remembered when preparing for preaching or teaching. He who only prepares academically for his sermons must certainly fail! He has lently has his attention given to men and not to the real enemies of truth. This reveals the necessity of ardent prayer and intercession, others to hold up our hands in prayer, to labor to intercede for the Christian ministry. May those who seek to encourage and support us understand the nature of our warfare!

Past Answers

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me *when I was in distress*; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. *Psa. 4:1.*

Prayer at times must be the most trying, agonizing call for faith in Christian experience. We often pray in a vacuum, uncertain of an answer which fits our needs or fulfills our requests. The Lord may or may not answer our most fervent prayers, and He may answer them in any completely unexpected or postpone an answer for a very long time. Every prayer becomes a challenge. We are ignorant of His will in any given matter. We ask by faith. We explore our own lives and others. We often struggle with our inherent unbelief. Is there anything that might give us solace and strength? Yes, previous answers to prayer! Do these not minister twice to us? First, when our present prayers are answered, and second, when further prayers are strengthened by previous answers.

Peaceful Sleep

He will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety. *Psa. 4:8.*

There is nothing like a good night's sleep, or so it is said. Is the believer's sleep different from that of the unbeliever? Yes! The unbeliever lives without a consciousness of God; the believer is conscious of God, especially when circumstances in this life cause him to become aware of God's presence and care. The unbeliever takes all things for granted and only becomes concerned when the usual occurs or threatens. The believer is conscious that the Lord is for him, and prays for a good night's sleep in God's goodness. Sleep is simply part of his life. His life, safety and blessing are in God's hands, and are exercised whether he is presently conscious of it or not.

This can be called a passive faith. With the unbeliever it is taken for granted—presumption; with the believer, it is in the context of a relationship that becomes a constant in his life. What a blessing that the Lord watches over us, even when we are not concerned about it or conscious of it!

Morning Prayer

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Harken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My

voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up. Psa. 5:1–3.

Morning welcomes or anticipates a new day, filled with the unknown. Above all things, one must enter the day spiritually prepared. Trials, temptations, surprises, testings and blessings may await. To be spiritually unprepared means the loss of blessings and may be unprepared for tests of faith. The unknown unfolds before us day by day, and each day brings its share and more of surprises, and trials which may try the soul. The believer should never face any day without spiritual preparation! This is the great difference between presumption and faith, between the unbeliever and the believer. Between the believer in fate, chance or luck and the believer in the Lord God. To begin the day without prayer is to act the part of an unbeliever—is this not sinful?

Whom does God Hate?

For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. Psa. 5:4–6.

It is commonly thought, even among Christians, that God loves all—every human being. Such thinking often derives from the word “world” in John 3:16, which is taken to mean every single individual in the world. But this passage was spoken by our Lord to Nicodemus, to him as a Jew, the “world” meant the Gentiles as well as the Jews—and the context bears this out—and the subject is every single man that believeth, not every human being! Further, in Psa. 5 it is declared that God hates all the workers of iniquity. What will be their punishment?—eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15)! Does this thinking need to be corrected? If God hates unrepentant sinners, then receiving the truth of the gospel is their greatest need that they might be saved from eternal judgment! As we live in this fallen, sinful world, we associate with condemned sinners continually—family members, friends, associates, neighbors, etc. Do we seek to evangelize them? Speaking the truth of the gospel may be used of God to their salvation. This must be uppermost in our minds. Who can tell what the Lord might do with a word fitly spoken?

A Cry for Mercy

O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I *am* weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? Psalms 6:1–3.

This is a possible reference to David's sin with Bathsheba—something he referred more than once. That David could do what he is unthinkable, yet he sinned against the Lord by committing adultery with the wife of one of his most trusted soldiers and then had the soldier killed to further cover up his sin. How could such a thing happen? How could such sins be committed? When considered by themselves, these rank among the very worst of sins—yet they were committed by an otherwise godly man, the Lord's anointed! And now he begged for mercy. Without dealing with the unbelief, lust, and utter wickedness of his sins, let us consider his cry for mercy. God had put away David's sin—he would not die—and he should have! He would have died four-fold, and he did. And subsequent events reveal that the Lord would never depart from his house. We want to consider God's mercy. Despite the awful, horrendous sins, David cries for mercy. This reveals that there is always hope for God's mercy, which considers us wholly and utterly undeserving. The very worst can cry out for mercy—May we be bold to do so if we ever need to!

Forgiveness

I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer. Psalms 6:6–9.

There is forgiveness with God for the repentant sinner. This is amazing! Whatever the sin and however horrible it might be, there will yet be forgiveness. We will suffer and agonize for our sin. The Lord God will chasten His own when they sin against Him. Yet He will forgive because it is His nature! Consider the wicked sinner who comes to Christ in newly found faith to seek peace and salvation. Will he be forgiven? Yes! How? Why? Because it is God's nature to give, and He has provided a substitute whose righteousness is imputed by faith to the repentant, believing sinner, however wicked and polluted that sinner is! The Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only

ior. He saves us from our sin and from its deserved punishment.
v is this performed? Through faith in Him our sins are imputed to
1 and His righteousness is imputed to us. This is the one and only
7 to forgiveness. Are you forgiven?

Continual Anger

...God is angry *with the wicked* every day. *Psa. 7:11.*

There are many things which are constants, about which we rarely
ver think: the rising and setting of the sun, our heartbeats, the
dreds of common activities which go on around us daily in our
s and the lives of others. We take a vast multitude of facts and
ities for granted until we are forced to think about them in a time of
is: the sudden death of a loved one or an acquaintance, the failure
ur automobile to start, a flat tire, or some other mishap.

There is a constant which not one in ten thousand ever
siders—the constant anger of God against sinners who live in sin
profane His name by thought and in activity, who live without
rd to God and stand in danger of Divine judgment every moment
/ live! Whether awake or asleep, they are under Divine wrath! Most
heir thoughts and actions are heaping up judgment against “the day
vrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5).
this they are utterly unaware—yet this changes nothing! Death and
gment will take them unawares and unprepared. “...he that believeth
the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Jn.
5). Does God’s wrath abide on you?

The Work of God

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the
stars, which thou hast ordained What is man, that thou art mindful of
him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made
him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and
honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy
hands; thou hast put *all things* under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea,
and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea,
and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our
Lord, how excellent *is thy name* in all the earth! *Psa. 8:3–9.*

Strange are the words of Scripture. Here, the creation of the
verse—the heavens—as immense as they are—are the work of God’s
ers. But the creation and position of man is a much greater work!
1 by contrast is the crowning and final work of creation. He was

created in the image and likeness of God, and created to have dominion over all the works of God. When man believed the lie of the serpent and fell into apostasy, this act affected the entire creation and set evil to work throughout the universe! The occasion of the Fall of man into sin set in motion a chain of events which have determined world history, set one against another, occasioned all prophecy, became the source of all bloodshed and warfare, and brought the Lord Jesus into the human race. The God—Man to bring redemption to our lost and sinful race. Consider what God has done and will do to redeem fallen, sinful man!

Prayer and Praise

I will praise *thee*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. Psa. 9:1–2.

As Christians, it is taken for granted that, according to the scriptures, we will pray daily. Prayer is to form, as it were, the very fabric of our lives. But is it not true that we often hurry through prayer and neglect it altogether? Rather than begin each day in prayer, we put it off for other activities which press in upon us, and then we omit it altogether—unless some crisis or pressing issue drives us to prayer and seriousness about our walk with the Lord. What does the Psalmist say? Our prayers will be filled with praises and He will recount God's marvellous works. He will approach God joyfully and with gladness—with singing! It is most important to give ourselves to prayer daily, that we give ourselves up to God completely in our prayers and praises! How time should be taken to open our hearts and minds to sing the Lord for His goodness! This is time well-spent. No, it is time spent in the very best way! Let us learn to praise Him with our whole hearts!

Judge and Refuge

And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee. Psa. 9:8–10.

It is both interesting and edifying to study the prayers and Psalms of David. His descriptions of the Lord God and His [David's] relation to Him [God] are very instructive. This relationship is salvific—leading to salvation, a spiritual relationship] and a moral

relationship. God is the righteous Judge. He shall judge in righteousness—and David has put his trust in this Lord. Can we say? Do we have both a salvific and a moral relationship with God? Have we been brought to repentance for our sins? Do we believe with saving faith? Are we just before Him? Do we rest in the imputed righteousness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? If this is so, then David's God is our God, and our relationship to Him is clearer and more knowledgeable than David could experience!

A Moral Revelation

The LORD is known *by* the judgment *which* he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah. Psa. 9:16.

This moral revelation is not in the thinking of the unbeliever; only the believer. The unbeliever's world is usually characterized by fate, luck and chance. It revolves around him; he is at the center of his existence. Moral revelation is limited to the believer who sees the hand of God in earthly matters and does not live by a self-centered assumption, but in the context of Divine providence. The believer, however, is surrounded by a world with a moral compass. For the believer, the Lord is in ultimate control, and governs the world in which we live. In this world there is a principle of Divine retribution which is at times revealed. In the language of Scripture, "the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." This gives reason for musing or meditation. The World-and-Life-View of the believer makes him aware of the presence of God in this world and this life; the unbeliever is unaware unless the Lord opens his eyes. Only then is he awakened to meditate and set things right or blamed others for his sinfulness.

God Irrelevant?

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after* God: God is not in all his thoughts. Psa. 10:4.

Pride entered the human race at the Fall. Like a contagious disease, it spread from the devil to mankind. Fallen, sinful man is self-centered when the reality of God is erased from his mind and consciousness. A true God-consciousness is terribly humbling! The man who is self-absorbed and fancies himself better than everyone else has become a practical atheist. He becomes his own "god." Our Bible may read from the Hebrew as follows: "In all his thoughts [he speaks] there is no God." [See the Heb. in Psalms 14:1–3 and 53:1–3]. The phrase "no God" could be written three different ways in the

rew tongue. All three of these references use a negative which ins “naught,” “of no consequence,” “irrelevant.” The import is not enial but a discounting. In all the thoughts of this man is the leful assertion that God is naught, of no consequence, irrelevant.” s is a practical atheism.

Foundations

f the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? *Psa. 11:3.*

Foundations are not only important, they are absolutely necessary ny structure. They give shape, stability, strength and support to the re structure. Apart from the material use of the term, a foundational iment, a foundational truth, and a foundation doctrine are arkably the same. Consider a foundational doctrine, such as the ine inspiration of Scripture. This is essential. It separates Divine, nal, absolute truth from mere speculation, from secondary truths non-essential assertions. Unless our beliefs and arguments are ily grounded in Scripture—the very Word of God inscripturated— / are defective at their very foundations. Their authority stionable and their force greatly diminished. One may easily see the Divine authority of the Bible is elementary and essential, nary and absolutely necessary. It is usually the first truth or aspect ruth to be questioned or attacked. If a given argument or belief can found to rest on religious tradition alone, it immediately becomes irect. If a given doctrine seems to have authority through a given ool of thought only, then it loses much strength and conviction. d fast to and defend the foundations! If these do not stand firm, all st!

The Judge

The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne *is* in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The LORD trieth the ighteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. *Psa. 11:4–5.*

The Lord God of Scripture is the God of heaven and earth. As 1, He cannot be neutral. He cannot be a mere observer. He cannot silent forever. Sooner or later, He must act. He must intervene. He st judge. His moral nature demands that He do so. His nature and /er enable Him to do so. The Lord is inherently good, thus He must ge evil. All creatures are His creatures, thus all the earth will be ject to Him. The Lord has a vital, discerning interest in His

tion, and has determined that He will be glorified in the same. is, sooner or later, He will act—and will act justly and righteously. at is your relationship to this righteous and Holy God?

A Cry to God

help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: *with* flattering lips *and* with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, *and* the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips *are* our own: who *is* lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set *him* in safety *from him that* puffeth at him. The words of the LORD *are* pure words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. Psa. 12:1–7.

The state and issues of this fallen, sinful world often cause the ly to cry out to God for help. What do we often find among fallen, ul mankind? Deceitfulness. Vanity. Unfaithfulness. Falsehood. ful Pride. Atheism. The ungodly persecute the godly. They speak ely. They live and act as if there were no God. These neglect the rd of God in their unbelief and oppose the truth in their pride. But l's Word is true and judgment must follow. God is also the God of verance. He will engage to deliver and justify His own. He will up to His word of promise by like action! Do we truly believe that Lord God will act upon His own Word?

Faith and Patience

how long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou ide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *aving* sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted ver me? Consider *and* hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, est I sleep the *sleep of* death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; *and* those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I ave trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will ing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me. Psa. 13:1–6.

There is often a struggle between faith and patience. Crisis eriences and unjust treatment may cause the heart to long for ice intensely and seek deliverance. Faith struggles with impatience, ecially after long trial and seeming inactivity on the Lord's part. v we long for resolution now! How we are taxed when things are

of order when the wicked prosper in their sin and seem restrained in their wickedness! It seems that the Lord has forgotten and we pine away in disappointment. Of course, this is far from the truth. The Lord will act, and when He does not do so immediately it is because He has a sufficient reason not to. We must be patient and wait upon the Lord. His time is the best, and His judgment is complete.

The Practical Atheist

The fool hath said in his heart, *There is* no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, *there is* none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one. Psalms. 14:1–3.

See Psalms. 10:4; 53:4. There are three ways in which these words may be expressed in the Hebrew: Never, ever any God [with the actual negation], no God [with the immediate negation], and God is naught. The last is the Hebrew constant here, as in the other two Psalms. What is considered is a practical atheism: God is naught, He is of no consequence, He is irrelevant. When one—believer or unbeliever—when an otherwise decent Christian at times—knowingly acts sinfully, as though God does not exist or will bring him into chastisement and judgment, he is acting in practical atheism! The great, awful example is David in committing adultery with Bathsheba. He knew better! But he went on in sin, acting upon that one look, and falling to the same sin—that is practical atheism. This led to adultery, murder, incest and murder in his household, and finally to a civil war! This is the price of a practical atheism! Can we act as though God is naught, of no consequence, irrelevant, and commit sin while knowing we are sinning against our God?! David did and his history is more than tragic!

Holy Fellowship

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. *He that* backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. *He that* sweareth to *his own* hurt, and changeth not. Psalms. 15:1–4.

Worship for many is reserved for a religious service. David in Psalm sees fellowship as culminating in worship, and being extensive with all of life. There is a tendency among many to separate the religious from the daily and the spiritual from the practical. David combines them both. He sees all of life contributing to relationship to God in active fellowship. Is it not true that all of life prepares for true spiritual worship? There seems to be no dichotomy between daily living and fellowship with God. One culminates in the other. The whole life is a preparation for the time of fellowship and worship we are to experience. There is little to no place for hypocrisy. Our fellowship with and worship of God is the culmination of our daily walk. Oh! That this should be our witness and testimony to our relationship with God!

Blessed Providence

The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant *places*; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Psal. 16:6–8.

Divine Providence orders our lives. Far above and beyond our knowledge, the Lord is at work guiding, leading, allowing, correcting, moving in our lives. We only see things as they come to finality fit themselves into the pattern of our lives and experience. Blessed be the God of Providence! As we look back over our lives at the critical points of transition and progress, can we say, “The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places?” If we are believers, we ought to be able to say such, even through this vale of tears with all its appointments and delays, its dark times and trials. Who would dare charge God with mistakes or failures? No. Once we see the trail behind us from the advantage of the mountain top, we, too, can say the lines have fallen out to me in pleasant places!”

Prayer in Trial

Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, *that goeth* not out of feigned lips. Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal. Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited *me* in the night; thou hast tried me, *and* shalt find nothing; I am purposed *that* my mouth shall not transgress. Psal. 17:1–3.

Behind this ardent prayer is evidently a crisis or strong reason to use such strong language. Whatever has occurred, it has sharpened David's spiritual senses and given him both strength and confidence to pray aright. We may misunderstand some trials or crisis which fall on us unexpectedly and seemingly without reason. Why!? Why?!! Why now?! And we cannot find a reason. We are brought to a noble renewal in prayer and communion with our God. And then the trial comes, but, praise God, we can face it in faith and strength because the Lord has providentially prepared us, though we knew it at the time. We must never judge our gracious and loving heavenly Father prematurely. He knows. He ordains. He prepares—and we only observe His working when the test or trial comes upon us.

Our Opponents

Show thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust *in thee* from those that rise up *against* *hem*. Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, From the wicked that oppress me, *from* my deadly enemies, *who* compass me about. They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; Like as a lion *that* is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places. *Psa. 17:7–12.*

The circumstances of this fervent prayer are unknown to us, but David is drawn out in prayer because of his enemies. This Psalm and *Psalm 17* are mostly taken up with a description of these opponents. David is fully aware of their superiority, their strength, their self-confidence, and his own relative weakness and susceptibility. He flees before the Lord as a small, hatchling bird and yet as one who is the very object of God's love and attention. What is our source of confidence and hope in such times when beset with the children of men who fear God and are filled with pride and superior in strength? Our strength and hope rest in God, and in His nature and character. He is for us and will protect us!

From Prayer to Praise

A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul: And he said, I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call

upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. *Psa. 18:1–3.*

Blessed are the times when we can exult in the presence of our Lord with full hearts and joyful souls! Such may not occur often, but when they do, we find ourselves full of faith and thankfulness, often with tears of joy and praise for the end of some great trial or tragedy which has plagued us for a long time and drained us of all reserve. Like David's heart overflows! He has finally triumphed over all his enemies among the heathen and from the hand of Saul. Years have passed when he was an outlaw, a fugitive—and now, he was finally delivered! He gives all the praise to God His Deliverer, Whom he describes in a great variety of analogies: Rock, Fortress, Buckler, Horn, High Tower. No one analogy is sufficient! Have we ever prayed and praised God so? What terms would we use? Oh, what joy to praise the Lord without reserve for His goodness, power and deliverance! Let us not be of a slow tongue or bereft of unrestrained similitudes!

A Thunderstorm

He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him *were* dark waters *and* thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness *that was* before him his thick clouds passed, hail *stones* and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the highest gave his voice; hail *stones* and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. *Psa. 18:9–15*

David's prayers are often filled with hyperbole as he seeks to impress God in prayer with fullness of heart and mind. He strains the language to express his fear or joy. Here he describes God's deliverance as a giant, powerful thunderstorm with flashes of lightning and rolling thunder—the voice of God from the black clouds and strong wind. Consider the time in which David lived. The greatest demonstrations of power in nature were earthquakes and thunderstorms with their lightening and booming thunder. In his joy and overpowering sense of deliverance and final freedom, he borrowed from nature the most powerful figures he could. Are not our prayers the same in comparison? There are times when it might be proper to shout and be utterly taken up with such praise—at least in private!

A Clear Conscience

He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me. The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments *were* before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight. With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward. Psalms 18:19–26.

David had experienced a great deliverance during battle, and was conscious of Divine power exercised on his behalf (Psalms 18:29). Through him the Lord wrought a great victory. He was elated, overcome by such an incident, and moved to give God the glory. His conscience was also free from any sense of unconfessed sin or guilt. This is very significant, as a sense or consciousness of unconfessed unforgiven sin can rob us any sense of victory in a given situation. How humbling! How convicting! How humiliating! Yet the Lord acted on our behalf! This should teach us to keep short accounts with God, never let time consciously go by without confessing our sins and shortcomings and keeping a clear conscience before our God! Nothing gives strength and stamina spiritually than a clear conscience which sets the mind and heart free from any burden or restriction in prayer!

Finally

For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but *there was* none to save *them: even* unto the LORD, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets. Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; *and* thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people *whom* I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places. The LORD liveth; and blessed *be* my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. *It is* God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man.

Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore. Psa. 18:39–50.

For close to thirty years David had lived as an outlaw, a fugitive, hated man by both the Philistines and by King Saul and the army of Israel. These were hard years for David, cut off from both friend and family as it were. The heathen hated him for his victory over Goliath and subsequent victories over their armies. Saul hated him because the Lord would crown David king and Saul's kingdom was doomed. The only place where David could find solace was hiding in the wilderness—and even there, there was some who would betray his position to Saul. Finally, after years of privation, misunderstanding, travail and grief, this all came to an end! For several years, David reigned over Judah, and finally, over all Israel. How long before God's promises might be fulfilled! How many delays might be experienced! What an exercise in faith and patience! How often hope was all but gone! How David's experiences should strengthen us! The will of the Lord will be done—but it may be delayed, and it may be with great trials before it is fulfilled. These are all tests of faith—and ultimately come from God's providential hand and plan, not the plans of man. All over the seeming delays, trials, tests and tragedies can be written, "as the Will of the Lord our God!"

The Heavens Considered

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which *is* as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. Psa. 19:1–5.

Many a night over the years, this writer has gone out into the dark, and contemplated the heavens. What a blessed preparation for eternity! Slowly the mind ascends into the dark sky and moves about from one constellation to constellation. The mind is drained of earthly thoughts and taken up with heavenly realities. God becomes as He is—great and glorious! Then one can truly pray, consider, praise and adore. In our daily prayers, we often must go through them and leave off praying because of time restraints, but at night, under the stars, there is often more time to contemplate and praise the God of

tion—and our Heavenly Father—in all the greatness and glory of heavenly majesty. Our souls are taken up with God and we are blessed to pray with contentment and a sense of God's greatness and glory. We all need this often!

Divine Revelation

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether. More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward. Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. Psa. 19:7–14.

Psalm 19 is comprised of two parts: v. 1–6, natural revelation, or God revealed through nature, and special revelation, or God revealed through His Word, v. 7–14. These two witnesses to God are not meant to be considered apart from one another, but together. Natural revelation is great enough to hold man fully accountable to know God and be left without excuse (Rom. 1:18–20). Special revelation comprises the Scriptures and holds man fully accountable. Together the two halves of Divine revelation constitute the complete, most convincing witness to God, His purpose, salvation and how to live by faith in Him and die in hope of eternal life. When viewing the starry heavens, we naturally ascend to God's Word as His final, full revelation in our worship. When opportunity presents itself, partake of full revelation of God. Begin with the heavens and end at Calvary! From Calvary, proceed in your mind and heart to the end of time and enter into eternity! What treasure is ours in God's revelation!

Prayer Essential

The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel. We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our

God we will set up *our* banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions. Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call. *Psa.* 20:1–9.

This entire Psalm deals with the subject of prayer—with prayer as essential to daily life. This is to be expected and anticipated. Man was made in God’s image. He has a closer relation to God than any creature on earth. And man was created with the capacity for prayer. Prayer ought to be as natural as breathing. Alas! It is not because of sin which has separated and alienated man from God. Prayer is not the exception, not the rule of life, and limited to those who live in a God-consciousness. To those who believe and live in the text of God’s Word and grace, prayer is not only characteristic; it is essential. Is prayer—daily communication and communion with God essential to your life? Is He your daily companion? Is He necessary for your daily activities and worship? Is your relation to Him as natural as any other part of life? It ought to be! God is not only our companion, but our Savior and King—the one indispensable “Other” in our lives!

Answered Prayer

The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart’s desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of thee, *and* thou gavest *it* him, *even* length of days for ever and ever. His glory *is* great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance. For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved. *Psa.* 21:1–7.

The subject of prayer is many-sided. Much has been written on severing prayer, how to pray, how to pray so as to receive an answer, how not to pray, how to pray with the right attitude, for the right reason, etc. Relatively little, however, has been written about being thankful for answered prayer—and this is the subject before us now. That we should be thankful for answered prayer is expected, but how often do we seriously devote ourselves to this necessary and needed exercise? There are some things which call for life-long thanksgiving, such as prayer for a godly, loving husband or wife. For

at blessings, it may be proper to thank the Lord upon many an occasion! Indeed, in some cases periodic times of thanksgiving might refresh our minds and hearts as we remember and rejoice in the blessings of God. May we be just as ready to repeatedly engage in times of praise for answered prayer as we do for the initial asking!

A Prayer Applied

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* Psal. 22:1.

Many hundreds of years before our Lord uttered these cruciating words on the cross just before His death, they were foretold prophetically by David. This Psalm is a prophecy of the crucifixion and found its fulfillment in the sufferings and death agony of our Lord. Jesus was quoting Scripture as He hung dying on the cross! Psalm 22 is the most graphic portrait of this awful time. Our Lord appropriated this Psalm to Himself in His awful hour of suffering. The Greek text of Matt. 27:46 changes the word-order—the only Gospel bold word to do so—making this not only a prophecy but an appropriation of our Lord to Himself! “My God! My God! Why Me has Thou forsaken?!” Can we appropriate Scripture in our times of grief and suffering? We have here the example of our Lord!

Perpetual Provision

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. Psal. 23:1.

Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar and most loved passages in the entire Bible. It emphasizes the care of the shepherd for his sheep as a picture of God's tender care for believers. This Psalm is rich and filled with blessed pictures and loving care. Consider the life of a sheep; its entire life and its quality depended upon the personality and character of the shepherd. Its entire life was in the shepherd's hands. A good shepherd would give his life for the sheep. David muses that, because the Lord was his shepherd, he would never ever lack (Hebrew: perpetual neg.)! The very same truth is ours by application! If indeed the Lord is our shepherd, we will never, ever lack! What comfort these words can give! Even without exploring the strong expressions in the original language, the truth remains that our God cares for us, supplies our needs and more, and manifests His love and attention. His mercies are our protection. Knowledge of the streams, grazing lands

trails are all meant to serve us! To say that the Lord is our shepherd is to say it all!

Quietness

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. Psalms. 23:2.

The sheep awakens hungry and ready to eat. The shepherd causes sheep to lie down in lush, green pastures. He has already walked through and cleared out any dangers or poisonous snakes or noxious weeds and thorn bushes. The sheep can rest itself and eat to the full without fear, gaining strength for the later climb up the steep mountain side to the high mountain pastures. Now, the morning air is cool, but with the rising of the sun, the canyon or valley air will become stagnant and filled with biting insects. By that time, the shepherd and sheep will be out of the valley and on their way up the steep mountainside to the high pastures where breezes will sweep away the swarms of insects. Then, He leadeth me up (Heb.) beside the still waters. Rushing waters were dangerous to the sheep. Along the steep, narrow trail to the high pastures the shepherds would form small pools in seep springs so the sheep could drink. What a comparison between the Lord's care for us and the shepherd's care for his sheep! We should meditate on this daily!

Help!

...He restoreth my soul... Psalms. 23:3

What is referred to here? The words mean to turn back again. Don't think that the wandering sheep is turned back by the shepherd—this is true, but there is a much different and life-threatening situation in David's mind! The sheep may easily become cast when lying down, especially feeding or sleeping. "Cast" is an old English expression for a sheep which, because it has become entangled in a thorn bush or fallen asleep in a depression, or its wool is very heavy, that it is pregnant, cannot regain its footing. All four legs and hooves would flail in the air and the sheep would panic and die within a few seconds from the shift in bodily fluids. This was a constant danger. Not only David had rescued many a "cast" sheep! Yes, "He turns me over and around." How we need to be rescued at times—rescued from our own stupidity, from our own carelessness and the manifestations of revealing sin and remaining corruption! The Shepherd is on the

stant lookout for any of his sheep to become “cast.” What a wonderful God we have Who treats us as a loving shepherd!

Uphill

... he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Psa. 23:3.

The shepherd leads the flock up the steep mountain paths to the high pastures where there are fresh breezes and no insects or valley t. By application, righteousness is an uphill climb. These paths are unmistakable [Heb. deeply-rutted, unmistakable] symbolizing the moral Law of God. “He leadeth me in the deeply-rutted or well worn paths of righteousness for His name’s sake! God leads us according to His Law. The law is not passé nor has it been abrogated. That was once engraved on tables of stone is now internalized in our hearts—the promise of the New or Gospel Covenant (Ezk. 36:25–27). This is what the Old Puritans called “the grace of Law.” This is not legalism, but grace—and grace is defined by law. The absence of the law is not grace, but lawlessness. Which of the Commandments has been cast aside or completely been disannulled?

Don’t Run!

For even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me... Psa. 23:4.

The evening comes upon the shepherd and his flock as they descend into the dark canyon below. All is shadow and darkness. Most of prey are on their evening hunt. Robbers or bandits may prowl about, ready to attack and plunder. Despite the dangers, the sheep does not run. Note: “I will never, ever fear any evil.” (Heb. verbal neg.). Are we able to walk through the dark places? “Valley of shadow of death” Heb. expression for very dangerous situation). The sheep is conscious that the Lord is with him. Not only so, but the word “together” (Heb. means “together as one”). May we not picture the sheep pressed against the shepherd’s leg so they walk down that steep trail together? Such is the picture of the believer and his God! Do we—do we—have such confidence? Never has there been a shepherd like our Lord! Every possible simile must fail. All human language must fall short. O Lord! Forgive my unbelief when I fear!

Our Comfort

...thy rod and thy staff they comfort me... Psa. 23:4.

In dangerous situations in this life, we may be comforted by the presence of law enforcement armed with firearms. In David's time, weapons were swords and spears. Shepherds possessed rods and staffs. A shepherd's rod was a short club, often having short metal spikes protruding from one end. These rods were used to pull thorn bushes from the sheep's wool, for prying rocks out of the way, for hitting poisonous snakes and other varmints—and were the primary weapons against human adversaries who might seek to kill or injure the shepherd and his sheep.

In the time of Joseph, the son of Jacob, the Chaldean shepherds, or Hyksos, ruled Egypt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their symbol of power was the shepherd's club, which they carried to the throne. This evolved into the scepter of the monarch, the military baton and other symbols of power and authority. So, the shepherd's rod is with us, even today—but now made of precious metal or Ivory.

For us as believers, the Shepherd's rod is both figurative for his protective hand and also for his authority. Both give the greatest comfort! How the Scriptures draw the simplest pictures for our comfort!

Personal Care

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Psa. 23:5.

Once the shepherd and flock reach the small canyon or valley where the sheepfold is located, the shepherd feeds the flock for the last time in the dusk. The wild beasts are prowling and preying on their evening hunt, so the shepherd stands guard over his sheep. He examines each animal for scrapes, scratches, and sores and anoints each with a mixture of oil and spices for healing. He also may rub this mixture into and around the nostrils to protect from the screw flies, which lay their eggs in the nostrils of the sheep. Then he cups his hands and draws a final drink for each sheep. The sheep then enters the sheepfold, cared for, comforted and tired. Then the shepherd himself, with his sheepdogs, sleeps across the opening, and becomes, in reality, the very door of the sheep! Such is the care of a good shepherd for his sheep. What a picture of our God in His loving care for his own! So, return to the first verse, "because the Lord is my shepherd, I will

er, ever lack any good thing!” A very loving, caring, idealistic—imperfect Picture of God’s care for us!

Sheep Dogs?

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...
Psa. 23:6.

“Goodness” and “Mercy” in this Psalm are said, literally, “to dog steps...” [Heb.]. These represent God’s two sheep dogs. Often we are not appreciated as they ought to be, but they are always there, accompanying, following, guarding, chasing, “barking” at us! The sheep dogs were essential to the shepherd’s work. He would send them forth to correct, turn, and drive the sheep from dangerous places. They would also find out the holes of poisonous vipers and other vermin, give a warning of any predator or bandit close by. Do we appreciate the Goodness and Mercy of our God? Do we consider them when they seem contrary to our desires and natural inclinations? What fitting figure for God’s care, and often how lacking in appreciation! At times, our very lives and safety depend upon them!

Never Lack

The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Psa. 24:1.

The Psalms in the words of David are often given to hyperbole in describing God’s care and provision for His own. This opening statement, however, is not hyperbolic, but literal. God is, indeed, the Lord of all the earth. He is the only true God, the one and only God. Others are but the figment of one’s imagination. And He is God of the earth and its inhabitants. We need to contemplate such and seek to grasp this when we are tempted to worry and lose the greatness of God in our thinking. He spoke this universe into existence by His fiat decree—the greatest example of omnipotence ever conceived! In this reality, far exceeding our ability to think or imagine, we live and move and have our being. Never, in any given situation or circumstance is God too small! How this ought to comfort us and cause us to sing joy! How humbling when we consider the sovereignty and power of God. And in this context, He works out His eternal purpose for all mankind, including us!

A Glorious Entrance

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift *them* up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he *is* the King of glory. Selah. Psal. 24:7–10.

This Psalm refers to the entrance of the Ark into the City of David its final resting place (2 Sam. 6). The Levitical choirs sang responsively, David danced before the Lord with all his might, the people sang and shouted, the priest blew their rams horns—it was a great and glorious celebration! The Ark had been taken by the Philistines and after its return, left in various places throughout the reign of Saul. Now, after many years, it was brought to Jerusalem. The Ark was the visible symbol of the Divine presence and so, awesome in its significance. It was held in the minds and hearts of the Israelites as synonymous with God Himself. God had come to be with His people in the fullest sense! Some believe this Psalm to be prophetic of our Lord's entrance into heaven at His ascension after His resurrection to resume His High Priestly ministry. One thing is certain, when we are enabled by faith to rest ourselves in the very presence of God in prayer, we should be filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

True Prayer

Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. Psal. 25:1.

Prayer serves many purposes. It is much like the lubrication in an engine. Spiritually, prayer may occur in a variety of circumstances. One characteristic of prayer is that it be uttered in faith on our part. Prayer may or may not be answered, but it must come from a believing heart and mind, and it must be subject to God's will. Prayer may occur about both minor and major things, as we are to pray literally about everything in our lives and experience. What is peculiar about our text is that prayer—true, believing prayer—must arise to God from a living soul. A prayer which originates only from the lips is not true prayer. It does not arise from the heart and soul, but is merely a form, a ritual, an expression. True, believing, effectual prayer arises from the heart and soul. Thus, David declares that in prayer he lifts up his soul unto the Lord. Mark the effectual elements of true, believing prayer: It is directed up, i.e., it is directed up to God, not simply spoken into the air as

ish or voiced as a desire. Again, it finds its source in one's soul and
rt, i.e., one's inner being. The whole man is involved in prayer! Do
lift up our souls in prayer? Do we express our inmost thoughts,
ires and requests in prayer? True, believing prayer is necessarily
usive of the whole man. The tongue and soul are involved, the
rt and voice, the mind and inmost thoughts. Such prayer must be
rest and accordingly effectual. Do we lift up our souls in prayer? Is
yer to God our most serious and spiritual endeavor? This must be,
rayer serves a multitude of purposes in the believer's experience!

Progression

Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy
ruth, and teach me: for thou *art* the God of my salvation; on thee do I
wait all the day. Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy
ovingkindnesses; for they *have been* ever of old. Remember not the
sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy
remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD. *Psa. 25:4–7.*

For the believer, there may be or should be progression in almost
ry area of our spiritual walk and experience. Although salvation
not be improved—we are either converted or not—we may and
uld grow in the various graces which accompany conversion. The
nues the Lord opens for us are increasing in knowledge—
easing in the knowledge of God, His attributes, purpose and the
nate relationship we are to have with Him. Further we must
ease in the knowledge of His Word. This is almost infinite! The
ous areas of Bible study and the application of God's truth to our
1 lives and experience are almost beyond imagination! Even after
1y years of Christian experience and study, we still learn and
ease in edification! Then, we should progress experientially. The
lication of truth, the exercise in prayer, various experiences in our
s, bring us progressively to a mature believer. David prayed for
gression, let us do the same!

Old Sins

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according
o thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD. *Psa.*
25:7.

Youth is often a time of exploring the borders and limits of
ities and liabilities. It is also a time of refining and immaturity. In
early days of our conversion experience and Christian walk, we

I have lightly committed some sins which we afterward are very much convicted about with better teaching and biblical conviction. As work of sanctification progresses, so such sins are left off and omitted. But later on, even years later, such sins may be brought to remembrance and cause troubles to the soul and conscience. Such sins ought to be dealt with, confessed and repented of—and if dealt with properly, then deal with their memory, lest our Adversary use these to trouble us and rob us of our peace. The remembrance of old sins can become a provocation if left in the memory.

Behavior Argued

Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; *therefore* I shall not slide. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. Psalms 26:1–2.

David knew he could not argue his own righteousness before God, for he was righteous only on God's account. But he argues his behavior through which he worships the Lord and refrains from sinful behavior. No reason or cause is not given, but it may be that some have accused him of sinful behavior or of duplicity of life. It may even be that his struggles with his own heart and weakness in the face of strong temptation. Do we struggle in prayer? Do we argue our godly behavior before God? Let us always remember that foundational to all is the love of God!

Confidence

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1.

David lived a varied life and had a many-sided experience. He was the youngest of eight brothers, was a shepherd who had killed a lion and a bear as a young teenager, became a national hero with his slaying Goliath the Philistine Giant at age seventeen. Became son-in-law to King Saul, forced to flee and become a fugitive for over twenty years, led a large band of outlaws during that entire time. Fought the battles of the Lord against Israel's enemies, wrote much of the poetry of the Old Testament, reigned forty years as the king of Israel, Never lost a battle as King and leader of the army, Committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah her husband killed by the children of Jonatham. Through his sin caused a civil war and the death of Absalom, his son who rose up against him. Yet David was a man after God's own heart, was repentant for his sins, and strove to serve the Lord.

fully. God had graciously put away his sin. David had more than share of enemies, who capitalized upon his sins and never understood his forgiveness. As a forgiven sinner, David could and did *prayer*—was a man of prayer, and had confidence in his relation to God. His testimony, varied as it was, ought to be a strong encouragement to every believer!

Encouragement

Into thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, *if* thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle. Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbors, but mischief *is* in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert. Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up. Psalms 28:1–5.

This Psalm contrasts the righteous and the wicked. David considers himself as among the former, not because of his own self-righteousness, but because his sins have been forgiven. We see here the attitude of a man whose forgiveness is so vivid that he has little if any consciousness of sin in his life. Do we truly and actually believe in forgiveness with and before God? We ask for forgiveness, but do not remember—the memories of past sins—haunt us? The devil can and does use such to rob us of our confidence in prayer. Let us truly and actually believe that our sins have been confessed and forgiven, and can pray as did David.

Weather and Prayer

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. Psalms 29:1–2.

Viewing creation may have a distinct effect upon prayer. It does when one views the night sky (Psalms 19:1ff). Here, David is praying in the midst of a thunderstorm, evidently from a safe location, and the flashes of lightning and rolling of thunder act upon him and fill him with the wonder and vision of God's immense power and might. Most would never think of this, but praying in a storm might increase our sense of the immediacy of God's presence and make us more than ever

scious of His mighty power. The heightened degree of oxygen
ht help, too!

Personal History

A Psalm *and* Song at the dedication of the house of David. I will extol
hee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to
ejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast
ealed me. O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave:
hou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. Sing unto
he LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of
is holiness. For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favour *is* life:
weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning. Psal.
10:1–5.

This Psalm marks the end of David's days as a fugitive and his
blishment as king. The construction of his house is complete. The
g warfare is over and a great sense of thankfulness and joy
neates his soul. His enemies have finally all been subdued, and his
ttest external trials are over. Setting aside a time for prayer,
icing and thanksgiving is proper after a long time of conflict and
osition. To see the culmination of a long-standing trial and the
wers to many prayers and night watches is an unspeakable blessing.
e, David experiences such with fullness of joy!

Acknowledgement

My times *are* in thy hand... Psal. 31:15.

This Psalm was composed either during or toward the end of one
David's trials and conflicts. He is still being opposed, but his
mies are God's enemies, and he is bold in his own defense and in
condemnation of his opponents. His enemies were lying about him
spreading falsehoods. At times, the thought they had taken him in
r gossip to his ruin. But at last he was being exonerated. He
eved for la time that he would perish under such awful
umstances, but the Lord had graciously delivered him. His words
given in summary fashion in our text: "My times are in Thy
ds." He acknowledges that God was and is in control, and now this
eing revealed. What a blessed state when the Lord begins to
nerate his own and the lies and subterfuge are finally revealed!
at a blessedness to give witness to the truth that "All my times are
hy hand!"

A Sense of Forgiveness

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Psalms 32:1–2.

This Psalm seems to have been penned sometime after David's sin in Bathsheba. Psalm 51 was the first, filled with agony and self-ignition with the horror of his awful sins. This Psalm is not so dire, and has notes of promise and a sense of forgiveness. It seems to be written at a time when he was once again establishing and experiencing his fellowship with God. It is a blessed reality, known only to the true believer, to begin to have a sense of forgiveness and a renewed sense of re-established fellowship and worship after the nation of sin has been taken away. For those with only a traditional religion, such is unknown, but for a true believer, with a biblical sensitivity concerning fellowship and forgiveness, this is a most blessed experience!

The Natural and Moral Realms

Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise. For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. Psalms 33:1–10.

This Psalm takes into account the sovereign government of God in both the natural and moral realms. Both bear witness to the moral government of our God. He who raises or stills the mighty waves of the sea is the moral Governor among mankind. He who quiets the stormy wind also quiets hearts and troubled minds. There is no limit to power in either the physical or moral realms. Our very lives are in His hand, and He has ordained good for us as His people. No evil intentions made against us can harm us if He does not will it. What a blessing to have this God as our God!

Deceit and Deliverance

A *Psalm* of David, when he changed his behaviour before Achish; who drove him away, and he departed. I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear *thereof*, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They mocked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him. O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for *there is* no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good *thing*. *Psa.* 34:1–10.

This Psalm gives David's testimony to God's deliverance when he drove the madman and the Philistine King drove him out of his city. David was able to escape (1 Sam. 21:10–22:1). This deliverance is attributed to God, not to David. It was the Lord who caused Achish to think that David was insane and so drove him out. We may plan and strive, but deliverance belongs to God Who is the great deliverer! I came upon David, the Lord's anointed, to act like a madman, yet I blessed his efforts and caused the façade to be effectual. Let us believe that we do not trust our own deceptions, but in the living God who is able to deliver!

False Friends

Plead *my cause*, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop *the way* against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I *am* thy salvation. Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase *them*. *Psa.* 35:1–5.

This Psalm is yet another which deals with David's deliverance from those who would harm him and take his life. This time, it seems to be directed largely against false friends who would have betrayed him. He prays the Lord's judgment upon these in the strongest terms! David's enemies are a sore trial, but false friends cut deeply into the heart and soul. These are two-faced, deceitful and while they profess friendship and loyalty, all the while scheme to betray one over to his

mies. David experienced this on more than one occasion. In this
for one reason or another, we will have false friends, even
uding some in whom we once put our trust. Deliver us O Lord
n those who would deceive us and seek our destruction! Let our
friends be blessed forever!

Calling God to Take Sides

The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, *that there is no* fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth *are* iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, *and* to do good. He leviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way *that is* not good; he abhorreth not evil. Thy mercy, O LORD, *is* in the heavens; *and* thy faithfulness *reacheth* unto the clouds. Thy righteousness *is* like the great mountains; thy judgments *are* a great deep: O LORD, thou reservest man and beast. Psalms 36:1-6.

David had his enemies. This was sadly true when he was but a young man and served under Saul. It remained true when he finally ascended to the throne. Even the godliest and wisest of rulers will have his enemies, false friends, and those who envy his rule and power. In this world and in this life, sin and temptation will continue to exist and temptations, to prevail, unless the God of all grace prevents it. David in prayer asks God's blessings upon the righteous and faithful and judgment upon the unrighteous and unfaithful. God has a definite moral character and He must take sides on the side of right and on the side of his king! Do we have such confidence when we come to God in prayer in a time of crisis?

Faith under Fire

Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. Psalms 37:1-5.

The confidence and faith of David shines here from the very start. It is certain that the Lord will bless the righteous and judge the wicked. This confidence extends throughout this entire, lengthy Psalm. It is a blessing when we can have our hearts in such a state that we can pray and praise the Lord with a settled confidence and assurance! It is not wrong in prayer to contemplate the final end of the wicked.

pite their power, insinuations and attempts to destroy the righteous. David also dwells on the inevitability of the blessing upon the righteous. His heart is settled in this Psalm and his faith is strong. How blessed it is when we are enabled so to pray!

Full Confession

A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance. O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.* For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and *there is no soundness in my flesh.* I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire *is* before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. *Psa. 38:1–11.*

There are times when we are led by circumstances to make a full confession unto God of our frailty and weakness. Perhaps sickness coincides with our confession of sin, as it seems here in David's experience. Sin is a burden and the aftermath of sin may lie heavily on our souls and even upon us so as to affect our physical nature. We may become physically sick because of sin and its effects on our

Some sins cannot be shaken, but remain until we are forced to admit, confess and finally simply give up and come to terms with our illness. It seems so here. As blessed confession if it cleanses our souls, minds and renews our strength! The Lord has His ways of bringing us back to himself and restoring us—such is our God!

Confession Delayed

David said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, *even* from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: *then* spake I with my tongue, LORD, make me to know mine iniquity, and the measure of my days, what it *is*; *that* I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age *is* as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state *is* altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up *riches*, and knoweth

not who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst *it*. Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. Psalms 39:1–10.

This Psalm is closely related to the previous one. David put aside postponed confession of sin until it was unbearable. There are times when we do not want to deal with certain sins. Perhaps at first, we believe that we were justified. Maybe at the time it did not seem important or wrong. But as time past, we became more convinced we need to repent. The consciousness of sin became a burden until it became unbearable. This, strangely, is a mark of grace, as the wicked may shrug off any conviction and justify themselves of any sin, while the truly godly must eventually deal with any and all transgressions.

Externals

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed *is* that man that naketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O LORD my God, *are* thy wonderful works *which* thou hast done, and thy thoughts *which are* to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: *if* I would declare and speak *of them*, they are more than can be numbered. Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and grain offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book *it is* written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: *thy* law *is* within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation. Psalms 40:1–10.

It seems here that David had been faithful in the externals of religion. He had led in public worship. He had remained outwardly faithful and had sought to glorify God before the people. But inwardly, he knew he was sinful and corrupt, as are all men. When these two realities come into conflict, they bring about a conviction of sin over which it eventually will become hypocrisy. God help us to keep from the

ocrisy of being faithful in public outwardly, yet allowing temptation to creep in inwardly!

Broken

Lord, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee. Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish? And if he come to see *me*, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth unquietness to itself; *when* he goeth abroad, he telleth *it*. All that hate me conspire together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. An evil conspiracy, say *they*, cleaveth fast unto him: and *now* that he lieth he shall rise up no more. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which hath eaten of my bread, hath lifted up *his* heel against me. But thou, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever. *Psa. 41:4–12.*

The time-frame for his Psalm seems to be the betrayal of Ahithophel, at one time the king's trusted counselor, the wisest man in Israel (v. 9). There is here a mixture of feelings. Ahithophel was not only the grandfather of Bathsheba, and had personal reasons for conspiring the death of David. David's pain overshadows everything else, including his responsibility for Uriah's death. All he can think of at this point is that his once most trusted companion now turned to be one of his worst enemies. Now, in this Psalm, he lumps all of his enemies together and cries out to the Lord for deliverance. God had forgiven David, but many of his enemies had not and would not. We must remember and consider it well that some will remain alienated from us in their hatred until "death do us part." Such experiences tend to break even the strongest of men.

Withdrawal

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where *is* thy God? When I remember these *things*, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance. *Psa. 42:1–5.*

When the Lord, our God and Heavenly Father withdraws the consciousness of His presence from us, it can be excruciating. There is

void which Only God—and God as our Heavenly Father in His loving relationship—can fill. Life becomes empty, fellowship with God is non-existent, a consciousness of His presence gone, leaving a large and painful void. We seek Him until we grieve in our souls. We question our own hearts and minds as to the possible reasons for our departure from our consciousness. We feel empty when we seek to find Him and are disappointed as we diligently seek His face. What is the cause? Is it sin? Is it the ploys of an enemy? Or are we being tested in the day of temptation? Such should lead to introspection and filling the mind with thoughts of His love and compassion.

The Physical & the Spiritual

Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. For thou *art* the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God. *Psa. 43:1–5*

We have included the entire Psalm, as it is short and a unity. David is despondent because of his enemies and their oppression. This has worn him down until he feels forsaken by God. The interplay between the physical and spiritual is all too common. God created us as social beings; we are meant to be with others. When the social life is disrupted and enemies rise up, it will affect us spiritually. David longs for sanctified worship. Perhaps his enemies have cut off access to the presence of God so he cannot worship. Whatever the situation, David sees it terribly. Is this true of us? Are we so sensitive that whatever affects us socially also affects us spiritually? It should be so if we are intent on walking with God.

Past & Present

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what* work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. *How* thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; *how* thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. Thou art my King, O God:

command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah. But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and joest not forth with our armies. Psa. 44:1–9.

This Psalm begins with a reference to the past, then brings up our attention to the present. David remembers the history of Israel and their initial conquest of the Land many years before, he remembers the deed of God and His deliverance of the people. Then he comes to the present and the difficulties he is experiencing. God delivered them and gave them victory in the past; will He do the same now? As Israel once trusted in God, so must they do it once again to gain the victory. A present defeat is not the end; the battle will end with Israel once again victorious. This is a statement of faith. It is good too rehearse past victories when we face present challenges. God has not changed; the victories are all His!

A Paean of Praise

Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom *is* a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Psa. 45:6–7.

In the midst of praise to God for the marriage of Solomon, a prophetic voice rings out to glorify the Son of God of whom Solomon is only a type. That is a prophetic utterance pointing to our Lord not to be denied (Heb. 1:8ff). The author of this Psalm was lifted up spiritually to declare the glory and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, as noted in Hebrew chapter one. In this exclamation, the curtains are drawn back to reveal to the truth and glory of David's "Greater Son." Yes, indeed, that some cannot see the truth here! Their eyes are closed to the truth of prophecy and Divine revelation. Are our eyes open to see the truth and glory of our Lord by prophecy? He is manifested through typology, implication, and anticipation—and in these places by direct prophecy, as in this instance. From Gen. 1:1ff, to the close of Revelation, the eternal Son of God is revealed!

Divine Power Revealed

God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though

he mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; *Though* the waters hereof roar *and* be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. Psal. 46:1–3.

The power and sovereign reign of our God are not static, but ever-*ve!* God rules His creation and reveals Himself in His righteous and absolute power. He has chosen the earth as the theatre to *als* and demonstrate His power. This the God to Whom we pray. *must* not think of Him as only kind, gentle and quietly fulfilling will, but take into full consideration His sovereign and absolute *er* His will will be done despite of evil men, wicked governments the devil and His angels. Do we dwell on and contemplate the *er*, strength, and glory of our God? We must, for such power and *y* are also characteristic in answers to prayer and His rule over all *kind*.

King of the Earth

Do clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. For the LORD most high *is* terrible; *he is* a great King over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah. God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God *is* the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, *even* the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth *belong* unto God: he is greatly exalted. Psal. 47: 1–9.

Christians often think of the Lord God only as gentle, loving, kind, and caring. We may forget His power and glory, and necessary exercise of such power when He establishes His purpose to be fulfilled His glory as He reigns over the earth. He revealed His power at *as* to Israel, and will do so again when in the last days, He sends judgments to subdue the earth and judge mankind. Do we truly know God? Do we have a scriptural grasp of His power over the earth its peoples? Have we any idea of His power as He judges His creation and punishes the wicked?

The Greatness of God

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, *is* mount Zion, *on* the sides of the north, the city of the

great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw *it*, *and* so they marvelled; they were troubled, *and* hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, *and* pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. According to thy name, O God, so *is* thy praise into the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers hereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell *it* to the generation following. For this God *is* our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide *even* unto death. Psalms 48:1–14.

God is awesome in the revelation of His power and glory. Further, awesome revelation has been made especially with regard to Israel to Jerusalem. Historically, God has defended His people. The Old Testament Scriptures give examples of this. Spiritually, believers are the people and children of God and under His protection. Are we conscious of His protective power and strength when we pray and seek to serve Him? Is our God great enough to answer the most ardent of prayer and graciousness enough to lift up His own that they might praise and glorify Him? Then let us be bold in prayer!

A Selfish Forever

Their inward thought *is*, *that* their houses *shall continue* for ever, *and* their dwelling places to all generations; they call *their* lands after their own names. Nevertheless man *being* in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts *that* perish. Psalms 49:11–12.

This Psalm explores the subject of death—an unpopular subject in people are consumed with the joys of this present life. Certain emotional thoughts seem to coincide with our lifetimes. Youth dream of possibilities, power, influence, success and fame. Old people dream of good health, desire the best for their families, dote upon their children, grandchildren and, if among the ancients, their great grandchildren. Men and women in the very zenith of their earthly lives dream of living on forever. They are consumed by the present, of their achievements, their estates, their riches, and inwardly they forget that they are mere mortals. They often live as though they will live forever. They forget that their days are numbered and that they will eventually pass away and die, as this Psalm declares. Beware of the blinding

er of present advantages! Today will soon pass away and
orrow will bring us one day closer to death!

The Danger of Externals

Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:
And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt
glorify me. Psal. 50:14–15.

It is always dangerous—and in religion absolutely fatal—to be
sified with externals and forget the internal realities of true religion.
ere external religion may be relatively easy to maintain, when the
ities of heart and mind are missing. This Psalm is concerned with
1 inward and outward worship, and the acknowledgement of God.
ward religion may be very impressive, yet entirely false and exist
/ on the surface. A God-consciousness; may not exist despite of
ressive ceremonies! Often the genuineness of religion is to be
nd outside the realm of religion itself in the context of the other
ivities of life. Has our religion affected these and brought them into
formity with our religious profession? True religion tends to
nge everything it touches. Does our religion tend to transform
ry other activity?!

A Rude Awakening!

A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he
iad gone in to Bathsheba. Psal. 51:1.

For months, the sin of David and Bathsheba, and the plot to
der of Uriah had remained private. Now, all was public, declared
Nathan before David and his Court! Ahithophel was there—the
idfather of Bathsheba—and from that moment became his hateful
my. Nathan had declared, “Thou art the Man!” The worst words
id had ever heard. And now, judgment had settled down into his
ily circle. One death after another. This Psalm reveals David’s
s of repentance and grief. Yet there is a note of hope. Does not this
arate believers and unbelievers, however grievous the sins and their
ompense are? The unbeliever is under the reigning power of sin,
eless, hateful and self-exonerating. The believer is humbled,
cen, in agony before both God and man and repentant. David’s
e was not in restoration, but in acceptance before God through
ntance. What is our hope when we sin? It must be that the Lord
acceptance our repentance from a broken heart. With the believer,
e is always hope—not so the unbeliever!

Righteous Indignation

Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; *and* lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. Thou lovest all devouring words, O *thou* deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of *thy* dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah. Psal. 52:2–5.

The historical bases for this Psalm are 1 Sam. 21:1–9 and 1 Sam. 23–29. Doeg the Edomite reported David's visit with Abimelech to King Saul and then killed the priests of the house of Abimelech who had helped him. Here David pronounces judgment upon Doeg for betrayal. What a tragedy fell upon Abimelech and his house because he helped David unwittingly! He evidently knew nothing of David's escape or of Saul's intent to kill him. His actions against the priests were gratuitous. David pronounces God's judgment upon this traitor and murderer. We may have reason to pray down judgment upon all our enemies when they act gratuitously and out of hatred for God's people, if it is a matter of justice and not personal revenge. God is a God of justice as well as grace and mercy. It is always best to leave things in God's hands and prerogative. Can we pray aright? Can we pray without personal vengeance and animosity?

Repetition

The fool hath said in his heart, *There is* no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: *there is* none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were *any* that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who say unto my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God. Psal. 53:1–4.

This is a companion to Psalm 14, often using the same Hebrew words. David condemns a practical atheism, or living and acting as if there were no God; that God is irrelevant. Sadly such behavior and such an attitude are native to fallen, sinful mankind and rampant among them. It is implied that these know better, but act out their atheistic behavior in the very face of God. It is true concerning Israel that "because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Sinful men justify their sin through a thinly veiled self-righteousness. Have we come to terms with the Word of

and His nature and character? How this must affect our prayers sense of justice!

Betrayed!

A *Psalm* of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us? Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah. Behold, God *is* mine helper: the Lord *is* with them that uphold my soul. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. *Psa. 54:1–5.*

David was a fugitive from King Saul. He was in constant hiding, now in a tight spot, the Ziphims betrayed him into the hand of Saul when he was hiding in the wilderness in their territory (1 Sam.

The Lord delivered David and his men, and he humbled Saul at that by revealing that he could have killed Saul, but did not. There always seemed to be those who, for their own reasons, would betray David. And we have our enemies, too. Often, those who ought to be friends and help us, turn against us and seek the favor of our enemies. These are usually motivated either by thought of relationships or by bitterness against us. How can fellow-believers—at least professing believers—turn upon their fellows and seek their ruin? Yet it is often so.

From Friend to Enemy

For *it was* not an enemy *that* reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither *was it* he that hated me *that* did magnify *himself* against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But *it was* thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, *and* walked unto the house of God in company. Let death seize upon them, *and* let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, *and* among them. As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. *Psa. 55:12–16.*

This Psalm pertains to Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, his closest earthly companion. He was also the grandfather of Bathsheba, since David's sin with Bathsheba became known, Ahithophel was sworn to kill David. Although we must sympathize with David and his way to his repentance, we can sympathize with Ahithophel. —tragic—when the closest of friends become the bitterest of enemies! And this happens between Christians! Where there was once fellowship, love, companionship and trust, there is now animosity and

avor. Once close brethren, who prayed and labored together now not even stand each other's presence, or act the hypocrite. Such atly grieves the Spirit of God and stifles prayer and Christian rice! Let us serve the Lord with fullness of heart and not with a ocritical attitude or outright animosity!

The Cure for Fear

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, and God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts *are* against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? in *thine* anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: *are they* not in thy book? When I cry *unto thee*, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God *is* for me. *Psa. 56:3–9.*

The historical background: 1 Sam. 21:10–15. David became very full for a time when he was captured by the Philistines in Gath. He was running from Saul, and now, his other enemies, the Philistines, were after him. Faith finally rises to the fore and calms his heart and soul. He cried to the Lord in fervent prayer and the Lord moved him to play the harp and so escaped. Without delving into the problems of David's situation and his escape, let us simply deal with faith overcoming fear. Evidently what David did, he did in faith and the Lord delivered him. Faith is always the answer to fear. Fear and relief are companions, and when God grants faith, fear departs!

A Cry from a Cave

Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth *all things* for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me *from* the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. My soul *is* among lions: *and I lie even among* them that are set on fire, *even* the sons of men, whose teeth *are* spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; *let* thy glory *be* above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen *hem*selves. Selah. *Psa. 57:1–6.*

David and his men were hiding in a large cave when pursued by Saul and his army. Saul entered the cave to sleep and rest. David took

antage of the situation and faced Saul with his wrong. Saul nowledged it (1 Sam. 24), left and ended the pursuit. A crisis over and a blessed answer! David was able to put Saul into an enable position and win the day. Prayer finds a way to honor God win a notable victory. It is so with us, even today!

Innate Sinfulness

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison *is* like the poison of a serpent: *they are* like the deaf adder *that* stoppeth her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD. Let them melt away as waters *which* run continually: *when* he bendeth *his* bow to shoot his arrows, let them be cut in pieces. As a snail *which* melteth, let *every one of them* pass away: *like* the untimely birth of a woman, *that* they may not see the sun. Psalms 58:3–8.

The wicked here are described as sinners from the womb and from birth. This is true, as fallen, sinful man is depraved—he carries the sinful nature of Adam throughout his nature. “Depraved,” from “de,” “roughly,” and “*pravus*,” crooked. The effects of the Fall permeate nature, mind and soul. In considering the extent of man’s sinfulness by nature, we must consider the glory and wonder of Divine grace in salvation. Salvation must be complete; it must be as extensive and thorough; as the sinfulness of man by nature! Let us never, ever, in our temple that salvation may be less than the awful, inclusive, sinful effects of sin!

A Graceless Family

Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not *for* my transgression, nor *for* my sin, O LORD. Psalms 59:1–3.

David was the King’s son-in-law, yet his Father-in-law sought to have him murdered! Such is the sin of jealousy! David in his prayer, includes all men as wicked and prays for Divine judgment upon all the wicked only. Family troubles are tragic. They strike at the root of what would be the closest of human relationships. They destroy more than our sins. They alienate from what ought to be the closest of earthly relationships. David, here, as in many other places, prays for Divine

gment upon sinners, be they even among his own relatives. He does overlook them because of family relationships. Many, sadly, overlook the sinfulness of family members. But God does not make distinctions!

The Banner of Truth

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah. Psal. 60:4.

The theme of this Psalm is victory after a great defeat. The Psalm begins with sorrow and ends with rejoicing. Verse 4 has a history that reaches into the present. It is the source for the theme and title of “The Banner of Truth” religious magazine, which began publication in 1855. A better name and title could not be chosen—and the editors have stayed by their orthodox stand for the biblical and historic faith. The first editors were Iain Murray and Erroll Hulse. This publication coincides with the modern return to the Puritans and a revived

evangelicalism with articles and writings by the great Reformed and evangelicals of the 20th and 21st Centuries, including J. I. Packer and M. Lloyd-Jones. The Banner has also sponsored the republication of most of the great Puritan works and classic works. Blessed be the ministry of this sanctified publisher!

Pray Anywhere

From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock *that* is higher than I. Psal. 61:2.

There is here a geographical truth which may be edifying to contemplate. We can cry unto God “from the end of the earth.” God is omnipresent; He fills all space and is everywhere present. This is a theological truth, but it is also a very practical one. Many of us have a *proseuche*, or usual place of prayer—the place where we customarily go to engage in private prayer. This place begins to become a special place in our lives and experience and this in itself, through our prayers and helps us sense the presence of God. To pray is a very strange place might be somewhat daunting, whatever our background. But sustained by the truth of Divine omnipresence, we may now close to and consciously enter into the presence of God in any place and every place. May we continue fervently in the place of prayer, and, if not a familiar place, let us sanctify every place as such!

Faith Tested

Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation. He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall *shall ye be, and as a tottering* ence. They only consult to cast *him* down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah. Psal. 62:1–4.

This Psalm finds David praying in the midst of trial—a familiar one for David, both as a refugee and a King. His enemies pose a threat, but his confidence is in the Lord and he remains unshaken. In your trials, our faith may wear thin, and we may at times give way to our fears. We see this variableness in the case of Job, who was worn down constantly, with only a short revival here and there. David maintains constant His faith is to be mimicked. How so? His faith is logical—and this is the strength and constancy of it! He templates God as his defense and is strengthened. A faith that is theological, i.e., that does not rest itself upon the God of Scripture fully considered, must be a weak and inconsistent faith!

Faith Consistent

Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah. Psal. 62:8.

David here preaches a message to others which he himself has needed. It is a lesson of difficult learning. “Trust in Him at all times...” Do we? At times, our faith seems strong, at others, weak and wavering. A biblical faith should exhibit consistency because it honors the God in Whom we trust. “Pour out your heart before Him.” This does not preclude prayer, however. Faith is kept up and strengthened by constant prayer. True prayer clears the truth of God and gives us a clear view of His greatness and promises. Boldness in prayer is the result of a clear comprehension of God as our help. Do we need strength? More faith? Let us pray until our vision clears and the Lord becomes clear in our vision!

Faith and Distance

A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, how *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Psalms 63:1–6.

David in this prayer is far from the Ark in the City of David. He is in a desert place, far removed from home. Yet he discerns the presence of the Lord, for His God is omnipresent. He lies down to sleep and relies upon the Lord and has a sense of His presence. He remembers what it was like to be in the tent of God with the stretched wings of the Cherubim overshadowing him. He is comforted and even emboldened to think upon his enemies. They shall surely be destroyed! How the mind is awakened and strengthened in prayer! It is not merely his memory, or the power and might of God which moves David, but God's moral power and purpose. He shall see His desire upon his enemies!

Sinful Tongues

Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: Who whet their tongue like a sword, *and* bend *their bows to shoot* their arrows, *even* bitter words: Psalm 64:2–3.

This Psalm is concerned with the words, gossip and counsels of a man's enemies. They have and do speak against him. They plan and strive against him. David prays that their plots may prove fruitless. He laments the sins of the tongue! No member of the human frame can equal its power! It can destroy with but a word! How many lives have been ruined by a word! Lies, falsehoods, truth twisted and perverted into a weapon, or a meaning misrepresented—all may do great damage and harm to those who are innocent. Often a word becomes a weapon when removed from its original context and used differently than intended. David endured it all, and thus his prayers and trials minister to us when we have been wrongly set upon by the gossip of others. Though men may charge us with various wrongs, we must remember that the God of all truth knows what was said and what was meant. We must at times, leave it all with Him and His providential government.

A Prayer—Hearing God

O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. Psalm 65:2.

David comforts himself in the wise, just and blessed government of God and His providential rule of the world. God is a prayer hearing

1. He hears and answers prayer. He is inherently good to His people. His government extends to all the earth. He is able to answer most anxious prayers and grant the greatest blessings! His power is unlimited and his goodness is freely expressed in His provisions. Indeed, all creation rejoices in God's care and blessing! With such a peace of mind, David prays and praises the Lord His God. Should we do the same? Often we are burdened down and fail to see the larger picture—God's provisional government of His creation. He is good. He provides and He blesses what He has made!

Prayer and Praise

Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah. Psalms 66:1–4.

In this Psalm, David associates singing with prayer. The idea of singing to God in prayer brings us to the consideration of singing in prayer. Christian singing is inclusive: worship of God and His attributes, His works, the truths of salvation, evangelism, missions, etc. Hebrew worship majored on set prayers and recitations, some of which were sung. David was often spontaneous, praising God in song and later writing these out as Psalms. It is a fine experience to have certain hymns which praise the greatness and goodness of God. Sadly, we do not have sufficient hymns of praise. But there is nothing which prevents us from authoring our own. Singing is one of the unique experiences and exercises left to man. Angels do not sing. Man alone, image-bearer of God has such a gift and privilege. Such worship must be intelligent and indulged with fullness of heart and soul.

Universal Praise

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. Psalms 67:1–4.

David in his joy and thanksgiving calls upon all the people to rejoice with him. This seems to be a challenge to all the earth—the goodness of God to Israel. When the people of God praise His name and rejoice in His goodness, the earth should be greatly affected! The

✓ land will be productive and the earth will fear the Lord! Some
✓ object and restrict such thinking to the Old Testament and Old
✓ enant, but in our own history, when America was basically an
cultural nation, did not the farmers praise the Lord for bountiful
✓ests and attribute to Him the blessedness of a bountiful year? How
should praise God for all things pertaining to this life!

Praise Divine Justice

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him
lee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive *them* away: as wax
melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.
But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them
exceedingly rejoice. Psa. 68:1–3.

Historically, the people of God have had praise services in times
bountiful harvests, during times of war when they experienced
ories and deliverances, and when experiencing His power in extra-
nary circumstances. Israel did the same. The difference was that
el did these things nationally, as they were nationally a covenant
ple, whereas with Christians—believers—we are personally and
vidually the people of God. Israel and Judaism were preparatory to
istianity. It is sad that believers today do not call for services of
✓er and praise for the goodness of God. We can never praise our
l enough. Our song services and worship services usually have
ms of praise, but also should our prayers, both public and private.
at a challenge for times of private prayer, when we often rush
ugh praise and worship and major on petition and our needs!

Troubled Times

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto *my* soul. I sink in
leep mire, where *there is* no standing: I am come into deep waters,
where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is
ried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without
cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy
ne, *being* mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored *that*
which I took not away. O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my
ins are not hid from thee. Psa. 69:1–5.

As with many of David's Psalms, this is a prayer for deliverance.
cries out to God under great stress. His enemies are numerous and
is in extreme danger. These enemies are such because they have
n sent to kill him by the crown. He is considered an outlaw. His
mies have no personal hatred for him; it is their calling to kill him.

se circumstances seem to make his situation all the more crushing. He has been separated from all family and friends, and is at the point of death. He is a broken man and simply casts himself upon the Lord and clings to Him. Although we may never be in such extreme circumstances, we may know what it is to be at the end of our strength and reason. All gives way. We are empty. All thought of love, peace and fellowship is gone. We simply cling to the Lord and hang on in faith and foreboding. Where is our faith? Where is our joy? Where is our loving confidence? Time and the pursuit of the enemy may rob us of these comforts. Then all we can do is cling. Such an experience may well should renew us in faith and bring us to a greater degree of maturity and knowledge of the ways of God. He allows fear and trembling, but He never leaves us there. He delivers and we are stronger for it all!

A Crisis Prayer

*Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt. Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame that say, Aha, aha. Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as owe thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. But I *am* poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou *art* my help and my deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying. Psalms 70:1–5.*

This type of prayer was often on David's lips and from his heart, especially during his years as a fugitive from King Saul. In David's story, he knew that Saul's persecution and attempts to murder him were based on jealousy and had no justifiable basis. This in itself gave David his greatest advantage in prayer—a clear conscience! There was no legitimate reason for this rigorous pursuit or attempt to kill him. He could freely condemn his enemies and seek deliverance. This is true today. Usually we are liable in some way when others seek to bring us into judgment or hate us and seek our harm. If we do have a clear conscience, then we have great freedom to pray and seek God's help; if not, then our prayers become weak and vacillating. Our consciences convict us and our motives become divided. If so, then we must seek a solution before God! If not, however, and we have clearly not been wronged and we can neither forgive nor find reconciliation, then we may pursue Divine deliverance. May our Lord work in the hearts

both sides to bring about forgiveness or reconciliation and peace. Let us be certain of our stand when we pray!

Confidence in Prayer

O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Psal. 121:12.

This Psalm makes several references to David's enemies and to stringent circumstances, yet it is filled with assurance and confidence, which gives it an overall positive tone. He looks at the present and into the far distant future and prays that the Lord will not leave him off in his old age. Is there some reference here to King Saul, who began in God's blessing, then departed from the Lord and died a romantic? We cannot tell what the future might hold—the far distant future, yes; the immediate future, no. O, may the Lord God keep us faithful and trusting in Him! May we not prove unfaithful or unbelieving! Prayer has two main enemies: unbelief and impatience. Hence, persevering faith is our greatest ally!

Holy Desires

Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. Psal. 72:1.

This is a prayer for Solomon, evidently prayed when he was very young and at least before his enthronement in the last days of David. He wished his son grow into manhood. He personally knew the pitfalls of sin, even in the most godly. He knew the various temptations and trials of the Monarchy. He had witnessed the apostasy of his predecessor. He prayed as we pray—from his experience, fears and desires. What he did not foresee was Solomon's apostasy to worship and serve other gods in his old age, when his wives turned away from him and he built pagan altars in Jerusalem and worshipped at them with his wives. Solomon was the wisest of kings and greatest of fools. Hence, we must pray for our children! And we must not omit anything which might seduce them from the truth!

A Deceitful Heart

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: *but* God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring

from thee. But *it is* good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works. Psalms 73:24–28.

Asaph was a godly priest. He wrote several of the Psalms. He was a leader among the family of Aaron. He had trials we would not expect. The one which he laments and repents of in prayer is his envy of the wicked. The cause of this sinfulness from which he repented was that he considered the wicked in their present state, not their future under Divine judgment. Do we often not do the same? We look at us and see the prosperity of the wicked and wonder what it would be like to live as they do. We may forget for that time their punishment. We see ourselves suffering in many ways while these enjoy pleasures of life and the seeming blessings of God. But the Lord corrected him in his thoughts when he considered their later end. May this be our perspective of all men and we will not wonder at the wicked!

Why This?

Remember thy congregation, *which* thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, *which* thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. Psalms 74:2.

Asaph in this Psalm seeks to answer and find a logical explanation for the destruction of his homeland by the wicked. Was not God—their omnipotent God—the true father and king of Israel? How, then, could and would the wicked destroy the land and its religious memorials? Was God united to Israel by covenant and His faithfulness? Everything seemed out of place. The covenant with God seemed to be null and void. With all His power and might, the Lord seemed to be deaf to his prayer and had abandoned His covenant with the nation. Could not the God of creation and providence deliver His own people and save His religious buildings and memorials? Will He not hear the distraught prayer and cry of His servant? Have you ever felt as Asaph? That God had turned His ear from your prayers? That the heavens were silent, though God's name and works were being destroyed and His cause was suffering greatly? There is always a cause, a reason, and it is usually sin on the part of God's people, chastisement from above—or judgment to restore God's people and renew His purpose. Such is the history of Israel, and so might be ours.

God Rules

Into thee, O God, do we give thanks, *unto thee* do we give thanks: for *that* thy name is near thy wondrous works declare. When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly. Psal. 75:1–2.

Another Psalm of Asaph, quite different from the previous Psalm. It seems that God has answered his prayers and restored order and brought blessing once again to the land. The Lord has awakened and judged the wicked. He has restored order. He is the almighty, the Just, Holy One, and the cause of God is certain and thorough.

There are times when our cause seems hopeless. The Lord seems to be asleep or inactive. We may pray, weep, beseech Him with tears, but heaven gives no response. Then, when all hope is all but gone, the Lord begins to act, and He answers prayer, sets matters right and reveals Himself as Judge and Just, as the God Who is righteous in all His works and ways. Let us then persevere in prayer. This is the great question, is it not? The Lord has His reason for seeming delays—to test our faith and strengthen our resolve.

Divine Justice

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. Psal. 76:10.

Another Psalm by Asaph. This Psalm lauds God in victory and power. There is no struggle of the Psalmist or hesitation to praise Him for His greatness, power and justice. This Psalm is literally filled with faith! O that we could pray like this daily! O that our faith was ever so strong and our confidence and assurance were ever so great! Often, at times, we are weak and questioning, praying, seeking the favor of our heavenly Father, fighting back doubts, and hoping against hope that He will answer our prayers. This is especially true if we have waited long and hard and have yet no answer. How blessed it is when our faith is strong and our hearts and minds are fresh with belief! Praying for long things, situations or persons for an extended period of time is one of the greatest tests of faith. We must refresh ourselves in the Lord Himself, His power and purpose before we continue praying and find our prayers getting weaker.

Agony in Prayer

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my soul ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God,

and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot sleep. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Psa. 77:2-7.

We meet Asaph again in his prayers. This time the prayer sees to the result of a long physical malady. He suffered much pain, a mind or physical discomfort, a loss of sleep, perhaps pain keeping him awake. His prayers have remained unanswered, despite their intensive and prolonged duration. In this state of suffering, he remembers God's mercies to Israel, especially during the long wilderness journey. He has reached an extremity in prayer. He has persevered so long that he takes comfort in Israel's years of suffering in the desert and God's sustenance and final deliverance! This is faith persevering to the utmost! Do we often give up through exasperation in prolonged trial and chronic pain? Then Asaph's prayer will have a special ministry in our own experience! He never gave up, and neither should we!

From Generation to Generation

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. Psa. 78:1-4.

Asaph is now in much different circumstances. He is no longer the seeker, but the teacher. Perhaps his own suffering has taught him to be like the sage. He explores the history of Israel and contemplates both the unbelief of his people and the mighty providences of almighty God fulfilling His promises. No one seems to be able to praise the Lord with the fullness of heart as the man who has had deep experiences in both seeking and answers to prayer! He does wonderfully in rehearsing the story of Israel, contrasting both the unbelief and failures of Israel with the faithfulness and deliverance of their covenant God. Is not this the method, not only of the biblical historians, but of our own spiritual experiences? When our prayers are answered, how we lament our unbelief and disobedience. Oh, that we waited longer, sought His presence sooner, and trusted Him whatever the appearances and circumstances seem to be. God has never failed us, and His

fulness has never waned, though He seemed to prolong our trials test us to the very limits.

A Plea for Mercy

O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given *to be* meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and *there was* none to bury *them*. We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. Psal. 79:1–6.

Asaph is once again pushed to the extreme to beseech the Lord for mercy for his people Israel. The Gentiles have polluted the Temple and Jerusalem waste. The population has been butchered unmercifully. It seems that their own covenant God has utterly forsaken them and turned them over to utter destruction! The heathen rejoice. Such awful judgment is for Israel's sins. Now that such devastation has been brought upon the people will not the Lord turn to end this and bring blessing upon His people? Such is the reasoning of Asaph. When I's own people sin against Him, will He not chastise them? Shall such be severe? Yet when it is done and complete, will He not return to bless? Shall He not then judge the oppressors and butchers? Do we really understand the severity of God in dealing with sin among His own? Can we fathom Divine chastisement and discipline? If so, why can we ever take sin lightly?

Enough!

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest *between* the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come *and* save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. Psal. 80:1–3.

Asaph seems to be the Psalmist of Judgment and blessing, of discipline and goodness, of retribution and restoration. He rehearses the goodness of God to the nation, how He led Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, settled the people in an ideal situation and gave them great blessing on every hand. Now they were suffering for sin and transgression, and the promises and blessings of God seemed

ant and would not return. After all the blessings and faithfulness of l in giving them the land and blessing them in every way, will He return and restore them? Have we ever prayed in such fashion? remembering the many days of God's favor, and now bearing up er trial and discipline, do we pine and complain? If there is sin, let seek forgiveness and begin again to serve our God! Let us pray for iffulness in al things and seek to enjoy His favor! Often, like Israel ld, we forget that the path to blessing is obedience.

What Could Have Been

Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. I *am* the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: *and* they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, *and* srael had walked in my ways! Psa. 81:8–13.

Another Psalm by Asaph. In this Psalm he is not grieving over sonal trial or seeking the face of God for deliverance. Rather, he is ply retracing the moral and spiritual history of Israel. God had sed them mightily, but Israel went aside in unbelief and obedience. What blessings could have been theirs had they obeyed Lord and enjoyed His goodness! But they went their own way and ed against the Lord—and received His judgment and disfavor. re we ever looked back upon our ways and examined our tionship to God? Have we seen a place of departure from the path obedience and the cessation of a faithful walk? God's chastening d does not fall for no reason! He does not relish judging and stishing His people, but in blessing us. How sad when we are ced into sinful activity and disobedience. We reap pain and uring, meant to turn us back to obedience once again. Throughout Old Testament, let us look to Israel and see the blessing of dience and the price of sinful disobedience.

National Disobedience

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid *them* out of the hand of the wicked. They know not, neither will they understand; they

walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. I have said, Ye *are* gods; and all of you *are* children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations. Psalms 82:1–8.

We include this entire Psalm by Asaph. In this Psalm he does not deal with personal issues, or personal sins. He is more concerned about the nation and national characteristics and behavior. In verse 1 the reference to “gods” is to judges, who become the major theme of this Psalm. The state of the nation has been lowered by the arbitrariness of judges and rulers. The way of obedience is clearly spelled out in Scripture, but these chose to pervert judgment. Fallen, sinful human beings often set themselves against the Word of God. Such is the nature of rebellion, and so it is here, sadly! O that men would consider and understand that obedience is the path to blessing and disobedience the path to judgment! Do we understand this? Are our hands clean? Are our hearts right before God?

In Defense of Israel

Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. Psalms 83:1–4.

The final Psalm of Asaph. No internal conflicts. No personal sins. Everything is on a national level. Asaph prays against Israel's enemies. The covenant people are standing together and her enemies are assaulting her. National troubles call for national prayers and intercessions. Do we pray for our nation? Should it not be part of our prayers to intercede for our nation in this modern world? We are in great need of revival and a spiritual awakening in this secularized age with its lawlessness and debauchery. We should think about praying in national terms for the Lord to move as He has in times past. He has done the unthinkable before, may He do so again, and for His people!

May God bless Israel!

How amiable *are* thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for thee living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, *even* thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed *are* they that dwell in thy house: they

will be still praising thee. Selah. Psalms 84:1–4.

A Psalm of praise and thanksgiving for God's blessings upon Israel. No mention of enemies or crises—just a description of Jerusalem in a time of blessing and quiet. How few Psalms like this! Do we ever pray in times of quiet blessing when there is nothing crisis or threats from an enemy? O for times of quiet blessing and peaceful, unruffled peace! Such times are not for leaving prayer and simply resting in present circumstances, but times for fervent prayers for God's favor and blessing, when we are not benighted down with crises and troubles. We should take advantage of all times or seasons to rejoice in God's presence and rejoice in the peace and quietness which He gives! We can rejoice in God's blessings and the great evidences of His lovingkindness, and not be benighted down with pressing cares—remember how much we long for peace, and celebrate when we do experience such!

Revival!

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Psalm 135:6.

In this Psalm the land had been restored and God's blessing were plentiful, yet the Psalmist prays for revival. There is always, even in times of blessing, something more to pray for! Here, it is a longing for revival. The same is true now. We need many things, including a return to the Word of God in our godless and degenerate society, but we have all things, we stand in need to a true, heaven-sent revival! Such revivals come through believing and persevering prayer, ardent prayer, prayer that God be glorified. Revivals are a part of our history as a country. There have been times in the past when the heavens were opened and the power of God came down and society was transformed, multitudes converted and the nation once again brought nigh unto God. We have seen the like in over a century now. Have we forgotten? Do we ever? Do and will we pray? Revival is prayed down from the skies!

Pleading for a Hearing

Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I *am* poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I *am* holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. Psalm 86:1–6.

Perhaps the greatest challenge and burden of the soul of the ever is unanswered prayer. We seek the face of God. We confess of our sins. We go through our minds and hearts in an orderly way trying to find anything which is out of place or might prove an obstacle—and still our most fervent, searching prayers are unanswered! This is grievous, indeed. We pray until we simply repeat the same words over and over, yet there remains no answer. There is a great danger in becoming stagnant and degenerating to the point where prayer becomes a ritual and faith is lost. We are simply going through the motions, but all life has drained away. It is time to change our approach. Find a very familiar passage of Scripture extolling the power of God, find a new place to pray, meditate upon the power and goodness of God, gaze into the heavens on a starry night, refresh ourselves in the Scriptures. It is dangerous to fall into a pattern of subtle unbelief.

The Love of the Lord

This foundation *is* in the holy mountains. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this *man* was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, *that* this *man* was born there. Selah. As well the singers as the players on instruments *shall be there*: all my springs *are* in thee. Psalms 87:1–7

This Psalm has been the subject of much speculation as to literal spiritualized identity, time-frame and prophetic limitations. The mention of Babylon necessitates a late date. The varied places seem to point to the time of Restoration Era and the Second Temple Era. By implication, we can say that the especial love of God, as it was focused on Jerusalem is now focused on the church. The church is the God-ordained institution for this Gospel economy. It is in the context of the church, a gathered assembly, that we have vital, living relations with God's people on a personal basis. This greatly affects our prayers and confessions, and our daily concerns. The assembly of God's people is the center of the work of the gospel and the life of God's people, so should have a central place in our daily prayers.

A Step from Death

Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted *me* with all thy waves. Selah. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me;

thou hast made me an abomination unto them: *I am* shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. *Psa.* 88:7–9.

This is a Psalm by Heman the Ezrahite, who was one of the chief singers among the Temple Levites. He seems to be but a step from death, revealing either a personal life-threatening crisis or a national calamity. What is predominant is that when on the very brink of death, prayer becomes the most important thing. Prayer, indeed, may bridge two worlds—we may die praying and awake in the spiritual world still praying. There is never a time when prayer is out of place. And it is prayer that characterizes the true believer, as it is fitted to every circumstance and condition. O that we had settled spirits sufficient to pray under any and in every circumstance!

God our Defense

Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite. I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. *Selah.* *Psa.* 89:1–4.

This Psalm begins with great blessing and then transitions to the troubles of God's chosen and His covenant mercies. There ever seems to be such a theme in these Psalms—from praise to problems, from joy to jeopardy, from pondering the Covenant blessings of God and the privileges of His people to their failures and need of restoration. Such are the issues of life, even in our relationship to the Lord God. But the Lord does not change; He is immutable; we are not. Often we are filled with the best of intentions and enjoy the greatest privileges, but are weak toward sin and failure, and so thanksgiving turns to repentance and sorrow. Will the Lord forsake His own? Will He not heal and restore? Then let us seek His face and never slack in seeking and praising His faithfulness overcoming our weakness and failures!

A Prayer of Moses

A Prayer of Moses the man of God. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight

are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning *they are* like grass *which* groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret *sins* in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale *that is told*. The days of our years *are* threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Psalms 90:1–10.

Historically, Moses was the greatest man in Israel between Adam and our Lord. He knew God face-to-face. He was eminently a man of prayer. He saw God's glory as no one else. He knew human nature at both its worst and its best. This Psalm is didactic; meant to teach. Here, the power and greatness of God is contrasted with the weakness and plight of man, even of the covenant people. The transitory nature of human life is contrasted with the eternity of almighty God. He witnessed the rebellion of Israel and their unbelief. He held God's promises before them and remained faithful to the end. In patience, he equaled Job. When we struggle in prayer, it is an advantage to contemplate Moses and his patience in both living and interceding for the children of Israel. He is the picture of perseverance!

The Christian's Confidence

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *and* from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his *ruth shall be thy* shield and buckler. Psalms 91:1–4.

Unlike many of the Psalms, this is concerned only with God's blessing and care, and does not dwell on human weakness and failure. It is an advantage to our spiritual life and walk to be taken up at times with the lovingkindness of God, and His care and protection. What a blessing, when all sin and failings are confessed, to simply rest ourselves in the power and protection of our Heavenly Father and rest in peace! What a strengthening of our faith! What an impetus to high and holy thoughts! How glorious it is to rest one's self in the very presence of God and own Him as our God, claim His blessing and

y in His grace! Contemplating His goodness and protecting hand it strengthen our faith indeed, and calm our troubled souls!

A Sabbath Song

A Psalm or Song for the sabbath day. *It is a good thing* to give thanks into the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night, Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound. For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. Psaa. 92:1–1.

All days are not the same. God gave us the Sabbath or Seventh as a day of rest, a day set apart from our usual labors and duties. Should it not also be true with our spiritual activities? Many of our prayers and much of our concern deal with trials, sickness, recession for the lost, crises within the family or church. We are often driven to prayer by the issues which confront us. Have you ever considered taking a “Sabbath” from the usual and set aside a time simply for praise and communion with our Heavenly Father? How blessed, sweet, and even glorious this must be! Just to bow in His presence and contemplate His greatness and goodness! Are there problems? Yes. Are there obstacles? Of course. But setting aside such as refreshes the soul and renews the faith. Are we worn out from striving for family, church, friends, the sick, the unconverted, the destitute? Are our prayers repetitious and yet remain unanswered after months or years? A Sabbath time of prayer and praise and quietly resting in God may renew our faith and quiet our hearts. See the following reading.

A Sabbath Prayer?

The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, *wherewith* he hath girded himself: the world also is established, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne *is* established of old: thou *art* from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The LORD on high *is* mightier than the noise of many waters, *yea, than* the mighty waves of the sea. Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever. Psa. 93:1–5.

This Psalm could be entitled “A Sabbath Prayer.” The Lord is praised in creation, and then mention is made of the Temple in closing. It can be adapted to any occasion when the soul is magnifying the

y of God. Often, we are taken up too much with petitions and too e with praise. The state and attitude of the mind and heart rmine the type of prayer which is offered up. When troubles assail concerns tend to overwhelm, petitions seem to crowd out praise and icing. Times of thanksgiving for answered prayer after a long trial grave crisis open the mind to a time of praise and humble ksgiving. How blessed it is when we take time simply to praise the d for His goodness!

A Sad State

O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? *How long* shall they utter *and* speak hard things? *and* all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard *it*. Psalms 94:1–7.

In this Psalm, the wicked of society have set themselves against people of God. The situation seems customary, and the plea for the d to act implies a continued state of affairs. There is, in this fallen, ul world, a need to pray for deliverance from the ungodly who live out reference to God. A continued state of trial calls for a tinued state of fresh faith. Daily trials call for daily prayer and y faith. Old fashion canons were muzzle loaders, i.e., they loaded n the muzzle and did not use shells containing both powder and ectile. First, the powder was poured down the barrel, then the ectile was rammed down the barrel, the fuse the inserted. The rder burned quickly, forcing the projectile out of the barrel with losive force. In much the same way, faith pushes prayer and sends orth. Much powder, more distance; much faith, more force and er.

God and Circumstances

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the ock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with hanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the .LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. Psalms 95:1–3.

As with many Psalms, there is, first, a tribute of praise to the Lord o His power and might, then a change to exhort and submit to Him,

rust Him in time of trial. These Psalms are usually in two parts. s Psalm is the same. First, praise to God for His power and rule (v. a), second, an exhortation against unbelief and disobedience (v. 11). How wicked is such disobedience after such praise! If we truly w the Lord God, praise ought to follow praise! Sadly, there is h spiritual blindness among men in failing to realize the grace of l and react in thankful, faithful obedience.

Universal Praise

ing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day o day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD *is* great, and greatly to be praised: he *is* to be eared above all gods. Psalms 96:1–4.

This is a Psalm of universal praise of and to the Lord. His is the ous Creator; the gods of the heathen are idols and impotent. iness is beautiful; the worship of the heathen was usually immoral at times, hideous. Let all creation join in with worship of the Lord God. He will judge the world in righteousness. We cannot litate or worship our God without thinking of His moral character. n the unified worship of all creation does not rid the creation of its n, sinful condition because of alienated mankind. Righteous gment must come. Many pray and think they are worshipping God ough their religion, but unless such worship considers His moral racter and necessary Divine judgment; it is false. Is our worship or false?

True and False Religion

he LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad *thereof*. Clouds and darkness *are* round about him: righteousness and judgment *are* the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. Psalms 97:1–3

This Psalm is a contrast between true and false religion. We have e the people of God and the enemies of the Lord. God's people are ouraged and His enemies are warned by the revelation of His er and glory in nature. True and false religion do not stand alone. h look to Divine revelation in nature for confirmation. The figure is quent—a thunderstorm. As these were fairly common, the imony of nature to the God of power and glory must have been quent also. Modern man does not give a religious significance to la

understorm, but views it as a natural phenomenon. But the ancients see the power of God. When we look at natural phenomenon, do we see the reality of our God? We should! What blessings we miss when we do not.

A Universal Witness

I will sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Psalms 98: 1–3.

Much like the other Psalms in this section of the Psalter, creation testifies to the reality and power of almighty God. Heaven and earth, land and sea all witness to the greatness of the God of Israel. Such is the lead God's people to praise and worship. Once the mind and heart are set to worship, the end is to consider the righteousness of our God. What is the connection? Contemplating the greatness and might of God should bring one to consider His moral character—His righteousness! Does our contemplation of God lead us to worship Him because He is righteous? It should! When one considers God in His power and greatness and does not consider His moral character, he is no better than the heathen.

Divine Holiness

The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved. Psalms 99:1

A Psalm filled with praise and worship. The holiness of God dominates this short Psalm. True worship approaches a holy God. The term holiness means set apart, to be separate. This ought to be considered, and made a subject of contemplation when we pray! Praising the Lord God distinctly separate and set apart from everything and everyone else in prayer is the highest form of worship. That is so it is in prayer! We often come to God with our minds filled with various issues, concerns, pressures, and problems. It may be very difficult to settle down and truly pray. Contemplating the holiness of God is the means by which we make the Lord God separate and distinct in our prayers. The heart is stilled and the mind filled with a sense of the holiness—the glorious distinctiveness of God in His glory and power—to prepare us for prayer!

Joyful Worship

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he *is* God: *it is* he *that* hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, *and* into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, *and* bless his name. For the LORD *is* good; his mercy *is* everlasting; and his truth *endureth* to all generations. Psa 100:1–5.

This is a Psalm of universal praise to the Lord God for His goodness, or for His people in all lands to worship Him for the same. Moments of praise are suitable for times of prayer. This is so in public worship, and we expect such for the edification of the congregation in preparation for the preaching. Are such not also suitable in preparation for prayer? Not only public prayer, but also for private prayer? Very few things prepare the heart and tune it for prayer than a scriptural, God-honoring hymn! How important to commit to memory the great truths of the faith written and intended for worship! May we have them in mind and heart when preparing to pray!

A King's Determination

A Psalm of David. I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; *it* shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked *person*. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes *shall be* upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD. Psa. 101:1–8.

David as king asserts his dedication to God in prayer to God. There is no reservation, no slacking, no hesitation. Can we pray like that? Sadly, there is often some reservation in prayer. Our hearts are faithful above all things and desperately wicked. We might, indeed, do one thing and yet be thinking something else in our hearts! How blessed it is when mouth and heart agree and there is no contradiction! The Lord knows the heart intimately, and sees any hesitation or hint of hypocrisy. What a blessing and joy when the whole person, outwardly and inwardly, is dedicated to God without reservation and hesitation!

Affliction

A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day *when* I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day *when* I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are turned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. Mine enemies reproach me all the day; *and* they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. My days *are* like a shadow that inclineth; and I am withered like grass. Psalms 102:1–11.

Affliction arises from two possible sources—from the mouths of men or from the hand of God. Often the afflicted confuses the two or mixes one with the other. Here, others who have caused pain and suffering have so injured the soul that the afflicted even that God is against him. This should teach us that times of suffering are dangerous to us, not only physically, but also socially and spiritually. And the thing which causes us spiritual anguish affects our relationship with God. This last, most delicate relationship must be maintained at all costs! It undergirds and is foundational to our very lives, in spite of what man can do, and so it needs to be maintained as primary, and it must rise above all other realities.

Continual Praise

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless* his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good *things*; so *that* thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. Psalms 103:1–6.

This Psalm is glorious in that it gives to God continual praise for His greatness and goodness. The Lord's blessings are perceived in every area of life and the world about us witnesses to this reality. Consider the attributes of God on display: greatness, glory, goodness, givenness, justice, grace and mercy. How can one not be given to wonder in such a state? Man is by nature temporal; God is eternal—but

does not affected God's goodness to us! What encouragement to
x near to Him in prayer and worship! The more we focus upon the
d and His goodness, the more we are enabled to pray and praise
1. This reveals that our attitude of mind and heart are most
ortant for prayer!

Inclusive Praise

3less the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou
irt clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest *thyself* with light as
with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who
ayeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the
:louds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who
naketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: *Who* laid the
oundations of the earth, *that* it should not be removed for ever. Thou
:coveredst it with the deep as *with* a garment: the waters stood above
he mountains. Psa. 104:1–6.

Another Psalm of universal praise and adoration to God for His
itness and rule over creation. In this Psalm, the author considers the
and those who sail its surface. There is no place where the Lord is
God, i.e., where He does not rule and reign in absolute power and
trol. How we should take times to contemplate the Lord's
itness, and know in a practical sense His lovingkindness to all of
creatures, especially man, who is made in His image and likeness.
kindness reaches out to all His creation, even to fallen, sinful man,
) does not realize it as he ought. No mater. It is the Lord's nature to
ress Himself graciously. For believers, it is a great encouragement
onsciously live in His presence and seek His favor.

A Look Back

) give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his
leeds among the people. Psa. 105:1.

This is a historical Psalm. It urges praise to the Lord for His
ious works, then traces the history of these works from the
riarchs to the judgments upon Egypt to the wilderness journey. At
es it is profitable to look at our entire lives and see the hand of the
d at work throughout the years, the prayers answered and the
res granted. A remembrance and recitation of the faithfulness of
l is a strong argument when pressed to pray for present needs. We
/ even look back upon our ancestors, if they were godly people, and
His blessings and faithfulness. This is common in the Psalms and
he praises of the nation. It should be with us. How often over the

rs have the faithfulness and provision of our God manifest
nselves to our good and preservation!

Remember Joseph

He sent a man before them, *even* Joseph, *who* was sold for a servant:
Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that
his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and
posessed him; *even* the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made
him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes
at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom. Psa. 105:17–22.

The life of Joseph is the greatest study in Divine providence in the
re Bible. Every instance is instructive and encouraging! The
sosos Chaldean shepherd kings ruled Egypt in the time of Joseph. He
e pled their kinship when imprisoned. Note v. 18, “...the iron
red his soul.” His chains broke him. It was the lowest point of his

Yet the Lord delivered him and he would rise to the highest
sible position in Egypt. The means the Lord used to bring Israel to
pt to make them a mighty nation is instructive. Divine providence
st be kept in mind, especially in our prayers and trials. What great
glorious things God may accomplish when His people are tried!
must not judge our God or give in until the trial is over.

God is Always Good

Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his
wonderful works to the children of men! Psa. 107:8, 15, 21, 31.

Our theme is recited four times in this Psalm. And it is worthy of
stition! We have much to praise the Lord for. This Psalm is varied
ts content. The Lord chastises, disciplines, blesses, heals, feeds,
vers and exalts His people. In every circumstance, there is much to
thankful for! Do we see the Lord working in all of our
umstances? Does His kindness show through His discipline? Do
provision and protection reveal themselves even through our trials
crises? This is Divine sovereignty on a very practical level.
sing the hand of the Lord in the contrary issues of life is a large
of living by faith. His design is not the troubling of His children,
their ultimate blessing. It seems that almost every blessing is either
ed by trial or comes to fruition after trial—but the blessing comes
ass to our joy and strength of faith.

Praise after Victory

A Song or Psalm of David. O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I *myself* will awake early. I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy *is* great above the heavens: and thy truth *reacheth* unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth; That thy beloved may be delivered: save *with* thy right hand, and answer me.
Psa. 108:1–6.

David has great reason to praise the Lord at this point in his life reign. He had been granted great victories over his and Israel's enemies in the providence of God. David hints that he had suffered some temporary defeats, but all ended well and victory was finally his. Have we not say the same in our own experience? There may have been times when we felt defeated and weak, but then the Lord refreshed our spirit and we finally won the victories He meant for us. Let us be bold and when necessary, patient. Victory is assured.

Prayer for Justice

Told not thy peace, O God of my praise; For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I *give myself unto* prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; *and* let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Psa. 109:1–9.

Is it ever right to pray for God to recompense the evil done to us by others? David in this Psalm prays for such retribution against Hophel. Under inspiration, Peter refers this to Judas in Acts 1:20 to let another to take his office. This is a Psalm filled with one's desire for justice upon his enemy. This is a difficult subject. David was not spared from the blood of Uriah, and was Bathsheba's grandfather. Hophel was determined to kill David. In bringing this scripture up to a New Testament standard, and seeking principle to govern our prayers, let it be said that it is permissible to pray for justice if there is no motive for personal revenge or self-righteousness. God is just, and may safely leave those who have done us harm in God's hand. By faith we know that He will do what is right in His time and in His way.

Far-Reaching Prayer

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill *the places* with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: herefore shall he lift up the head. Psa. 110:1–7.

This prayer of David contains a prophecy of the Messiah, and it is far beyond David's personal experience. If our prayers are heard by the Spirit, our attitude and words may have meaning well beyond our present experience. We often know little how the Lord will answer the words we pray or the meaning we give them. And the Lord may take our prayers and answer them in ways we have not anticipated. How often we have prayed with little faith and had blessed answers which are greater in blessing than we thought or imagined.

Congregational Prayer

Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with *my* whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and *in* the congregation. The works of the LORD *are* great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. Psa. 111:1–2.

Congregational prayer is a part of public worship; it is prayer which is fit for everyone within the sound of the words so uttered unto the Lord. Such prayer necessarily is inclusive, unless offered for a very specific purpose. It seeks to be inclusive so all who hear might silently join with the one who is speaking. Such prayer is often filled with public praise and thanksgiving, more so than private prayer. It is truly should be an act of worship, as articulated to the glory of God, His blessings upon the congregation, thanksgiving for His goodness and in proper, petitions for His power to be expressed. Public prayer is not reserved for those who are asked to pray because of their personal lives, position as leaders, and their gift of prayer. He who so prays represents the entire congregation and must be aware of this when offering up such unto the Lord.

A Fixed Heart

He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. Psa. 112:7.

This Psalm reiterates the blessings of the man who serves the Lord and enjoys His blessings. Much of this is idealistic, giving one thing upon another, without listing any adversity. This is evidently to emphasize the state of one whose heart is fixed in its faith. One of the main reasons for unsettledness in our spiritual pilgrimage is that our faith is inconsistent. We sadly experience times of doubt, fear and shame from the conscious presence of the Lord. This man's heart is fixed in its faith. The term "fixed" means steadfast, unmoving, stable. Not at all a singular individual! Who can consistently say this? Never to have a day or an hour when doubt does not arise or fear enter? Most of our times strive against our unbelief, which seeks every opportunity for its entrance! May we have our hearts fixed in faith!

Remembering the Good

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, *and* Israel his dominion. The sea saw *it*, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, *and* the little hills like lambs. What *ailed* thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, *that* thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, *that* ye skipped like rams; *and* ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; Which turned the rock *into* a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters. Psa. 114:1–8.

Israel's deliverance from Egypt and sojourn in the wilderness for forty years was characterized by unbelief and rebellion. Indeed, all of those who left Egypt perished in the wilderness except Joshua and Caleb! Even Moses and Aaron did not enter the Land of Promise due to their disobedience! But here in this Psalm, the good and positive are remembered. This is noteworthy. What is emphasized is the power of God and His faithfulness. Is this not true in our own case and experience when we look back over our own history? Encouragement comes from remembering the power of God, not our failures! In many of the Psalms this is true—the past, as exhibiting the deliverance of God, not the failures of Israel—is the edifying reality. Dwelling upon God's grace and deliverance sanctifies the past and strengthens our faith!

The Living God

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, *and* for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where *is* now their God? But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Psa. 115:1–3.

Part of this short Psalm is given to a description of pagan idols—their fiction. Sadly, many in David's day prayed to such figments of their own imagination, represented by wood, metal or stone images. As Christians, would we never resort to praying to idols—or would we? Do we not pray to the one and only one true God? Does not the very thought of idolatry seem heinous? We would never bow to a piece of stone or metal! But is not idolatry among professing Christians more common than one would think? How many there are who pray to the “god” of their own imagination! They envision God never judging sin or correcting them from their errors. They believe the Lord will always overlook their shortcomings and never discipline them. These are wholly traditional rather than scriptural, and never enters their mind to contemplate the God of the Bible and have their prayers governed by Scripture. If and when we worship and pray to the “god” of our own imagination, are we not idolaters?

Answered Prayer

Love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice *and* my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will he call upon *him* as long as I live. Psa. 116:1–2.

From the content of this Psalm, it seems that David had just experienced a near-death experience, and now was thanking the Lord for His gracious deliverance. He had gone from no hope to deliverance now, thanksgiving. Great crises and near-death experiences call for great thanksgiving and Joy! This may well have been in a time of escape from King Saul, or from an experience in battle with a pagan army. David experienced both more than once. The greater the deliverance, the greater the praise for answered prayer and the greater joy of deliverance! Have we ever experienced such? Has it changed our lives? Does everything seem different? Is our faith and commitment to the Lord greater than ever before? God has a purpose for everything, including a near-death experience. May we pray with a joyful and thankful heart!

A Call to Praise!

O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD. Psa. 117:1–2.

The Psalmist calls on all nations—all human beings without option—to praise the Lord! The cause could have been a great mystery of international proportions. It could have been simply a realization of God's care for sinful humanity, which is wholly deserving of His goodness. It could have been the end of a great plague or pandemic. The moving of the Lord God toward fallen, sinful mankind is ever one of kindness and undeserved goodness—and such should be both remembered and praised! And the goodness of God toward us, His children? Are we any better than they? Are we more deserving than the ungodly? What is there in ourselves that God has put there in His grace and mercy? Surely the Lord is to be praised by all, including His own spiritual children!

The Lord is with me!

I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, *and set me* in a large place. The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see *my desire* upon them that hate me. *It is* better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. *It is* better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes. All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. Psa. 118:5–10.

The Lord delivered David in a time of great life-threatening crisis. The Lord did not allow David's enemies to triumph over him. His response to the Lord is whole-hearted and glorious! He is filled with thankfulness beyond measure—and he voices this without reserve! And his rejoicing in the Lord for his deliverance. It is overflowing with faith! May we speak of the boldness of faith? We see it here in Psalm. Boldness in faith means boldness in prayer. Have you ever spoken out in prayer to God and later wondered at your boldness? Oh, we always had such boldness and acted upon it! David did in this Psalm, and it stands for us and our edification.

Thy Word is my Law

ISAIAH. Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed *are* they that keep his testimonies, *and that seek him* with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his

ways. Thou hast commanded *us* to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! *Psa. 119: 1–4.*

Several of the Psalms are alphabetical, i.e., arranged according to Hebrew alphabet. The only Psalm so arranged in our English Bible is one, with each eight verses beginning with a alphabetical letter in order. This is the highest literary form for Hebrew poetry, though appreciated in the English language. Every English Bible, however, divides this Psalm accordingly.

Further, every verse in this Psalm has some mention of the Word of God under various designations. How the Scriptures are described and their place in our lives and their influence in our experience!

The first designation is “law.” The Word of God is the law of and for our lives. This term reveals the force and standard the Scripture is to have! Do our prayers reflect the Scriptures? Do they conform to its precept? Are they expressive of its regulations? Power in prayer may be affected and be governed by its conformity to God’s Word as well!

Half-Hearted Prayers

Blessed *are* they that keep his testimonies, *and that* seek him with the whole heart. *Psa. 119:2.*

Prayer is serious business! Yet in its daily exercise, it may become mundane. Repetitious exercises tend to lose their force, and so it is in prayer. How sad when that which is to be most fervent becomes dull and wearying! At times it is necessary to immerse one’s self in the Scriptures until prayer is formed in the heart and mind. At other times, contemplating God’s glorious creation tends to exalt the mind to a prayerful frame. Critical issues also draw out the soul in prayer. May we never fall to the level and habit of half-hearted prayer!

Youth and Prayer

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *hereto* according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. *Psa. 119:9–11.*

Great and many are the temptations of a young man! His senses are acute, his desires are full and seek to govern, his very nature cries for fulfillment, his instincts are honed, hormones at their peak, and promptings of his physical nature are easily turned to lust. This age of life is filled with the great potential of a multitude of sins.

at alone can and must prove to be the great preventative? The daily living and contemplation of the Scriptures! How he needs the very Word of God as his stay and instructor! How he needs the preventative ministry of the Spirit to teach and admonish him! His heart is deceitful, his body easily turned to wantonness. Only God can deliver, and does so through His inscripturated Word. The Spirit uses the Word, the Word is empowered to remain active. How blessed it is to see and know a godly young man who exhibits a true, heart love for the Lord and maintains a holy profession!

Opened Eyes

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Psalms 119:18.

The Bible is often a closed book to unbelievers because these are left out of the Spirit. The Bible may also be a closed book in some areas for Christians if they are not spiritually prepared to study it with a prepared mind and heart. Spiritual discernment is neither static nor permanent. It is maintained and increases in accordance with the work of the Spirit in the life and experience. It may also decrease due to confessed sin and neglect (Heb. 5:11–14). Preachers must study and pray for spiritual insight and to find legitimate application for preaching and teaching. There is also an unction of the Spirit, a discernable though mysterious influence or power which manifests itself in preaching, giving even a simple message power and force. David's prayer is very practical and very necessary for every believer!

Night Thoughts

I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law. Psalms 119:55.

Almost everyone dreams and has nightmares at times. Sleep may be lost and peace may be greatly disturbed. But there are thoughts in the night which are blessed and pleasant—such as meditating upon the Word of the Lord and the truth of His Word! It is blessed to fall asleep at night praying and communing with our Heavenly Father. Oh, to make such a continual habit! All too often other things creep into our minds and rob us of such comfort. God has given us the night for rest and sleep. It is a great blessing when we can add true spiritual rest to our necessity! Biblically, and especially in the Old Testament, we find an entire twenty-four hour day described in the following manner: "And the evening and the morning were the----day." Should we not

sleep at night with thoughts of God and thus, actually “begin” our with evening worship?

Affliction

Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. Psa. 119:67.

Only the believer can and will thank the Lord for affliction—and, only after being humbled and taught by the Spirit! None of us likes to suffer in any way—physically, mentally, socially or spiritually. Yet the Lord often uses opposition or pain in these areas of life to correct us, return us to a closer walk with Him, or lead us to a more blessed Christian experience. Our natures are sinful, and will manifest themselves in sinful tendencies, acts and habits unless our Lord and Savior is pleased to rescue us. Such rescues usually mean adversity and affliction. Blessed are we when the Lord draws us back from sinful tendencies and acts! He loves us, and whatever He does in our lives, He does in love. This we must remember, as some correction is painful indeed!

Values

The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. Psa. 119:72.

A person’s entire life reveals what he values most. One’s main interest, occupation or investment of time and effort largely determines waking hours, use of time, thoughts, energy and focus. With many people it is money—financial investments, business, property and possessions. With others, it is a hobby which becomes consuming. For many it is the family or someone deeply loved. With illicit love it can become obsessive and morally determinative. Such is fallen, sinful human nature that someone or thing necessarily assumes priority in one’s life. Whatever assumes priority in one’s life becomes his “god.” For the true believer, the priority must be God as known through His Word. Anything else would be idolatry!

Knowing One’s Self

Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. Psa. 119:73.

What is man? This has been the subject of philosophical speculation and contemplation since the Fall. How a man views himself reveals his essential nature and purpose, instinct and direction.

life. Fallen, sinful man by nature is self-centered and self-
 ilgent. Left to himself, he worships himself, i.e., is sinfully and
 resively self-centered. To fulfill his desires and instincts is his
 nest motive. He finds the truth of God's Word alien and repulsive
 ause it teaches that man has been made in the image and likeness of
 l. Without or apart from God, man has no legitimate meaning—and
 he cannot bear! How blessedly different is the true believer! He
 vs himself as the image-bearer of God and understands this as
 ig spiritually dignifying. He finds his worth and meaning in his
 tionship to God through His Word. His life-direction derives from
 l's Commandments—what a blessed, orderly and productive life
 uld be that of a true believer!

Sanctified Fellowship

Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy
 testimonies. *Psa. 119:79.*

Of all human relationships in this life, godly fellowship is often
 most rare and blessed! Family closeness and the intimacy of long-
 e friends are pleasant in themselves, but often not edifying. Only
 ow-believers who hold the truth in righteousness and seek to enjoy
 imunion with us in and because of the Word of God as our
 mon bond will prove to be soul-satisfying. We may share mutual
 ss and pleasures, experiences and dreams with family members, but
 it often holds us together is of this world and this life. True godly
 owship with intimate believing friends has a spiritual, eternal
 ndation! Few there seem to be with whom we can openly and
 erely pray without reservation and hypocrisy. Let us highly prize
 ons and times of true fellowship!

Meditation

How love I thy law! *it is my meditation all the day. Psa. 119:97.*

The mind is a malleable thing. It may remain on a given subject
 hours, interfering with duties and work, make one "absent-
 ded" if controlling the thought process for very long. What does
 Psalmist mean when he says that he meditates on God's Word all
 day? Certainly he cannot mean that he is so taken up with God's
 rd that he gets nothing else done! Meditation can be intermittent.
 believe this is the significance of the Psalmist's words. Every few
 utes, or ever now and then during the day, the words of God's law

ie to mind and we may repeat them under our breath, or rehearse n in our mind. When taking a break, our minds go to the given sage or verse, and we continue throughout the day. In this manner, meditate on God's Word, it has an immediate impact upon our s, yet it does not interfere with our duties and work. Do you litate upon God's Law? Does it periodically come to mind and fill r memory?

Walking in Darkness

Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. Psal. 119:105.

The picture here is that of a man walking in darkness with a light ch sheds its beams or lights the path ahead of him. Walking in cness is dangerous. Unseen obstacles may trip, low hanging ches may cause sudden entanglement, wild animals may lurk close and, serpents might lie in the path unseen. A dangerous person or er may be set to ambush. On the tamer side, even a small rock or ole might cause a sudden fall and injury. Yes, the darkness may l a thousand dangers which even a small light would dispel. This has its dark places and times physically, morally, ethically and itually. What a comfort is even a small light! In the moral and itual realm, our guidance is provided in and by the Word of God— s sufficient for light and guidance from the small to the great tacles and dangers. As it is foolish to walk without a light, so is it lish to live without the guidance of God's truth!

Discernment

Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; and I hate every false way. Psal. 119:128.

Discernment is the ability to judge all things well. Many sadly c discernment, especially in moral and spiritual matters. By nature n are blinded by sin and disabled by its noetic effects. Often they good evil and evil good. How can such be avoided? How is a son to get and keep discernment? Our text declares that the precepts God—His Commandments—are right. It is necessary to know this ore we can hate every false way. Without the influence of the Word God in our lives and hearts, we will be bereft of discernment, and nature and disposition, be led away with the wicked. God meant n to live by His Word and walk in truth; man, as a sinner, is bound

urn from God's precepts and walk in his own counsel. May our
rious Heavenly Father deliver us from every false way!

The Greatest Concern

Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.
Psa. 119:136.

Being emotional is natural to human nature. While others may not
it strong emotion by their behavior, a personal relationship can
g tears and strong crying when another whom we love brings
ut the greatest concern. For the believer, the deepest concerns are
n expressed in tears for unconverted family members whom we
w intimately and love deeply. Who has not wept over parents,
dren and grandchildren who are living sinful lives in defiance of
l and His Word? How we grieve over those whom we love dearly
n we see them live with no regard for the saving truth of the
pel! We are reminded of the words of John the Beloved, "I have no
ter joy than to hear that my children walk in [the] truth!" (3 Jn.
1). We may weep over the sins of men generally, over those we love
icularly, and over our closest loved ones exceptionally. Yet we
tinue to pray and beseech the Lord in prayers and intercessions for
r souls and lives—This is as it ought to be!

Day and Night

prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.
Mine eyes prevent the *night* watches, that I might meditate in thy word.
Psa. 119:147–148.

Some things trouble and agitate the mind, heart and soul day and
it. This is true of the Commandments of the Lord when the Spirit
gs their truth to our attention to the extent we cannot ignore or
ce them. Unconfessed sin may lead us to face the truth of God
n we want to quiet our hearts and avoid the consequences. Great
ptations may do much the same. How we must come to terms with
state before God and deal with sin and its temptation! At other
es, the Word of God comes to us to stir up to action, and we will
e no rest until we act upon it and bring ourselves into obedience.
l at times, the Word of God quietly remains in our minds and
rts, haunting us with it truth and bringing us to a tender state so that
begin to change our mind and our ways. What a blessed grace
n the Lord sends His Words into our minds to silently, quietly
v us to Himself! Our response will and must be life-transforming!

Hidden Riches

rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. Psa. 119:162.

Since the Fall, man has set his heart on finding riches. He may dig them out of the earth, seek to discover hidden or lost treasure, or simply take them by force through robbery and warfare. All of these men are beset with great temptation. Once a man gets “gold fever” or a passion for conquest, he changes. His morals are modified, and he commits acts which he might otherwise condemn. Our text implies one has found some hidden or lost treasure for which he need not fight or steal. Is this how we view the Word of God and His commandments? As lost or hidden treasure? Do we revel in the scriptures? Do we fill our minds with its promises and fear its warnings the same way a man plans to acquire material possessions through means of such treasure being found and possessed? We sadly take so much for granted. What if the Word of God were forcibly taken from us by some government power? Would we long for it? Would we scour all of our resources to find some portion? Would it come as precious as “great spoil”? Let us never take for granted our possession of the Word of God!

Great Peace

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them. Psa. 119:165.

We all desire peace. We all want to live daily relatively free from contention and strife. Personal differences are the usual source of much dissatisfaction and contention. And much of this is unnecessary. It is simply one will seeking to dominate another. If all loved God's law, most of the dissension in society would cease. Peace and righteousness would abound. Offenses would be few in number. Sadly, this is rarely so. When man is guided by his own desires, lusts and is determined to have his own way, differences and troubles arise. The self-centeredness of fallen, sinful man takes center stage. How different when there is a standard and positive command to which may give guidance and love from their very hearts! Christians, more than anyone else, should be able to get along and seek God's blessing and abide by His truth!

A Cry of Distress

A Song of degrees. In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, *and* from a deceitful tongue. Psa. 120:1–2.

Psalms 120–134 are called the “Songs of Degrees.” These were sung by the Jews on their three yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate the major feasts. Jerusalem is situated on a high ridge and plateau. The Pilgrims literally went up to Jerusalem. Here, at the very beginning of their pilgrimage, the Pilgrims could meditate on and celebrate answered prayer and deliverance from those who would persecute them. Meditating on answered prayer is a blessed way to begin and continue a journey and to contemplate God’s protection at the beginning of a trip. They sang such praises to God throughout their journey.

The Source of our Help

He will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. Psa. 122:1–2.

It is fairly common at Bible camps in the mountains to see the first line of this verse printed in large letters below a window which looks out to the hills. The source of our help is not the hills, but the Lord. Hills and mountains may cause us to look up to God, as they suggest majesty and beauty, and as such they reflect the greatness of our Creator and Heavenly Father. But the source is not the hills. We look beyond them to our God. Is not this true in many aspects of our life and pilgrimage? We look through or beyond our circumstances and the beauties of nature to behold the face of our God—a fit preparation for prayer!

Our Sleepless God

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD *is* thy keeper: the LORD *is* thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. Psa. 121:3–6.

If guards or outposts fall asleep, the military camp may be in great danger. If those entrusted with watching out for danger or enemies are not wholly alert, great tragedy may occur! Have you ever contemplated the truth that our God is a sleepless God? It is not that

does not sleep, but that He does not need to sleep! He is ever
like, intently watching, listening, observing every facet of our lives.
There is never a time, although we fear such in our unbelief, when the
plans of providence hang loosely in the hands of our Lord and
Sovereign! His very nature prohibits such, as does His love for His
people! Never fear—we have a sleepless God!

Our Attitude

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the
LORD. Psalms 122:1.

The pilgrims would arrive in Jerusalem from all over Judea,
Galilee and beyond, journeying several days—often a trip of over 150
miles, and through dangerous territory, to reach Jerusalem.
Anticipation built as they traveled. What rejoicing when they reached
Jerusalem, found family members and loved ones. Their worship
expected much of their joy. Do we have such joy of both anticipation
and realization when we meet with the people of God on the Lord's
day? We should!

Held in Contempt

Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters,
and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes
wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us. Have
mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly
filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of
those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud. Psalms 123:1–
4.

Fallen, sinful man will always hold someone in contempt. This
often derives from a self-righteous attitude. Man believes himself
better than others from some supposed superiority. Such may be
abilities, race, social distinctions, or physical strength. Such an
attitude is inherent in the children of Adam—and such is mostly
self-reflective and self-engendered. Blessed is the man who sees himself
as God sees him—an object of grace, mercy and pity! To see ourselves
as such objects means that we have a biblical outlook, a right
perception and hope for God's mercy! Is this not the first step in
salvation? To see our great need of a Savior? To humble ourselves
before God and seek His grace and mercy? How sinful pride keeps
us from seeing ourselves in reality! The man who thinks he does
not need repentance and deliverance is blind, indeed!

Our Help

Blessed *be* the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help *is* in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psa. 124:6–8.

Every human being stands in need of help! And the very worse of those who think that they do not need it! Every man is a sinner, and a sinner, he is in dire straits! The wrath of God abides on him. He cannot deliver himself. He is spiritually blind to his awful state and does not consider that repentance and faith are the gifts of God! Finally, there is no escape from this awful condition except by free and sovereign grace! Only the Lord God can change the mind, heart and will. Only He can open the eyes of the blind to see their awful state. Only He can give the gifts of repentance and faith. The Lord God of heaven and earth alone has the power and prerogative to save man from himself, his sin and its certain consequences. Has He so moved in your heart and soul and mind? Has He drawn you to Himself in saving grace?

Unmoveable

They that trust in the LORD *shall be* as mount Zion, *which* cannot be removed, *but* abideth for ever. Psa. 125:1.

We may change about many things. We may outgrow some ideas and beliefs. We may learn that some things are not true and so we must change our thinking. We may see the blunders and falsehoods of others. We may come to see the Scriptures as Divine truth and all other philosophies and religions to be false. If we do, there is great hope for us. We should ask the Lord in prayer for open eyes and thinking clearly, for a belief and conviction that God is true and every man a sinner.

The only truly unmovable persons are not those with only strong convictions, but those who know and love the truth! God's truth is absolute; His truth is saving truth, and His Word opens such truth to our mind and heart. The strongest faith will fail unless it is fixed upon right object. This is life—eternal life! Noting less will suffice!

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him*. Psa. 126:5–6.

The law of sowing and reaping is a reality in several spheres, including the physical and the spiritual. C. H. Spurgeon spoke on this and made the observation that the seed was more productive if sown in water, and thus had a better yield. Then he made application to the spiritual harvest of souls through evangelism. Those who were the most successful were those who steeped the gospel seed in their tears before sowing. Some things demand great sacrifice and effort. Preaching the gospel and seeking to make converts is necessarily arduous and demanding. The gospel seed, if steeped in tears and put forth with ardent prayer, is sure of a harvest! The work of God is preeminently spiritual and demanding, and if we are moved from the depths of our souls and personalities, and put forth the utmost effort, we can hope to see blessed results. Such is the import of these verses. In every season all efforts and tears water the preaching of the Word.

Vain Labor

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain. *Psa.* 127:1.

Everything pertaining to the gospel and evangelism—to the work of God in general—implies His power and blessing, or our efforts are in vain. The Lord never intended His work to be done merely in the strength of the flesh. How we need His help and blessing! Religion is one thing, true gospel work another. Religion may produce large numbers, vast congregations and impressive works—but to have the Lord's blessings and thus His power and true, spiritual results which will last and bear fruit—this necessitates the direct work of God in obedience to His command. How we must pray for God's blessings and seek to do His work in His way. The path of obedience is ever the way of blessing!

Children a Blessing

Forsooth, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is* His reward. As arrows *are* in the hand of a mighty man; so *are* children of the youth. Happy *is* the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. *Psa.* 127:3–5.

In this day when abortion is so widespread and the Word of God twisted and its meaning perverted, when abortion is considered in terms of only a woman's body and the life of the fetus [unborn child]

not considered, much is misrepresented. It is the Lord God who gives meaning to both life and death. Abortion is murder. The Bible regards children as a great blessing from God. Big families were considered a great blessing in biblical times. A Man's power and greatness were often measured in terms of his children, especially sons. Children are a treasure and we must treasure them as the gift of God, to be reared in the truth and trained in the ways of God. Society may change; man's concept of marriage and family may change—but God's Word never changes!

Obedience and Blessing

Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy *shalt thou be*, and *it shall be* well with thee. Thy wife *shall be* as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. Psal. 128:1–4.

To fear the Lord means to have the utmost respect for His Word and to seek to live in obedience to it. This Psalm describes the fruit of a person and his life. Although such temporal blessings are not always consonant with the New Testament Christian, and hearken back to the Old Testament environment, the overriding principle remains unalterable: obedience is the path of blessing. This has always and will always remain true in the spiritual realm. In the social and political realms, we may have troubles, such as living under some form of totalitarian government which is opposed to godliness. But the eternal principle derives from the Lord and so never changes. What blessings for the person who gauges his life and seeks to live according to the Word of God! Yea, he shall be blessed!

Israel Personified

Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows. The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up: Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD. Psal. 129:1–8.

The nation of Israel is personified in this Psalm. By implication, we can visualize Israel's history from its beginnings—both its fallings and restorations. The Lord was faithful to Israel because of covenant promise and His faithfulness, not theirs. The final verse reads the usual greeting in the harvest field. Is this not generally true of believers today? We can recount the blessings of God, not because of our own faithfulness, but because of God's faithfulness to His covenant promises. To say otherwise would be to deny the consistency and blessing of His grace!

Forgiveness

If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But *here is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. Psalms 130:3–4.

None of us among fallen, sinful mankind is without sin. Even the most holy and godly reveal manifestations of their sinful nature in their relationship to God, if to no one else. There are both sins of commission and sins of omission, so that no one is without some deviation from God's revealed will and order. Thus, the Psalmist does not point to a certain segment of mankind, but to all. What enables us to walk with the Lord in obedience to His commands and enjoy fellowship with Him is not a sinless state, but a relationship which is maintained by our union with Christ and resting in His imputed righteousness. We further maintain our daily walk with confessing all our sin and living in a state of continual repentance. We walk with the Lord as a little child walks with his father. The father knows the weaknesses and imperfections of his child, but receives him and protects him because of his parental love. God's love to us is that of a father to a sinner, but also as a Father to his son.

A Weaned Child

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul *is* even as a weaned child. Psalms 131:1–2.

A weaned child has made the very first advancement in his young life. He no longer is nourished at his mother's breast. He has made the first step toward being an independent human being. He begins to feed himself, or at least allows himself to be fed. He will need his diapers changed, but he can talk and make his wishes known. He is beginning

develop a taste for certain foods; and begins to explore a diet of new things. Life becomes the beginning of a great adventure. So it is with the child of God. There is—there must be—some degree of spiritual growth and development, a desire and appetite for certain foods, and a reaching out for new things. There is growth, activity, desires and commitment. Are these not the marks of a true child of God in his spiritual growth?

Priorities

LORD, remember David, *and* all his afflictions: How he swore unto the LORD, *and* vowed unto the mighty *God* of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed. I will not give sleep to mine eyes, *or* slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty *God* of Jacob. Psalms 32:1–5.

This Psalm is part of the celebration of the Ark of the Covenant being brought into the City of David, the fortress citadel within the city of Jerusalem where David built a tabernacle for the Ark (2 Sam. 6; Psalms 132).

The Ark had been gone from Israel for over forty years, from its capture by the Philistines in the time of Eli the High Priest and his wicked sons, Hophni and Phineas, throughout the entire reign of King Saul, and several years into the reign of David. Now the long-awaited moment when the Ark was brought into the citadel with great celebration and rejoicing. Some promises are long in being fulfilled. Have we vowed unto the Lord and made promises unto Him? Have we drifted aside after a long time, or are we still persevering? Have we trusted ourselves to the Lord, then afterward repented? Let us renew our vows and serve Him. He gives persevering grace!

The Blessing of Unity

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity! *It is* like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, *and as the dew* that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, *even* life for evermore. Psalms 133:1–3.

Times of unity among God's people are precious times! Often the churches are divided because of personalities, jealousies, party spirit, doctrinal differences and seeking preeminence. A church has numerous enemies, all of which seek to tempt the Lord to abandon His church and leave the church a spiritually weak or empty place with its

d and dry formalism, bereft of truth and blessing. In times of val and spiritual awakening, the Lord is pleased to remove such pour out of His Spirit upon God's people; the blessings and power God far outweigh any opposition. When we pray for revival and itual awakening, are we also praying for resolution and unity? One bring the other. May our God be pleased to overcome the church's mies and overrule the sinfulness of pride and division!

Whom do we Bless?

Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by ight stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands *in* the anctuary, and bless the LORD. The LORD that made heaven and arth bless thee out of Zion. Psalms 134:1-3.

Israel had every reason to bless and praise the Lord God! He had chased them to Himself as His peculiar people. He repeatedly vered them from their enemies. He gave them the Scriptures and : a multitude of prophets to them. They were the most favored ple to ever live upon the earth! What high and holy privileges did el possess! Yet they sinned against Him and He finally rejected n. With the incarnation of our Lord and the ushering in of the New Gospel Covenant, God's ultimate people were taken from among Jews and the Gentiles. Believers have covenant promises and ervation which national Israel never enjoyed. We are His people ver! Nothing can break the strength of the New or Gospel renant. What confidence we must have to come to God through the son and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ! How we should and must se and bless His Name!

God does all His Pleasure

Praise the LORD; for the LORD *is* good: sing praises unto his name; or *it is* pleasant. For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, *and* srael for his peculiar treasure. For I know that the LORD *is* great, and *hat* our Lord *is* above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* lid he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. Psalms 135:3-6.

Our concept of God is all-determining. Some consider God to be verful, but not all-powerful. These hold that He struggles with or ply leaves some of His creatures to themselves. He cannot save ers unless they are willing, but He does what He can in His offers grace. These fail to realize that God's grace makes people willing that saving faith itself is the gift of God. Do we pray to a

gging God? Do we pray to a God Whose will is never fully or
ays done? Is His power limited? What good does it do to pray if the
d cannot save sinners? It is true that God in His offers of grace
er coerces or forces, yet it is true that His people shall be willing in
Day of His power (Psa. 110:3). A biblical understanding of God's
e is blessed, indeed, when interceding for others! It is God's
er that makes prayer powerful and effectual.

The Folly of Idolatry

The idols of the heathen *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see
not; They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there *any* breath in
their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: *so is* every one
that trusteth in them. Psa. 135:15–18.

Ancient idolatry may seem strange to us. Men bowing down to
tks and stones! Yet every modern man, apart from Divine grace, is
idolater! He worships the “god” of his own imagination. Further,
atry may be mental. Not all gods are made of wood, stone or metal.
ne are ideas, others are plans or strong desires. Whatever becomes
: in our lives—takes priority, and takes our time, energy, thoughts
finances—is our idol, and is worshipped as such. What is a idol? It
anything which becomes an end in itself. How different is the
ship of the one true God! As the God of Scripture, He has ordered
/ He is to be worshipped; He has revealed Himself; and He has
manded us how to serve Him and to enjoy Him! There is literally,
he difference in the world between idolatry and the worship of the
true God!

Divine Mercy Endures Forever

O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is* good: for his mercy *endureth* for
ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy *endureth* for
ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy *endureth* for
ever. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy *endureth*
or ever. Psa. 136:1–4.

The reoccurring theme throughout this entire Psalm is “for His
cy endureth forever.” This deserves to be repeated! The Psalmist
ociates strange occurrences with God’s mercy, such as the death of
firstborn in Egypt, the overthrow of Pharaoh in the Red Sea and the
eat of great kings in Canaan. Do we fail to see the mercy of God
ard His own people when He judges our enemies? Every act of
l has some mercy in it when it pertains to God’s people. There may

judgment upon others, but mercy to us. Let us not forget this! And every act of mercy we should be extremely thankful. What do we deserve more than others? Certainly, we are not morally superior. We who and what we are by the free and sovereign mercy and goodness of God. He has set His love upon us and therefore He acts lovingly toward us. What a blessedness that God should take us to Himself and reveal Himself to us in His grace, mercy and love! And would we not—must we not—reflect such goodness and blessing in our lives?!

Reason for Weeping

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? Psa. 137:1–4.

The Jews of the Babylonian Captivity had every reason to weep. The Lord had sorely judged them for their apostasy. They were living in a pagan land. They were far from Jerusalem and the temple. Their past had been destroyed, their belongings taken and their children enslaved. And now their captors demanded they sing one of the songs of Zion! Do we think as believers that we have reason to weep? We must confess our sins, repent of our waywardness, return to the Lord for we have neglected and refresh our souls in the truth and in His presence—but we have no awful state as did the Jews of the captivity. Oh! What could have been! How they had squandered the Lord's bounty and blessing! How they had taken for granted His commands and spurned obedience to His law! It might do us much good if we were so sensitive to the light way we treat our spiritual privilege! How privileged we are! How loving is our Heavenly Father!

God's Word

I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee. I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. Psa. 138:1–2.

What a glorious wonder is the inscripturated Word of God! We are not left to speculation, or to natural revelation—but we possess the Words of God—and all words He has given so we can live in this world in hope and obedience. We are not limited to the Old Testament

were the ancient Jews. We have the entirety of Divine revelation that God has willed us to have. We have instructions, revelations, commandments, warnings and promises. And what is expected of us? Knowledge and obedience—we must know, learn, become acquainted with the Word of God and then bring ourselves into a humble obedience to all of it. What a world of life and practice is contained in two terms, knowledge and obedience! The first contains a host of endeavor to truly and completely know God's Word—the original languages with their peculiarities and nuances to gain the fullness of meaning, developing the habit of memorization to instill the truth in minds and hearts, and then bring ourselves to obedience—overcoming the natural inclination of fallen man by nature to neglect God's truth, to believe all God's truth and finally to bring ourselves to submission to all of God's truth. This is for our blessing. May we reach it all with joy and determination!

The Priority of God's Word

...thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. *Psa. 138: 2.*

What place does the Bible have in our lives? Since the invention of the printing press, Bibles have been relatively easy to obtain, and cheap, they can be purchased relatively cheap and in a multitude of editions and paraphrases. Yet there is probably less respect for the Word of God than ever before. What are the causes? First, modern man has little reverence for the Word of God. He has become more secularized than ever before. Second, the Bible is considered simply one of many "holy writings" of religion. In this modern age, the Scriptures are often looked upon as ancient tradition with no authority. Third, the Bible is simply set aside by modern, secularized man. Take the modern debate over abortion. At most the Scriptures are considered as completely irrelevant and without authority—even by many who claim to be sincerely religious and devout! Modern man is almost completely relativistic with no absolutes. Yet God declares that His Word has been magnified above all! This modern negative or dismissive attitude will be set aside by either revival or the coming Day of judgment. For the sake of sinners, may it be the former!

No Hypocrisy

Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off. *Psa. 138:6.*

This passage emphasizes the Lord God of heaven and earth will countenance hypocrisy. He respects the lowly, the humble, the trite, the penitent, but knows and searches out the proud, the ocrite. Whoever and whatever we might be before Him, He knows—each and everyone of us—thoroughly. For the proud and the ocrite, this may be devastating, but for the contrite, the penitent, repentant, the humble believer, this is a glorious truth! He knows and still He loves me! He knows all about me, and yet He deals 1 me in mercy and grace! He knows me and so sustains me by His 1er so that I might not fall. Without Him I cannot live. Without 1 I have no joy—but with Him in all that He is, I have acceptance, His very nature is gracious toward me! In my service, in my 1ers, and in my often feeble attempts to glorify Him, He accepts

The God Who Is There

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. Thou knowest my lowness and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. For *there* is not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even here shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as he day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*. Psa. 139:1–2.

There are certain passages in Scripture that lend themselves to 1er or give comfort to the utmost. This is one! We are presented 1 the God Who knows us thoroughly—all about us, and nothing is den from His sight and knowledge. How tis is a great comfort in 1er! How comforting it is when we lack the words to say and can 1 say, “Lord, you know! You understand”! God’s omnipresence is 1 a large part of the truth revealed. We can be no place where the d is not! And nothing hides us from Him. Is it not comforting to sit 1 contemplate God’s knowledge of us when we are forlorn, sad, 1ncast, suffering from outbreaks of indwelling sin and remaining 1ption? He knows! How different our spiritual lives might be if,

n our earliest years as believers, we understood this and made it characteristic of our prayers!

In the Womb

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* mysteriously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them. Psal. 139:13–16.

In this godless age, when abortion is considered simply “the termination of a fetus,” and something pertaining to a woman’s body prerogative, how beautiful it is to hear God’s Word about the yet unborn child in the womb! Oh, the blind prejudice of this humanistic new generation! Fallen, sinful man seeks to be his own “God” and determine for himself what is right and wrong. Few believe that the fetus is a viable human being, who is alive before God and in the womb! The Bible holds children to be precious and a blessing from the Lord. Today, the majority believe them to be a burden and often unwanted. How wicked and ungodly may the sin and crime of “inconvenience” be! But fallen, sinful man’s thoughts and behavior are sinful before God and He will judge. Yes, even the awful, horrible sins of murder, even under the heading of “inconvenience”!

God Thinks on Me!

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! *If* I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. Psal. 139:17–18.

How much truth is contained in these few, simple words! More in number than the sand, and even when we are asleep! Yes, when we are not conscious of God’s loving care and knowledge of everything, including us and all about us, He cares for us! This is figurative language for both omnipresence and omniscience. How futile it is to seek to hide from the Lord and to sin in secret! There are some sins which are nothing less than a practical atheism! We live as though God is irrelevant (Psal. 14:1, See the Heb.). He who sleeps with the thought that God knows, God cares, God keeps and God loves should praise the best! How sweet and blest it is when our last thoughts before death overtake us are prayerful thoughts! He Who kept us in the

nb will keep us through our childhood and into our adulthood and
n unto old age. “How precious also are the thoughts unto me, O
I!”

A Open Invitation

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my
houghts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in
he way everlasting. Psa. 139:23–24.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,
o can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). But the believer, while knowing this,
still open his heart to the Lord and face the consequences. The true
ever or serious Christian, confesses his sins regularly when he is
le aware of them, and seeks to live a life pleasing to his Heavenly
ier. He confesses and repents when sin is made known to him. He
call God his “Father,” and thus possesses a sense of acceptance
forgiveness when he comes to the Lord in prayer. Martin Luther
l if he could but call God “Father,” he could pray...and so can we!
l knows our guilt; we know our guilt; let us then set our hearts right
ore God and experience His forgiving mercy! Sin which remains
onfessed plagues the heart and corrupts the mind. Let us rid
selves all such actions and be prone to confess, repent and enjoy
Father’s forgiveness!

The Tongue

They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison *is*
under their lips. Selah. Psa. 140:3.

The word “selah” is a musical term. It refers to holding a high
e for an extended time—a sort of accent or emphasis on what is
g. It occurs 71 times in Scripture. The Selah here points to the
ortance and misuse of the tongue. James has much to say about the
and unruly character of the tongue (Jas. Chapter 3). The tongue is
organ of speech. Speech unveils the soul. It exposes the sinfulness
he human heart. It reveals the hypocrite. It contradicts the rest of
life and exposes the real thoughts of the man—and it is often
ontrollable! What was created as an instrument of praise, prayer
revelation is twisted in fallen man to be expressive of his depraved
ire. David experienced this against himself, as revealed in this
lm. How often have we said to ourselves that we should not have
l what we did! The only safe place for the tongue to exercise itself
i prayer—and only when God Himself is listening!

Sanctified Prayer

LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Psa. 141:1–3.

Not all prayer is sanctified. Many times, for perhaps, several months, we may go through the act of prayer and not really pray. There are many reasons why we can go through the form of prayer and not truly pray—an unprepared heart and mind, unconfessed sin that is conveniently laid aside and not dealt with, No consciousness of God's presence, saying the words from a heart filled with unbelief, a wrong attitude in heart and mind, such as anger against God or against another, etc. Simply because religious words and formulas are spoken does not mean that true prayer is being uttered. We may have to pray for our prayers and weep over our tears! We may have to pray until we truly pray. We may spend most of our time struggling or confessing sin before our minds and hearts are clear enough to actually pray. Do we pray? Do we seek the face of our God until we can pray? Do we persevere until we experience the reality and blessing of God's presence? Perhaps many prayers are not answered because attempts to pray are barricaded and we end our attempts before true prayer is received and offered up to the Lord!

Application

David looked on *my* right hand, and beheld, but *there was* no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. Psal. 42:4.

This Psalm refers to the very dangerous and critical time when David was in the cave with his men and Saul and his army were about. Saul was left there to rest and fell asleep. When he awoke, David had cut off the border of his garment and could have killed him, but he called to him and ended the critical situation (1 Samuel 24). The words “No man cared for my soul,” uttered by David, have been applied evangelistically to good purpose in many a sermon. Do we, indeed, care for the souls of men? Is the evangelism of the lost before our minds even daily as it ought to be? Do we have someone in mind, whom we pray, that we are seeking to evangelize? These are personal, yet proper questions. Unless our hearts are set to evangelize, we seek opportunity at all times, we will find excuses and fail

in the opportunity presents itself. First, there must be a definite discernment, second there must be fervent prayer, third, we must take advantage of every opportunity, and fourth, we must give the truth of the gospel to this person in a proper manner. We may add a sixth—continue praying once the truth has been given out. Let us rebuke sinners with these words, “No man cared for my soul!”

Justification

And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. *Psa. 143:2.*

Justification is one of the elementary realities of the gospel. It means to be declared just or righteous in the sight of God, and thus reconciled to Him. Many do not think like this today, or understand the gospel doctrinally. They can only speak in terms of “making a decision,” “feeling sorry for sin,” or “loving Jesus.” How important it is to know the gospel doctrinally! We are right with God when we are justified. Justification is by faith, not because of faith. And this faith is a gift of God. Justification is the imputation, not the infusion of righteousness. It is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ that is credited by faith to the believing sinner. He repents, turns from sin—sin—and believes. This belief or faith is whole-hearted and without reservation. Justification differs from sanctification, which is righteousness imparted. In justification we are declared righteous; in sanctification we are made righteous. We need to be both justified and sanctified—these, though distinctly different, are both essential and must never be separated! God has no unholy children!

The Lord our Strength

Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and *he* in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me. LORD, what *is* man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away. *Psa. 144:1–4.*

The people of God are to be strong. This strength may differ from age to age. In David’s time and case, he was anointed king, and was called to subdue the enemies of the Lord by military means. The Lord gave him physical strength and moral courage. He praises the Lord as fortress, high tower, deliverer and shield. In our day the battle is different but the need for Divine strength remains the same! We are

in ourselves, and we need the Lord's strength to witness for Him, valiant in God's work and succeed where and when the Lord has ordained. Spiritual strength and spiritual victories as just as real and standing as the physical warfare of the Old Testament and David's!

Every Day

will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness *is* unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. *Psa. 145:1–4.*

David was determined to bless the name of the Lord every day—and every day! What determination! Now, the Lord does not change; He is immutable; we, however are not. We are subject to change every day and in some cases hour by hour. What feeble creatures we are! And how changeable! Strong one day; weak the next. Defeated by sin, and often the very same sin. How we need the Lord's strength to preserve and strengthen us! The Lord is able; our dependence hangs upon Him continually. Past generations speak to the next generation concerning the power and grace of God. Revivals and seasons of spiritual awakening have characterized past generations. What testimony will we pass on to the next generation and to our children?

Hallelujah!

Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *here is* no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy *is he* that *hath* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein *is*: which keepeth truth for ever: *Psa. 146:1–6.*

A Hallel Psalm, i.e., one which both begins and ends with "Hallelujah" in the Heb. (*Psa. 112, 147–150*). Such should be our case—it should begin and end with a Hallelujah! We have so much to thank our God for! The Psalmist first contrasts man the creature with the Lord, who is the Creator and omnipotent. He contemplates the greatness in the remainder of the Psalm. Sometimes we should stop asking and simply begin to contemplate the greatness of God as revealed in His creation. Natural revelation [God revealed in and

ough His creation] is a powerful testimony that deserves contemplation. It may take time for such thoughts to capture our minds and translate into heart-felt praise.

Praise is Pleasant

Praise ye the LORD: for *it is* good to sing praises unto our God; for *it is* pleasant; *and* praise is comely. The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by *their* names. Great *is* our Lord, and of great power: his understanding *is* infinite. Psal. 147:1–5.

The Psalmist offers all his praise up to God in prayer. He does so because, first, praise is proper; it is a pleasant exercise. It is positive and truthful, and gives all the glory to God. Second, he singles out God's special love to His people. That the Lord should single out one people to manifest His glory and care is astounding, considering the universal need for all mankind. Third, he contemplates creation, which reveals the greatness and glory of God. Fourth, he again contemplates God's continual care of creation and God's care from the greatest to the smallest minute. Are our prayers too often too restricted? We are, sadly, too preoccupied with ourselves and our problems or needs. We often fail to simply glorify God and praise Him for Who and What He is. Holy contemplation certainly prepares the heart and soul for prayer. Medically, an enlarged heart is a negative condition, but spiritually, it is wonderful!

Universal Praise

Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Psal. 148:1–4.

This Psalm calls for the universal praise of God as Creator and sustainer of the universe—heavenly bodies and beings, sea and land, animal and human life. The praise of the peoples of the earth, great and small are to praise Him intelligently and His own covenant people are to praise Him, as He alone is worthy. How far has mankind fallen! We do not praise ourselves, not their Creator. They fancy themselves as a superior part of the universe and self-sufficient, answering only to themselves. They deny creation and embrace evolution, thus seeking to escape their responsibility of acknowledging and worshipping the

true God. But these are yet culpable, for creation itself witnesses the reality of God to such an extent that these are held inexcusable must suppress the awesome witness of creation to try not to face truth (Rom. 1:18–20)! How glorious it is to embrace the truth and only acknowledge, but fervently and unashamedly worship the Lord of all creation!

National Praise

Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, *and* his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. *Psa. 149:1–5.*

This Psalm is addressed to the nation of Israel, whom God called of Egypt to become His own peculiar people, to know Him and to glorify for His praise. They are called upon here to praise His name. The second half of the Psalm pertains to the judgment of God through which He will teach and correct the nations who do not acknowledge Him. The moral character of God demands not only praise, but also reproof; the wicked must be judged. Praise has a wide and necessary nature and responsibility!

Sacred Praise

Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD. *Psa. 150:1–6.*

The Lord God is worthy of the utmost praise. He is to be praised Who He is, for His mighty acts, and for His greatness. Man is to stand in awe of God Almighty! This praise in worship is accompanied by musical instruments for the greatest acknowledgement of beauty and sound. The references to praise here signify fervent praise, which is unexcelled by anything else. God deserves the very best and the best praise and acknowledgement of His greatness and goodness.

h praise is all-consuming, fervent and is without comparison. Oh, such could be reflected in our personal worship and prayers!

Proverbs

Wisdom

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: Prov. 1:1–5.

Of all of God's creatures, man is the slowest and most difficult to g to maturity and independence. Why? First, he is depraved, a er. Brute creation, though suffering from the Fall, is not comprised sinners. Second, As a sinner, man is prone to go his own way. mals are guided by their instincts and leave the nest or parents e early. Fallen, sinful man takes much longer, and is always in ger of lawlessness. Third, as the image-bearer of God, man needs itual, social and moral training, which brute beasts do not. Fourth, 1 needs a given amount of corrective discipline so he does not roy himself in the process of gaining maturity. For one brute to n or kill another is to be expected; for man this is a capital offense e punishable by death. God has ordained that much time be spent n the young, training them up to take their responsible place in an society. The sinfulness of man's nature makes this a long, ng process. Finally, the devil is at work with man, not the beasts. we understand parenting and growing to maturity in terms of l's Word? How far the image of God has been defaced in fallen kind!

Solomon

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. Prov. 1:1–4.

Solomon was at once the wisest man who ever lived and also the test fool! He had an intimate knowledge of God, His ways and His er. He witnessed the power of God and steeped himself in the

rd of God. He was for years a true worshipper of Jehovah and built Temple in Jerusalem. The Lord God appeared to Solomon and ke to him. Yet in his old age, he became an idolater and an state! Through his many pagan wives, he built and worshipped at an shrines in Jerusalem! His wives turned away his heart. Such is inkable—but true (1 Kgs. 11)! Do we wonder at mere, professing istians? Do we dare think that even fervent believers may fall and greatly? How we must keep to God's Word and never depart in the htest from the truth of our God!

Increase in Learning

A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: Prov. 1:5.

A wise man will increase in learning. This may have a very ctical, useful and advantageous application. Learning may be both demic and practical in the form of some skill. It is advantageous, resting and may prove extremely beneficial. We must never eve that our learning is over when we have completed our formal ooling! For the believer especially, great benefit may be had in the ning of the ancient biblical languages. These will prove to be life–sforming. A few minutes spent daily with a textbook and the ptures before him will transform a man's life! Reading through ks of the Bible with a commentary as a companion will open the ptures in a glorious way! Read and educate yourself in those areas ch will do the most for your spiritual pilgrimage and multitudes / greatly profit more than one can know!

A Truly Wise Man

A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a roverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark ayings. Prov. 1:5–6.

As the image-bearer of God, man by nature lives in a moral and itual context, distinct from brute creation. In a decent society, a 1 will progress in moral character and hopefully in spiritual iding as he grow older. He learns from his father and mother, and ns from the society which surrounds him. How important it is to e what influence we can upon children and young people! As iers, they will naturally gravitate toward evil and wickedness. Their / nature has a proclivity toward such. They desperately need to

enter such with godly counsel and examples. These need to be under instruction of the Word of God. Sunday schools have been the main means of such instruction for many years. This and parental instruction are most important in the life-and-death battle for the souls of our children!

The Fear of the Lord

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction. Prov. 1:7.

True education must be preeminently religious from the very beginning! To learn to fear the Lord, i.e., to know Him, reverence Him, serve Him in obedience to His Holy Word, is to be the very center of our lives! Everything else is built upon this sure foundation. How much time is wasted on some hobby or other interests when, for the end ever, knowing God increasingly—knowing Him, His ways, His character and purpose, what He commands—is to become the mainspring of our lives! What can take preeminence over this? What is more important? The fear of the Lord;—to live before Him and walk in intelligent obedience to His Holy Word—preempts everything else. This may be the first step in becoming a Bible teacher, a preacher of the Word, a true man of God. Even a great man of prayer must begin studying to know God through the Scriptures; prayer is not some optional exercise left for mystics, but for the obedient whose desire leads them into a holy intimacy with the Divine!

Parental Instruction

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they *shall be* an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. Prov. 1:8–9.

God has ordained parental instruction. The failure or neglect of this should not prove to be an effective obstacle. Some do not see the necessity and so disobey the Lord. Others seek to instruct in secular suits but neglect the soul. The young man may have to compensate for parental instruction by seeking to educate himself or putting himself under the tutelage of a pastor. The difference between the teacher and the student may be finding a pastor who will take a young man and train him in the Scriptures and their associated studies. Any study which helps in opening and explaining the Scriptures is extremely valuable! And learning accomplished at an early age will endure with the man. Pastors must encourage young men to study and

pare themselves for a life of service to our Lord—and be ready to
to those who are willing to put forth the time and effort to educate
nself in the things of God.

Pandemic

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: Prov. 1:10–14.

Birds of a feather flock together states an old proverb. And so it is in the realm of fallen, sinful mankind. And the wicked entice others to follow in their steps. If they can gain converts and companions, it tends to justify and empower them in their evil ways. Pandemics are evil. They spread from individual to individual and finally, from country to country until they permeate the human race. The greatest pandemic is sin and the only inoculation against it which is effectual is saving grace of God. From Adam, sin and death spread throughout human race. Each generation is infected. Only the grace of God in salvation is a preventative. The ungodly see no reason for inoculation, those whose eyes have been opened by the grace of God see the evil and fatal danger. Have you been inoculated against the ruling power of sin? Only regenerating grace, manifested in saving repentance and faith, proves to be effectual. Repent and believe is the universal antidote—have you been inoculated by the grace of God?

Warning to the Young

My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof. Prov. 1:15–19.

Part of a parent's responsibility is to train up a child to be just and faithful. This means, among other things, keeping his son from bad company and its influence. Evil company is pictured here as being suicidal. It is self-destructive at the very least. Whatever some might think, we live in God's ordered universe, and it is ruled by the Lord Who is moral and equitable. Animals and birds are governed by their instincts; man is to be governed from without, from his parents,

n the Scriptures, not from within. He was not born with self-serving instincts, but with original sin and a sinful nature. He by re is self-destructive. How necessary it is that children listen to r parents, and how necessary for parents to instruct children in the of the Lord! Note that the teaching of evolution in our educational em is not only devoid of all morality, but is, in principle, immoral, it is founded upon a lie and its fruit has never produced a moral son!

Reasonable

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. Prov. 1:17

God created the bird to be governed by its instinct and man to be led by his reason. The bird will escape the fowler instinctively, as sees the snare, which is for its capture, laid out and baited. But i's reason has been polluted with sin and his sense of evil has been ped. He misjudges evil and believes it to be good because he is -centered and does not recognize the danger because he is bereft of reason God gave him. He believes himself more intelligent than the st High, wiser than the All-wise God, and intuitive enough to pe judgment. Yet all the while he is bent on self-destruction ause he follows the way of death and not the way of life. The ellion of Adam flows in the veins of his posterity and poisons the y truth which is meant for his preservation and deliverance. Man ds to be saved from himself. Deliverance comes from above. Have looked up to God and have you escaped the falsehood of empty gion and sought the salvation which is in Jesus Christ alone?

Spiritual Irrationality

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth n the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying*, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit into you, I will make known my words unto you. Prov. 1:20-23.

Man naturally prides himself on being rational. He fancies himself e intelligent and even brilliant in the things of this world, physical mental. He claims to understand the movement of the planets and xies, and has classified the laws of nature into a system. In itual matters, he has a score of religions he has developed over the turies. He can debate religious issues and point out the greater

traditions. Where and why, then does he fail? He fails because he is blind to the truth of God, Who has put forth His truth in the Scriptures. But natural man will not submit himself to the Word of God in an obedient faith. He would have to admit his errors, lay aside self-righteousness and come to God through the Lord Jesus Christ as a lost and condemned sinner—and apart from saving grace, this he cannot do! Spiritual deadness, blindness and pride keep him from the salvation and redemption he needs!

The Lostness of Man

When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. Prov. 1:27–31.

In some religious circles, it is thought that man possesses a free will, i.e., the power of contrary choice, i.e., that he can at any given time turn from sin to righteousness because salvation is simply a matter of the re-direction of his will. These believe that when man fell, he remained unfallen. But the Scriptures speak differently. Even when men know that their judgment is Divine, rebel against God in their hatred and curse Him (Rev. 16:9–10). Man is a free moral agent, but he does not have a free will. Being a free moral agent, he is fully responsible for his actions and does not act by compulsion, and he is fully responsible for such actions. Yet he is so set against God, apart from grace, that he is set against God without fail—unless the Lord changes his heart! Has God changed your heart to love Him?

Seeking God

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: *he is* a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. Prov. 2:3–9.

Man by nature wants to be wise—he desires wisdom, only he wants his wisdom on his own terms. The Scripture points the way to true

dom—the fear of the Lord. But fallen, sinful man, as rebellious as father, Adam, refuses to seek after God in order to gain true dom. Consider the scientists who study the universe. They see it in lutionary terms, existing for millions of years. They view God’s ous creation and seek to see it, study it and find its meaning apart n God. Yet creation itself—natural revelation—is a witness to the stence, power and greatness of God! Not only so, but this witness is great that man has to deny the self-evident in blatant unbelief to

y the existence, power and wisdom of God! Study Rom. 1:18–20. witness of creation leaves man inexcusable and is so great that n has to continually suppress its testimony! Such is the willful dness and ignorance of lost mankind!

Preservation

When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant into thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil *man*, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk n the ways of darkness; Who rejoyce to do evil, *and* delight in the rowardness of the wicked; Whose ways *are* crooked, and *they* froward n their paths: Prov. 2:10–15.

The possession of godly wisdom, i.e., the wisdom which comes n God, preserves us from the wickedness which proves to be a re to the ungodly. Man is necessarily and inescapably a moral ig, as he has been made in the image of God. Although this image been defaced and crippled by the noetic effects of sin, yet it ctions to a great degree. Man left to himself is ungodly and acts out sinfulness through ungodly living and acting. He is guided by his raved nature rather than God-given wisdom and so walks and acts ully. His only hope is to truly know God and be converted— ight into conformity to the moral nature of God. This is biblical version considered as to its results. Have you been brought into al conformity to the nature and character of God?

Deception

To deliver thee from the strange woman, *even* from the stranger *which* lattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and orgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. Prov. 2:16–19.

True wisdom delivers both from the evil man (v. 10–16), and also wicked woman, who is now considered. It seems that she was once ried, but the either divorced or abandoned, still attractive and bent destroying young lives through the sin of lust. The young man, still married, his hormones raging and his desires exploring possibilities, taken captive by this harlot. She marks his life forever. He is ally destroyed. If he later marries, he will still carry with him the memories of an experienced lover and nights of debauchery, and these haunt him whenever he seeks to be a faithful husband to his wife. He will be forced to return to his immoral haunts, women and experiences. This is the nature of sin, especially immorality! Morality strengthens a man; immorality slays him. He trades life for death and ill-ordained pleasure for debauchery.

A Father's Counsel

My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Prov. 3:1–4.

Older men are wiser than younger, or should be. But what makes unique is that it is the young man's father who is giving counsel! He does so from the unique context of a father's love and concern. His father loves his son! He wants to save him from the bitter, sinful experiences of many. He wants him to enjoy his life and not have memories of sin and regret to cause him grief. The father wants him to be a better man than he himself has been, one who will profit from his son's mistakes and failures. This makes a father's counsel both precious and forceful. The son knows from the father's voice and tone, from his face and countenance that the father speaks largely from experience as well as the Word of God, and this enforces the truth with genuine love and concern. We have the Lord God as our spiritual father. He has no failures to confess, but His truth is meant to subdue and guide our hearts in the way of righteousness.

Familiar Words

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Prov. 3:5–6.

This passage is one of the most familiar in the entire Book of verbs, and rightly so. Much truth is contained in this short oration and promise. Much in the realm of grace is contrary to man nature and the ways of the world. The worldly person trusts in self and his own wisdom and discernment; the godly person trusts in the Lord, not his own understanding. In concert with God, his word is infallible. And we should acknowledge Him in all things—Word, His leading, His Spirit, His Word—and He will direct our steps. God knows all things and everything. We do not; we are merely limited. In and through God and His Word, we have an infallible guide!

True Wisdom

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.
Prov. 3:7.

True wisdom comes from God. We are not infallible, and may easily be deceived. We may even indulge in evil through misjudgment, being led astray, misinformation, partial judgment, or our own bias. The fear of the Lord necessarily includes prayer for wisdom and discernment, for leadership in certain matters where we are not certain, matters which may lead us into a compromising position. Being self-willed or resting in our own wisdom leaves us open to many harmful things which spiritual discernment might deliver us. Let us never assume that we are on the right path or possess the necessary wisdom unless our position and direction coincides with that of our Lord. Among the subtleties of evil is that it is seductive and deceptive. Let us never be deceived by our own lack of vision! We have to know that evil is before we can flee from it!

God's Share

Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. Prov. 3:9–10.

Under the Old Covenant, the Lord demanded a tithe of ten percent. The New or Gospel Covenant perpetuated the tithe or tenth. Note the terminology used: “Honor the Lord with thy substance...” meaning what the Lord has commanded is to honor Him. Any fear of it because of the tithe is set aside: “thy barns shall be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” The Lord has promised blessing upon obedience. This promise is true throughout the

ptures: Obedience is the path of blessing. There is, however, an
nent of faith in every case. We must trust the Lord's promise, and
faith might be tested. Often people obey the Commands of the
d out of a sense of duty, not with the expectancy of blessing. This
ifests a lack of faith! Not only is faith essential, but an attitude of
1 rather than mere obligation is also a necessity! Oh, for an
dient heart that always rejoices in its devotion to God and does not
er or obey mere out of a sense of duty!

Misjudging God

My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of
his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a
father the son *in whom* he delighteth. Prov. 3:11–12.

Our heavenly Father is consistent, and any chastisement is for our
1 good as well as for His glory. This we must not misunderstand!
duties are two-fold: do not despise the Lord's chastening and do
grow weary of it. Although earthly fathers may be inconsistent, our
venly Father is not. And above all remember that God chastens us
ause He loves us! Theologically, God is morally consistent and
, as well as loving and gracious and merciful. Practically, the Lord
stens us because He loves us. "No chastening for the present seems
ous, but grievous..." (Heb. 12:11). But it later brings us His
sings. We need reminders at times that God loves us, and, although
hly fathers may be inconsistent; our heavenly Father never is—He
not be inconsistent!

Happiness

Happy *is* the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth
understanding. For the merchandise of it *is* better than the
merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She *is* more
precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be
compared unto her. Prov. 3:13–15.

"Happiness" means feeling the pleasure of contentment. This
live experience stands very near the top of the list in the thinking
feelings of many. And does happiness abide? For many happiness
emporary, being identified with passing experiences which appear
moment and disappear the next. Not so for the one who discovers
piness in finding wisdom from God! This is rich treasure indeed!
s lifts us above the earth and into God's presence. This remains
in all earthly pleasures and comforts fade and die. To be right with

l, to have a clear, clean conscience, to be at peace in mind and
rt according to the Scriptures—to be wise in the reality and glory of
ation—nothing can compare with this! Do you remember the
sedness of being truly converted? The first hours and days of joy
happiness at possessing true salvation? Of being made wise unto

ation? This is but a part of conversion being a life-changing
erience!

Peace

her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace. Prov.
3:17.

There is no peace to be compared with the peace which comes
n God—peace which He gives—which results from the wisdom of
wing Christ in salvation. The restless spirit is finally subdued. The
sciousness of sin which has plagued the heart and soul is finally
ed. The fear which has haunted the mind has been swept away. The
l is finally at rest. We have both peace with God and the peace of
l—the very firstfruits of saving grace! Years later we may vividly
ember the first unspeakable hours of our conversion experience as
reality of salvation dawned upon our souls and filled our hearts
1 joy! We had passed from death unto life and from judgment unto
ce! And all this was just the beginning of our pilgrimage to glory.

Creation

The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath
ie established the heavens. Prov. 3:19.

The idea and belief in evolution robs the observer of the vast and
rious treasures of wisdom manifest in creation. The poor secularist
ot only sinning against his own soul is refusing to acknowledge the
itive power and purpose of God, he also robs himself of beholding
beauty and wonder. He must constantly suppress the witness of
ition (Rom. 1:18)—a witness so strong that he is without excuse
m. 1:20)—to view creation as a matter of chance. He refuses to see
universe for the very reason God gave us eyes to see it and minds
omprehend it! (Psa. 19:1ff). Oh, the blessing and pure delight and
sfaction of siting under the black night sky and viewing the
gnitude and majesty of God's creation! The mind is elevated to

litate on spiritual realities, the heart is filled with thoughts of God, although the universe is vast, we can sense His presence as being *ie*. And the voice of prayer begins to arise in our hearts and souls as we see the witness of our God!

God-Consciousness

The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath *ie* established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be *fe* unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be *sweet*. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and *he* shall keep thy foot from being taken. Prov. 3:19–26.

See the previous meditation concerning the contemplation of the created universe and its effects upon the heart and soul. These verses tell the results of such in the life and experience. A consciousness of God and His manifestation in creation and his corresponding rule over creation give to the life a sense of God's presence in every place. Such overcomes fear of the unknown, of dangers and storms, of unseen dangers in the night. The Lord reigns! He is God and there is never a time when He is not! Nothing takes Him by surprise. He sovereignly reigns over all and at all times. And He watches over all His creation—and especially this young man who trusts in Him!

Procrastination

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do *it*. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. Prov. 3:27–28.

Procrastination is prevalent among fallen, sinful mankind. It exists in the business world, as well as in personal relationships. We may use such by lowering the level to convenience, and find that acting on legitimate debt is inconvenient. This command is considerate of one's neighbor. It allows no selfishness and no excuses. The commandment goes beyond that of legitimate debt to helping one's neighbor who is in need, for we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we are able to help and we do not, but seek to excuse ourselves from any moral obligation, we sin against our neighbor. And we are

ty of lying. How would we feel if the case were reversed? Would not be angered or disappointed? The command to love one's neighbor as one's self is one of the most inclusive and convicting commands in God's Word! And it is this strong injunction that is put

before us. We must remember that we are dealing with God, who knows all, and not merely with man whom we may deceive.

Being Neighborly

Refrain from evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Prov. 3:29.

What is forbidden here is to initiate evil against one's neighbor. Sin is evil pure and simple. When this happens, it is an example of the evil of man's heart being manifest—of harming or injuring another without reason or provocation. Yet such things do occur. The intended victim is one's neighbor, one who dwells innocently and trustingly beside you. Why? What motivates a man to take such action? Has he been wronged by his neighbor? Such sin is devilish, and reveals the depravity of man by nature. Perhaps it is done in jest. This is an awful wickedness—to harm someone as a joke! This is to sin against all men without regard to the consequences against someone who is innocent! There is an evil within man's heart which acts without reason. This exemplifies the innate sinfulness of man by nature and against which he must beware. Such breaks all trust and proper relationships. Think of the consequences of our actions. How will others interpret them? Do people often think the worst because they are evil or because at times, they are the recipients of such?

Oppression

Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. 32 For the reward is abomination to the LORD: but his secret is with the righteous. Prov. 3:31–32.

The most basic reality and entity is power! Almost everything can be reduced to the reality or lack of power. God revealed Himself usually in terms of power. We are held in awe at the power of God. We fear Him of power. It is the wish of almost every man to have power—and to use the power! The problem with sinful man is that power usually leads to oppression. It has been so since the sin of Adam and the Fall of the human race. When man seeks to be his own "God" and determining

himself what is right or wrong and has enough power to implement to a given degree, he usually becomes the oppressor. The believer, who has power or ability, is to use such for doing good, to be like His Father which is in heaven! This is peculiar to the people of God. What would you do if you could? The answer to this question may well reveal everything about a person we would desire to know. It would reveal His entire character! Power tempered by grace and motivated by love is a matter of grace and mercy. Anything else derives from the evilness of unregenerate human nature or from the evil one!

The Giver of Grace

The curse of the LORD *is* in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely he scorneth the scornors: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools. Prov. 3:33–35.

Wickedness precludes God's blessing and invites His curse. Such a curse rests upon the whole family. This is true when one or more of the members lives in rebellion against God and brings judgment upon the family. How different when one of the family members is a fervent believer! He or she may become the avenue of God's blessing upon the entire household! Once God's saving grace enters a family circle, it will spread through prayer and example until others are converted. When whole households are thus converted. What a blessing when the Lord has mercy upon a family! What a gracious work when the Lord uses a family member as the instrument of grace to the others! From enemies and opposers to fellow-believers and comrades in grace! Oh how often the instrument the Lord uses to convert one's family!

A Father's Concern

Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. Prov. 4:1–2.

Biblically, the father is the authority figure of the family. This is what God has ordained. But man, by virtue of his fallen, sinful nature, naturally wants his own way and is sorely tempted to rebel against this God-ordained authority. Such an impulse must be resisted and the child brought into subjection to the father's instruction. Further, if the father is a godly person, his instruction will be according to the scriptures and will be given in love. What more could be asked of a father? What a blessing to have a godly father, and one who repeats

truth of God for the good of his children, and does so in love?!
his instruction, although not fully comprehended now, will prove
itself to be much more helpful and blest as the years pass and the mind

grows to maturity. Finally, the father, as an adult has had experience
in instruction, and thus has a double force—he has already put
his instruction to the test and found it both true and beneficial. Such
is the great blessing of having a godly father!

Rewards of Wisdom

Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy
getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she
shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give
unto thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver
unto thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy
life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led
thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened;
and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of
instruction; let *her* not go: keep her; for she *is* thy life. Prov. 4:7–13.

These verses follow and reinforce the previous command and
teaching. How young men need wisdom! Their youth sets itself against
reason. Their inexperience tempts them. Their energy seeks to misguide
them. Their companions seek to lead them astray—depravity and
inexperience leading depravity and inexperience. The proneness of
youth, especially boys and young men, tends toward trouble. The great
good is wisdom, not merely discipline or punishment after the fact! It
is far better to have received instruction than receive discipline once
deviation and disobedience have occurred! What blessedness for
a loving, caring father when his son is spared punishment because he
obeyed his father's instruction and not gone astray!

Keep the Heart

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life. Prov.
4:23.

The author of Proverbs begins with the heart—the innermost part
of man, then he progresses to other parts of the human anatomy:
mouth, lips, eyes, eyelids, feet and hands (v. 23–27). The heart is both
central and primary. The core of man's being is corrupt due to his
fallen, sinful nature: “The heart is deceitful above all things and
perpetually wicked. Who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). What a statement

describe the importance of keeping the heart! The only true and long cure for the heart of man is regenerating grace. This is promised in the promise of the New or Gospel Covenant in Ezk. 36:25–27. Physical discipline may deal with an act of sin or disobedience, but it will not cure the heart. What is needed is saving grace, making man, or here, the young man or boy a new creature in Christ, put within him a new principle of life and direction. Then added to fathers, who may discipline in anger or with shortness of temper—we cannot beat a boy into the kingdom of God; he must be born into it. The discipline is for wrongs committed; prayerful counsel toward the impartation of new life. Both physical discipline and spiritual counsel should be bathed in earnest prayer and intercession!

Catechizing

My son, attend unto my wisdom, *and* bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and *that* thy lips may keep knowledge. Prov. 5:1–2.

The picture before us could well depict a young boy sitting closely at his father's feet, carefully listening and repeating the questions and answers of a catechism. The term “catechize” is from the Gk. *katecheo*, closely related to our English “echo.” The word occurs eight times in the New Testament in the Gk. (Lk. 1:4; Acts 18:25; 21:21, 24; 1 Tim. 2:18; 1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6). The teacher reads the question and answer and the learner repeats them and commits them to memory. Catechisms were once widely used and had a great ministry among the young in families and Sunday schools. Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists all had their catechisms. Some catechisms were very short, but others were very long and formed complete manuals of Christian doctrine. What a rough and simple way to introduce young children to the doctrinal teachings of Scripture and provide an opportunity for parents to discuss the teachings with their children! Many a young person has been converted through the consistent use of a sound catechism.

Warning: A Strange Woman

My son, attend unto my wisdom, *and* bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and *that* thy lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth *is* smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life,

her ways are moveable, *that* thou canst not know *them*. Hear me now herefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Prov. 5:1–8.

Sins which are closely related to natural and legitimate functions desires are often the most dangerous. Such is the case with morality. God created sexuality, and the sexual union of man and woman as the highest and most intimate expression of love. This is to be experienced only within the married state and relationship—never apart from it. Adultery or fornication demanded the death penalty under the Law. God created the sexual desire, which is very strong and is focused only upon one husband and wife for life. In the moral text of marriage the sexual union is meant to be beautiful, completely satisfying and blessed by God. The picture drawn in our text portrays the whore who seeks to seduce young men into illicit sexual unions for money. She takes advantage of the strong sexual desire and preys upon the young man who is seduced into thinking that this is love apart from the fulfillment, responsibility, and the intimacy of the God-ordained marriage union. What God ordained as beautiful and fulfilling is made sinful, degrading and temporary (vv. 10–20). Man brought down to the level of the beast and lower, as beasts are not sinful and depraved, but man is! And now he comes under Divine judgment! What was meant to create life has now become the vehicle of death! We must never be deceived!

God Sees and Knows

For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings. Prov. 5:21.

God is the unseen witness to every conversation and action, and is the unseen listener to every word spoken. Most tend to forget this, and sin against the Lord in both speech and action. If only we lived with a true God-consciousness, we would understand such realities and live accordingly. But a God-consciousness is a religious reality and because men are by nature only partially religious at times, they are very inconsistent. The true believer, however, is ever-conscious of God's presence and knowledge, and such does not offend him, but rather gives him strength and comfort. May our lives become consistent and may such truths as God's omnipresence and omniscience strengthen us and sanctify us! The sanctified life is a

ty, but it is filled with a God-consciousness and is occupied with a true communion with one's heavenly Father!

Acting before Thinking

My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, *if* thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art aken with the words of thy mouth. 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. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler. Prov. 6:1–5.

Strangers may prove to be dangerous, as their ways are unknown and their honesty may be lacking. But at times, even friends may become a snare to us. To become financially obligated for a friend's debt may cost a friendship and may be expensive if our friend proves untrustworthy or is beset with unforeseen financial problems. But we have given our word and obligated ourselves. His debt has become ours. We are to take nothing for granted when dealing with man. When dealing with God, we have the utmost confidence and faith in our Lord and Savior, but when dealing with man, we must beware. It is not that we dare not trust our friends, but it is in the nature of things that sometimes things go wrong and our friends may default. The only Friend we can rely on and finally trust is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is wholly trustworthy without hesitation. And blessed is the one who has trusted the eternal welfare of his soul unto his Savior!

Taught by an Insect

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. Prov. 6:6–8.

In our day, about the only time we think about ants is when they invade into our homes. But even the poisons we use take into account their methodological ways and cooperation! They take the poisonous bait and line up to get it back into their nest. Everyone cooperates—how rapidly do they work! It is a spectacle to see. We may learn from them many things, as the author of Proverbs notes. What cooperation and energy. Everyone does his or her part. No slackers. They act as though they all had one mind and goal to put away food for the winter. What lessons for us! What a family we would have if everyone did his part! What a church we might have if everyone put shoulder to the wheel and put forth the needed effort! It seems,

ing mankind, that the few do most of the work. We should be thankful for the few—yet we should understand and pray that God’s work might progress like the work of the ant! A church where everyone is fully involved would be a great blessing indeed!

Rest or Laziness?

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man. Prov. 6:9–11.

Rest is sweet when the task is complete! A sense of achievement when a difficult task is done, rest once the energy has been expended and the body is tired. Rest brings with it a sense of reward for the work accomplished. None of this, however, is true of the sluggard. He has put forth energy or tired himself with earnest labor. He is simply tired! The cost of honest labor may be high, but the cost of laziness is even higher. It not only affects the body; it affects the soul. It becomes a dishonest attitude and action against honest labor and necessary effort in a just cause. The sluggard will always lose. Every advantage he gains in honest work is lost—and lost physically, mentally and morally. Is there not some conviction that one is dishonest and wrong when shirking his duty? Unless he is found out, another has had to take his slack, and yet, unless he is discovered, he wrongly receives the reward which rightfully belongs to another. In spiritual matters, sloth is excusable. We each have a distinct relationship to God, and no one can substitute for another. And the blessings missed! How can we ever recover for these?

Dishonest Gain

A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. Prov. 6:12–16.

The “naughty” person is a wicked person. Not only does he lie with his lips, but the other members of his body express his sinfulness. He winks, betraying falsehood. He signals with his feet so his companions are informed of his duplicitous actions. He gives hints with his fingers as to his actions or intentions. This implies that his whole personality is engaged in evil. It is the manifestation of a

ked heart. He cannot seem to help himself from evil thoughts and . He causes a social stir. Judgment shall suddenly come upon him. se he has cheated or deceived shall take revenge! Once such a son is found out, he is usually avoided or altogether ruined. Sad it is n someone is driven to wickedness and evil in thought and act! He be discovered sooner or later, and his deceptions will come to an . All of these things were unnecessary. They were the expression of an depravity flowing unrestrained from a devious personality and estrained by moral or social barriers. We must beware of such sons because of their immediate and final influence!

Seven Hated Things

These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination into him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in unning to mischief, A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that oweth discord among brethren. Prov. 6:16–19.

What would we list as the seven most abominable things? tainly our list would differ from God's! Why? Because God sees heart and we do not. He views the hidden machinery which gives to such sinfulness, and so sees the heart in all its sinful tchedness! We are limited to the outward, the external, and so not see the true, hidden motivating factors behind much of man's eeding wickedness. "A proud look." Think of wicked deception olved, the sin of pride, the mother sin of devils and men! "a lying gue." Falsehood that must be expressed and cannot be hidden. nds that shed innocent blood." The hands of a murderer! "a wicked r being that deviseth wicked imaginations. The whole mind is d with sinful thoughts and ways. "Feet that be swift in running to chief." Difficult to keep back from the worst sins. "A false witness speaketh lies." Destructive of all trust and truthfulness. "He that eth discord among brethren." Bent on destroying that close tionship and trust of blood relationships. The more we contemplate ie, the more we begin see the hideousness of sin! And what the d hates we are to hate—and certainly it should be so!

Conscious Commandments

My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy nother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, *and* tie them about thy neck. Prov. 6:20–21.

The influence of one's parents often outlives their lives. This is especially blessed if these commandments are derived from or reflect scripture. There are three items of interest here with respect to truth: first, the idea of continuousness. "Bind them continually..." This implies that they might be set aside, and that they bound or secured continually and second, that these are bound upon one's heart, or the core of the inner being. Third, these commands are to be tied about the neck. The heart refers to the inner man; the neck to the outer man. The atrever is bound about the neck is worn for adornment; it is also consciously worn, as anything about the neck causes us to be conscious of it. What fitting language for parental commands, especially if they are scriptural! These are to govern the whole life and make it consonant with the God of our parents. More fitting language could not be chosen! The parents may be gone, their bodies in the grave and their souls with God, but their godly influence continues for their generation! What a legacy and inheritance!

Negative Admonitions

For the commandment *is* a lamp; and the law *is* light; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life: To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty and thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. 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. Prov. 6:23–26.

The commandments in our text are implied to be negative. It is noteworthy that eight of the Ten Commandments are framed in the negative. This implies the fallen, sinful nature of mankind, which needs to be kept in line. The young man needs preventative admonition, negative commandments, due to the temptations of this world which prey upon his fallen, sinful nature. We have no discerning the prevailing nature we were born with, but we have great temptations and admonitions to turn away from sin in repentance and to hold in saving faith to be delivered! Nothing so enforces the Divine commandments as does saving grace! The issues are those of life and death, and the only sure and effectual preventative is God's grace in Christ through the Lord Jesus Christ! Even sins of the strongest nature, such as described here, are conquered and avoided by such Divine prement!

Inexcusable Adultery

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. *Men* do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But *if* he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy *is* the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts. Prov. 6:27–35.

The subject here is not the harlot or prostitute, but the wife of one's neighbor. A woman with whom there would be daily association, the wife of a close associate, probably of one's best friend. This is especially heinous, as it irreparably breaks many of the closest human relationships. These can never be repaired. Nothing can compensate for it. More than blatant adultery; it is an utter irrationality of the worst sort! It reveals the utter wickedness of the human heart and the moral bankruptcy of the closest human relationships. How our relationships to those closest to us must be maintained to the highest degree. This is a sin and transgression for which there is no forgiveness on the human level!

The Seductive Sin

My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. Say unto wisdom, Thou *art* my sister; and call understanding *thy* maidservant: That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger *which* flattereth with her words. Prov. 7:1-27.

These first verses of chapter 7 introduce the lengthy passage concerning the seductiveness of a harlot and a father's warnings to a young man, lest he be seduced by her. This passage begins with the father's commandments which are necessary for life. The father knows life-and-death issues which will face his young son. He must take father at his word—what a necessary and trusting place are given father's words! God's law is to be faithfully and carefully kept as the most sensitive part of the eye—carefully, with the utmost care and mindfulness. They are to be part of daily activity—bound to one's fingers and written on the heart! Wisdom in moral matters are to be

t with tenderness and loving watchfulness as one would treat a
 er and kinswoman. The father uses careful and tender language to
 h his son's heart and soul! All of this careful language to keep his
 from the strange woman, a prostitute, who is most skillful in
 luring young men into a life of sexual self-indulgence to their
 ruination. This entire chapter is then used to give a detailed account
 of seductive methods. She seeks him out as a lonesome wife whose
 husband is gone for a long time. She has prepared herself and her bed
 for him. She has made herself as attractive as possible. She seeks
 to overcome him with her charms. She promises that none will
 interfere with their love. The dart through his liver may refer to a
 fatally transmitted disease. Her house leads to death. Once this path
 has been chosen, there is no return, only destruction. The great
 action and seduction of sexual sin is that it is natural turned into the
 unnatural, and the greatest of blessings into the worst of curses.

Wisdom

Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She
 standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.
 She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the
 doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice *is* to the sons of man. O
 ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an
 understanding heart. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the
 opening of my lips *shall be* right things. Prov. 8:1–6.

This entire chapter and the following are given over to the cry of
 wisdom to the sons of men. In the previous chapter, wisdom cried in
 order to rescue and preserve the young man from the seductiveness of
 the harlot. Here, Wisdom cries from the high places of the city and the
 hills, openly, for all to hear and take heed. Some take this to be the
 voice of the pre-incarnate Son of God from the language used. Surely
 it is applicable. What becomes evident here? Wisdom is everywhere
 it cannot and must not be missed! Wisdom permeates the world;
 exhortation is to see it and understand it. The whole world—God's
 creation—is gauged for our learning and profit. We must be educated
 to understand this and learn from it. The issue is not that man should
 become a hermit and separate himself from all the world of creation,
 but learn from it and profit by it. The deciding factor is that we are
 equipped and provided with God's law and given the ability to
 properly discern things. Thus, wisdom will profit and yet we will not

seduced by the world about us! May this be true of us in God's providential purpose and power!

Spiritual Nature of Wisdom

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding. Prov. 9:10.

As seen throughout the Book of Proverbs, true wisdom has a logical basis. We must begin with the fear of the Lord. This puts things into proper focus. Without the fear of the Lord, we may be stuck in the morass of utter foolishness and blindness. Consider the brilliant scientists who study the universe and have made great discoveries, yet they lose all credibility because they espouse at the end of their learning the idea of evolution. They have come to the very door of truth, yet fumble and cannot enter because they lack the fear of the Lord! The fear of the Lord is within their grasp. And some scientists have actually stated that they espouse evolution because it is the only viable alternative to creationism! Such is the blindness of fallen, sinful man without the fear of the Lord!

The Next Generation

A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son *is* the heaviness of his mother. Prov. 10:1.

How children may be the joy or the sorrow of their parents! When children grow up and become independent adults, it is a great joy to see in them the teaching of the parent come to fruition! This is especially true with regard to spiritual graces. To see and to know that the same grace resides in the lives of the children, to discern a true biblical morality exhibited in the life, and to see the children, now parents, perpetuate the teachings of Scripture to the next generation as they had received them. And to know that the same Spirit of truth dwells in the grown child as it did the father. All of these things give us utmost joy! But there are occasions for heaviness if the son or daughter proves foolish, and has cast off even somewhat, the teaching of the parent! What has happened to the years of precious training and education? Has all been in vain? Are there not the characteristics which have rooted themselves in the next generation? Oh, what joy when, through the disappointment experienced by the parent, the saving grace of God intervenes and the young man or woman is truly converted! At times the Lord waits for

re years before He answers prayer and sends the messenger of life to the young person—and when He does, there is joy unspeakable!

Contrasts

A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son *is* the heaviness of his mother. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death. The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked. He becometh poor that dealeth *with* a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich. He that gathereth in summer *is* a wise son: *but* he that sleepeth in harvest *is* a son that causeth shame. Blessings *are* upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. The memory of the just *is* blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot. The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall. He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known. Prov. 10:1–9.

The Proverbs of Solomon begin with a lengthy series of contrasts. And this series stands the education of the child and youth. What is *now* is the present manifestation of the spiritual education which has preceded it. One consideration is helpful and hopeful. Although the child is now grown and independent, it may yet be that the grace of God in regeneration and conversion will evidence itself and the life will be spiritually transformed. Many have been reared in godly homes and families, yet have proven disappointing to parents and churches and pastors—yet have later been converted and become godly believers. Although we must not presume, we must believe and continue to intercede and beseech the Lord for the conversion of our children as long as is necessary. Only when death intervenes and seals the fate is hope gone. Ungodly men and women have been converted from wicked lives and sinful habits, or from the deadness of a mere carnal religion. We have taught and lived by example and sought to tell the truth, and disciplined our children, and now, we always have the truth of prayer and intercession. Let us use these as proven weapons in this warfare!

True Love

He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall. The mouth of a righteous *man is* a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins. Prov. 10:10–12.

In this passage, there is a series of false or deceptive things, mostly in the form of contrasts, then the passage ends with a surprising

ement concerning love: “love covereth a multitude of sins.” In this
ld of deception and evil, love stands unique. It overlooks a
titude of sins. The translation is difficult; the general idea is that
overlooks many faults. We all have our faults. We are imperfect
his world and in this life. But love looks deeper and judges the
ters of the heart. It explores the motives and takes into
sideration the weakness of man and the good intentions of those
seek to do good, yet who often fail in their attempts. This is the
der of Love. God takes into account our imperfections and failures
weighs them against our good intentions; we must do the same.

Saying Too Much

n the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth
his lips *is* wise. Prov. 10:19.

The tongue is the most troublesome member of our body (Jas.
ἥ). Although small in the physical realm, it is great and
rmining in the moral, social and spiritual realms. While other
nbers may reveal physical strength, beauty or age, the tongue
als the heart and gives a picture of the state of the soul. The whole
sonality can be expressed through the tongue, and often is! There
not be a man or woman but who wishes that he or she has not said
ie things which been uttered in the presence of others. Inward
trations, likes and dislikes, bitterness or illicit love, anger or
action are expressed through the tongue. The tongue may be give
rance to ardent prayer and fervent petition to God for the good and
ls of others; but it may also be used to destroy the very lives of
se we despise. The tongue is a glorious instrument in the
laration of the gospel—that the troublesome tongue may be
essed to the glory of the cause of Christ is wonderful—but may
be harnessed to a hateful heart and mind to destroy the lives of
rs. Such is the tongue! Only God through the Holy Spirit can
rtify the tongue and submit it to the declaration of saving truth. In
inary conversation, let our words be few and well-considered
ore uttered.

Preaching

The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.
Prov. 10:21.

Taking these words in a spiritual sense, we may apply them to the
presentation of the gospel and Divine truth. What a seemingly

the plain and fallible method God has ordained to spread the gospel and work of His kingdom! Preaching and teaching—speaking with the plain words easily spoken and easily forgotten! Words easily understood and their meaning often obscured by the subject-matter considered and the language spoken. Words limited by vocabulary and diction; phrases and terms which may well seem strange to the hearers; doctrines before unknown; spiritual realities easily understood or simple and worn—this is preaching! Yet this is what the Lord has commissioned his preachers to do—preach the Word! Declare Divine truth! Herald the good news of the gospel! Vocally call men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation! On the other side, the Holy Spirit is at work, opening the mind and heart to receive the truth, and engaging the will to receive it savingly. The gospel is mysteriously received into the souls of the hearers in a transforming fashion and lives are forever changed. What gives preaching its strength and power is not the preacher's voice or reasoning, but the effectual work of God's Spirit! The tools may seem primitive, but the skill is with the Master!

Sudden Judgment!

As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no *more*: but the righteous is in everlasting foundation. Prov. 10:25.

Whirlwinds are awesome. They are small tornadoes, running along the ground and moving rapidly, pushed by great wind masses. As destructive as their larger, more massive counterparts, these move along the ground throwing dirt, dust and trash into the air. They are very interesting to watch racing cross the desert plains and hills as precursors to thunderstorms or running alongside their core. Creation—natural revelation—God revealed through nature (Rom. 1:20)—is meant to teach us many lessons. What does the whirlwind teach us? According to our text, it teaches the suddenness of passing of the concentrated windstorm. It moves rapidly. Thus, it comes a suitable symbol of the suddenness of Divine judgment. The wicked are here one moment and gone the next. How short life is! And yet it may suddenly change and be ended—pass away. What a fitting description of the wicked. Here one moment; gone the next. So the wicked will suddenly be gone, passed away from this life and swept away in judgment! A wise man will prepare for this unavoidable sudden

nent; the wicked will be taken unaware. How will this time find
? Will you pass from this life unprepared or prepared?

Godliness in Everything

A false balance *is* abomination to the LORD: but a just weight *is* his
delight. Prov. 11:1.

What does weighing things have to do with one's relationship to
I? The answer is: Everything! The Lord God is the God of all the
h. He requires honesty and faithfulness in all of man's matters,
uding business—buying and selling. The particular action is that of
ghing produce or money in a business transaction. To use a false
nce is to be guilty of falsehood to the customer, and to do so in the
sence of God, who is omnipresent and omniscient. The reign and
of God goes far beyond outward things. They go to the very heart
any matter with God's final word of judgment! He knows the
ives and thoughts of every human being, and judges their
eptiveness in business matters. He further knows the lust in the
rt and look of both the buyer and the purchaser if such exists. He
ws the covetousness of the one who intends to purchase any object
product with the profit from his unjust gain gotten by the false
nces. No sin, however remote, is exempted! God is fully aware of
sins involved, even thought the sinner is not! And He takes every
of these into account! And He hates the very means to illegitimate
by fraud! No sin remains hidden. No sin can be hidden from our
l. On the other hand, every transaction done legally and faithfully
nown to him. This is how deep blessing or a curse may run.
esty is never a mere surface matter, but reaches deeply into every
an act.

Secret Contempt

He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of
understanding holdeth his peace. Prov. 11:12.

To despise someone is to hold that person in contempt. This may
done publicly or done privately. Private or secret contempt is the
ude of the self-righteous, or the one who believes himself to be
rior in some way above all others. He says to himself or to a
fidant something derogatory about a person whom he openly holds
friend but secretly despises. At times, even the closest and greatest
riends are not immune from such slander. We must admit that even
best of us have flaws and lack in some areas. We have those we

sider as friends, and how it causes us sorrow or anger to hear some
etly deriding us for some failure or characteristic. This separates
very chief of friends and destroys all trust. Good friends may
wise see faults and negative characteristics, but dare not speak of
1 and overlook them because they are true friends, and love does
look a multitude of faults and shortcomings! We have no perfect
nds, save one, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Others, we simply
look faults and shortcomings because they are our friends and they
wise overlook ours. True friendship which understands and accepts
rs as they are is a blessed thing in this imperfect world of sinners!
uld we only desire perfect friends, then we should give ourselves
rayer for these, and trust the they will not turn against us for our
fections!

Watch Your Words!

A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit
concealeth the matter. Prov. 11:13.

Most people talk too much. Private matters are often made public
secrets are unwittingly revealed. Such is human nature for most of
Few there seem to be who can keep a matter completely secret.
s may well be a breach of love, as we harm the relationship we
e with one person when revealing something to another. Some
gs are to be held private and within the family, and it is often left
he children to reveal such things to those outside the family circle.
en such things are divulged, it is best to turn a deaf ear and not help
ad the gossip. Of course, much of this is against human nature. It
human nature to perpetuate gossip. Sins of the tongue are
espread and harmful, and most should be left alone. Considering
widespread nature of gossip, let us be quick to do what one has
ed “gossiping the gospel,” and furthering the truth of salvation by
versation. This is a sanctified way of spreading the truth which the
d is bound to bless!

Beauty and the Beast

As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is
without discretion. Prov. 11:22.

What opposites are here contrasted! A swine's snout; a fair
nan. Yet, in this world and in this life such may be brought
together by the reality of sin and indiscretion. A swine's snout is
filled with muck from rooting in the most filthy places; a fair

man is the object of beauty, purity and desire. The jewel of gold in the swine's snout, that part of the swine which is used to root in the dirt and more gets the most corrupted and filthy. So is a beautiful woman who allows herself to become soiled with loose living and corrupted with immorality. How pervasive is sin! How corrupting is the power of immorality! How wicked that such beauty is soiled by a filthy, depraved soul! Yet this is true in multiplied occasions! Beauty is irreparably marred and lost forever through the depravity of sin! Oh, young women should keep themselves for husband and marriage, to enjoy the blessing of God, and not soil themselves without necessity through indulgence in sin! Once debauched, it can never be recovered!

Selfishness

He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing *shall* come upon the head of him that selleth *it*. Prov. 11:26.

What is here an individual restriction on a given commodity is in our day the action of companies and corporations. Withholding a commodity in order to raise the price through scarcity is a common practice. But the Lord may take notice of such unethical business practices. Can we not make some pertinent spiritual application here? What of those who have the truth of God pertaining to salvation—the gospel—and never share it? Some are not missions-minded and do not feel the great burden laid upon them to send out the gospel of God's love to starving sinners. Their attitude is often that it is the work of teachers and missionaries to proclaim and broadcast the truth, but not the burden of the individual Christian. But this is not so! It is the spiritual burden of the church—but the church is made up of individuals—every believer has such a burden upon him. He is to support the work of missions through his church and must evangelize personally those whom he meets. Being a gospel witness begins on a personal basis! Are we not missionaries to our families, friends and fellow associates?

Idolatry

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a green branch. Prov. 11:28.

Everyone trusts in something or someone. Trust is an inescapable part of life in this world. To trust is to have faith in. Some have their faith in money, others in business, relatives or investments. Others

t in God. Whatever we trust in is, in reality, the object of our faith. Those whose trust is in money are idolaters. Their worship consists in daily checking their investments in the financial page or watching the stock market. Idolatry is very subtle and very widespread. Most are quite unaware that they are idolaters. But whatever is first in our lives, takes our time and energies, becomes our suit and is the source of our hope and blessing is our “god.” Gold and silver are the “gods” of many, even if not molded in the form of an idol!

An Inheritance?

He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart. Prov. 11:29.

In almost every society, the family’s possessions and property are passed down from one generation to another. Each generation bears great responsibility. But now and then there may be one who squanders this inheritance or brings shame upon or a lawsuit against the family and spoils the inheritance. What a tragedy! The family comes bereft of their inheritance and loses their reputation or good name in the community. Such may lose everything and inherit the wind! How foolish children may break the parents’ hearts! How only one person can bring an entire family into disrespect or ruin! Think of the damage done by some personalities in Scripture: Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron (Lev. 10:1ff), Hophni and Phineas, the sons of Eli (1 Sam. 2:33–34), Absalom, the son of David, etc. The same principle is at work in spiritual matters. A wicked son or daughter is devastating to the family! How we must teach, instruct and discipline our children and pray for them! Godly children are among the greatest of blessings (3 Jn. 1:4)—and these are themselves a godly inheritance.

Spiritual Wisdom

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. Prov. 11:30.

The latter part of this verse has become a motto in many churches and religious institutions. The meaning has been shifted from evangelism to evangelism, which is legitimate by way of clarification. The first part of this verse also deserves attention. The purpose of our lives is to bring forth life! If this first is true, the second will follow. A study of the lives of great men of God reveals that they were personal “soul-winners” in their daily lives as the

opportunity arose. George Muller the godly and great man of prayer of Bristol, England, was an ardent soul-winner, as was C. H. Spurgeon, pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. John Hyde, known as "Praying Hyde," the American missionary to India, was a soul-winner through prayer! We have access to the same power and force in our lives that they had in theirs. Let us pray to be as useful in the Kingdom of God as they were! Reading their life histories and recounting of their experiences will revive our souls and lead us to be fruitful and useful in the work of God!

Discipline

Who so loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish. Prov. 12:1.

The term "instruction" implies discipline and helps explain the training of sons in ancient Israel. Godly discipline was an inherent part of instructing the child and youth. This necessarily included both positive and negative parts of instruction. Man, it must be remembered, is now fallen and sinful; he needs discipline. Mere instruction without discipline lacks, as it does not deal with fallen, sinful human nature. Discipline helps straighten out the crookedness of man's inherent rebellion against correction. It is this corrective aspect which is often remembered when other aspects have been long forgotten. As the years go by and the youth becomes a man, he sees the worth and necessity of discipline. He has learned to be reproved and corrected. His person was trained to be mature through instruction enforced by discipline. Is not the same truth spiritually? To increase righteousness without correction often profits little, and we begin to think of God as indulgent and that He overlooks sin. Such, however, is not the case. Discipline in the spiritual realm fixes the instruction and brings remembrance of any deviation and native rebellion. Divine chastening is necessary to spiritual maturity (Heb. 12:3–11).

Divine Favor

A good *man* obtaineth favour of the LORD: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn. Prov. 12:2.

Are there truly good men? Yes, by the grace of God, for goodness is the fruit of the Spirit, and so a matter of grace (Gal. 5:22). No man is good by nature (Rom. 3:12). If we would be truly good, we must be filled with the Spirit. Such are spiritually mature and fitted to be useful in the Kingdom of God. These obtain favor of the Lord. They do good

do not seek harm or wrong to be suffered by others. What a blessing are such among believers! Then there are those whose lives corrupt and who seek to harm others. This sadly includes believers who are motivated out of jealousy or seek preeminence without holiness, as well as unbelievers whose native behavior is sinful and selfish. How we need to grow spiritually, seeking that maturity which Christ-like and beneficial.

Wives: Blessed and Cursed

A virtuous woman *is* a crown to her husband: but she that maketh herself shamed *is* as rottenness in his bones. Prov. 12:4.

In the marriage relationship, the husband and wife are rarely on the same spiritual plane. One or the other will be advanced over the other. At times, one will be converted and the other not. God has ordained marriage for the good of mankind. In this relationship, the husband is the God-ordained head and the woman [wife] is to be in submission to her husband. This submission is not tedious if the husband is Christ-like and understanding, ruling in love. As some husbands fail in their headship, so some wives fail in their submission and bring shame upon their husbands. This discredits the religious and spiritual standing of both husband and wife. Even if the husband is holy, the submissive state of the wife may be a challenge for the wife. The wife, as a fallen, sinful daughter of Eve, naturally revolts against God's command. It takes grace for both the husband and the wife, to be consistently scriptural. But this is the path of obedience and therefore Divine blessing!

Kindness

A righteous *man* regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked *are* cruel. Prov. 12:10.

Man's treatment of animals, especially domesticated animals under his ownership and control, are to mirror his behavior as the representative-bearer of God. Wild animals could be hunted and killed for food. Domesticated animals not used for food, but for beasts of burden used in pulling, plowing and packing, were to be cared for. There is no place for animal cruelty. Animals were servants and were to be used for. God cares for all His creatures, and especially those used to help man with his tasks. Man is to behave the same. Domesticated, trained animals such as beasts of burden, were valuable and to be used for as valuable assets. One of the marks of righteous man was

he cared for the life of his animals. God cares for man as His image and image-bearer; man is to care for the animals as his tenants. Some are cruel to brute beasts. These naturally treat animals in a cruel manner and take out their frustrations upon them. They do so because they can—and that is wrong. We must care for all of God's creation. Those who are cruel reveal their attitude toward both God and beasts.

Self-Righteousness

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. Prov. 12:15.

Fallen, sinful man is self-righteous by nature. This is part of being our own “god” and determining for himself what is right and wrong. He lives without thought to God, and believes he is independent. He receives no counsel and, unless pressed and brought to the end of himself, asks for no counsel. This is man by nature. When the Lord begins a man's salvation, often the first thing He does is reveal to him his insufficiency. This troubles him, and finally brings him to consider his plight before God. It is ever our need that brings us to Christ for deliverance. Once we have come to the end of ourselves, and are stripped of our own supposed righteousness and abilities, we find that we are utterly spiritually bankrupt and utterly unfit to stand before God. Saving conviction of sin bars every avenue of escape and we are forced to come to terms with our lost and sinful state. God saves sinners who cannot save themselves. Until this point is reached, man will not flee to religion or any other means to deliver himself. But once fully brought to inescapable conviction and condemnation, he must surrender. This is why defective religious teaching, which deviates from the Scriptures in the matters of conviction, repentance, faith, regeneration and conversion are so dangerous!

Deceitful Doctrine

Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy. Prov. 12:20.

Deceitful doctrine in the history of Christianity in the matter of salvation has done horrible damage to the souls of men! In much teaching today, the meanings have been changed or drained of their significance: the idea of “free will.” This means that the will was not affected by The Fall. To be saved, the will is simply re-directed to choose Christ. This is called “decisionism,” and differs greatly for

version which is an about-face or reversal of the life. Repentance reduced to being sorry for sin. Judas was sorry and grieved greatly for his betrayal, but he never forsook his sin. Salvation is turning from sin and forsaking it. Faith is belief, a life-changing belief which sees Jesus as Lord of the life. Saving faith is further by or through Christ, not because of faith. Many teach “because of faith” because faith has been seen as mere human trust and native to the sinner—not the gift of God. The only difference is where such faith is turned or focused. What is left when the essentials of salvation have been completely nullified and drained of saving efficacy? A “decisionism” rather than the biblical conversion!

Loss of Purpose

The slothful *man* roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man *is* precious. Prov. 12:27.

The purpose of hunting animals is to provide meat, or skins for clothing and use. Here the reference is to food. Like man things in this sinful world, the primary purpose is often forgotten. Some engage in hobby hunting—taking an animal for a trophy, not for food. Some hunt merely for the thrill of hunting and even leave the meat to rot! Hunting then becomes a thing of pride, not provision and usefulness. Hunting is a sport which entails much work. The animal is skinned and hauled out to the vehicle and then butchered. The meat is then preserved for food then and later. All of this necessitates several skills, much time and toil. It is exhausting labor and the meat is highly prized and eaten with much satisfaction. Hunting is a responsible action from beginning to end and necessitates a number of hard-learned skills and much energy expended. And the meat is precious and not to be wasted. The man often changes the purpose of this endeavor and reduces it to recreation through waste and loss of purpose.

Life Now and Then

In the way of righteousness *is* life; and *in* the pathway thereof there *is* no death. Prov. 12:28.

There is our earthly life, which lasts a few years, and there is a heavenly life which lasts forever. If we have no true spiritual life here, we shall have no true, spiritual life there. This life is in the path of righteousness. This must never be forgotten! This life goes beyond the physical, the social, even the religious. It is essentially spiritual. In this heavenly existence, spiritual life is characterized by being scriptural, and

inhibiting those blessed characteristics which betoken spiritual life among men. Actually, our heavenly life is one which is fitted for heaven but will be lived out on earth!—a renewed and re-created earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. 3:9–13). Are we fitted for such life? Do we contemplate this at times? We should. We should with anticipation consider the future life with God in Christ! How this would ease the trials and adversities which are present and troublesome! There is coming a time when these will all be past and shall enter the glorious, blessed time of our existence! Remember, this is the way of righteousness—no righteousness, no life!

Negative Instruction

A wise son *heareth* his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke. Prov. 13:1.

This statement implies that a faithful father will readily rebuke his son for his own good. Adequate instruction must be both negative and positive. A faithful father will do what he can if he loves his son and wants him to be diligent in life and consistent in action. What he does, he does in love. If the son understands this, it takes the hurt out of the rebuke. If not, then the son may get very discouraged. The Lord is sometimes severe in His discipline if His child is not serious or plays truant. Discipline is serious business and for our good. Thus it is often hard to be endured, but never what we should get and would get if our Heavenly Father did not love us!

A Fat Soul

The soul of the sluggard desireth, and *hath* nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat. Prov. 13:4.

In this life, unless one receives some large stipend, desire and effort must be combined to achieve success and riches. The sluggard desires, but does not put forth the effort, and so his desire fails in frustration. The sluggard is disappointed through his indolence; the diligent shall be satisfied because he will put forth the effort to achieve his desire. The reference to a “fat soul” is interesting. Today, “fat” is considered bad, and people seek to be “fit,” “thin,” healthy-looking. They want to be attractive, not “fat”! But “fat” in Scripture is at times a synonym for prosperity (Neh. 8:10; 9:25; Psa. 92:14; Prov. 11:25; 30:28; Isa. 58:17). Let us, then, be “fat” in a spiritual sense, not physical. We must shake off the dust of sloth; we must seek to be zealous in spiritual matters. We have the Word of God before us

the Spirit of God to guide and enable us! Much is lost because the it of sloth occupies the heart of many. Religion makes them rous of blessed things, but sloth causes them to lose zeal so they h but cannot get beyond the desire! It is the diligent who shall iver the blessing!

The Rich Poor

There is that maketh himself rich, yet *hath* nothing: *there is* that maketh himself poor, yet *hath* great riches. Prov. 13:7.

This is both a proverb and a riddle. What is it that makes rich and et poor, and is poor and yet rich? The contrast may be solved by a sideration of the material and the spiritual. Many a wealthy person nis world's goods and treasures is spiritually bankrupt, while many) are spiritually wealthy have little or nothing of this world's goods. s was true of the Apostle Paul. He was the greatest missionary who r lived, and yet he was bivocational—he often earned his support those with him by doing the work of a “tent maker.” Our Lord is greatest example by far! (2 Cor. 8:9). What contrasts! Yet the work)od is rich, indeed! God's riches cares for the service rendered and vides more than this world can offer! First, the Lord is the Lord r all the earth and can and does supply the greatest need. Second, : hearts and souls of all men are in God's hands and He moves rs to support God's ministers. Third, Some may be fed prison —fed and incarcerated by the state. Those called by God to the istry must concern themselves about the message to be proclaimed leave the support to the Lord. He knows how to balance the books!

Delayed Blessing

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but *when* the desire cometh, *it is* a tree of life. Prov. 13:12.

It has been said that “however the child of God is often tried in his 1, but never disappointed in his hope” [Bridges]. Perhaps most ls consist, at least in part, of hope deferred. We wait and wait and t, and still the anticipated blessing and answer to prayers does not erialize. Perhaps the answer is critical and the issues are very anding. We know that God is able. The test must be for the growth ur faith, not the ability of God to give and provide! What if our yers were always answered immediately and to the full? What 1? Would we grow in faith and perseverance? We would be God's iled children and any delay would be crushing! Our faith would

be that of little spoiled children who always want their needs met immediately and have no patience! We grow in faith through trials and suffering—which are not joyful in themselves, but trying and cause faith to be sorely tested at times. Yet when the answer comes and prayers are answered, what joy and thanksgiving are ours!

The Commandment

Who so despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded. Prov. 13:13.

Here, the “word,” referring to the Word of God is declared to be “commandment.” Today, Christianity by and large has forgotten and failed to see the relevance of the Decalogue, Moral Law or Ten Commandments. Which of the Commandments is not relevant today? What disobedience is not sin? Is there any Commandment which is obsolete? Some might say “The Fourth about the Sabbath.” Yet we have

the Lord’s Day, which has replaced it. The Penalties are not immediate, but the substance of each Commandment is reiterated in the New Testament and the Fourth Commandment has a future and eternal fulfillment in the eternal Sabbath of creation. What is the purpose of the Moral Law? To reveal sin as God sees it and to convict us in as it reveals the moral character of God (Ezk. 36:25–27; Rom. 7:1–5; 1 Tim. 1:8–11). Those who consider the Moral Law to be irrelevant should re-read the New Testament! What is its relevance?

The Law’s content has been modified and its administration has been changed. First, the ceremonial [sacrificial] and civil laws were fulfilled in Israel as a nation, and do not pertain to us. Second, its administration has been changed. It is no longer merely written on tablets, but upon the heart.

The Company We Keep

He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Prov. 13:20.

The company we keep and the companions we choose will determine much of our thinking and our actions. Few of us would purposely choose the ungodly for our companions, yet we may be misled by activities or interests common to ourselves and those who are leading sinful lives—the ungodly. For instance, a man may love to hunt, which is legitimate. But to do so, he may be tempted to resort to accompanying the ungodly. If he does so, he will be expected to engage in all the illicit activities of the others—trespassing on private

l, hunting after hours [if the given state has set hours for hunting
ain game], and a host of others regulations and game laws. Further,
as voluntarily submitted himself to the company of such men with
r ungodly talk and lifestyle. Perhaps this association is for a sport
re social activities put him in danger of coming down to the
odly lifestyle and conversation of open sinners. Or a hobby, which
ld mean being in the company of the wicked and in order to be
epted, to become one of them. There is a host of things which are
timate in themselves for others which the godly man may not
lge himself without violating his conscience and grieving the
rit of God.

Leaving This Life

A good *man* leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the
wealth of the sinner *is* laid up for the just. Prov. 13:22.

There are many things about this life which are misunderstood.
Scripture declares that we will take nothing with us from this life
n we depart: “For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is*
ain we can carry nothing out.” (1 Tim. 6:7). Yet there is one
ement which gives us some idea that something in the way of reward,
sing or influence may follow or in some way be recognized:
essed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith
Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do
ow them” (Rev. 14:13). We may leave an inheritance for our children
his life, and also leave behind, we trust a wealth of influence and a
imony for an inheritance. The text, of course, deals with a material
ritance. Far better a spiritual inheritance which has enriched many in
own lifetimes and will continue to do so after we are gone. Think of
great men of the past whose testimony for Christ has been left in
ks and memories! This rich influence many still inherit to the good of
y more!

A Contradiction?

he that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him
hasteneth him betimes. Prov. 13:24.

The world's parallel saying: “Spare the rod and spoil the child.”
course, today physical discipline is frowned upon and in most
es even illegal. Of course, the Scriptures are never wrong! And
is seen in the awful lack of physical discipline in our homes today!
at might need comment is that such discipline ought not to be done

nger, but in love. It is sad that even Christian children resent the sical discipline they received growing up. They have fallen victims he thinking of the world and fail to see such in biblical terms. The nterpart—biblical discipline—is very painful...and meant to be! cipline is to bring things to the mind as a preventative and so must mpressed upon mind and body Heb. 12:3–13). Those who object uld take up the matter with the Lord. Love without discipline is stionable and may degenerate into mere frustration and lack of iority. It is just and even blessed to see the parent and the child gle tears in the act of discipline!

A Wise Woman

Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands. Prov. 14:1.

A wise or godly wife and mother has more than enough to cause grief and take her time. She is not the head of the home; this is left er husband. But she is in the heart and soul of the home. Literally rything inside the house reflects her personality: organization, ngements, order, colors, hangings, the table, the food and cooking. manages the home and fixes the meals, controls the diet and sees he needs of her household. She wears not many hats, but many ns! She is the center of the home, yet its greatest servant. The e is a refuge, a place of safety and love if the woman is wise. She hes the clothes, mends them, and sees that her family is properly hed. Her responsibility is very great. And she serves out of love! e foolish woman is lazy, leaving necessary labor undone. The whole e is out of order if the wife is sick or refuses to do her share. The 1 comes home and rests while his wife labors to cook, prepare the d and make the house a home. Sad it is when this is not rewarded the wife is taken for granted. Blessed, indeed, is a home with a ly wife and mother!

Mocking at Sin

Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous *there is* favour. Prov. 14:9.

Sin is hellish. It threw the human race into ruin and cast an angelic t out of heaven. It devastated the human race at its beginning and tinues to slay its untold numbers with deceitfulness and auchery. It fills the dungeons of hell and sentences to an eternal th. Yet fools make a mock at sin! How can this be? It is because

do not see it as it is. They see the stupid acts of sinners. They hear uncouth things men say. They listen to the sexual innuendos and pleasure in the fumbling attempts of a man or woman engaged in attempted seduction. They laugh at drunks and find humor in their stumbling and mumbling. Such are the fools. Sad creatures! They must serve wickedness to find humor! These are strangers to wholesome joy; their depraved minds and hearts are so warped by sin that they cannot see humor or laugh unless there is some wickedness present. How different with the righteous! These are grieved with the foolish and wicked, and find edification in wholesome speech and actions. In the conversation of godly men and companions be edifying and the speech to a God-honoring level!

Wrong Thoughts

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Prov. 14:12.

Here we are not talking about the rebellious nature of fallen, sinful man, which seeks to break God's law on every occasion, but something much more tragic—man's suicidal plunge into the realm of death when he does his best and truly believes that he is doing what is right! Sad, indeed! This reveals the extent of man's condition by reason of his alienation from God. What hope is there for such an individual? Even when he considers his instinctive transgressions of God's Commands, and outwardly, for whatever reason, thinks he is conforming to what is right, is still wrong and sinning against God! This reveals the extent of human depravity and the spiritual blindness which accompanies it. What hope is there for such? The essence of the matter is—he needs to be saved from himself! Nothing less will do. He is so utterly lost and undone, divorced from the truth that he needs to be delivered from the very depths of his soul outwardly, and every part of his being. This takes an omnipotent act of God and an unpeakable love!

Mirth

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness. Prov. 14:13.

Mirth [light-hearted laughter, chuckle, head-shaking or nodding and so on] fits many occasions for the unconverted who live in a make-everything-even world. There is the mirth of the indecent, the comical, the embarrassing, the sexual innuendo, the double meaning, the ribald or

suous story, and irreverent humor, laughing at the expense of ther. These are the expressions of the unregenerate heart attempting rse laughter (Eccl. 7:3–6). Mirth is easily disappointing without ie coarse remark to make it attractive to the mind. So the mind of unconverted seeks out some laughter or jovial comment in a sinful ld which is destined for doom. But the end is sorrowful, taking the d off serious maters for only a moment. Mirth is one of many mpts at avoid thinking about the end—sickness, death, judgment awaits the unconverted at the end of this life. The immediate ids the ultimate and inevitable. How much better to discuss the need epentance and the hope of salvation!

Backsliding

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good nan *shall be satisfied* from himself. Prov. 14:14.

It is common to speak of the “backslidden Christian.” But this son does not exist in the sense used today. The term is a translation or misinterpretation of four Heb. terms, all of which in apostasy. It is an Old Testament term never used in the New tament. It means to throw off the yoke, stand off or against, turn y, not to slide back into sin. Some professing Christians do, ed, apostatize (Heb. 3:12), and turn away from the truth. These e never been converted, and eventually their true nature is exposed. must take care not to invent a new doctrine that gives the religious fessor a hiding place from being discovered for his false profession.

Modern Christianity has invented several terms that provide or for mere professors: the “carnal Christian,” “decision” acing “conversion,” and “repentance” meaning, not confessing and aking sin, but merely being “sorry” for sin. These are critical es! May we never be guilty of providing an escape for the mere fessing Christian!

Confidence

A wise *man* feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is onfident. Prov. 14:16.

Not all fear is wrong. There is a healthy fear of wrong doing, of , of lightly sinning against God. We should all fear sin and its sequences. Many are morally blind, and do not see the evil in gs. Their senses are geared to the externals, to the physical and

ial, but blind to the moral and spiritual issues. A wise man senses a spiritual perspective which sees the evil in things which pass by unawares. Some consider themselves brave or confident, and so rush into evil; others sense or see the evil and depart; but not cowardly to fear and depart from evil. The Lord protects the son who perceives the evil in things and protects him. The fool is not and is confident, or so he thinks. Actually, he is blind to the evil so snared in wickedness.

Quick Tempered

He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated. Prov. 14:17.

With maturity comes judgment. Often a hasty spirit or being quick tempered is characteristic of youth and immaturity. However, some are characteristically quick-tempered throughout their entire lives. This is a positive trait, but one which is negative and destructive. It often equals a lack of judgment and should be shunned, if possible. Rarely, however, does a hasty spirit or being quick tempered reveals itself as a positive asset! Being thoughtful, thinking a matter through before acting, possessing patience—these are the positive signs of a mature son. We are often tested as to our patience and self-control. A son given to anger shows that he is immature and is not in the habit of thinking matters through to arrive at sound judgment. This is described as “dealing foolishly” in given instances. May the Lord deliver us from such actions (Col. 3:8), and not allow sin to gain the advantage.

Planning Evil

Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. Prov. 14:22.

The heart of man is ruled by either good or evil. The believer, as object of God’s grace, is predisposed toward good; the unbeliever, a graceless person, is predisposed toward evil. This bias toward either good or evil is revealed at times as it grows and overcomes the negative unbelief and tendencies of human nature, and assumes control of the personality. We see this in the case of Haman (Esth. 3:5ff), offended at Mordecai the Jew, purposed to slaughter all the Jews of the kingdom. The brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery in Egypt for years thought him dead. King Saul sought for years to murder David. The Scribes and Pharisees sought to murder our Lord and do it

uch a way that it would be considered legal. Evil possessed these
1 and controlled them, but in each case, except in that of our Lord,
r plans were foiled. In our Lord's case, He gave His life voluntarily
our redemption and so their plan was fulfilled, but not as they
nded. Thus, we note that man, although depraved, is not as bad as
ould be—unless God gives him over to his evil plans. Sinful man
ot as “free” as he believes himself to be—he is a slave to sin and,
to himself—and moreso!

A True Witness

A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful *witness* speaketh lies.
Prov. 14:25.

This passage may be taken in a true, spiritual, evangelical sense.
: deliverance of souls may well depend on the nature of one's
ness. The Lord has ordained that the gospel be spread throughout
world and broadcast through preaching, and the preaching of truth
iat of vocally declaring the good news of the gospel. This remains
:, even if the means are electronic [radio, TV, tapes, CDs, etc.].
rything comes down to the sound of a human voice intelligently
culating the truth of the gospel to men (Mk. 16:15). The result in
providence and blessing of God is the deliverance of souls! Our
cern is that the message is that of the truth of the gospel and not a
ted or garbled message or one which has departed from the truth.
: messages must be as clear as possible and as complete as time will
w. Each message ought to be complete in itself, i.e., it should stand
ts own as a complete gospel message. This is absolutely critical, as
ie may hear only once; they need to hear the complete message of
ing truth! Clear, concise and complete—and may the Lord bless
a preaching with fruitfulness!

Hope in Death

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath
hope in his death. Prov. 14:32.

The only people who think about death in a positive way and
ak often about it, are believers. We can, by faith, speak about this
t enemy” without fear, as a fact known to us through the
ptures. The sting of death as a penal judgment and eternal
demnation has been removed. The unconverted are exceedingly
ated or fearful to talk about death in a serious conversation because
/ are subject to it as a sentence of condemnation, and so they seek

void it as a subject for conversation. Indeed, a man's religion and personal attitude toward death is one of the best indicators of the state of his soul. Remember, it is the righteous who has hope in his death!

Hope for Our Nation

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.
Prov. 14:34.

Never has our nation [2023] become so lawless, turbulent, divisive and irrational. Crimes are committed freely and left unfinished under the guise of "activism." Destructive behavior, includes burning down areas of cities and riots against law

enforcement. Murders have increased dramatically and senseless deaths and attacks have multiplied. What is at its lowest ebb? Religion. And not simply religion, but historic and biblical religion. Our country has witnessed great times of revival and spiritual awakening in the past, renewing true religion and transforming society. How we need such today! The last great time of spiritual awakening came in the early 1900s. How we need a revival of the Christian religion in power! There have been seven eras of revival and awakening in our nation's history (c.1734–c.1907). Each came through fervent prayer and intercession. Will Christians begin to pray once more, until the Lord is pleased to answer and move mightily once more?

A Soft Answer

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.
Prov. 15:1.

We are sinners, the progeny of Adam and Eve. Even as Christians, we are still tempted to react in self defense much like the unconverted, replying in a strongly worded response to any verbal attack. It takes much grace not to respond in like manner. Better to answer softly than we have to apologize for our attitude! The last thing anyone expects when he or she attacks us verbally and seeks a confrontation, is a kind answer! Thus, such an answer carries much force. It also convicts the other person by its very utterance. God can give us grace for such an occasion and for a testimony against those who give vent to their feelings with angry words. When one speaks unadvisedly, he is

challenging someone he makes an opponent for the sake of argument. words are weapons. This is verbal combat and he is ready to attack anything which might be said—except a soft answer! May our gracious God grant us the grace and wisdom to answer softly and disarm our opponent!

Right Use of Knowledge

The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. Prov. 15:2.

The tongue is a powerful instrument. There is a right and also a wrong use of the tongue. The wise man uses and controls his tongue; a foolish man is used and controlled by his tongue. The one considers before he speaks; the other speaks without thinking (Eccl.

1 Pet. 3:10). Christians have great opportunities for the use of the tongue. It is by speaking the truth of the gospel that men are saved (Matt. 28:18–20). One right use of the tongue is quoting Scripture. Scripture is the very Word of God. When stored up in our minds and expended at the proper time, it is like ammunition fired from a press in battle. The power of a Christian's influence is often what he has on his lips. In an exchange of words, it is the Word of God which possesses the power to awaken, convict and bring to repentance and faith. It is the Word of God that alone can speak peace to the heart and life. We must commit the Scriptures to memory, keep them fresh in our minds or hearts, then speak them at the proper time. The Spirit of God will both give us the words to speak and the time in which to speak them. It is our part to store them and have them at hand!

God Sees

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Prov. 15:3.

What a man believes about God says much about the man himself. However, what he believes about God may be true or false. His thinking may be defective and non-Christian, or it may be biblical and astute. Scripture declares that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." God sees. He sees everything. There is nothing which He does not see. To some, this is discomfiting, even terrifying; to others it is comforting and reinforces their faith. It is often that "the Lord sees the evil and the good." Nothing escapes His eyes or His mind. He is no mere observer. He is God and so discerns and interprets what is seen and spoken. Man cannot hide his sinfulness

n God. All is exposed. How many unsaved people ever consider ? They seem to think that they can hide from God—their concept of God is unscriptural and to them God is very limited. May their eyes be opened and their consciences aroused to consider that God knows all! This may lead to their salvation!

A Father's Instruction

A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. Prov. 15:5.

Obedience to parents is part of natural law. In the animal world the human, parents provide the example for the young. Further, obedience to a father's instruction is an essential part of the spiritual man, presupposing that the father is a spiritual person. How much is lost when a young man refuses the instructions of his father, especially if his father is a righteous man! In a sinful, wicked world one must ever be prepared by godly instruction or left adrift to wreck on the rocky shoals of unbelief, sinfulness, wickedness and godlessness. Due to original sin and a sinful nature shipwreck is unavoidable. A ship under full sail, under a stiff breeze, and without a rudder is a young man who is without instruction. The modern cry is for less parental discipline of a disciplinary character and more individual freedom. But what has the result been? More lawlessness, irrationality, immaturity, scandal, modern society does not believe in the inherent sinfulness of man by nature. The parents are often considered "old fashioned" and archaic. Parental discipline is considered too restrictive. Some men believe that man's "free will" will lead him aright!? Irrationality and sinful thinking are not limited to the youth alone! Blessed is the young man who regards his father's instruction!

Religion or Prayer

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. Prov. 15:8.

Man is religious by nature, for he was created as the image-bearer of God, distinct from either animals or angels. But the human race rebelled in Adam as their covenant head and so religion, or one's relationship to God, is fatally flawed and unacceptable. From the Fall onward, man has had to approach God by means of a sacrifice. Shed blood must make man acceptable. All sacrificial blood pointed ahead to the bloodshed and perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The saving Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone saves man.

n mere religion and unites him to the Lord and Savior. We need more than mere religion. We need our faith or trust in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. Then our sacrifice will be accepted and we will be justified or counted righteous in His sight. Then will our prayers be accepted and our worship sanctified.

Bad Religion?

The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright *is* his delight. The way of the wicked *is* an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness. Prov. 15:8–9.

Not all religion is true. The religion of many is not only false, it is an abomination to the Lord. What is the deciding factor? Why is the religion of some legitimate and that of others wicked? The difference is two-fold: first, the principle of acceptance with God. God accepts one religion and worship but not others. True religion is the religion that Himself has ordained—a religion of blood sacrifice the epitome of which centers on the blood-letting of His Son. The Lord Jesus is the only blood, shed for sinners, which is acceptable. Second, the state of the heart before God. All self-righteousness is absolutely hidden. The true worshipper's standing is wholly by grace alone! God has called him, purified him and made him acceptable with a changed heart—something which is impossible to man by nature alone. Unless these two realities—both the work of God's grace—are present and actual in the life, there is no acceptance. Such gracious acceptance magnifies the grace and mercy of God toward those who otherwise should prove to be wholly unacceptable!

Divine Omniscience

Life and destruction *are* before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men? Prov. 15:11.

There is nothing which God does not know. This is repeatedly stressed upon us when we turn to the Scriptures. Although we may speculate concerning the omnipresence and omniscience of God, the real issues are what does He see and know when He looks into our hearts? An assessment of the human heart is given by God Himself in Prov. 17:9–10. This is a terrible assessment! Can it be changed? How can it be changed? The secret lies in the grace of God. Divine grace is transforming power to make the guilty righteous, the wicked acceptable, and the self-righteous humble and forgiven by a gracious

1. However, no one can make himself righteous or cleanse his heart before God, or accomplish his own acceptance with a righteous, just holy God. How, then can such be accomplished? Can it? Is it possible? Ah, yes! But it is not what we can do; it is what God has already done! He has provided redemption in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have forgiveness and acceptance! Our part is to repentant, or confess and turn from sin, and I believe, i.e., trust and rest ourselves in the perfect righteousness of His Son by faith. This saving faith is God's gift. It is free, and it is eternal! The heart is cleansed and the soul purified—and the relation between God and the individual is healed!

Spiritual Riches

Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble herewith. Prov. 15:16.

One may be in great poverty, yet be very rich at the same time. How is this possible? He may be financially poor but spiritually rich. Consider carefully that we necessarily exist on two levels: physical and spiritual. These may differ greatly. We may be rich in one and be poor in the other. Many live in worldly prosperity but are in spiritual poverty. Worse, many live in earthly wealth and are spiritually dead! Our earthly lives may be prosperous and filled with activity, but all the while we are slaves of sin and utterly condemned. The debt of sin is too huge to ever be paid by what we can do in and through religion. We desperately need help from God! He has only one way of help and deliverance—through saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! We must repent and turn from our sins and trust in Him with our hearts. This the only way! This is God's way, and He has given specific instructions in His Word how to come to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Read, Believe, Rejoice!

A Full Table

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred herewith. Prov. 15:17.

Man has the ability to enjoy his food. A full, satisfying meal with good food, good friends and fine conversation is a very pleasant experience! Not every meal is so enjoyed. Some meals are eaten hurriedly; others consist of necessary food, which is hardly palatable, though healthy. Our passage contrasts a meal of simple vegetables served with loving friends contrasted to a rich meal of the best cuts in

atmosphere of hate. Yes, the mood can ruin the best meal; a simple meal with the best of friends is far better. The company with whom we has much to do with the enjoyment of the meal. "Love sweetens meanest food. Hatred embitters the richest feast." [Bridges]. Spiritually, the same is true. What a blessing is godly fellowship over a simple meal in contrast to a rich meal eaten in an atmosphere of debate

disagreement! We have experienced both at Bible Conferences when dealing with controversial subjects!

The Way of Life

The way of life *is* above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath. Prov. 15:24.

The tendency of the life is discerned daily in both words and actions. For those wise in spiritual matters, the life tends upward, to heaven and spiritual matters—and a spiritual attitude which tinctures everything. Working daily with a fellow-believer is a blessed experience, even if the toil is taxing and the circumstances less than ideal. The attitude of both become one. They work together, sweat together, hunger together, eat and rest together. And they learn to pray together. Each and every aspect of life, even that which is normally trivial and pressing may be sanctified and sweetened by solid Christian fellowship. Have you experienced such? Was it not something pleasant to be remembered?

Evil Thoughts

The thoughts of the wicked *are* an abomination to the LORD: but *the words* of the pure *are* pleasant words. Prov. 15:26.

Are not our thoughts private? Do they not belong to us and to no one else? In our inmost private world can we not be and think our own thoughts with no outside influence or intrusion? But there is a listener, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). God sees, and He also judges. This is inescapable! How it should convict if necessary! How it should cause us at times to repent! How it should cause us to lift our thoughts to a much higher plane if need be! It ought to train us in our private thoughts to meditate upon the Lord. His grace and be strengthened in heart and soul. Shame upon us if we allow wickedness to enter into our minds and hearts through

ciations or observations. The wicked may allow his thoughts to
ider to the profane and wicked, but the believer has the blessed
ilege of meditation and the fellowship of the Spirit to protect and
le him! Do you ask the Lord to sanctify your thoughts?

Is God Near or Far?

The LORD *is* far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the
ighteous. Prov. 15:29.

God is omnipresent and immanent, which means that God is
rywhere; He is also present in the fullness of His essence. Nothing
ypes Him. Not a word. Not a thought, not an intention or
ination. How then, is it that God is far from the wicked? He is far
n the wicked in that the wicked are greatly estranged from Him. He
ir from the wicked in that the wicked may cry but the Lord will not
wer. He is far in that the wicked have no sense of His presence or
er. The context implies that the wicked, in extremity, cry out to
l, but He does not answer them or respond to them. What a horrible
e to be estranged from God! Even the wicked, if pressed or
htened enough will cry out to the God they otherwise scorn! But to
n He is far away. Ah, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous!
responds to the one who trusts in Him and keeps His Word and is
nciled through Christ's blood! It is no small thing to be heard by
l. It implies much—it implies a right relationship to God through
Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of His redemptive work and
ccessory Person! Does God hear you?

Instruction

He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth
eproof getteth understanding. Prov. 15:32.

None of us are perfect. We all have defects in our persons. Some
physical, some are mental and some are personal, i.e., part of our
sonality. There are those who easily lose their tempers. Others are
y stubborn. Still others are too proud to reason with in some areas.
ough it is inferred that this is a father instructing his son, the same
inciple is of very wide application. If we need instruction or
rection in a given area can we accept it? Even if it is true, and the
who approaches us is a dear friend, this may be very hard to
ept. It is the mark of an exceptional man, a very reasonable and
roachable person, to receive instruction [correction]. What if we
the one upon whom the burden lies to set another straight? Do we

the grace to do so? Would the person we need to approach give us? If an equal, do we have the humility and honesty plain enough so that our words will be received? This is a most difficult matter, especially between equals!

God and the Tongue

The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD. Prov. 16:1.

There are many aspects to the truth of Divine sovereignty. God is absolutely and completely in every sphere. The glory of His sovereignty is seen in its greatness, glory and its minuteness. From the smallest atom to largest star, from the most wild beast to the greatest intellect among men God's rule is revealed. Consider the matter of conversion in the spiritual realm. Where does awakening originate? That conviction of sin which reveals one's utter condemnation before God and urgent need of a Savior? That sense of sin which strips the sinner of all his supposed freedom and reveals him to be but a slave to sin and lust? This quickening comes from God at the appointed hour. What of the reality of repentance which leads a man to renounce sin and desire to find peace with God in Christ? What is it but God working effectually in the mind and heart that enables him to flee to Christ and cast himself upon Him in faith and trust? Saving faith is the gift of God. The Lord often works unseen, drawing, enabling, quickening and motivating and giving—and this is the unseen work in the reality of conversion!

Evil and God's Purpose

The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Prov. 16:4.

Most have trouble coming to terms with the absolute sovereignty of God. Unless we can find some redeeming factor, we become somewhat apologetic. This is not a defect in our theology; it is simply recognizing a fallen, sinful human being, even if a godly person, and giving him His due without limitation. Can we trust God explicitly and without reservation? Is not absolute sovereignty, especially when dealing with wickedness, death and hell are concerned, brutal? Is not the exact opposite of God characterized as love, grace and mercy? Do we not attribute arbitrariness to God? Is there any contradiction in the Divine nature? Some think so, and deny God's purpose and the absolute nature of God's sovereignty. Do we? Study Rev. 4:11. As

e creatures, and sinful creatures, we are unable to fathom the
ity of God completely. There are no contradictions in the Divine
sonality. Every attributes fits perfectly with the others. Some things
must leave, if necessary, in the hands of God. We are to have
plete trust in our Lord and God, according to His inscripturated
rd. “Will not the Judge of all the earth will do right?” (Gen. 18:25).

Peace Among Men

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to
be at peace with him. Prov. 16:7.

There are five ways for us to be at peace with our enemies: first,
conquer them, second, they conquer us, third, we sign a peace
ty, fourth, we are brought to be friends with each other, fifth, the
d does such a work that hostilities are ended and we have peace.
s last is pertinent here. The Lord is able to do what we cannot. If
are concerned with personal enemies, then the reasons are personal.
h enemies know us well and we know them. Only the Lord can
g true and lasting peace. Such peace must be spiritual, meaning the
ation of those on each side who are opposed to one another. Only
l can change the heart and restore true peace. Our text declares that
righteous man has enemies, and God can turn them to be at peace
1 us. Amazing! This is a work which only God can do! He does this
amilies, neighborhoods and churches when the enemies are close
personal. Such things should be made a matter of prayer for peace.
s is especially true in our churches. We must be willing to repent
re we are wrong, and ready to forgive others. Peace from God is a
ious reality!

The Unseen Hand

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. Prov.
6:9.

After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo—a battle which he should
e won, but was defeated—the great military leader, who had
ned invincible said, “There was a hand working in Europe that I
not see.” He attributed his defeat to God. Many could say the
ie. Plans have been made, care has been taken, and intentions have
ked overtime. Yet unseen and unknown to the participants, the
d of the Lord has been at work. This has been true of criminals,
ies, businesses and individuals. God is at work. His will is always
e—and it is done for His glory and the fulfillment of His gracious

pose. How else would sinners be saved? They have laid their plans, / have purposed evil in their hearts, they have carefully sought to break the law, but the end result has been their conversion! God saves the very worst of men, as well as others. He snatches them from a life in sin and transforms them into His sons, to live righteously; and glorify His name in the present world. Praise the Lord for His goodness—effectual, yet undesk for and graciously given for His glory!

Of Great Value!

How much better *is it* to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather than to be chosen than silver! Prov. 16:16.

Many, yea, most covet finding treasure! This, it is thought, would give an answer to everyone of man's problems! But would it? They have many troubles that the poor do not. Now, consider the one who finds wisdom. None try to steal it from him or lie in wait to rob him of his prize. Many consider him either mad or lacking in zeal for riches. Fallen, sinful man never wants the immediate, the instant reward, the treasure which may be found and possessed without much effort. Not so with wisdom! Wisdom is not simply found or uncovered. It is gained. It is the reward of godliness. It comes to those whose values are spiritual, not material. If wisdom is aligned to the will of the Lord, then the effort put forth includes prayer and the teaching of the Scriptures. This leaves out most at the very beginning. What is its value? It never diminishes. It cannot be taken by robbery. Men are disappointed by its elusiveness. And it must never be put in storage or locked in a vault. It is for daily and constant use! How valuable and how practical is true wisdom! This is the believer's spiritual inheritance.

Pride

Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Prov. 16:18.

Some things are very dangerous. Among the enemies of mankind, at the forefront is pride. However it might be disguised or camouflaged, pride is an enemy! It filled Lucifer and caused him to fall. Examples of pride can be found in the Fall of Adam and Eve. Pride lurks behind almost every sin, hiding, disguising itself, and deceiving the one who is conquered by its subtlety. It is one of the well-worn tools in the devil's toolbox. He uses pride when other instruments tend to fail. Pride distorts reality, builds up self to act with vulnerability. Pride puts

confidence in the flesh. Pride deceives and causes one to fall and be humiliated. Pride often parades as self-sufficiency, and so not leaning on or trusting in the Lord but in ourselves. We consider some things too small to pray about, sins too little to be concerned about, and situations too simple to prepare ourselves for spiritually—and all may cause us to fail miserably through sinful behavior! The Scriptures say—pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

How humiliating it is to confess this before our God when we have been seduced stupidly by some sin because we did not see through it by prayer and spiritual discernment!

Self-Deceived

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Prov. 16:25.

This passage reveals that man is easily deceived by failing to truly understand the true nature of a thing. This means, especially in spiritual matters, that nothing be undertaken, except by prayer for guidance and leading. But what of the small things? Is anything too small to take before God in prayer? If we do not pray for God's blessing, we will be left to unsanctified activity, prayerless motivation and careless actions. Seemingly small things often necessitate more consideration and prayer than other issues simply because we act without consideration and almost by whim or instinct—a very dangerous action! It is amazing how blind a person might be to moral issues because he does not take enough time to consider the true nature of the situation. Thus, he acts by instinct or by habit, and not spiritually or scripturally. Is there something not wrong when we take things for granted and think such are too small or simple to pray about? Appearances may be deceiving and meant to lead us astray. The serpent has an enemy and he never sleeps—and his method is to deceive (Gen. 3:1–12).

Old Age

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness. Prov. 16:31.

The Bible has much to say concerning old age and if it be the conclusion of a long life of faith and obedience to God, a blessed life indeed! Think of Moses, Samuel and Daniel. These lived long lives because they had early committed themselves to the Lord and served Him. Their hoary heads were crowns of glory. A long life for God implies

rs of obedience and the increase of faith. Trusting the Lord in ningly impossible circumstances. Years in which the experiences answered prayer and sanctified service to the Lord have given its rewards. This is not to say that they did not have great trials, even heir final years, but their experiences of God's faithfulness is sed to read and enjoy. On the other hand, how tragic when the ry head has not been found in the way of righteousness! Consider Scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's Day. These were the ancients spiritual leaders of the people and they spent their time trying to l a way to murder our Lord and justify it. Think of the princes of el in their magnificent robes as leaders of the tribes, yet weep at r unbelief and deaths in the wilderness. O blessed Man of God! y your hoary head betoken your pilgrimage in the service of our l!

Temper

he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. Prov. 16:32.

Here we see the importance the Lord places on self-control as ig the companion of being Spirit-controlled. Any degree of anger, ss it is spiritual indignation, includes some loss of self-control. It is gerous to stir the physical and mental faculties to action in some se. This inevitably includes some sinfulness (Eccl. 7:9). Military 1 train for long hours and days and weeks to be disciplined so they it intelligently without wasted effort and personal anger, as this last become very dangerous and foolhearty. Taking a city is a very at victory—yet he that rules his spirit has won a greater victory! s is the declration of the Lord God Who knows us better than we w ourselves! For the believer, self-control is the fruit of the Spirit, a lack of this great gift is a loss of true spirituality! We cannot rd to act in the flesh or its strength in spiritual matters!

No Chance

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the .ORD. Prov. 16:33.

The belief in chance is pervasive of human nature, except among Jews, who cast the lot to determine the will of God in a given ter. This is belief in Divine providence and a direct denial of nce. The early church at Jerusalem used this method but once we e record of, depending upon prophets from that point onward (Acts

5–26). The lot was cast to reveal the will of God in a given matter. In any case, we normally resort to prayer and trusting God's providence. In fact, we do not. Our consideration is the idea of chance. Belief in chance is a denial of Divine providence. And this is a denial of the Divine government of the universe! We cannot live a life of faith in a world of chance. Either faith or chance must govern our actions! The Scriptures tell us the truth of faith—faith in the God Who answers prayer and governs all the actions of men. Without or apart from faith, it is impossible to please God! Faith underlies every action of the people of Israel!

Failure of Religion

Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife. Prov. 17:1.

In ancient Jewish homes, the leftovers from some sacrifices and feasts provided sumptuous meals. Such meals are here contrasted with a meager meal of dry morsels—a great and sharp contrast. What is missing is love. Love is the essence of the Law (Deut. 6:4–5; Lev. 18; Matt. 22:37–39). Love puts an end to all strife. Consider this: the celebration of the feasts and offerings which provided the food was the essence of Israel's religion and worship of God. After such worship, the family would sit down to feast...and argue?! What good did their religion do for them?! It had degenerated into a mere outward form which did not change the inner man. This is the failure of religion. It is merely outward, formal, ritualistic, but often fails to reach or change the inner being. But where love is, there is a great blessing and a congenial atmosphere—the influence of the feast or the living just observed has had a great impact. May our meals together express the love of our Lord which binds us together in the truth of His redemption. May God deliver us from mere religion!

Disinherited

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren. Prov. 17:2.

A son who shamed his father's house and brought great disrepute on the family could be disinherited as a son and a faithful servant could be elevated to the position of a son. What a reversal! And the father rested with the shameful son, neither the family nor the servant. In ancient Israel provisions were made to deal with wayward or unfaithful sons. In an extreme case, the son could be stoned to death for

sinfulness and rebellion! Contrast this with the spiritual realities of I as our heavenly Father and we as His spiritual sons! He loves us and will not forsake us. If and when we sin, He chastens and corrects, never disinherits! This is the effective work of grace in our hearts and minds. Grace overrules sin. Grace will not let us go. Grace provides an inward power and force to keep God's children. Can and will we be chastened? Yes, and it may be severe (Heb. 12:3ff), but we will never be disinherited.

Spiritual Refining

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts. Prov. 17:3.

There is, as so often revealed, a parallel between the material world and the spiritual. These parallels are not only interesting; they are also instructive! Gold and silver in their native state are mixed with dross. Debris from the rocks and the mining process constitute most of the mass. The streaks of gold and silver are burned out and separated to produce the purified precious metals. Then their purity, preciousness and brightness may be easily seen. On the spiritual plane, the Lord is the Refiner. Who tries [smelters with heart and fire] the raw ore and separates pure, precious metal from the dross and impurities. This is a Divine process of sanctification (1 Kgs. 8:39; Jer. 17:10; 1 Pet. 1:6–7). Again the Lord tries [smelters] the hearts and burns out the dross to purify the graces which He has given. Faith untested is like raw ore, taken from the earth and filled with dross. Faith refined is a tried faith, purified through trial and brought to maturity through testing. Why the refining process of the Christian life and experience? It is the necessary process of refining our faith to maturity, purifying it to bring out the glory of God's grace reflected in the precious life.

A Careful Tongue

A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue. 5 Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. Prov. 17:4–5.

Sins of the tongue are a study in themselves from the Word of God. They are aligned with moral darkness and falsehood (Jer. 17:9–10; Jn. 3:20; 1 Cor. 4:5). The truth matters not to the lover of gossip; the lips only serve the depraved mind and further the desire of the wicked. The Believer must not align himself with such! Bishop Hall: then I cannot stop other men's mouths from speaking ill, I will

er open my mouth to reprove it; or else I will stop mine ears from
ring it, and let him see in my face, that he hath no room in my
rt.” We simply cannot be neutral in such matters without
promising the truth and betraying our Lord. The second thought is
of mocking the poor. There is not one poor person who is
ingly so, or desires such a state. Some, if the truth be known, have
ered much and their plight is agonizing. We, as believers, must
h out in sympathy and understanding. Are we too quick to assume
gment upon such who have suffered much and are derived of
hly blessing?

Lying Lips

Excellent speech cometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.
Prov. 17:7.

We do not expect a foolish person to speak intelligently about
gs of substance. Often the closest these get to serious conversation
make something humorous of it. One’s whole approach to serious
versation often reveals the inability to reason and consider serious
ters or to come to terms with issues which are of the utmost
ortance. This is, perhaps, a type of irresponsibility which avoids
consequences of sound speech. On the other hand, a person of
ortance and sober thinking will give something of value to the
versation. A person given to falsehood brings distrust upon his
re person as one who cannot be trusted. And if a man cannot be
ted to tell the truth, he cannot be trusted at all! Such a person will
e an agenda which is sinful and destructive. Such a one can never
a person of importance because he is untrustworthy to his own
ruction.

A Kind Spirit

He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a
matter separateth very friends. Prov. 17:9.

Some people are naturally very kind. Perhaps the trials of life
e left them with much more understanding than others. To talk with
n is to find a refreshment and friendship. These will cover a small
cretion or fault because of its relative unimportance. These are
erstanding concerning the weakness of human nature, and are
rious of peace and not contention. Then there are those who take
ry opportunity to speak against others, to hurt others through their
sted attempt to tell the truth on every occasion. These become tale

ners and people tend to avoid them. They can and do cause much . Such are often extreme in their views of being righteous and ing to settle everyone's cause, especially if they have a stake in given matter. And they do not care if they harm others or tionships.

Reproved?

A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool. Prov. 17:10.

It is never enjoyable to be reproofed. It implies wrong in the pient. Such may be minor, but it still stings and causes one arrassment. If both parties are equitable and honorable, the matter s at that point. The wise man has taken his reproof and accepted it the mater ends. The fool, however, is prone to defend himself, as cannot cope with the idea that he has been wrong in some way. He elf-defensive to the utmost and given to retaliation. We are fools if do not receive as legitimate reproof and carry the matter on until it ws out all proportion and becomes a major issue. A reproof gives an opportunity to be wise and let the matter pass and fade away. y the fool will carry the contention further or to others in an mpt to nullify it. In the end, he will separate chief brethren and g judgment upon himself.

Small Sins and Providence

An evil *man* seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall e sent against him. Prov. 17:11.

All sin is great. All sin is against God, therefore all sin must be ished, and the punishment will be just. We tend to categorize sins big and small. This is usually with regard to their nature or results.

this is a human mismeasurement. The Lord measures sins erently. Rebellion is an awful sin because it is against God and His v-order. It is against honesty, against all good and against the rebel self (1 Sam. 15:22-23; 16:14; Deut. 21:18-21; Titus 3:3). While sin is great, some sins are more aggravating than others. Such is the of rebellion. It is further two-sided: there is rebellion against God also disobedience as something else replaces the obedience manded. Further, the Lord will move upon the rebel. Some things not be allowed to stand. Some sins must be found out and dealt

1. The Lord will deal with rebellion directly or indirectly, i.e., either directly or providentially through circumstances. We must be aware of Divine providence, or God's intervention in human affairs, to begin to understand God's ways. His hand is ever at work to fulfill His purpose. When we become aware of such, we term it Divine providence. When the Lord deals with rebellion it is a "dark providence."

Rage!

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. Prov. 17:12.

The comparison drawn here is proverbial. One of the most savage acts in nature is the fierce rage of a bear robbed of her cubs. She has no self-control, sense of fear and tendency to turn aside. Death mauling, by being bitten, being torn to pieces by a raging bear was worse than any other wild encounter with any beast. Again this was proverbial for the utmost rage, and used to frighten (2 Sam. 17:8; Hos. 3). The comparison reveals the danger and enormity of the fool in folly. He is not merely someone to observe, but someone to flee from! We are not merely to shake our heads at the foolishness, but flee at all costs that we have nothing to do with such a person. How much trouble is caused in churches and among Christians by the foolishness of some, even members, and how much damage is done to the cause of our Lord by foolish people who cannot seem to leave off their agendas and the troubles they cause!

Retribution

Who so rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house. Prov. 17:13.

This saying may seem strange, as it seems to reveal a principle which is absolute. We must remember that we are dealing with Scripture—the very Word of God—and that the Lord God has given the Word that this will be so! This is God's work. This is God's purpose. This is God's promise, not man's! The great example of this principle is the sin of Adam, for which we all continue to suffer! Adam's sin was manifold: It was disobedience to the known command from God not to eat of the tree. He committed sin by not taking the leadership and putting Eve in her place. He should have spoken up when he remained silent. He followed his wife and her example instead of maintaining his obedience and refraining. When he and Eve

he faced with their awful sin and disobedience, he still sought to save his wife and absolve himself of all responsibility. When he could not escape, he belittled his part and minimized his sin! Such is the nature of man as a sinner. But the Lord held him accountable on every count. The human race fell in Adam, not Eve.

Don't Begin!

The beginning of strife *is* as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with. Prov. 17:14.

A graphic picture is here drawn of a little water let out of a cistern, which quickly grows into a stream, then a torrent and finally, a great flood! This is the nature of water let out and of man in his pride. Were it not for sinful pride and an irreversible determination, anger could be controlled. But it is not so. Things get out of hand quickly and often the worst occurs. This tendency is in the very nature of the things involved: human nature, contention, pride, stubbornness, determination and lack of sanctification. Such is true of the unsaved, and, at times, even among the converted! See the following references about contention and anger (Prov. 26:21; Rom. 14:16–19; Eph. 4:2–3, 32; Jas. 3:2ff; Heb. 12:14). Such is possible even among the most faithful and godly of believers (Acts 15:39)! How, then, must we guard against contention, which the evil one may use to do harm and destroy the unity of the work of God!

Justified or Condemned?

He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both *are* abomination to the LORD. Prov. 17:15.

There are two levels for consideration here—civil and spiritual. The civil magistrate is to be the minister [deacon] of God for good (Rom. 13:4; Deut. 25:1). In matters of human government and human affairs, examples abound of the first. The Lord warned Israel against sinful actions (Ex. 23:7). The sinful, unjust sons of the blessed prophet Samuel sinned to the extent that it ended the Theocracy and brought in Monarchy (1 Sam. 8:1–7; 12:1–5). There were unjust judges even in David's day (Psa. 82:2; 94:1–8). We see the utter corruption of justice with Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs. 21:1–29). On the spiritual level, we are to judge righteous judgment. Now, God did an amazing thing! He justified the ungodly (Rom. 4:5)! How so?! Salvation is by grace through faith. God justifies the ungodly through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is justification by faith apart from works. Only in this way

God “be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 5).

True Friendship

A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Prov. 17:17.

Man by nature is a social being. In our changing world there are different levels of friendship. Acquaintances, casual friends, close friends, trusted friends, intimate friends, life-long friends, and those whom we would die for. Some are like Job’s “friends,” who came to comfort and stayed to mock and deride. Others are like our Lord’s disciples, who all forsook Him in the hour of trial. But there is one friend” Who far surpasses all others! It may be strange to call Him friend,” but the Scriptures do, and so may we (Matt. 11:19; Prov. 24). The Lord Jesus is not only our Lord and Savior, our Redeemer, Elder Brother, but He is also our Friend! We are united to Him by Holy Spirit in the closest possible relationship. As our Friend, He established this intimate relationship and maintains it. He died in His stead because of His love. He is the epitome of the closest of friends. And He desires our fellowship and intimacy! Oh, to spend time with our Friend! To be alone with Him, to pour out our hearts to Him and to commune with Him! No believer is friendless, even if all men forsake him!

Merciful Medication

A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones. Prov. 17:22.

There are times when we are sick and in need of medication to cure the condition or pain. It is necessary that the medication fit the disease or condition. So it is with a merry heart. Simple humor or a joke will not minister to one with an aching heart filled with sorrow. A heart needs stronger medicine. The highest form of suffering is spiritual, and spiritual pain needs spiritual medication. The blessed and living truth of the Gospel is well-suited for such application. For a heart-bound sickness, other cures may be sufficient. Disappointed love, a misunderstanding between family members or good friends, or a disappointment which injures the friendship needs a merry heart to release its medicinal flavors. A kindly word may set a matter straight and restore a friendship. A promise may heal a mental wound. An apology may mend a broken heart. The greatest of trials and disorders

those of the soul. A saving conviction of sin needs the rich blood the Lord Jesus applied. More than merriment, the sinner needs a flood of peace and assurance in the blood wounds of Calvary. Remember, whatever the disorder, the Word of God has the sufficient remedy.

Silence

He that hath knowledge spareth his words: *and* a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: *and* he that shutteth his lips *is esteemed* a man of understanding. Prov. 17:27–28.

One of the greatest gifts is to know when to speak and when not to speak. All of us at one time or another has spoken unadvisedly, and repented afterward that we had never opened our mouths. The tendency is to speak out, and often with emotions rather than intelligence motivating the use of the tongue. Most are prone to speak to offer their opinion, or take sides, or to promote one and negatively judge another. We are so prone to speak out, that they simply must say something, offer an opinion and meddle where they should not. Consider the saying: “He cannot be known for a fool that says nothing. He is a fool, not who hath unwise thoughts, but who utters them. Even concealed folly is wisdom.” [Bishop Hall]. How silent we would be if seriously remembered the words of our Lord! (Matt. 12:36–37). Pardon me, O Lord, By your grace and mercy, have me remember these words when tempted to speak unadvisedly or foolishly! Graciously rule over my tongue and the expressions of my heart!

Hurtful Speech

The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Prov. 18:8.

We are commanded with one of the most inclusive and penetrating, repetitive commands of Scripture: “Thou shall love thy neighbor as thy self” (Lev. 19:18; 19:15–16; 24:19; Deut. 5:20; Job. 4:4; Psa. 15:3; 101:5; Prov. 11:9; 11:12; 14:21; 24:28; 25:18; Jer. 9:5; Mt. 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:23; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9–10; Gal. 5:14; 2:8). Have you ever seriously contemplated this? What a great lesson this puts upon the mind, heart and conscience of another! How much damage can be done by an unruly tongue! And how much good can be done by either silence or speaking well if it is proper! To be a talebearer is to be a gossip, to spread tales about another. It is all but

ossible to maintain the original, as we tend to add to the words
ights of our own until the whole report has taken on a different
it and much is added to it of an interpretative nature. Far better to
ain silent than to give one's interpretation of a given matter!
ther, we must understand that the person we talk with [confide in]
probably add his or her own embellishments to the gossip and
bute such to us! O Lord! Keep us from gossiping about our
ghbor, that our speech remain pure and our words be few!

Prejudice

le that answereth a matter before he heareth *it*, it *is* folly and shame
into him. Prov. 18:13.

There are some things which are universally true of fallen, sinful
ian nature. One of these is prejudice. Whatever the underlying
se—ignorance, pride, previous experience or an adverse reaction—
mind is already made up and thus closed to further thought. This is
wise true on the spiritual or religious plane as well. The Arminian
not countenance the arguments of the Calvinist, no matter how
ptural and cogent his arguments. The same is often true concerning
y differences even among Evangelicals and Fundamentalists
cerning the teaching of Scripture. Minds are closed and, if
ments are given, they rarely deal with the issues. It is surprising
/ many scriptures are either misquoted or misinterpreted! If we are
uly learn and progress in biblical knowledge, we must listen before
speak, and think—and often study thoroughly—before we give our
gment. Let us seek to learn, grow and mature in the faith!

One's Gifts

A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.
Prov. 18:16.

The reference here is to gifts of a material nature given to gain
eptance in some way. This was the practice in biblical times. The
and nature of the gifts would procure a hearing before someone
at such as a king or prince. Or such would be used to pacify another
establish a relationship with their acceptance. Gifts would be
orable to the recipient. Spiritually, it is customary to speak of
itual gifts the Lord has given to His servants. In our day, the most
mon use is for preaching gifts, singing skills and abilities for
ship, and mental gifts for the ministry. A young preacher, after
g heard for some time may be referred to as having preaching

s. One elevated to a song leader or choir director may be said to be ed in voice and musical skills. Both referring to God-given ities which make such imminently useful in the gospel ministry. A rch is said to be greatly blest which has a gifted preacher. For our ;, we should pray for the Lord to raise up gifted men for the istry, men to whom people will listen, and learn, and be edified. A gregation can also legitimately pray for their pastor/preacher to elop his ministerial gifts for greater use in the work of the gdom of God.

The Offended

A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city: and *their contentions are* like the bars of a castle. Prov. 18:19.

In this sinful world, contentions are common. It is a wonder that 1 get along as well as they do! History is filled with divisions, tentions, wars and hatred where there was once trust and love. at is the essence of the trouble, the basis of the division? Both are iers. This is true in the world, and in the church, and in the family. ; true among the ungodly and among the godly. Some of the most er fights and broken relationships occur between Christians! Should surprise us? Remember, among Christians, the devil is at work to what damage he can. Thus, among or between believers, the ation is more complex. Consider Paul and Barnabas, two of the est believers—brothers in Christ, brothers in suffering, brothers in ministry, closer associates in the work of the gospel cannot be nd! Yet they separated with offense over John Mark (Acts 15:36–! Years later, they would be reconciled, and many years later Paul John Mark would work together (2 Tim. 4:11). We should seek to ble ourselves and submit everything to the Lordship of Christ is. We must seek reconciliation where there is estrangement and c unity where it has been broken. If not, yet we must go on and r for our Lord and the Gospel!

Finding a Wife

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the .ORD. Prov. 18:22.

Marriage is the normal state ordained by God for the human race. ; unmarried are incomplete. Those who are married are usually er fitted for life in this world (Gen. 2:18). This a general statement, Eve was at one time worse for Adam (Gen. 3:1ff), as other wives

been in history. Contemplate Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs. 16:31; 1, 13, 19; 19:1–2; 21:1ff; 2 Kgs. 9:1ff). To avoid adultery, fornication and a host of other sins it is better for man and woman to be married. Spiritually, the wife may be a great support for and to the husband. The godly wife and mother is to be a true helpmeet for her husband, and the husband will learn and experience the blessing of God in the marriage relationship. First, let the believer marry well, with much prayer and seeking the face of God for a godly wife, then treat her as she deserves to be treated, as his godly mate, as the weaker vessel, and as his partner in their spiritual pilgrimage. A man should be no less a Christian if he has a truly believing wife!

Worldly Friendship

Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. Prov. 19:4.

In this sinful world in which we live, society is usually divided, most of the time it is separated into the “haves” and “have nots.” into the poor and the wealthy. The one attracts others for advantage and hope of gain or gifts; the other causes most to avoid them because of the absence of gifts and gain. The basis for such friendship is one’s selfishness and self-interest, not one’s worth as an individual or his abilities or positive characteristics. What advantage is there in befriending the poor? The answer to this question settles the friends of the rich! Much of the time, some crisis or upheaval reveals the nature of one’s friends. A sudden financial reversal will cause many friends to become strangers. And sudden wealth will cause the previously poor to become popular. This is simply the way of the world and should not surprise us. A man may be relatively poor and yet highly educated or skilled, and his friendship advantageous to those who would want to learn and increase in knowledge or skill. This is at least a higher motive than mere wealth. The way of the world, however, is so entangled with personal advantage of some sort. Being true friends because of righteousness, because of like faith, because of integrity—this is sanctified and profitable—and honorable!

Understanding

The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and *it is* his glory to pass over a transgression. Prov. 19:11.

There is a point when most lose their temper, manifest their anger and become, for a moment, uncontrollable. At this point, they may say

to something which they will later regret. A man of discretion will maintain his self-control at such a time. This is exceptional and marks the person to be an exceptional person. This is sufficiently unusual to mark him out and hold him in remembrance. It also reveals that it is possible not to react as most will, and for a moment lose their temper. For the believer, we can attribute much to the grace of God enabling a person to defer his anger when others would let it loose. It is a mark of self-control and strong character when someone is able to defer an outburst of anger and let the moment pass—and not react or succumb to another's weakness and loss of self-control. May our Lord and Savior enable us to be such persons! His grace is sufficient!

Husband and Father

A foolish son *is* the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife *are* a continual dropping. House and riches *are* the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife *is* from the LORD. Prov. 19:13–14.

The wife is the center of the home in a very practical sense. Most activity of the household revolves around her. But the husband and father is the head of the home, and to him must pertain all responsibility for the reputation of the family. The godly husband and father will spend much time before God on behalf of his family. He seeks to lead them all according to the Word of God. The responsibility is his, and at times it is overwhelming. What a blessing to have obedient and wise children! And what a blessing is a godly, submissive wife! There are times, even in the godliest of families, when the entire family may be in disarray! Disobedient children, a son who lacks a submissive spirit—the rebellion may seem complete! The head of the home must examine himself. Has he been too strict? Has he been unreasonable? Has he in these matters angered wife and children? Both the husband and wife must obey the commands of God, the children must obey the parents. At times, the children might rebel against the wife against the husband or *visa versa*. Blessed is the man who has an open Bible on the kitchen table and instructs himself and family daily!

Fatherly Discipline

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

Most fathers love their sons, and want the very best for them. In a young boy they see the man. So they discipline him with this ideal in

d. Doubtless many a father, moved greatly at his son's tears, has said to him, "Son, this hurts me more than it does you"! Yes, it pains a father to discipline his son. How much better it would be if no physical punishment were necessary, but in a fallen, sinful world, physical punishment is sadly necessary—and must be administered in love! As the boy grows, there is less physical punishment and more reasoning—the boy is becoming a man, and hopefully the earlier discipline has borne good fruit (Heb. 12:10). Mark the words, "while there is hope." There may come a time, when the boy is almost grown, when discipline is rejected and a fight ensues. This reveals that there has not been sufficient loving discipline beforehand. Too little discipline or neglected discipline will bear evil fruit. May we be obedient to the Lord, for He knows the heart of the lad, and has commanded the discipline!

Many devices, Immutable Counsel

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand. Prov. 19:21.

Even the best and most powerful among men are yet creatures—mortal, fallen creatures. Their devices are intentions and their fulfillment is subject to the will of God. The counsel of the Lord is true and infallible. God created man in His image as a being of reason and determination, one who plans and seeks to give fulfillment to his purposes. But, alas! He is a mere creature and self-subject to his creator and God. Is there not a pattern for man to follow? Yes, the Word of God! Anything which is unscriptural must not be attempted. Man's greatest fulfillment is to be found in obedience according to the Scriptures. We must also consider the workings of Divine Providence, which governs our lives with respect to time and opportunity as well as obedience. God's counsel shall stand (Isa. 43:13; 46:10). It is the greatest of blessings when we seek the will of God and experience its leading in the service of our Creator and Savior. Consider the determination of William Carey, "the Father of Modern Missions" in his determination to go to India as a missionary, consider Adonairam Judson, who followed and went to Burma, consider J. Hudson Taylor who went to China, and the thousands who followed these! How blessed it is when Man's devices and God's purpose coincide!

Satisfied!

The fear of the LORD *tendeth* to life: and *he that hath it* shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil. Prov. 19:23.

Man naturally seeks satisfaction. He desires the fulfillment of his favors and intentions. He sows and reaps, he plants and harvests, plans and awaits the fulfillment of these plans. Sadly, in this life he is often disappointed, unless he lives in obedience to the Lord and is following the Lord's leading. At the very root and beginning, must be the fear of the Lord. This must ever be the deciding factor! This lies that all effort to find fulfillment in our endeavors will begin in and proceed in the fear of the Lord. Obedience is ever the path of living! This cannot be stressed enough! The fear of man bringeth a re, one's own counsel may be defeated or brought to naught, but fear of the Lord is the blessing of a safe passage, fulfilled counsels realized success. O that men might truly fear the Lord as they ought! Search the Scriptures as they ought! Seek to glorify God as they ought!

Activism?

Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, *and* he will understand knowledge. Prov. 19:25.

The scorner must be smitten because of his waywardness and illicit ways. But a person with understanding need only be reprov'd. Such is life in our fallen world! Some need much stronger reproof, even of physical contact. In biblical times, some were beaten for their rebellious attitude. But a man who has understanding will not need to be talked to. He is reasonable and will listen and reason. A child must be whipped; the adult may need public punishment. So was in biblical times. Today, in our lawless society, filled with defiance and disobedience to law enforcement, groups may gather and commit any number of crimes—yet not be punished. Why? Such action, done in the name of some cause, is termed “Activism,” and the perpetrators, “Activists.” This in some way exonerates the lawlessness! Such is the failure of the state and its officers to exact justice. But this does not make it right, or cause law enforcement to stand back and allow open crime!

Wine

Vine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived hereby is not wise. Prov. 20:1.

This passage has been misrepresented by some and denied by others. First, this verse does not forbid the use of alcohol, but rather warns against being deceived by it, i.e., to indulge and then to overindulge by being deceived. Listen to the Psalmist (Psa. 104:15). Priests were not to drink wine when officiating (Lev. 10:3ff). Judges were not to imbibe lest they pervert judgment. But wine was a symbol of joy and given for man's enjoyment (Psa. 104:15). Our Lord evidently imbibed (Matt. 18–19). Drunkenness is, however, severely condemned. As with the misuse of God's blessings, man has sinned in disobeying God's Word by overindulging himself. This is a subject of great controversy because of man's tendency to misrepresent God's Word, of becoming an example of indulgence which is easily perverted, and a practice which has been removed from its biblical context and the Divine intention. Today, the situation is quite different and one must exercise great caution if he desires to imbibe and stay within biblical parameters! Better to abstain than sin through weakness and overindulgence.

The Time is Now!

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing. Prov. 20:4.

Farmers must work within the schedule of the seasons to plow at proper time, then harvest at the same. The lazy person is usually procrastinating about most things, always putting off some necessary duty until the last possible moment. But the farmer—he must know that his very livelihood depends upon doing his work at the proper time, and the season for plowing was during late year cold weather! The same principle holds true spiritually. There is a time-frame for spiritual harvest. We must serve the Lord as He has commanded, even when our hearts are cold! Indeed, it is when we feel least desirous that we must give of ourselves with renewed zeal! What great blessings we may miss if we do not remain consistent in the service of our Lord! The salvation of souls may be at a critical point, needing someone to speak to them the Word of God and give hope through its promises. In great times of revival and spiritual awakening have begun with one or two under conviction of sin. What blessings we may miss if we

not faithful in plowing up the soil of men's hearts—there may be a rest waiting in a marriage, a family or a church through one's faithfulness in a gospel witness!

Pride

Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? Prov. 20:6.

Pride tends to permeate the sinful race of father Adam. Most men, held in conversation for a given amount of time, will tell or recount something which puts themselves in a favorable light. This is but a flaking of the Ninth Commandment: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor (Ex. 20:16),” but here, he bears false witness against himself! Falsehood is still falsehood, even if self-inflicted! The Bible recounts such among leaders and persons of note. A the Israelitish king was living in disobedience, yet declared, “See my zeal for the Lord!” (2 Kgs. 10:16–31). Absalom stole hearts of the men of Israel. His constant declaration was “Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!” (2 Sam. 15:1–6). If we but viewed ourselves in the mirror of God's Word, we would be fed of such twisting of the truth. At times, we simply want to make ourselves look good, wise or honest in a given matter which we confront. But our version does the very opposite! This is sadly true in church matters when the truth must be searched out for the good of the congregation of someone who has been misrepresented. When we choose to ignore and tell the truth, we never have anything to fear!

Unclean!

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

To stand before men and proclaim our innocence or a clean heart is one thing, but to stand before God and proclaim the same is quite another! This is often seen in a court of law. Men are not infallible. The truth may or may not be spoken, or it may be spoken with given doses of truth or an admixture of truth and falsehood. But when man stands before God, the situation is entirely different! God knows. God knows the heart, the mind, the soul, the innermost thoughts and desires. There is not nor can there be any falsehood or even a slight lie before Him! We are all unclean before Him! He knows us better than we know ourselves. Again, unlike a court of law, or standing

ore men, with God there is forgiveness for the offending sinner who ly and completely confesses his sin and seeks peace and nciliation! This is the blessedness of God's grace and mercy in the pel!

Hearing and Seeing

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them. Prov. 20:12.

What miraculous things are a hearing ear and a seeing eye! Many of these in their bodies and so are greatly infirmed and impaired—deaf and blind. We pity such and identify with them—and seek to help them if the need arises. Reading the Bible to a blind person or seeking signs to help a deaf individual are acts of mercy. Have we ever considered that spiritually there are vast multitudes of the blind and deaf? This is the sad state of man by nature. He can neither see nor hear the truth to his deliverance and salvation. He desperately needs someone to minister to him—to open his eyes to see the truth of the gospel and to open his ears to hear the truth which alone can save him. There is always a place of service in lovingly giving the truth of the gospel to an unconverted person, especially one who has made a mockery and needs explanation and exhortation. How blessed it is to minister such to the Lord and His saving grace!

Evil Actions

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel. Prov. 20:16–17.

Some are given to folly. He who is surety for a stranger puts himself in jeopardy. There are those who make a livelihood from such transactions. They take advantage through supposed friendship and rely upon the simple and the lonely by suddenly becoming a “friend,” when they have ulterior motives. The same is true for a prostitute. She makes her living by being duplicitous. Her beauty and sexual attractions are attractive to the simple and they are seduced by her seeming advancements. The attractiveness of such relationships seems most appealing at first, but soon the individual realizes that he has been deceived and taken for his valuables by a false friend or a cunning man, who gained his attention and promised love by deceit. The sweet morsel of anticipated love becomes as gravel in his mouth. There are two main ways to rob a person: through the force of robbery,

through deceit, preying upon one's affections falsely. Such practices as old as sin itself. When the serpent seduced Eve, he chose the r, and robbery was unnecessary. Beware of a mocked weakness or ned ignorance and a seductive spirit, which appeals to one's otions.

Hateful Speech

Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness. Prov. 20:20.

Hatred seems to be a part of fallen, sinful man's condition. Hatred often directed toward one's enemies or those who have done him n. Hatred goes beyond the acts of others toward us; it includes the sons themselves. It is more than what, it is who! What is the most ul hatred? It is the hatred of one's parents. To curse the very ones o gave us life, who taught us to speak, who have provided for us protected us from birth. What could be done to cause such ing? God ordered that one who cursed his parents be put to death . 21:17). No question about this, no mediating circumstances. No uses. This is the very opposite of loving, honoring and obeying 's parents (Ex. 20:12). Such is a despicable sin! Unruly sons were e put to death without exception (Deut. 21:18–21). To sin such inst one's parents was to sin against life itself and all that gave it ining and substance—a heinous sin! What can be said of God's dren when they speak against God's providence in their lives, iging trials and correction, chastisement and hopefully repentance? ll any speak against His heavenly Father? O blatant unbelief! O kedness unspeakable! Our heavenly Father only does us good, even n it is in the form of chastening. Never doubt our Father's love nor a contrary thought enter your mind against your Heavenly Father!

No Revenge!

Say not thou, I will recompense evil; *but* wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee. Prov. 20:22.

There are many things forbidden to the believer. One of these is nge, or recompensing evil with like action. Now, such is natural fallen, sinful man, but the Lord has animated us with a far different rit! Man by nature and without God in this world must take action self to “even the score.” He assumes the Divine prerogative, and cs to be his own “God,” determining for himself what is right or ng. This is wicked and dangerous ground! The believer's world is

d by God and he must wait on the Lord, Who will, if need be, take on on our behalf. Absalom murdered Amnon for raping his sister. h of them died (2 Sam. 13:1–34; 18:9–17). King Saul sought to der David many a time, but David left his life in God’s hand and 1 the day and God’s blessings when he could have killed Saul on eral occasions (1 Sam. 24, 26). It is by faith that we leave all in l’s hand. This is part of living by faith! We may not have the threat leath, but in matters both small and great, we are to leave all in l’s hand. This principle is universal! Obedience is the path of ising!

Small Things

Divers weights *are* an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance s not good. Prov. 20:23.

It is commonly thought in some religious circles today that ntial religion consists in one making his “religious decision.” He responded to the invitation, repeated a prayer, and can call himself hristian. But a religious decision is not conversion and coming to front in a church service is not coming to Christ! Salvation is a rt matter. And the result is a converted life. Do our lives manifest l’s converting grace? There are no small things in salvation! Mark text. There are no small things under God’s rule. Different weights measuring and weighing goods is part of God’s world of right and ng, honesty and dishonesty. To have two sets of weights which er in order to cheat customers is sinful! God is by His nature the l of all the earth, and He rules it minutely. Dishonesty is sin. It is e and thus a lie (Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:13; Prov. 16:11; 20:10, 23; h. 6:11)! This is a breaking of the Eighth Commandment, “Thou lt not steal” (Ex. 20:15). Does our religion come down to the ningly small things of this life?

Providence

Man’s goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way? Prov. 20:24.

Divine Providence is that pervasive, universal and effectual cess by which God brings to pass His eternal purpose. He does this tinually, universally and without interference. Providence is not trary, but reflects God’s nature and character, and is designed to be best for us and for His own glory. He who protests against Divine vidence does not know the Lord! He is never coercive, but works

above and beyond man's will and purposes to bring about His own. eternally, God gives His commands; internally and providentially, controls all the circumstances to bring this about. Thus, the scripture can promise that "To the ones loving God all things work together for good..." (Rom. 8:28). What a great, unspeakable blessing to perceive that whatever the circumstances, the Lord is fully in charge in complete control of all things! We have His protection, leading, provision and enablement. He cannot but ordain the best for His own for His glory!

Strength and Beauty

The glory of young men *is* their strength: and the beauty of old men *is* the gray head. Prov. 20:29.

Every stage of this earthly life has its peculiar beauty and honor. In young men, it is their strength. Such power, agility and speed! Sports and labor reflect the energy of young men. The beauty of old men is the grey head, both beard and silver locks. [It must be remembered that God commanded the men of Israel to have full beards]. With the elderly, the strength has diminished, the speed is gone, but the silver locks are a sign of maturity and wisdom. They represent many years of experience and hopefully godly living and so they are to be revered. Let the young man rejoice in his youth and do exploits; let the old man rejoice in his stateliness and appearance of age. Oh, that each were a true picture of the inward man—if the inward man is a believer who has over the years acquired wisdom and experience of godliness, answered prayers and strength of faith!

The King's Heart

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. Prov. 21:1.

The sovereignty of God over His universe is absolute. His sovereignty over man is absolute. His sovereignty over kings and rulers—the most powerful among men—is also absolute. The scriptures witness to the greatest of men acknowledging the sovereignty of God. Consider Nebuchadnezzar, the monarch of Babylon, the most powerful monarch of that era. His statement in Dan. 4–35 is one of the clearest in Scripture! Consider Abimelech and Ishmael (Gen. 20:6; Psalms 105:14–15). Consider Pharaoh and Joseph (Gen. 41:37–45). Consider the kings of Babylon and Daniel (Dan. 1; 2:48; 3:30; 6:1–3, 28; Psalm 106:46). Consider Cyrus, king of

sia (Ezra 1:1ff; 6:22; 7:27; 9:9; Neh. 1:11; 2:4–9). Yes, and sider Herod, Pilate and the Jewish leaders with regard to our Lord ts 4:24–28). It is the glory of God to use the greatest of men, and n His enemies, to fulfill His will! Such historical realities make d subjects for meditation when we are engaged in prayer! As ing into the heavens at night, and watching the greatness and esty of the sea, so considering the sovereignty of God over the atest of men help prepare our hearts for prayer. The heart and mind l upon such truth and magnify the God of glory, whose power is ater than all. We may at times question God’s will, but never His /er!

Subjective Thoughts

Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth he hearts. Prov. 21:2.

If we but commune with our own hearts on any given matter, we / easily be greatly mistaken. As sinful, fallen creatures, we all er from the noetic effects of sin [“noetic” fr. Gk. to perceive, and he how the Fall has affected our thought processes, so we do not eive as we ought. Our minds have been negatively affected or pled by sin]. In our present, mentally crippled state, we may be ly deceived. First, we have the nature of the heart itself (Jer. 17:9–

It is deceitful and desperately wicked. Second, left to ourselves, tend to become very subjective and so lacking in advice from rs. Third, the devil is the great deceiver, and, if left to ourselves, may be more susceptible. More than ever, we need the counsel of Lord to guide us, correct us, and lead us aright (Psa. 139:23–24). it is Who ponders the hearts—and He can be trusted to tell us the h and guide us in the right way. O blessed man whose God is the d and whose Counselor is Divine! Others will wonder at his dom and seek his counsel, for he displays much wisdom! Such is goodness of our God unto those who seek His counsel!

Practical Religion

To do justice and judgment *is* more acceptable to the LORD than iacrifice. Prov. 21:3.

The contrast here is between practical religion expressed in good ks as opposed to external religion, which may or may not express state of the heart and soul. External religion—the offering of ifices—may be either the outward observance of a godly soul and

ful heart, it may only be the externals of a ritualistic religion. The
ons would be essentially the same. But the execution of justice and
itable justice and judgment is manifestly a righteous work. It is
emely important—vital—to understand this! Mere external
gion costs little. It may be visibly impressive and even beautiful to
erve, but the heart and soul may not be involved. Whereas, to do
ice and judgment must be expressed in righteous behavior—and,
aps, in much greater cost and effort! Further, to offer a sacrifice is
act of obedience and faith, but to do justice and judgment is
usive of obedience, faith, a given cost and acting in the physical,
ital, moral and spiritual spheres. There is much more dedication in
latter than in the former! Blessed is the man who knows and
icipates in both!

Pride

An high look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked, *is* sin.
Prov. 21:4.

Human pride has a thousand faces. It is perhaps, more deceitful
n other sins. It has a multitude of disguises, and can even disguise
lf as humility! A successful man may carry himself with a high
κ and a proud heart—and take great pride in his estate, which is
ded to here. Pride can thus affect whatever we do! It contaminates
timate labor through motive and result. It can take plowing—a
essary and common work necessary for good crops and make it a
ter of pride and therefore sinful. Thus, sinfulness seeps into every
: of a proud person's life, work and estate. His very motive has
n lost—doing all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)—and subjected
proud spirit. How much is lost because we might have a wrong
ive, or acted in pride, or have some ulterior motive for what ought
be legitimate work or effort. A woman may take pride in her
dlework, a carpenter in his furniture, or an artist in his paintings!
h is the nature of sin that even legitimate pursuits may be robbed of
r blessing and made a curse! Let us serve the Lord with gladness
enjoy what He has given—and so bring glory to Him!

After Love has Gone

*It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling
woman in a wide house. Prov. 21:9.*

How sin has devastated the human race! Sin has spread over all
earth and seeped into every crack and crevice. It has been carried

the wind into every corner of the world and poisoned the best of meats and food. Nothing has been left untouched! Consider the marriage relationship. God gave marriage to man for his good. A life-long companion to complete his person and fulfill his desires—a true blessing from the Lord! Yet now in a world cursed by sin, the husband and wife do not only fail at marriage, but become bitter enemies (Prov. 19)! Now, the husband wants to be alone for peace and quiet. The wife is angry! Unspeakably sad! Both need to repent and regain what they once had at their marriage. This state of affairs suggests some crisis, conflict or great contention which has changed and ruined their relationship and killed their love. They need, before God, to seek its restoration and rekindle the love they once had. This will take both of them and it will take the Lord's grace and mercy! How sad it is when we lose and suffer from losing what the Lord has ordained for our happiness! Blessed is that couple who love one another seek to understand one another and forgive one another when something threatens their union!

A Changed Countenance

The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes. Prov. 21:10.

Apart from the saving grace of God through the gospel, all men are wicked and under the reigning power of sin. The extent of their evilness and lost condition in sin is that they desire evil! They never seem to be satisfied enough to satiate their souls, but desire it more and more! It is their very nature; it is where they are at home and comfortable. Further, they become more self-centered or self-absorbed (1 Sam. 25:11; Ecclesiastes 1; Prov. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 3:3). They care not for others, even their neighbors. Such is the isolating tendency of evil. How different is the true believer! In love and concern he reaches out to others to seek to do them good. This can only be attributed to the grace of God! It betokens a thorough transformation of personality and therefore character. What has our religion done for us? Has it made us interested in doing good to others? Do we have an interest in their souls and their eternal good? Grace can and does great things!

A Reversal

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard. Prov. 21:13.

The poor are a perennial reality. They will always be among us. We are poor because of reversals of business or health and so made late. Some are poor due to loss of fortune and property. Others are poor through indolence and laziness. Thus, helping the poor requires discretion. Legitimate poverty is a sad state of affairs, and the cause is beyond those so afflicted. They are brought to poverty through no action of their own. The cry of these we need to hear and help. We must note that in Scripture and in biblical times, there was no state agency to act and provide for the poor. They were left to the care of persons who could and would help them as an act of mercy. Our passage and text assumes that the unmoved, uncaring person will one day himself have great need and not be given a ring. We would say "The shoe is on the other foot." What a blessing when others are prone to help another when the need is immediate. Sad it is when someone has proven stingy and refuses to step out and help the poor. It may be that the situation one day will be reversed. What then? No one will hear his cry! The Lord at times moves through such reversals. How sad when those who could help refuse, and how blessed when those who can help do help and show that society has long called "Christian kindness."

Keeping Confidence

A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.
Prov. 21:14.

Some things are better done in secret than in public, lest a mistake be made. Some times it is better to settle a matter privately than to settle it in a more public manner. The circumstances here are questionable. Some hold that things done secretly means that dishonesty is afoot, others, that privacy is the best policy. Usually the more private a matter the better, as many negative things can come of more public demonstration. There is less place for praise and an ulterior motive and meaning when matters are held in private, unless it may be perceived that secrecy is covering sin and wrongdoing. The circumstances can usually dictate the action to be taken without compromising the situation. If our motive is to end a matter, then privacy is best; but if it is to injure or harm another, then broadcasting becomes sinful (Prov. 21:25). Discernment is needful. Blessed is the man who seeks to end a matter equitably and for the good of all!

Instant Gratification

He that loveth pleasure *shall be* a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. Prov. 21:17.

One of the chief characteristics of children is that they want instant gratification. For them, hope deferred is extremely painful and they cry and bring attention to themselves and those who might help them. Our modern age, filled with various conveniences, caters to those who want a quick answer and instant gratification and for things to be done quickly. The crying children have become very impatient adults! But, is all pleasure wrong? Some pleasures are not only timely, but blessed of the Lord! There is to be—and can be—joy in worship, in the fellowship of God’s people, in the service of Christ, and in the legitimate joys of life. What is condemned is a joy which results from self-indulgence and overindulgence where moderation is called for. Earthly things have been given to us for our food and also for our enjoyment. But these can never take central place (1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:1–5). We are to use such, but never abuse them (1 Cor. 7:30–31; 1 Tim. 4:4–5). Contentment and moderation enable us to use God’s creation and to enjoy it without making more of it than the Lord intended.

Pursuing the Best

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour. Prov. 21:21.

The infinite possibility of spiritual growth and advancement is always presented to us. We are to “follow after” righteousness and mercy. In such things, we will never “arrive” as having fulfilled them ourselves. What we must desire is to increase in such for the glory of God by the grace of God. The righteousness presented here is not imputed, perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus, but that quality of character of life which derives from it and reflects it. We do not follow after righteousness in order to be justified and reconciled to God. This would be salvation by works and a denial of grace. Rather, because we are justified, we are to seek to reflect that righteousness in our lives and seek to bring others into a right relationship with Him! Christian evangelism is concerned with righteousness—the righteousness which justifies and reconciles to the Son of God. Do we possess such?

Slow to Speak

Who so keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles. Prov. 21:23.

Many are the warnings concerning an unguarded tongue! We may see what we have tried to do for many years by the sins of the tongue! Speech is “the exhalation of the soul,” i.e., it reveals our most thoughts and attitudes, or relationship to others and to God, and can easily destroy whatever we have sought to build up. The tongue is the most influential member of our body, and the most revealing. In the Scriptures, we have many warnings about its use and misuse. In silence—how beautiful is silence when we should observe it! In speech, in listening, in thinking, in meditating, and in keeping ourselves from sinning against another. Sadly, our tongue easily becomes our “Judas,” betraying our inmost feelings and attitudes. These things we can repent of and turn from—unless we utter them to others. Would we keep our souls from troubles? Then let us prayerfully and ardently guard our tongues!

The Scorer

Proud and haughty scorer is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath. Prov. 21:24.

We are all against something or someone. We take sides for various reasons which we hold to be important. At times, this means siding against leaders, ordinary people, causes or political or moral positions. How we utter our disapproval exposes us to the commendation or condemnation of others. The words of our text also reveal something very negative—“the haughty scorer.” This is a full-mouthed and unrestrained attitude voiced in an emotional state. Certainly, this is not way to intelligently win our cause or change the minds of others! Rather, it is a time to either refrain from speaking or speaking very carefully and thoughtfully about a given issue. We may hurt our cause when we express ourselves in an emotional or extreme way which we have not carefully thought out. This often occurs in either political or religious conversation. We invariably hurt our cause in either one when we become sarcastic rather than intelligently discuss the issues.

Laziness

The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not. Prov. 21:25–26.

What can be gained by laziness? Only disappointment and a bad repute! And whom has he to blame but himself? “He thinks to live by lying, not by working.” [Bridges]. Not only so, he sins against God breaking the 10th Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” What a state of affairs! He is trapped in a self-inflicted state of indolence which becomes deadly! And if he does have opportunity without much effort, he will steal or lie to obtain what he desires! Contrast this with a wise person, who can give from his industry and activity—from his ability to help others who do not have. Mark carefully that our text does not say to help him who will not labor to obtain what he wants! There is no plea to help the slothful! Such would not be charity, but lying against God and promoting slothfulness! What about helping the indigent and beggars who sit in public places and beg? Simply giving them a pittance will do little good, and perhaps much harm. If, however, we hand them a gospel tract with a couple of dollars, at least we have both shown concern and also ministered the gospel to them—only God knows what might be done through a gospel tract?

The Wicked Worshipper

The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, *when* he bringeth it with a wicked mind? Prov. 21:27.

See comments on Proverbs 15:8–9. This is a further comment on the wicked and worship.

Religion is often a mask for inner wickedness. Many have a mere outward religion with no inward reality. Rather than outward religion revealing a righteous heart and soul, it masks a wicked mind and heart. Consider the religious leaders of our Lord’s day, who spent three years devising a way to murder the Son of God and do it legally. Often a wicked mind masquerades behind a religious exterior. On the other hand, how beautiful it is when outward religion expresses a righteous heart and mindset! Let us beware of a wicked mind! Religious wickedness is that of the worst kind!

Consistence

A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly. Prov. 21:28.

This Proverb might seem to contradict others, teaching that a true witness will speak continually. The meaning of the term “constantly” means to speak consistently the same, not simply to rattle along continually. A false witness may change his testimony here and there to make it fit his agenda, but a faithful witness will be consistent in his testimony as to what he heard regardless of the number of times he testifies. The same must be true concerning the gospel. We must have saving aspects of the gospel etched deeply in our hearts. The truth of salvation cannot and must not be modified in any way to suit the situation or the hearers. A modified gospel is no longer the gospel! It comes drained of saving truth and becomes a defective religious message! Some leave out or modify repentance; others change the core of faith. These modifications are fatal and reveal themselves in supposed “converts” who are gained! Change the meaning of any essential gospel truth and we have but a lie which does not save!

Futility

There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD. Prov. 21:30.

What an absolute statement! Yet history is filled with attempts to frustrate the purpose of God and render His words null and void. When man attempts this, he only sets himself to fulfill God’s purpose unwittingly. King Herod sought to kill the infant Jesus, and failed. The Jews and Pharisees sought to murder the Son of God and failed—through their failure fulfilled the redemptive purpose of God in the work of the cross (Acts 4:27–28). When men have sought to do their best against God and His purpose, they have only succeeded in giving it to fulfillment! The same is true concerning God’s people. When persecutions have arisen against the people of God, the persecutors and persecutions have unwittingly help spread the gospel (1 Th 8:4). This is the Lord Whom we serve! And He has given His word. There can be no success against the purpose of our God.

Our Responsibility

The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD. Prov. 21:31.

In biblical times, military power and might centered on the horse and its fitness for battle. It was a creature of speed and mobility, and could either be harnessed to a chariot or ridden by a single warrior. When taken into battle, the horse was eager and unafraid. It was the pride and pleasure of an army both collectively and singularly (Job 39:19–31). The ideal was to be an army of foot soldiers who were not to rely on horses (Deut. 17:16–17; 20:1). This put the Israelites at a great advantage militarily, but their trust was to be in the Lord and not in horses or chariots. This is an illustration of a practical faith. Today, it is not horses, but in a variety of things meant to empower the gospel to give an advantage to believers evangelistically. The modern necessities seem to be popular music and even Christian Rock bands! Friendship has become entertainment and trust has been transferred from the Lord to the imaginations of man. Correspondingly, the message has been modified to compensate for the seeming powerlessness of the message preached. Religious “decisions,” not conversions. Repentance seen as non-essential, and faith is looked upon as mere human trust, not the gift of God. Such has been the sad result of harnessing the gospel to the world’s methods and source of power!

A Good Name

A *good* name is rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favour rather than silver and gold. Prov. 22:1.

Here in the West, we place great importance on wealth—gold and silver. The Scripture states that we should rather choose a good name. What good is a good name? Ah! A good name betokens respect, trust, confidence and an impeccable reputation. Riches may come and go, but a good name has a more lasting value. Silver and gold may carry a man a long way in society, but a good name will carry him in respect and judgment. A good name will open doors where wealth will be blocked. Many may be rich and powerful in this world’s goods, but who has a good name gains entrance and has power that wealth alone cannot obtain. Even a wicked man may be wealthy, but a good name is a rare jewel that far surpasses all wealth and power. And for a Christian? A good name is consistent with his profession of faith, although perhaps poor in this world’s goods, a good name is far more valuable than the precious metals the world covets so greatly! Its rarity and consistency are rarer than costly jewels.

Equality

The rich and poor meet together: the LORD *is* the maker of them all.
Prov. 22:2.

There is a great diversity among men as to either rich or poor. The rich tend to lord it over the poor, believing that they themselves are successful through their industry to heap up treasures for themselves. These are often ignorant that we all come into this world the same—equal and utterly dependent on others. What we do gain, we do so by personal industry, reward, inheritance or discovery. Some find great wealth with little effort; others labor their entire lives and remain poor. This is the Lord's providence. He works according to His own purpose and providence. He makes one poor and another rich. Realizing this, we should be industrious for what the Lord providentially puts in our hands. And if we labor long and hard, and still remain poor, then we must thank Him for what provisions He has made available. The Lord knows His reasons; it is our part to be industrious and seek to honor Him in all things. We may be poor, but we can yet have a clear conscience before God, holding that we have sought to be faithful and consistent.

Prudence

A prudent *man* foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. Prov. 22:3.

To be prudent means to be cautious. One who is prudent has an eye to the future and seeks to be prepared for sudden calamities and anticipated crises. The prudent man learns from life. He foresees that crises often come upon the sons of men. These may be natural, such as storms, floods, drought; or man-made crises, such as war, the failure of governments or plagues and diseases. He recognizes the signs of coming destruction and takes proper action. The truly prudent man is a holy person. He prays as he prepares, and so he can deal with crises both spiritually and socially. Many, however, fail to see the signs of coming catastrophes; these live for the present only and are left unprepared. Spiritually, the same principle holds true in a much greater sense! Death will come to us all! Yet how many there are who are asleep, unawares, unprepared—although death is universal and unless it comes suddenly, its signs are forecast well in advance. Are we prepared? Are we prudent with regard to our souls?

The Means to Much

By humility *and* the fear of the LORD *are* riches, and honour, and life.
Prov. 22:4.

The greatest Christian virtues—humility and the fear of the Lord—are despised among men. Yet the rewards are riches and honor and life! We constantly see the lostness of man in his native state as a result of the Fall. Do we forget how lost sinful man is? He is spiritually dead, spiritual blind, spiritually insane. The wonderful powers he possessed at creation have all been reversed, and he wonders about God's creation, failing to see the graciousness of God in His plan to lost humanity! Mark the virtues: humility and the fear of the Lord. How blest is the man who possesses these and exemplifies them in his life and demeanor. What blessings they bring—as our text states. Man shuns the former, but covets the latter, being blind by nature to spiritual realities. His pride causes him to stumble and the absence of fear of the Lord tends toward a sinful self-sufficiency. Do we also, believers, forget these blessed truths? The world has a pull on us and seeks to blind us to these glorious truths. The way to riches, honor and life are humility and the fear of the Lord. May we simply seek to in obedience to our heavenly Father and discover His blessing!

Escape!

Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. Prov. 22:5.

This life is full of traps. If we are not constantly on guard we may be snared. The devil has his snares, and he is often successful. The world has its deceit and nets. Wicked men have their baited traps as they seek to take down the righteous. Other hindrances and snares include thorns, which tear at us and seek to entangle us. Those who do not take care are bound to fall and become ensnared sooner or later. In this sinful world we cannot be casual or let our guard slip. Being watchful should become a part of our lives. We not only have our responsibility to keep us, but the preserving grace and mercy of God. He watches and protects His own! He foresees and sees what we do not and do not. When we walk in faith, then we are safe from the threats of our enemies.

Godly Training

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Prov. 22:6.

Every child needs training. He bears in his nature the original sin of Adam. He also partakes of Adam's sinful nature. He is a sinner by nature, inheritance and personal transgression. What is emphasized here is being trained as a child. Instilling within the young the principles of godly obedience and direction will instill within him the principles for all of life! Such is the promise of God's Word. Let this should spur us onward with loving discipline and repetitive instruction and discipline! Parental indulgence and lack of early discipline breeds sinful attitudes and habits which may never be broken. But godly teaching and discipline will bear good fruit into adulthood and into eternity! Godly loving upbringing will manifest itself in the personality throughout the rest of one's life. And it is clearly noticeable. Why, then, do not parents so discipline their children? For relief. When we fail to train and discipline our children it is because we do not truly believe, and so do not act consistently. O Lord give us the faith and determination to lovingly and consistently discipline and train up our children!

Careful Finances

The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. Prov. 22:7.

Riches and power are inseparably joined in this world. The rich rule over the poor and the one who must borrow becomes a servant to the lender. The poor have need of more money than they naturally possess, and so must borrow for their sustenance. Thus, the one who borrows becomes servant to the lender. And, of course, there are necessary evils which are associated with such transactions. It is relatively easy for the rich and the lender to exact more from the borrower. The matter spreads beyond the financial to the social, moral, legal and even the religious. Between Christians, when involved in business transactions wherein one is heavily indebted to another, let Christian love govern the relationship! And seek to keep the business separate from the church relationship. Much harm and damage is done when the church must become involved in the business dealings of members. And if not so, the believer is to seek to maintain a good testimony when doing business in the world!

Kindness

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. Prov. 22:9.

A man with a stingy eye can look upon the poor and remain unmoved, but the one with a bountiful eye must help the poor. Many things enter in to such an action. First, a tender heart which sees the need and seeks to help in filling it. Second, a consciousness of Divine providence which marks that he has the blessings of the Lord, not only for his own good, but that he might help others and glorify God therein. Third, the ability to help presses upon his mind and soul—that the Lord has blessed him and thus he can and should help his brother in time of need. Fifth, the Jews of that era lived in communities and were all related by race and tribe. Thus, whoever had need was in the same way related. In Christian times, believers are related spiritually, the same principles apply. Shall we not help our brother in need?!

The Scorn

Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease. Prov. 22:10.

A scorner is one who holds others as worthless and despicable. Naturally, as we are fallen, sinful creatures, it is at times relatively easy to become a scorner. However, to hold someone with scorn means that we have forgotten our own liability to sin and susceptibility, especially when we fall upon evil times or find ourselves financially strapped or subject to reverses in health, social standing or finances. This is especially true in the church. Many in churches, sadly, are judgmental, and these soon become scornors if some fail to meet their obligations or seek help from the congregation. If there is one place where we should find love and understanding, it is in the Church of Christ! Yet, often not so. Satan seeks to cause divisions and there are always a few who will play into his hand! Let us love one another fervently and there will be no place for scorn or the scorner!

Goodness

He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend. Prov. 22:11.

If we are well-instructed in the Scriptures, and so acquainted with the sinful man's heart and condition, we might well ask, "Where is

1 a person?" Certainly such are few and far between! Even from personal experience, we have met very few, sadly! And if and when we meet such, we become united with them. They are attractive in a magnetic sense, and we are drawn to such. In such, the grace of God is discerned, and the sweetness of the gospel is detected, for such characteristics are foreign to human nature. Can we be bold? Might we be such! Might the grace of God in our lives be such a reality that others would be drawn to us for fellowship and confidence. How refreshing it is when in company with the godliest of men and enjoy their fellowship and conversation! Instead of talking about others and being derogatory, they speak of the Savior and their conversation is edifying! May we seek to be such ourselves for the good of others!

Revival

The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. Prov. 22:12.

The eyes of the Lord refer to His omnipresence and omniscience. He sees and knows all things. Nothing remains hidden from Him. There are certain times—those glorious seasons—when the Lord is pleased to answer the prayers of His people and send revivals and spiritual awakenings. From 1734 to the early 1900s, our country witnessed seven extended seasons of revival and awakening. Christianity became infused with life and religion became renewed. Hundreds—yea, thousands of lives were transformed. Churches were reborn, and—most importantly—religion had a great determining effect on society. One historian has written that “by 1832, America could almost be called a Christian nation.” Oh, for such today! To see wickedness and transgression swept aside and the Spirit of God reign over men! To see the most wicked converted and the institutions of immorality and sinfulness come to naught. It has happened several times before, may it happen again in this sorely needed time!

Excuses

The slothful man saith, *There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.* Prov. 22:13.

We were once told that “if you don’t want to do something, one excuse is as good as another.” A lion in the streets was highly unlikely, most cities and towns were walled, and the possibility of a lion in the streets was next to nothing. Such talk was meant to conjure up a very terrifying picture! Thus, there might be some sympathy for the

hful man. Yes, and some people always think the worst, which is
1 to this slothful person. Sadly, such people usually miss out on the
st significant things of life through alleged fears and excuses. We
ht make good application here to the work of God. There is always
sh to be done in God's work both through and apart from the local
rch, from physical labor to the church property to the spiritual work
vangelism. Such is usually left to the few, sadly. How we need
se who eagerly desire to serve the Lord and are more than willing
ass out tracts, make visits, and do the practical work in the ministry
he church. Let us be of that nature and number!

Sexual Sins

The mouth of strange women *is* a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the
LORD shall fall therein. Prov. 22:14.

As these proverbs were meant especially for the young, we might
ect many warnings concerning sexual sin. And so it is in this book!
haps the greatest sins are those bound up in immorality. The main
ion is that sexuality is a large part of being a human being. We are
sexual beings. God has provided marriage for moral sexual
ression. Marriage was meant to be beautiful and completely
sifying. But, as fallen, sinful man has perverted everything which
Lord has given, so it is with sexuality. And the young, unmarried
1 is especially vulnerable. The natural sexual urge and the
ilability of the seductress combine to form an irresistible
ptation. Many have fallen into this “deep pit.” Even the married are
n susceptible—such is the sexual urge. O Lord! Protect your
ple from the “lust of the flesh”!

Discipline

Foolishness *is* bound in the heart of a child; *but* the rod of correction
shall drive it far from him. Prov. 22:15.

Foolishness is the universal inheritance of Adam's posterity when
/ are young. The immaturity of children, it seems, is ever bent on
ing into trouble. Some are rather innocent, but almost all of it is
seless, that is, it is troublesome and causes problems for parents
others. We might remember those early days and even the words
our fathers, “Why did you do that?!” And we had nothing to say.
simply did it, perhaps out of curiosity or without thought of the
sequences. And when we were made to consider what we had
e, it did look foolish, did it not? What discipline we received would

se us to think before we acted—next time! Of course, many if not
st are slow to learn—it is in their genes—literally! They are the
dren of fallen Adam and are prone to foolishness. How we are now
kful to our parents for their patience and discipline—especially
n we find ourselves having to discipline our own children for like
gs!

Oppression

he that oppresseth the poor to increase his *riches*, *and* he that giveth to
he rich, *shall* surely *come* to want. Prov. 22:16.

The oppressor has a sense of superiority which causes him to
pose a right to oppress the poor, whom he considers to be inferior.
rich seem to have their own set of rules by which to live. They
ress the poor to increase their riches and they give to the rich for
same reason—both are a self-centered attempt to increase one’s
lth. Life to these is always a matter of financial gain. This governs
r social life and their relationship to others, both inferior and
rior. Are there not such people in our churches? At times, yes.
se use the church and relationships within the congregation to their
advantage. There is always an ulterior motive at work. How tragic
miss the blessings of fellowship and true communion and friendship
the ulterior motive of financial gain!

Wise Words

bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine
heart unto my knowledge. For *it is* a pleasant thing if thou keep them
within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in
he LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Prov.
2:17–19.

Here Solomon returns to his short proverbs. From chapter ten
ugh 21 he had been occupied with short aphorisms in an
thetical form. Now, again, the words of the wise. The words “Bow
n thine ear” picture reverence and an intense personal hearing. The
rence to “the words of the wise” may refer to the Scriptures.
tainly these, above all, must be fitted to our lips! The greatest and
thing a father can do is instill the Word of God into his son’s ears
reach down into his heart! “Fitted to one’s lips” refers to the
norization of God’s Word and then teaching it to the next
eration. The very Word of God should be transmitted by word of
th from generation to generation so each succeeding generation

sesses it as its own! Oh, that today, with all of our mechanical
s, computers and recording devices, we would and could instill the
rd of God into the ears, hearts and souls of our children until these
fitted in their lips!

Retaining the Word

Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge,
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?
Prov. 22:20–21.

What is written must be put to the test of personal experience and
ome part of the individual. Memorization and meditation firmly fix
truth in the life, mind and heart. Then these Words may be given
to others who will hold them to be priceless and precious. There is
ply no alternative for a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. The
ptures are so exact that often a paraphrase will not do—but a
d-for-word rendering of the exact language will be sufficient. And
it of us in our day who must work through translations and versions
work through another language? The Greek and Hebrew are very
ct. Among other things, these contain grammatical constructions,
hatic devices and idioms which are not brought into the secondary
uage. This weakens to some degree the force of Scripture. A
lom example: Gen. 3:8, “And they heard the voice of the Lord God
ing back and forth in the garden in a windstorm...” An entirely
erent picture than the English! This first disturbance caused Adam
Eve to flee and hide! “Pacing back and forth” is the Hithpa’el
exive. Creation was reflecting their sin in a windstorm [not the cool
he day]. God was not seeking fellowship, He was searching them
to confront them! We can never know the Scriptures too well!

Be Just!

Rob not the poor, because he *is* poor: neither oppress the afflicted in
he gate: For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of
hose that spoiled them. Prov. 22:23–25.

There is a tendency to judge others by their wealth, station in life,
upation, or social standing, as though these are inherently inferior.
ause they are in difficult straits, it may be thought that they can be
used as none will come to their defense. But the Lord is the Great
alizer! He defends the poor and the afflicted. And He is a just and

itable God Who will defend those who live under adversity. The r is self-explanatory. The afflicted were those who gathered at the : to beg or ask alms, as they had been smitten with disease or were pled. The Lord God of Scripture will plead the cause of those who e been downcast or who suffer in society. Those not so smitten or icted must be reminded of this at times. What a blessing it is to be ed what others may have to suffer! And what a blessing to know , if called to providentially suffer poverty or affliction, the Lord own our cause! This is the hope of the downcast!

Cautious Friendships

ake no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou halt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul. Prov. 22:24–25.

Sin is both infectious and contagious. We are sadly susceptible to ie sins, and anger is one of these! It is easy to be angry, and such er spreads easily from one person to another—such is the weakness he creature and the effect of such friendships (Psa. 37:8; Gal. 5:17–

God made us rational and emotional creatures. And now, tainted 1 sin, the worst side of our emotions and learning is susceptible to negative realities which snare men's souls. Consider the society of evers—the church assembly. How quickly at times does anger ad throughout the assembly and how quickly is love lost! The ent strikes and poisons one or two and the venom spreads through congregation. It is easy to take sides, as none is perfect. How we st pray constantly for the unity of our congregation! Such must er be taken for granted. Not only are we susceptible, but our itual adversaries are quick to take advantage of any discord among l's people. May we know the blessedness of a loving assembly!

Godly Tradition

Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set. Prov. 22:28.

The ancient landmarks in Israel set the boundaries of property, were essential to the land, the families, the ownership of property, the inheritance of both families and tribes. We have somewhat the ie in a spiritual sense when considering the doctrine of the inspired stles and our Lord. Sadly, churches and some religious movements

our day have removed the ancient landmarks which our Lord and Apostles have set. New innovations in the churches, entertaining worship, doctrinal modifications, and new means for angelism and gospel preaching have done much harm in departing from the doctrines and practices of the New Testament. It must never be forgotten that what we find in the New Testament by way of doctrinal truth is inspired truth and what we have today are traditions which are grounded in such truth. It is not for us to change in any way that which the inspired New Testament authors handed down to us! Let us be faithful, never innovative!

Receiving Hospitality

When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what *is* before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou *be* a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they *are* deceitful meat. Prov. 23:1–3.

Our lives may experience some strange things for a variety of reasons—and some of these will have a significance which is not immediately evident. Why should we be invited to dine with a person of great importance? The reasons may vary greatly: possibly as a reward for services rendered, or we have earned a higher position for which we are being prepared, or our host wants something from us, or he wants to observe us and make a judgment concerning us. Whatever the reason, there is something at work which has brought us to his attention. Thus, whether the cause is primary or not, we are being served by another of influence. This is not the time to overindulge in food and drink—no matter the temptation, the invitation or the gourmet items on the table. An ulterior motive seems afoot. Self-government and discipline are the order of the day. Enjoy within reason and keep a watch over one's appetite and conversation! By contrast, how blessed it is when feasting with friends—fellow-believers! We should never overindulge, but with Christian Brothers

Sisters, we may freely converse about spiritual things and experience true fellowship! Such is a blessed privilege known only to God's people. May we enjoy such within bounds!

Misplaced Labor

Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. Prov. 23:4–5.

Once again, the believer is at odds with the world. The world lares that to seek its riches is the highest good for man. Much of is geared to this goal, including education, investments, training, tionships, promotion, and our energies put forth. For most, wealth ie full and final goal of life and realization, anticipating a relative of ease and power. What is not realized is that this is also a itual matter, however unexpected or anticipated by the unbelieving ld: whatever is first in our lives is our “god.” To this “god” people ifice all other goals, give their energies, time and relationships to ain. Yet riches are elusive. Many a man has made shipwreck when thought his fortune was almost within his grasp. And what if he lly achieves a measure of wealth? He cannot change; he now wants e! He is taken as a fish on a hook. And what does it all avail? He / lose his fortune all at once through some business deal gone ng, for others, more determined and more unethical are striving for same thing! And, at most in a few short years, he will die and leave it he has left to others who will not appreciate his efforts. Only itual treasures will satisfy and only these will carry some influence ie life to come. Let us invest in eternity through serving the Lord!

Avoidance

Eat thou not the bread of *him that hath* an evil eye, neither desire thou is dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he: Eat and drink, aith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee. The morsel *which* thou ast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words. Prov. 23:6–8.

Evil has permeated the human race. Even the simple things of this may be used to further an evil agenda. What could be so innocent meal with another, enjoying some food and having an innocuous version seems very innocent. After all, we must eat, and a isant conversation over simple food is a beneficial experience. A / friend is made, or an old friend’s acquaintance is renewed. Ah! not necessarily so! Behind the social intercourse may lurk the evil ! Ulterior motives may poison the very food we eat. The words ken may conceal poison and seek to seduce one’s dinner partner. en friendships are either made or destroyed in a seemingly innocent version over a simple meal. Words are exchanged, attitudes are ned and the lives of people are destroyed. The evil eye looks with ulterior motive; it cannot be trusted. It carries a hidden agenda ch is evil and destructive, and catches the unwary in its snare. How erent is true Christina fellowship, even over a simple meal. The

effects of one is depressing, the other, blessed and encouraging. us be honest and seek to encourage our brethren!

Refraining from Advice

Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words. Prov. 23:9.

It is a common thing to be asked for advice by someone who does not respect us and want to know our opinion on a given matter. Ah! do they really want to know or do they treat us as they do many others—ask for advice simply as a means of conversation? These have little humility, and use our information or advice simply to play them against the help given from others. These collect bits and pieces to use in discussion without seriously considering the value of that content to others which have been vouchsafed to them. Thus, all is for naught, by comparative discussion destroy any good which may come of it. These put everything on the same level and do not question the value of such wisdom. The words of a godly man are worth much more than those of a worldly, yet intelligent man! The basis or roots of a man's philosophy often marks its relevance and truth! And his motive is so much to prove or disprove his genuineness!

Criminal Behavior

Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee. Prov. 23:10–11.

Often the criminal act is considered as to its recipient, as to whether it is greatly damaging or not. Crime committed against a wealthy person may not be of much consequence, one reasons, as the person has so much money he may not even realize the theft. Again, a crime committed against a poor person is of little consequence, as the person robbed has little standing or significance. Such is the perverted reasoning of the criminal. What is forgotten is that God has commanded, "Thou shalt not steal," and all such behavior is against Him! Indeed, most sin occurs because the sinner or criminal does not think about God, except, perhaps in a remote, traditional sense. For him, God is not real, not the living God Who rules this world in righteousness and justice! It is said, "All things are disciplined by one's theology." And "theology determines morality," so it is! To walk in this life with a true, God-consciousness is to walk in a godly, consistent fashion which will bring glory to Him!

A Godly Beating

Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. Prov. 23:13–14.

There is a time when children are younger and before they can be reasoned with to their correction and advantage, that they should be physically disciplined. Such discipline settles several things. First, that this world, ruled by God and having a pervading sense of right and wrong, one should see and feel discipline to be necessary. Second, discipline serves as a strong reminder that sin is real and must be punished. Third, that the parent is involved because he is the responsible person to teach discipline to his child. Fourth, All of God's commands must be taken seriously and there is a severe penalty for disobedience. Fifth, Such discipline is performed because the father loves the son and seeks his correction and deliverance from evil. Sixth, God commands such, the father must instruct the son about the nature and character of God—the theology of the rod! Seventh, such discipline is but a step toward the soul's salvation. This is the spiritual effect of discipline—it introduces the child to the God of the Bible who seeks obedience in both the physical and spiritual realms, and an obedient mind should coincide with an obedient heart and soul.

A Wise Son

My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but *be thou* in the fear of the LORD all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off. Prov. 23:15–18.

What is the greatest joy the father can have in his son? Some might say that the son has had the drive to finish his education and attain a responsible position in society—and this is a worthy goal. Others would rejoice that their son has succeeded in a given sport and won a scholarship to a prestigious university. Still others are proud of their son because of his success in the business world under difficult circumstances. He has shown himself to be one of the very few who have succeeded in a difficult field. What of the father in our text? He lived long before the educational and technological age in which we live. He rejoiced that his son had found wisdom and was living in the fear of the Lord. Can anything be greater in any age? This implies a great relationship with God. What would we wish for our son? To be

y converted, to live a truly godly life and to become a true servant
he Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could be greater!

The Godly Son

Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be
not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the
drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall
clothe *a man* with rags. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and
despise not thy mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and sell *it* not;
also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. Prov. 23:19–23.

When a father speaks thus to his son, it is the voice of experience.
The father has either done some himself or witnessed it in the lives of
others. He well knows the dangers and pitfalls which confront a young
man. Because he loves his son, he greatly desires to deliver him from
all evils. Young men are susceptible to such dissipation and
idleness because they are inexperienced, such attractions seem
entirely new, and sinfulness is extraordinarily attractive to the
young. How this young man needs the voice of reason, maturity and
experience from someone he trusts and respects to warn him of such
dangers! Consider the voice of wisdom and experience in spiritual
matters. New converts are often enthusiastic, neophytes in biblical
knowledge, friendly toward all who profess religion and desirous of
spiritual growth and holy adventure. Unless these are under a sound
biblical ministry, they are open to many doctrinal errors and religious
excesses. Further, the devil is always at hand to sow error and lead
new converts astray. How important it is for new, young converts to
be well-instructed in the basic doctrines of Scripture and mentored by
true believers!

The Attractiveness of Sin

My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways. For
the whore *is* a deep ditch; and a strange woman *is* a narrow pit. She also
lieth in wait as *for* a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among
men. Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who
hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of
eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.
Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in
the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent,
and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women,
and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 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
cast. 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. Prov. 23:26–36.

How is it and why is it that such sins as whoredom and drunkenness remain so attractive? After so many centuries of such rage and ruin as these cause, why do they remain so forceful in seducing and ruining young men? Have they not seen the effects of a sin in their own families and among their own friends? and generally in society? The causes may include: the pride of young men cause them to think that they are the exception, that they will anticipate yet remain unaffected by such addictions. Further, they never intend to remain in such dissipation. They only intend to sow a few wild oats, then settle down to a normal life. They fail to realize that it is too late the addictive power of sin! Again, these do not understand sin's reigning power in the life. They easily become enslaved to sin and it becomes their master. Deliverance only comes through the grace of God in salvation. The sinner needs to be saved from himself! Unless this is true, he will never be saved from sin! Has God saved you from yourself?

Evil Companions

Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief. Prov. 24:1–2.

What is the chief attraction of sin? What is it in man's fallen nature that sinks so attracted to sin, especially open ungodliness? Sin attracts the young man like a magnet, despite parental instruction and religious training. But it continues to be a threat to one's peace and even one's life. One thing which makes sin attractive is the promise of immediate satisfaction. The whole life and the whole man are not considered; sin is seen as a quick and temporary gratification which soon passes. This immediacy makes sin very attractive. A night of debauchery, immorality, drunkenness and in the morning a new beginning, fresh and unsoiled—but this is to forget or deny the permanent stain upon the soul and haunting experience which remains! It cannot be shaken, but pleads for repetition night after night, until it consumes the sinner. The very fact that one desires to repeat such is a sign of its reality, seductiveness and grasping power over the life! Nothing is so harmful and controlling as evil companions and their influence. A young man not only must deal with himself, but with many others—he is virtually outnumbered when he seeks to escape!

Godly Influences

Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man *is* strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is* safety. Prov. 24:3–6.

From the strength of ungodliness in the previous passage and chapter, we move to consider the influence of godly men. Now, a word about wisdom—what is there about wisdom which delivers the young man? One thing is that godly wisdom enables the young man to discern the end results of a life lived in wantonness or godliness. He has been instructed by his father, by other old men, and by godly elders. He knows there are consequences to all his actions. He observes the wicked and he sees the end of their lifestyle with its dreadful effects. While the present pleasures, as wicked as they are, may be tempting, the end result is dreadful to consider! The body becomes old prematurely, and is plagued with diseases. The soul itself becomes hardened toward God and religion. The personality becomes alienated from family and friends—and the man becomes a lost soul. His soul is not only lost spiritually and for eternity, but even now he is lost to his family, to society about him and to his previous friends. Oh! what a tragic end to a young life filled with good potential!

The Thought of Foolishness

Wisdom *is* too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. The thought of foolishness *is* sin: and the scorner *is* an abomination to men. Prov. 24:7–9.

The city gate was in olden times the place where the leaders of the city gathered (Gen. 19:1; 23:18; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:11). There was always a number of elders gathered there, and they sat in judgment upon civil and more personal matters—the municipal Court. Here, the fool's voice was not heard. He was sadly out of place. His personality, reputation and deportment kept him from uttering a word! Now, the essence of the matter is reached: the very thought of foolishness is sin! Sin is so contagious that it cannot even be considered without the taint of sin! This silences the fool and the mocker. The city gate was reserved for serious business, and the foolish and scornful proved unworthy and untrustworthy. Think of the

rich and believers. We have pastors and deacons—men of station and renown. It would be entirely out of place to have a foolish man or scorner in such a position! Enough said.

Weakness

If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. Prov. 24:10.

We are still involved with a father instructing and warning his young son. There will be days of adversity ahead and the young man's strength—physical, mental and moral—will be tested. Such may come on him suddenly and without time to prepare on his part. He must be ready. If he fails and faints, his strength is small. Such may haunt him entire life—that in a time of crisis he failed and demonstrated weakness instead of strength. At the core of instruction and exhortation is the truth of faith. The young man must have faith in God, faith that the Lord will give him wisdom and uphold him in the hour of trial. It is implied throughout this Book of Proverbs that the young man has been and is being instructed in the Scriptures. This is key to strength in the hour of trial and testing. Crying out to God as Samson. Going in the confidence of God as did David against Goliath. Marching against combined forces as did Joshua. Faith is the element the world cannot understand, but it is the hidden power in the life of a young man brought up on Scripture, nourished by his father's instruction and fitted by a personal faith. And so it is with us in the spiritual sense. Faith is only as strong as its object—and our faith is in God Himself!

Help the Innocent

If thou forbear to deliver *them that are* drawn unto death, and *those that are* ready to be slain; 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? Prov. 24:11–12.

The picture drawn here is evidently that of a person wrongly accused. The young man knows something which might deliver or aid the accused, but he does not speak up and seek to defend the innocent. Above and beyond men stands almighty God and He knows the truth. If anyone is a witness or knows something which might possibly exonerate the accused, let him speak out and not retreat through fear. Powerful opponents may seek to intimidate, powerful persons may seek to condemn for their own purposes, those with an agenda will seek to

der evil for evil, and the cause will be lost unless someone boldly
ids up for the truth and seeks justice. Be that man! Should such an
asion arise, be valiant for the truth! The same is true in a church
ation when someone is on trial for alleged sin or wrongdoing. If we
w something to the contrary, it is our responsibility to take a stand,
irdless of who may oppose us. God knows and He is the final
ge!

Honey and Truth

My son, eat thou honey, because *it is* good; and the honeycomb,
which is sweet to thy taste: So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* unto
hy soul: when thou hast found *it*, then there shall be a reward, and thy
xpectation shall not be cut off. Prov. 24:13–14.

A comparison is here made between honey and the truth of
dom and knowledge. Nothing was sweeter than honey and nothing
e preferable than the knowledge of wisdom. Both can be imbibed
1 beneficial results, the one strengthening the body and the other
sying the soul. The sweetness was tasted and the nourishment
ived only by eating, and so the knowledge of wisdom can only be
nd and blessed by its consumption with the mind and heart. The
feeds the body, the other the soul. One will never lose or suffer
by feeding upon the knowledge of wisdom. For us, the initial
aking of the knowledge of wisdom is finding the Lord Jesus as our
ior and uniting with Him in and by faith. The truly converted man
gain wisdom and begin to experience the realities and blessings of
ine grace. He will be nourished as a man eating and experiencing
sweetness of the honey. The one feeds the body, the other feeds the
l. Are we of that number who have healthy souls?

Divine Ethics

.ay not wait, O wicked *man*, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil
ot his resting place: For a just *man* falleth seven times, and riseth up
again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief. Rejoice not when thine
nemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest
he LORD see *it*, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from
him. Prov. 24:15–18.

The wicked man hates the righteous. He seeks his demise or ruin.
he is warned here that the Lord protects the righteous and though
fall, he shall rise again. Then a rather strange statement. Do not
ice when your enemy falls, for the Lord may turn His wrath from
and his judgment will be disappointed! We may think that the

acts of our God are strange at times. We must remember that our God is equitable and just, and the Divine ethic is consistent to both the godly and the ungodly. Let us be careful that we, too, are equitable and consistent in all matters. If and when we see an enemy under the rod, must leave such in God's hand. As human beings, we are all tainted with sin and may sin against the Lord by judging those with whom the Lord is dealing. Let the Lord do what pleases Him. One thing is certain: the Lord will deal justly and righteously with each and every person!

To Fear or Not

Fret not thyself because of evil *men*, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall be no reward to the evil *man*; the candle of the wicked shall be put out. My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: *and* grieve not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall come suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both? Prov. 24:19–22.

In this changeable world of fallen, sinful men, nothing remains the same very long. We live in a world of change. Those who prosper in their wickedness today will be gone tomorrow. And even their glory will fade and they will be forgotten. We, however, must give glory to the Lord, Who is immutable, and to the king, whose word and power must be recognized. Do not try to change what will prove unchangeable of itself. The young man is taught by his father to live in a world of change, to recognize proper authority and not to trouble himself over the changing times. Among believers, unless a specific church or denomination is carried along by the world into error and decay, stay by the unchanging Word of God! Today, sadly, many of the orthodox denominations have espoused worldly methods and means, and some have even openly embraced immorality! The one unchanging element is the authoritative Word of God. This must be and remain our sole rule of both [what we are to believe] and practice [what we are to live].

Liars and Truth

He that saith unto the wicked, Thou *art* righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: But to them that rebuke *him* shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. Prov. 24:24–25.

At first glance, the words of v. 24 seem strange. But this is very true in our modern world of relativism! Politicians lie boldly. Many openly deny the truth. But there is a day of judgment coming when all

be set right. Above and beyond all earthly judges with their
 udices and falsehood stands the Lord Jesus Christ, the final Judge,
 o will set all things right at His return. Truth shall reign in and
 ough the Lord Christ! The great in this world, who live as if there
 e no God, will be faced with absolute truth and eternal punishment.
 ry mouth will be stopped. The wicked will be cast into hell and
 h shall reign through the reign of our Lord! Let us live in and for
 truth without compromise and stand in the say and hour of trial.
 : final victory will be ours in the Lord Jesus!

Being Orderly

Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and
 afterwards build thine house. Be not a witness against thy neighbour
 without cause; and deceive *not* with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him
 as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.
 Prov. 24:27–29.

An orderly life and work ethic can accomplish much with its
 discipline and right priorities. Once the work is being done and the life
 disciplined and orderly it will be time to build one's house. An echo of
 eighth and Ninth Commandments—sins against one's neighbor.
 ally, a word about revenge. Such is God's provenance, not ours!
 : godly man lives a well-ordered life. He acts only when he has just
 se to do so. He does not meddle. Further, he does assume the
 ine prerogative of repaying another as he himself has been treated.
 y is this wrong and in error? One major reason is that, unlike God,
 o knows and sees all things, we cannot look upon the heart of
 ther or discern his motives and actions. How different things would
 f we acted in such a way toward our fellow-believers! Seeing their
 d and seeking not to deceive or distract them. Sadly, at times, even
 ever want to exercise the Divine prerogative and judge the hearts
 thers.

A Lesson in Life

Then I saw, *and* considered *it* well: I looked upon *it*, *and* received
 instruction. Prov. 24:32.

The words of our text refer to the preceding statements about the
 hful man who lets his property and possessions go to ruin. This is a
 state of affairs! We should certainly learn from the indolence of
 1! There is a principle of application here for our lives in v. 32.
 re are three parts in our study of God's Word: (1) Exposition. (2)

genesis. (3) Application. These principles can be applied to our studying a text and preparing a message upon it... We must always end in application. The Word of God is meant to be studied, understood and applied to our lives and relationships. Without this final step, all is in vain! We must progress from the theological to the intellectual to the practical! Unless we seek to be practical, our whole approach to the scriptures is defective and will not bear good fruit! We are meant to be conformed by the Word of Truth, and in order to do so, we must not only understand it, we must apply it faithfully!

Dross

Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked *from* before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. Prov. 25:4–5.

In its natural state, silver, as other precious metals, is mixed with dross. Ore is the raw state of precious materials. Ore is a mixture of silver, iron, copper, soil, and inferior or base materials. These must be melted away and burned away through the process of smelting. Then, the silver is refined and brought into a rough shape for the finer to finish with hammering and engraving. This process is one of refining, and is an appropriate figure for the work of God upon a man's natural state and condition before he can stand before the king as a fitting prince or person of importance. He must learn the language and decorum of the royal court. His manners must be refined and at the king's table or at the king's side, he must act appropriately. God does the same with His children. They are taken from their natural state of raw ore [the "old man"] and put through the fires of grace to burn and purge out the old man and his habits and lifestyle. Then they are educated spiritually and shaped by the Word of God into the "new man" or regenerate self. Then, subject to the Word of God and the Spirit, made acceptable for the King's court and table. How are we to have proper spiritual table manners?

Self-Exaltation

Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great *men*: 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. Prov. 25:6–7.

The desire for self-exaltation is native for the natural man. A careless individual seeks to put himself forward as someone important. In the presence of the king, one such person may be sent

on to a lower seat at the king's feast. If this man were humble and
thy, he might be commanded to take a higher seat to his honor.
Lord Himself stated this in a parable (Lk. 14:7–11). It is
erstandable that we each believe ourselves to be important for a
ety of reasons. But we are not the ones to judge. Who may be at
feast? A soldier who has been wounded in the King's service, a
o who saved the king's life, an honorable man who is a hero for
y, or a prince. And so it is among men, but not with our heavenly
ier! He treats us all with grace and mercy. If we are His, He
mmunes with us personally and we sit close as honorable and
oved guests! Let us remember this when we next pray and labor
n intercession and anxiety!

Justifying Ourselves

Go not forth hastily to strive, lest *thou know not* what to do in the end
hereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause
with thy neighbour *himself*; and discover not a secret to another: Lest
he that heareth *it* put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.
Prov. 25:8–10.

This is a warning not to be hasty in making a charge against one's
ghbor. We may be sore pressed, and even angry about some
posed ill or evil our neighbor as done to us. We begin to the debate,
raps with the elders at the gate—the setting seems to be public—
then the neighbor tells his side of the story and we are publically
ned and embarrassed or being ill-informed and in the wrong.
idle such things privately and not to others, lest we bring shame
n ourselves. What an appropriate lesson for differences between
evers, especially in a given congregation! Remember, Satan is at
k constantly to cause dissention between church members and
cs to harm the name of Christ among His people. What we do, we
st do in love, sowing kindness and concern for Christ's sake!

Reproof

A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an
arring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so *is* a wise reproof
upon an obedient ear. Prov. 25:11–12.

As members of Adam's sinful race, none of us likes to be
oved. It is embarrassing. We are humiliated. We want to turn away
neither receive the reproof nor experience the rebuke. This is
erstandable. It is not natural to the natural man, but it is necessary

beneficial to the spiritual man. The burden here is upon the one who reproves another. What wisdom it must take to assume the role of reprove! At times this must be done—and done by someone to whom the one who needs reproof will listen. This means respect and a willingness to listen and even implement what needs to be done for correction. What grace is involved! What humility and tenderness must be exemplified! It may take the utmost skill to gain a hearing and not be refused! But once the matter is conveyed and the loving confrontation is over, the blessings may be experienced by all!

A Faithful Messenger

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. Prov. 25:13.

Harvest time is usually hot and dry, being in the fall of the year before the rains set in. But an early light snowfall brings a cold front, and the heart of harvest time is replaced by the cold, which is refreshing! This was a rare occasion and so remembered for a long time. This is likened to the return of a faithful messenger who has returned with very good news to his masters. The Bible has many such instances for our observations: the return of Issac's servant with Rebecca, the return of Cornelius' servant to bring Peter to preach, the return of Paul's associates from their journeys to the various scenes of his labors carrying his epistles. It is a great blessing in the Lord's work to receive good news in answer to inquiries made concerning the progress of the gospel! What refreshment when we find that a new field of labor has opened for evangelism, or the foundation has been laid for new ministry. We rejoice and anticipate the future opening for the gospel!

A Grievous Gift

Who so boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain. Prov. 25:14.

The Old Testament witnessed many false prophets who did much harm and brought judgment upon themselves and upon the nation. They professed to be sent from God, but misrepresented Him—an egregious sin! The New Testament witnesses to the same in some of the churches. There are false prophets today, professing to be called of God to the gospel ministry, but unconverted and tarnished by immorality and various sins! How tragic! How harmful to the cause of

Lord Jesus! How much damage is done to churches through such sons! Churches may be split, the gospel brought into disrepute, and reputation of a gospel church compromised by sin! Some of these are gifted in personality and skills, some have prepared for the ministry, but proven themselves to be reprobates. They leave a path of confusion and harm many. All is noise and false impressions [“clouds and wind without rain”]. How careful the churches must be when considering any man for the gospel ministry! How the church must pray and seek the face of God lest some come unto them and bring a curse upon the ministry.

Excess

Fast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Prov. 25:16.

History is always interesting. The Bible knew of no sugar. Europe did not import sugar from Asia and India in the time of the Crusaders. By the 16th century cane sugar was imported in large quantities from the New World. Honey was the sweetener found in Scripture. Honey is delicious, but one can overindulge and become ill and so vomit the honey. Many things are fine and refreshing in their use with proper restraints. This includes honey. But if taken in much quantity, it is sickening. This in several places in Scripture is used figuratively for one's gifts or glory (25:21). Pride, self-importance, self-centeredness, and one's gifts or glory may bring the son into disrepute. Pride is one of the mother-sins, as it gives birth to a host of brats—other sins which grow quickly! In the work of God, humility balances out the glory of man. All true gifts are God-given and are not subjects in which man can take pride, but must be exercised with the enabling grace of God and in all humility. This is the path to blessing and usefulness!

Wearing out one's Welcome

Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee. Prov. 25:17.

The Bible has much to say about hospitality. This is true regarding the Old Testament among the Jews. Hospitality was a refined art filled with long-standing customs (See Psa. 23:4–6). The New Testament also speaks of hospitality and both its formality and its abuses (Lk. 9:5–50). But hospitality has its limits. For someone to constantly come over and finally make a nuisance of himself is bad manners of

worst sort. It reveals little or no respect for the host or his family household. He wears out the hospitality of the home and the friendship of his neighbor. The causes may be many: loneliness, desire for the host's food and drink, attraction to someone in the family, perhaps a young maiden, similar occupations, etc., etc. The result is not the same—becoming weary of the visitor! Hospitality is different today, and we are much more informal. Christian neighbors may have coffee together, study the Bible together, pray together and share a common meal at times—but the bottom line is the same, too much closeness is not good. Let our relationship be respectful and unobtrusive and may we always be welcome as brethren!

Harm

A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour *is* a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble *is like* a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. Prov. 25:18–19.

Much harm is done by a false witness. One may ask, why would a man lie about his neighbor? The answer: he believes that in some way it is either true or to his advantage: Maybe the neighbor has proven harmful in some way; or has cheated him in time past; or he simply is not like his neighbor and this is his opportunity to get back at him whatever reason; or someone has paid him to lie. Consider the pain and damage that are done, as described in the weapons used by the Lord of illustration. What confidence can be had in such a person? The consequences are very painful to consider! We live in a sinful world. Truth is often considered relative and subjective. People lie and get by with it. But there is a God in heaven Who rules this world, and He may not let such go for long. He may not wait until the final Day of Judgment. Truth may come out unexpectedly. Providence is on the side of truth! The believer, though lied against, is never alone—the Lord knows and acts.

Cheering the Down-Hearted

As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, *and* as vinegar upon bitre, so *is* he that singeth songs to an heavy heart. Prov. 25:20.

Seeking to cheer up someone who is down-hearted is never an easy task. And it must not be taken without prayer and much consideration. To make the attempt without thinking only seems to make things worse, or it may seem that you are making light of the situation. Do not put yourself into a position of seeming to belittle

ther or his circumstances. Do not use humor, thinking that what persn needs is simply a good laugh. Asking to pray with or for 1 a one is aproprate if he or she is a believer. Sympathy is the licine called for on such occasions. This is where and when evers may excell, as we do pray and sympathize with one another occasions, and are used to being serious about another's trials and es. Sadly, we have all probably experienced another seeking to ized our situationl and dealing with us in humor, believing that it we need is to laugh away our troubles. So we understand others n our own experience. How blessed it is to have a true, erstranding friend who knowsl how to give comfort and show pathy!

Our Enemies

f thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee. Prov. 25:21–22.

This exhortation is truly and uniquely Christian! It towers above heathen ethics and principles of behavior! Nothing compares with in this fallen, sinful world in which we live! What is its source? : Moral Law! “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 18)—and this includes our enemies! (Matt. 5:43–49; Rom. 12:17–

These are, perhaps, the most demanding and humbling commands ll of Scripture! How far we are in seeking to fulfill these when the ortunity arises! Yet these are scriptural and given to us by our ivenly Father for His glory and our ultimate good! And they are ctical, neither theoretical nor hypothetical. If taken as they must –true, to be implemented as opportunity arises and done for the y of God and the good of our enemy—they provide the greatest imony to the reality of our faith! These may provide the greatest ortunities for evangelism, and as a testimony to the reality of the pel in our own lives. If put into such circumstances, may we rise to occasion and reveal the reality of our faith!

Just a Look

The north wind driveth away rain: so *doth* an angry countenance a jackbiting tongue. Prov. 25:23.

Margin; ASV: The north wind bringeth forth rain: So doth a backbiting ongue an angry countenance].

How are we to deal with a backbiter? He or she is one who imes or speaks maliciously against someone who is absent from the conversation. This is considered the worst sort of gossip! He or she asks derogatorily about someone in his absence to defame him when s not present to defend himself. This is compared to the cold north, wind which did not bring needed rain, and was only a chilling sance. Such backbiting is met with a strongly disapproving, silent c. The picture is vividly drawn. Not a word spoken, but such a ative look as to end all conversation! Gossip is often attractive in a ous way. People want to know and savor any tasty morsel of sip. But certain subjects and people as backbiters, who have an ax rind must be silenced with a silent, disapproving stare! The hearer be party to the sinful tale and damage done if the talk continues. ly, even Christians are liable to such things! May we not partake, stare down the offender! Let us heed the admonition to never be a aker of other men's sins!

Thirst Satiated

Is cold waters to a thirsty soul, so *is* good news from a far country.
Prov. 25:25.

Thirst is one of the most intense sensations known, next to the ands of the lungs for air. The dry tongue and mouth, the waves of sea, the weakness of the body, and the difficulty breathing all add r ache to a terrible thirst and the dehydration of the body. Ah! the nderful sensation of a drink of cold water, easing the thirst! How it ns to be welcomed by every part of the body! It is a revival of life lf! There is a satisfaction which has been anticipated for a long od of time and its realization makes the cold drink even more sfaying. It is the same with good news from a far country. There been a dearth of communication, a lack of desired munication. Fears arise and desire increases for some word of or n a loved one! What joy when it arrives; fears are dismissed and e is rekindled! Have we not experienced such when a loved one is ie front during a time of war? Or a missonary is in a troubled land we have not received word in a very long time? Or a son or ghter has been away at school or traveling and we have not had d for a season? Often such word comes from afar as an answer to yer, and we have a double reason to rejoice!

A Corrupt Spring

A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring. Prov. 25:26.

Much of the land of Israel was desert. Rains were sparse. Water drinking was obtainable at wells or springs, which were few and highly prized. The pollution of any spring, well or fountain was considered a major incident and crime. Drinking water was carefully guarded by the population. Towns were built around wells or springs. Available water by necessity. A corrupted spring, which became no longer potable was a major catastrophe! All life—plant, animal and man—depended upon such a well or spring. The comparison given here emphasizes the great tragedy of a righteous man falling down and giving obeisance to a wicked king, magistrate or chieftain. This was a matter of life and death! The greatest of tragedies! It would seem that the whole course of nature had been reversed, that evil had triumphed over good and justice had disappeared from the land. It is no small thing when this occurs in a religious setting. When a church succumbs to the false doctrine or heresy of a denomination, or a pastor fails to stand for biblical truth before the deacon board of a church, and the action moves from doctrine to politics!

The Curse and the Cause

As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come. Prov. 26:2.

Cursing is the most useless of sins. A man may in his anger or foolishness utter oaths and curses of the worst sort, profane God's name and make a fool of himself. He simply has no power to bring the curse to its effect. Why, then, do men curse? Perhaps it is an attempt to be their own "god," to say, as it were, "Let there be light," and darkness remains. Despite fallen, sinful man's wickedness and depravity, he has no power to make his curses effective. On the other hand, the Lord can bring a curse upon a man or men, an army or a kingdom—and it will come! It may come upon men as sinners, as rebels against God, against His covenant, against His chosen leader or king, or against his prophet. If there is sufficient cause, the curse will come into effect. It will not come as a wandering bird but as just retribution. Nothing will be able to stop it except the One Who had given it. Goliath's curse proved baseless; David's came true (1 Sam. 17:43–48). We are not to curse, but to pray. And we are to pray even for our enemies and for

er good. As the curse causeless shall not come, so the blessing in answer to prayer may come as a blessing.

The Fool

The legs of the lame are not equal: so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools. Prov. 26:7.

The opening twelve verses of this chapter deal with the fool—aertation on the Fool. He is seen from different aspects, all bad or disappointing. A fool in Scripture is a person lacking moral sensibility and consistency. He is thoughtless and lives without reference to God. The psalmist sadly describes many among sinful, fallen mankind! We are foolish to the extent that there are moral and spiritual inconsistencies in our lives. How are we to escape being such? By living according to the Scriptures and finding a scriptural consistency and morality. To live without God is to live the life of a fool. The Scriptures are our source of wisdom, knowledge, godliness and consistency. If we would trust worthy, godly, and find great blessing, we must live according to the Word of God.

The Slothful

The slothful *man* saith, *There is* a lion in the way; a lion *is* in the streets. *As* the door turneth upon his hinges, so *doth* the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in *his* bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard *is* wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. Prov. 26:13–16.

From the fool, the writer of Proverbs passes to comment on the slothful. This person is characterized as being intelligent in his own eyes, superior, yet indolent—all theory and talk, yet wholly unproductive, and so useless in a practical world. God has ordained that Christians live practical, active lives. We are to be given to prayer and to the study of the Word of God. We are to give ourselves to the service of the Lord Jesus to practically serve Him. What keeps the average Christian from speaking a word to his neighbor or friend concerning the gospel? Passing out tracts at a busy market or thoroughfare? Volunteering to teach a children's class? Doing some practical work in helping a neighbor or even a stranger as opportunity presents so he has opportunity to give out the word of the gospel? Who opens what doors of blessing the Lord may open when opportunity presents itself? For the true Christian, slothfulness is sinful!

Intrusion

He that passeth by, *and* meddleth with strife *belonging* not to him, *is* like one that taketh a dog by the ears. As a mad *man* who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, Prov. 26:17–18.

It is not polite to intrude into a conversation which is private. This is true unless the situation is of such a nature that someone may be teased or physically assaulted. Even a heated debate should be left to the disputants. Taking a strange dog by the ears almost always results in a very bad dogbite! We make ourselves the objects of ridicule and even verbal or physical assault. There is a place for the public declaration of the truth of God—the pulpit, unless we include in our preaching under certain circumstances. Even then, the latter may be questionable. We can be easily misunderstood if we do not save ourselves with definite decorum and take care not to be misunderstood or misrepresented. We want to do good and serve the world, not cause trouble. The goal is to present the truth as clearly as possible. Any contention or confusion defeats this purpose. And we must be carried along with fervent prayer that our good will not be evil spoken of!

Sins of Speech

As a mad *man* who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, So *is* the man *that* deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out: so where *there is* no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. Prov. 26:18–20.

The remainder of this chapter (26:18–28) is devoted to the sins of the tongue—that troublesome member which causes so much contention among men. Almost every phase of the sins of the tongue is here mentioned. Solomon begins with the awful damage done by the tongue when it is called a “practical joke.” A practical joke is a prank intended to embarrass, humiliate or confuse its object. He is finally told of things which the joke has done its harm. Some pranks can be very harmful. The “joke” causes humor and levity to the ones creating it, not the one who is the brunt. The Scriptures take a dim view of such perverted humor. Among Christians, some pull practical jokes and do harm to others; some limit themselves to mere humor and levity. We must take care not to cause harm to a person or his or her reputation, and we must do our best to remain godly in all things. We are to lift each other up and seek to edify one another, not cause undue stress or crisis.

ough a perverted idea of humor. May we love one another and edify another to the glory of God and the good of all!

Boasting

Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. Prov. 27:1–2.

Boasting is a type of pride. Boasting about something intended is especially grievous and presumptive. Who knows what may happen tomorrow? Further, we must not praise or congratulate ourselves—which is simply bragging about what we have done or will do. These matters are the very opposite of what and how believers are to act. Indeed, we should preface every anticipated action with “the Lord willing.” We live or die, are able or not, may or may not act unless the Lord permits or allows a given action. But most men presume—they live on presumption, and live as though they had complete control over their own lives and over the future. Such is not the attitude or lifestyle of the true believer! He humbly aligns his life and expectations to the will of the Lord. There is no place for pride or presumption in the life of the true believer!

Words of a Friend

Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Prov. 27:5–6.

No one wants to be rebuked. But if such is necessary, let it be done in love. This will change the nature of the rebuke and make it palatable because the one who rebukes us loves us and has our best interests at heart. Only the very best of friends can engage in this, and only by this is such friendship revealed (Lev. 19:17–18). Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul as he dealt with contention and the Corinthians (Gal. 4:12–16). He cleared up misunderstandings with the Romans (Rom. 15:1–6). He advised younger Timothy to act accordingly (1 Tim. 5:20–21). He challenged Peter and kindly rebuked him for action which called into question an unscriptural separation (1 Pet. 2:11–21). Loving rebuke is the great test of friendship between Christians. Let our rebuke be made sure that it is done in the utmost love and concern, so no one can intervene and misinterpret our actions or words.

Prudence

My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent *man* foreseeeth the evil, *and* hideth himself; but the simple pass on, *and* are punished. Prov. 27:11–12.

Solomon tells us that it is a great blessing from God to have a prudent son. Especially if and when someone accuses him of not raising his son of being prudent. He then goes on to reiterate the blessings of such a son. A father's actions toward his son are of wide and in depth, loving instruction. Every godly father wants the very best for his son. He wants his son to be better than has been, and to be more loyal and faithful. A prudent son is one of the greatest blessings a father could have. Such prudence would reveal a thorough education, righteousness as well as wisdom. What a joy to a father if and when the latter is accosted concerning his training of his son if the former proves to be prudent! Among Christians in the present day, technical matters and skills have taken precedence over moral issues. Both are important for the whole man. May our sons take their place as men who are prudent!

Questionable Blessing!

He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, shall be counted a curse to him. Prov. 27:14.

This is a strange saying! What we find here is evidently an ulterior motive masquerading as friendship. Close, consistent friendship needs much praise or attention. To engage in such arouses suspicion. What might be the reason? Any number of things, all of them sinful and deceptive, come to mind: sinfulness against the neighbor is disguised under the assertions of blessing his neighbor. Or, even the worst—committing an immoral act with the neighbor's wife. Often it was the friend and closest friend and neighbor, as it is today! Oh, the deceitfulness of the human heart! What friendships are destroyed and what sins are revealed when everything is brought out into the open! Jealousy, falsehood, immorality, false accusations, and sins of a tragic character have come between neighbors. Such is life in a fallen, sinful world where there is a lack of grace and an opportunity for evilness to find entrance into a friendship!

Reciprocation

iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Prov. 27:17.

Man was never meant to be a solitary being. He was created to be, only a spiritual being to hold communion with God, but a social being—men living together in a society of families. Thus, man was not meant to live only to himself. The Lord ordained for men to converse with one another, trade ideas, discover things of God's creation and improve their lot in a world now cursed by sin. All advancement in the activities in human history depended upon minds affecting one another. Upon this principle exists every library, almost every book, most information and social intercourse. All scientific advancement has resulted from minds brought together in discussion and experiments. On a personal level, one mind sharpens another as a whetstone or file sharpens a knife. Blessed are friends and conversations which are edifying! Blessed are conversations which open the riches of Scripture! Blessed are the times when two friends pray together concerning their nation, families and church!

Reflections

As in water face *answereth* to face, so the heart of man to man. Prov. 27:19.

In this apt illustration, one's face is very clearly reflected when he comes into the undisturbed water of a pot or a pond. Every detail is seen, as in a mirror. There is an exact reflection. The same is true according to the Word of God. Now, this is not universal, except to a certain degree with modifying conditions. Man-to-man, and Christian-to-Christian. The converted and unconverted do not possess this exact correspondence, believers do. There is a true heart-correspondence between believers. Both have been renewed by the Spirit of God. Both have had their sins forgiven. Both are indwelt by the same Spirit of God. Both have been delivered from a life of sin. Both have a desire to glorify the grace of God in their lives, and both have a glorious expectation of eternal life in the presence of their Lord. What a blessing to have a godly relationship with another whose life reflects one's own!

Diligence

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, *and* look well to thy herds. For riches *are* not for ever: and doth the crown *endure* to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. The lambs *are* for thy clothing, and the goats *are* the price of the field. And *thou shalt have* goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and *for* the maintenance for thy maidens. Prov. 27:23–27.

Godliness is never separate from the practicalities of life. Some like to believe that to be preeminently spiritual, one must remain separate from others, live a solitary life and refrain from the usual pursuits of others. But nothing could be further from the truth! Godliness is the art of being active and diligent in managing an estate and providing for one's family and household. There is no dividing line between the temporal and the spiritual. Each has its place and both demand diligence. A man may be feeding his flock or plowing a field while he prays! All of his daily tasks can be seasoned with communion with God, and when breaks must be taken for rest, these, too, can be given to prayer. Let all our activities be sanctified with prayer and a mind directed up to God and we can live in both worlds simultaneously!

Fear and Boldness

The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion. Prov. 28:1.

Adam and Eve knew no fear until they had disobeyed God and eaten of the forbidden Fruit. Hearing the voice of the Lord God coming back and forth in the garden in a storm of wind, they were filled with fear and hid themselves among the trees of the garden. Man knew no fear until he was a sinner. Fear arises from a guilty conscience. The wicked may seem bold and without fear; this is but a ruse. When guilt is brought home, they are afraid, even when they are not pursued (Lev. 26:17). The righteous are as bold as a lion. They are without fear. The testimony of true Christians throughout history is that, when called to the extreme—even to give their lives for the gospel, the Lord has never wanted for martyrs. He can even overcome the fear of death! It is an unspeakably blessed reality when the fear of man is replaced by the fear of God! O Lord! May we fear Thee—and only Thee!

Political Division

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. Prov. 28:2.

The believer must live his life in the context of human government, and often that human government is corrupt, divided and fused. King Solomon observed—and it would hold true, tragically, at his death in the reign of his son and the division of the kingdom of Judah and Israel—The more princes or sub-rulers, the more contention and division in the kingdom and in society. When there is one ruler, society is stabilized. How we must pray for the nation and society in which we live! Government and our religion are closely entwined. Government seeks to interfere with religious observances and restrict the practice of true religion—the unified testimony of the church. Throughout our national history we have witnessed many revivals and spiritual awakenings, even when things seemed hopeless.

We need an out-pouring of the Spirit of God as never before! May our gracious God hear our cries and answer our prayers and longings for revival!

The Law

They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them. Prov. 28:4.

Man was not created lawless; the moral Law was indelibly etched on his inner being (Rom. 2:12–16). It was later codified at Mt. Sinai. Man has always had the Law—the God-given sense of right and wrong. Where the law is denied, lawlessness abounds and the wicked are increased. But the lawful, who are instructed by the Law oppose them. The Moral Law was never given for justification, but has forever been the standard of righteousness for man, always defined sin, and always been the standard for man's conduct. The Moral Law was codified at Mt. Sinai and summarized in 10 Commandments. Salvation is by grace, but it is the duty of the Law to convict the sinner and drive him to Christ in repentance and faith! Once men reject God's Law, they become like the wicked, for they are lawless. But those who keep God's Law contend with them. The strength and use of the Law are to convict of sin and leave the sinner hopeless except in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Poor vs. Rich

Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. Prov. 28:6.

This proverb is essentially repeated from Prov. 19:1 and is an echo from David in Psa. 37:16. It approaches a seeming contradiction of the Divine government of this fallen, sinful human race. We have to compare the godly who is poor and the wicked who is rich. How is this possible in the context of God's blessing upon the godly and obedient as opposed to the ungodly and disobedient? It simply points out the differences which exist in this present life and world before Divine and final judgment. The godly are often poor and the ungodly are often rich. God wants us to differentiate between the inner man and the outer man. Godliness must at times suffer want and experience privation; the perverse or wicked may at times be rich, though they are cursed of God and destined for judgment. We must not judge according to earthly prosperity, but according to faithfulness to God's truth in heart and life. This has always been true from Adam to the present. Let us learn to see as God sees and judge accordingly!

Father and Son

Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father. Prov. 28:7.

This is a timeless truth. It has been appropriate since Cain and Abel. A son who keeps God's Law is an obedient son, a God-fearing son, a morally-clean son, an honest son, a son who is neither malicious nor covetous. A son who has been seduced by evil companions may be guilty of all such sins. What a tragedy when a son who has been reared in the fear of God departs as he grows older and becomes a companion of evil men! What heartbreak for fathers and mothers when their children grow up and depart from the holy teaching of the home and parents! We see this in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11–32). Thankfully, this young man returned and was transformed. Fathers! Mothers! Keep praying for those who have left home for the world to pursue its ways. May our gracious God bring them home as He did this young man! He is able!

Covetousness

He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor. Prov. 28:8.

Covetousness is a disease of the soul for which there is no cure from the fear and grace of God. The covetous person wants just a little more, and the present situation never offers enough. In a society where covetousness is rife, nothing is as it should be. God prohibited one of His professed people to charge exorbitant interest [usury] upon money or goods lent to another Jew (Ex. 22:24; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 19–20). The Lord hates such covetousness and will intervene for the sake of the poor (Psa. 140:12). Even in the New Testament, far removed from Jewish interests, the lust for unjust gain is strongly condemned (1 Tim. 6:3–11). Such should never be named among Christians! We are people of faith, which means that we trust God in every area of our lives. Covetousness makes a god out of money and wars against His providence! For whatever is first in our lives is our God!

Life a Unity

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer *shall* be abomination. Prov. 28:9.

Life is a unity. This is unavoidable in a world ruled by God. Divine Providence leaves out nothing. God is God over every person, over the whole person. Failure to recognize this is the source of most religious problems. Man, however, if not guided by the truth and Spirit of God, is fragmented in his life. He can and does separate various aspects from others. He can, he mistakenly believes, separate his prayers from his other actions. As our text reveals, he can turn away from the Law on the one hand, yet fervently pray on the other with no contradiction! No, the whole person is involved in every action, with right and purpose! Thus, prayer is offered up to God from a mind, heart and life that is submissive to His will and lived in obedience to His Word. Is there any reason our prayers might be rejected?

Enticement and Retribution

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. The rich man *is* wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out. Prov. 28:10–11.

Some sins are more devilish than others. So it is with those who entice the righteous to break God's Law and go astray. What satisfaction they get for harming another through transgression! But the Lord is ever the unseen Judge of such things and will act in defense of His Law.

he righteous and the poor. This is one reason a person must remain reverent and dependent upon the Lord for good.—and take nothing granted. The unwary may at times be seduced into thinking that sin is a light thing, but he whose trust is in the Lord never has such a thought! Even foolishness is sin! Yes, and evil company must be avoided. Such persons as would cause the righteous to go astray are never known or at least suspected, and these ought to be avoided. Obedience, keep your people from being seduced by the wicked!

Deceit, Confession and Forsaking

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and sheweth *them* shall have mercy. Happy *is* the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief. Prov. 28:13–14.

It is easier for an evil person to cover his sins than for him to confess and forsake them. The former is hypocrisy; the latter a confession! The former demands no change; the latter demands a great change! In the providence of God, the deceitful person may be brought to repentance before his sins are found out (Numb. 32:23). This is a blessed occurrence! There is no rebuke from another, no restitution to be made, no embarrassment. And there is hope for a permanent change of character! But the one whom the Lord must judge is in a tragic case. He is set for a great fall if the Lord must intervene through His servants! He is marked out as a troublemaker and one who cannot be reformed. Such a reputation may cling to him from henceforth, despite reformation.

Violence and Oppression

As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so *is* a wicked ruler over the poor people. The prince that wanteth understanding *is* also a great oppressor: *but* he that hateth covetousness shall prolong *his* days. Prov. 28:15–16.

Rulers and kings bear a great burden to be just when ruling over the lives of others, especially the poor. They can make life much better by bringing blessing, or make life unbearable and bring upon the kingdom Divine retribution (2 Sam. 23:3–4). A wicked ruler is unrighteous and godless—there is no fear of God within, and so the kingdom life is destructive. How tragic! And will not the Lord take this into account? Whether the Lord is forgotten or not, He remains the Lord of all creation and He judges righteously. A wicked ruler is self-destructive, and has denied his responsibility as a leader and ruler. If

people cry out to God for deliverance, shall He not answer? Destruction, disease, plague and oppression by a foreign power may be means the Lord will use to rid the nation of a wicked ruler. Even kings have been executed by their own people. Mark the case of Charles I of England (1600–1649), who was beheaded by his own government!

The Murderer

Whoever sheds violence to the blood of *any* person shall flee to the pit; let no one stay him. Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but *he that is* perverse in his ways shall fall at once. Prov. 28:17–18.

The death penalty was established by God Himself for the sin and crime of murder. No alternative or escape was given because of mitigating circumstances. Why? Because man was made in the image of God, and to strike at one was to strike at another, making murder especially heinous as an assault against God (Gen. 9:6). This was stated most clearly in the Moral Law, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13). This, as with negative Commandments, is stated in the absolute [נִשְׁבַּע] or perpetual neg. “Thou shalt never ever kill!” Modern man tends to protect the murderer while lauding the murder of the unborn through abortion. The reason? Life and death have been removed from their God-ordained context—Man was made in the image of God. When man fears God, human life is highly valued and protected; when man loses the fear of God, human life simply becomes carnal life and thus greatly devalued. Modern man has lost much, much more than he thinks when he turns from biblical Christianity to secularism.

Industry or Poverty

He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain *persons* shall have poverty enough. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent. To have respect of persons *is* not good: for for a piece of bread *that* man will transgress. He that hasteth to be rich *hath* an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. Prov. 28:19–22.

Some truths bear repeating. This Proverb has been given once before in 12:11. Agriculture has been the mainstay for man’s food since creation. He has been called, not to scavenge, but to subdue the earth. This implies an orderly method of plowing, sowing, tending and

ing, refining and eating. Such implies industry and much effort put h to obtain food and supplies. Since the Fall, man has evidenced h dissatisfaction with God's plan and purpose. He seeks, not only mprove what God has given, improve the tools and implements ch help in agriculture, and are legitimate, but he also seeks to rcut the process through laziness and rebellion and resort to ury and theft. These became shortcuts to everything necessary to and wealth. He may join himself to a band of robbers as a means achieving both necessities and wealth. God is not only interested in end, but in the means as well! He will not bless the plunder of the r!

Flattery

he that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that lattereth with the tongue. Prov. 28:23.

No one loves rebuke. We all want praise. This is human in a en, sinful world. But what of flattery? Do we not suspect such n it is spoken? If not, then we should be suspect! He who engages lattery wants something from us to his advantage, and not to our d or benefit. Thus, we should be very careful; when others gratulate us or would cause us to think that we are more successful icher or more intelligent than others. We should ask ourselves, at does he want? When someone has to rebuke us, we sense that he st do something which is painful for him and he believes it is for good. Such is reserved for the very best of friends, and so we may onfident that he means well. Thank the Lord for friends who love ough to tell us what they believe is for our good, when they have ing to profit in so doing.

Robbing Parents

Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, *It is no* ransgression; the same *is* the companion of a destroyer. Prov. 28:24.

What wickedness to rob one's parents! To take from them eptitiously something of value for one's own use or advantage is very worst of theft! It is a denial of family love and value, of ing suffering and loss to the very ones who have given us life and ained us at great cost and sacrifice. Such breaks the strongest ds of relationship and destroys a love which is stronger than life lf! And if discovered, what can ever be done to repair the damage? titution necessarily fails for the greatest trust has been broken. Will

blessed family circle ever be the same? And what of robbing our heavenly Father? Of taking and wasting what belongs to God? Is this among the greatest of crimes and sins?! Yes! But some lightly take and spend upon themselves what faithfully belongs to the Lord. Let us never be guilty of such! To have and to remember that God is our heavenly Father is a great preventative!

Pride

He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. Prov. 28:25–26.

Pride, when truly seen from the Scriptures, is the root-sin of all evil, and carries with it a host of evils. Here, the stirring up of strife is mentioned in particular. Pride unsettles everything and brings contention as it moves and pushes to make way for itself. It cannot be content and it must set one against another. What a host of troubles is invited by the proud individual! And what a contrast to the one who trusts in the Lord! He will experience fatness [prosperity]. He who trusts in his own heart is deceived, for he does not see things clearly and is easily deceived. The one who walks wisely is a blessing! Consider how much harm is done among Christians when sin enters and breaks up the blessed fellowship of brethren in Christ! Pride is a chief divider because it is self-centered, the exact opposite of what is sought to comprise true fellowship. We should seek to possess and prolong our fellowship at all costs!

Giving

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse. When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase. Prov. 28:27–28.

The Lord God is a God of Law. Not only the Moral Law or 10 Commandments, but of all Law. This is part of His ordered universe and His providence. He has ordained that he who gives to the poor shall not lack (Psa. 41:1–3). As it is the Lord Who gives and takes, who makes rich and makes poor; He must be the cause and author of such conditions. What an encouragement to those whose liberality sees and ministers to those in need! Those who turn their face or close their hearts to those in want only hurt themselves and lose the blessing of giving a blessing to others in their need. We should never be afraid to minister to those in distress, especially those in need among the people of

1. The Lord may, indeed, bring some of His people to want as a test
thems! Thus, we may be tested by observing the needs of others, to
if we will do what is necessary to help them. Practical religion is a
utiful thing to behold!

Reproof

le, that being often reprov'd hardeneth *his* neck, shall suddenly be
lestroyed, and that without remedy. Prov. 29:1.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”!
b. 10:31). The God of the Bible kills people! He is just and
iteous, and there may come a time when He cuts people off if they
sist in their rebellion! The term “hardeneth” means to remain stiff-
ked or rebellious. This is a most solemn verse—one of the most
ided in the Bible—and it is true. God cut off Israel for its constant
ellion and sent them into Babylonian Captivity. He killed both the
s of Eli the priest. Several of the wicked kings of Israel were cut

Consider the case of Ahab and Jezebel. Study the sickness and
th of Herod, whose bowels rotted out and he died a lingering,
ible death. Let these warnings prove the truth that as the Lord is
ious to the obedient and kind, so He is just to the wicked. With
1 warnings, there is no excuse for man’s rebellion against Him. We
e been forewarned. What a blessed thing it is to know and
erience the kindness of God in our obedience!

Oh! To Rejoice!

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the
icked beareth rule, the people mourn. Prov. 29:2.

This proverb could be written over the whole of Israel’s history
ing the Era of the Monarchy. Saul was an evil king; David a great
godly king. Some kings were godly and blessed, such as Josiah
Hezekiah; others were evil and unjust, such as Ahab and
asseh. The life of the average Israelite was largely determined by
Monarch under whom he lived, to whom he paid taxes and who led
armies and determined the laws. An evil king; the people mourned;
ood king; the people rejoiced. The same is true under Presidents,
inistrations and the Congress in our time. We live under their
s, and their philosophies, ideas, treaties, agreements and leadership
his world have a great effect upon our lives. How we must pray for
rs and all in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–4). Consider the present
troversies concerning abortion. It has become twisted into

omen's health," when the real issue is the killing of the unborn. Are / human beings? Is not this murder?! How scientific is it to hold life begins at birth and not conception? The Scriptures are clear ut the unborn (Psa. 139:13–17). Men want to believe what they rather than submit to God's Word. May the truly righteous rule!

Love of Wisdom

Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth *his* substance. Prov. 29:3.

This is repetitious of previous proverbs and warnings against morality. Here the emphasis is upon wisdom and loss of valuables. on who loves wisdom and is industrious is a joy to his father, for he implemented his father's teaching and instructions, and profits n them. But a son who associates with immoral women loses ost everything: his valuables, his desire for advancement and his lth, if not his life! Immorality is a one-way street. It is in the nature mmorality to take possession of the whole life. It is very much a stitute for marriage, especially if it is habitual, and thus the iciples of marriage are manifest in the life of the immoral person. paramour has a great influence on him, his money, his time, his sions, his plans, his industry and his religion. Her power over his becomes more and more possessive and influential. This is qual, because, as they are not married, she has no vow to keep her / for him, and she can remain promiscuous. It is. For this young 1, a lose-lose situation! True conversion saves one from the ning power of sin, including immorality. O blessed deliverance!

Bribery

The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts verthroweth it. Prov. 29:4.

Of all the persons who have influence within a kingdom, the king central. His person, personality, preferences, dislikes, moral racter or lack thereof, interests and purposes determine the nature direction of his kingdom. Blessed are the people who have a godly g who seeks to govern wisely and morally! Sadly, human nature at worst abides in some Monarchs! Both Scripture and history give ndant witness to this reality! A king who receives bribes from /erful people within his own kingdom may pervert judgment in or of the few. A godly or equitable king considers all of the citizens is kingdom and seeks their good. Each and every king has his own

itive and negative characteristics and none is perfect, so this ionition is necessary. A godly ruler was a great blessing; a ruler ly influenced by bribes would at least be tempted and probably ld do much harm. Christian kingdoms in history, although mostly ristian” in name only, at least had some influence from the Bible, for this we can be thankful.

Flattery a Net

A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. In the transgression of an evil man *there is* a snare: but the righteous doth ing and rejoice. Prov. 29:5–6.

Flattery is excessive and insincere praise, and so is deceptive and / be immediately detected by the wary. Then how does flattery gain othold? Ah! This is often the decisive issue! The flatterer himself it seek acceptance and so is deceptive. This is necessary for his ery to do its work! The Apostle deals with this in 2 Corinthians 13–15. Satan is transformed into an angel of light, and so are his isters. Mark the flatterers of Darius and their purpose to kill Daniel n. 6:6–9). If the flatterer is known as such, he can gain no ground, if he masquerades as someone of worth and godliness, his words carry much weight and be received. This is simply one of Satan’s hods. See 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:11. The term “wiles” in Gk. is δειλίαις, i.e., “methods”! Let us seek to have godly, edifying speech ng our brethren, and never spread a net through flattery!

Consider the Poor

The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: *but* the wicked egardeth not to know *it*. Prov. 29:7.

What is the great equalizer of all men? What causes the righteous onsider the cause of the poor, and why should the wicked regard it o? The answer is found in the Word of God. We are all God’s itures. Man, however stands unique in creation: he is the image–rer of God. This is true whether he be rich or poor. The division of 1 into rich and poor is a distinction made by men who despise one exalt the other. The wicked assume some kind of superiority over poor as they usually abound in possessions. God sees men erently, and His assessment is the inspired standard. All are iers, all are responsible to God, all are human beings whose lives to be lived to God’s glory. For various reasons, we have the poor ng us—failed crops, ill health, large families, financial reverses.

erty is only culpable and sinful when caused through laziness. The
ked, however, secretly condemn and ridicule the poor and think
nselves superior. They should rather thank the Lord for
vidential blessing and wealth!

The Scornful and the Wise

Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise *men* turn away wrath. *If*
a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh,
here is no rest. Prov. 29:8–9.

Scorners set themselves against God. Theirs is a higher evil than
merely wicked among men. They may bring judgment upon a city
their scornful ways. Men who are truly wise may deliver a city or
on from judgment. The Teacher then progresses to consider the
lish man who cannot keep silence but brings himself into
pprobation. The scorner needs to read in the Book of Daniel
cerning the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and how God humbled him.
testimony is awesome! (Dan. 4:1–37). Then consider the pride and
th of his grandson, Belshazzar, under Divine judgment (Dan. 5:1–

Hate

The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul. Prov.
29:10.

Some things and situations have always existed since the Fall of
1. That the bloodthirsty hate the righteous is one of these. We see it
1 Cain and Abel. We see this throughout history. Even the religious
not without guilt! The Scribes and Pharisees sought to murder our
d out of envy! What makes some men desirous of killing others?
y is there murder in their hearts? First, they are consumed with
ed and taking the life of another is final; it ends the situation.
ond, it satisfies the lust for blood; these get to work out their hatred
he violence their hatred demands. By contrast, the just seeks peace
1 his adversary and to end the awful animosity which exists. Unless
soul—the inner man—is changed, all attempts to quell the hatred
avail nothing. What strong motives we have for prayer for those
1 whom we are alienated!

We talk too much

A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise *man* keepeth it in till afterwards.
Prov. 29:11.

We often say too much in questionable situations and embarrass ourselves. When we utter all our minds, we cannot help but embellish it we know and add our opinion, making the situation worse. It is great restraint at times to keep things private and not utter them. Once spoken, we cannot retract them without great embarrassment and much misunderstanding. May the Lord put His hand upon our lips to let us keep silence, lest we do more damage than good (Eccl. 3:7)! What safeguards do we have? First, we are not forced to speak, and we must seek God's help in keeping silence. Second, No one forces us to divulge what should remain secret. Third, we must remind ourselves of consequences when we do speak. Fourth, The Lord can strengthen our resolve. May our gracious God enable us to speak at the proper time and to refrain when it is not the right time!

Gossip

If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked. Prov. 29:12.

Gossip is a social sin which abounds among fallen, sinful mankind. One speaks against another. If the ruler listens and gives credence to such talk, all of his servants are wicked! So, the ruler must be discreet in what he hears and gives credence to. If he is a wise ruler, he will discount most and let the character of his servants speak for themselves. If he is wise, he will be able to tell truth from falsehood, and whom he can safely trust. King David understood this and took precautions. The Lord gave him discernment and he acted accordingly (1 Sam. 10:1-7). We must also learn whom we can safely trust and whom we cannot. How sad it is when some will separate chief friends within a church congregation or denomination! And there are always some who will seek to harm others so they can find prominence among leaders of churches and religious groups.

A Repeated Promise

The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established forever. Prov. 29:14.

This Proverb has been repeated often in like substance. Evidently ears repeating! A king has a kingdom, and in that kingdom there are various types of individuals: the rich, the poor, the wicked, the righteous, the old, the young, the rebellious and the obedient. If he is a wise and good king, he must seek to rule them all. Some he must judge and seek to correct; others, he must seek to change, and some he must

for more than others. If he is a compassionate ruler and truly cares for his subjects, then he will faithfully judge the poor. God's Word promises that his kingdom shall be established. We are also citizens of that great and mighty kingdom—the Kingdom of God—and our King is Jesus for each and every citizen of His kingdom! We do not have to stand in the outer court for days to seek an audience with our Lord—is as close as prayer, as our very hearts! Why do we not come into His courts more often? We can even sit at His banquet table and partake of the royal dainties. We are both citizens and sons! The great sovereign of this universe is our heavenly Father! What a privileged position we occupy! Let us come to Him and more fully understand His love and our sonship!

Our Mothers

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to *himself* bringeth himself to shame. Prov. 29:15.

Children are sinners and their tendency is toward rebellion, which must be made manifest if left to themselves. The discipline of the young man was left to the father, the head of the family and authority are under God. But the influence of the mother is vitally important! She is the first to contradict the child's contrary actions and attitude. From a babe nursing at her breast, she is the center of the child's life—the source of all authority—long before the husband and father assumes the authority figure. The child's headstrong tendencies which manifest early in life must be dealt with by the mother. There is yet another aspect which must be considered: what if the mother and father disagree on discipline? What if the father seems too severe and the mother objects because of her love and indulgence for her son? Considered is the young man who has parents who are in agreement in the end for discipline and support one another!

Increase through Numbers

When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Prov. 29:16.

This Proverb has both an immediate and a far, far-reaching fulfillment. There are seasons in a nation's history which are more evil than others, and there are seasons which are more lawful, moral and religious than others. Revivals and spiritual awakenings have punctuated our own national history when all hope seemed gone and restored a great degree of morality and religion. There are also far—

thing considerations: Noah saw the demise and death of the Old world through the Flood. Abraham witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Believers will witness the final judgment of the world, his angels and the whole number of the ungodly. This, then, is a principle which God has revealed before and will reveal again. Let us pray and beseech God for a time of revival and a spiritual awakening. The hearts of all men are in His hands. Oh! To see a time of revival arising and spiritual awakening before the final judgment, when the Lord will once more have mercy upon men!

Gift of Godly Children

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight into thy soul. Where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he. Prov. 29:17–18.

Here the Preacher returns to family discipline, a subject which needs reiteration as long as children are born and families exist! The nature and extent of discipline depends upon the age and nature of the individual child or young man. If godly discipline has been ministered from an early age, it might be more easily administered than if it is not implemented until the young man is older. Blessed is the family where discipline has been a major element from the time of the child's birth, through his early years to the time of maturity and independence. Such families and such a society are blessed, indeed! If the Law of God is known within a given society, it promotes righteousness and there is an atmosphere conducive to individual discipline. If not, then it becomes a degenerate society. The same may be said of a given church congregation, which is, in itself, a small religious society. How many parents fail through busyness in other matters, especially in this modern age! But where there is discipline in the family or larger social entity, there is usually an evenness and blessing for all who seek the favor of our God through loving, proper discipline—to the joy of the parents and the good of the children!

Human Nature

A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer. Prov. 29:19.

The Preacher now extends his teaching and exhortations from the family to the entire household. There were two types of servants in biblical times: indentured servants who had to work a specific number of years to gain their freedom and slaves who served for life. Both

e forced into servitude, and so essentially unwilling. Fallen human
re was a sinful reality in both. Rebellious or unruly servants had to
punished to maintain order in the estate and perform the various
essary tasks. Discipline was often a great concern because of the
/illingness of the servants to serve. Discipline was more in the form
unishment rather than a positive approach. This was often harsh.
: Apostle exhorted masters to treat their servants justly. The kindest
ster is the Lord Jesus, and as His servants, we are blessed, indeed!
l we are to serve out of love and thankfulness for His love and our
mption!

Hasty Words

seest thou a man *that is* hasty in his words? *there is* more hope of a
ool than of him. Prov. 29:20.

The previous Proverb was concerned about sullen silence; this
verb about hasty words. So, we here deal once again with the sins
he tongue—a common topic for this Book of Proverbs! It may be
—and more than often correctly—that we talk too much. And in
ing too much we often say things we ought not. And once spoken,
1 cannot be taken back. And if one tries to take back what has been
l, he must understand that the damage has been done, however he
s to make amends. Hence, the strong admonition and comparison
1 fools (Prov. 26:12; Jas. 3:6). Being hasty in speaking one’s mind
in emotional state means that the person has lost control of his
gue—an exceedingly dangerous state to be in! The consequences
/ be dire and unforgettable, ready to be brought up in remembrance
years to come! And open one up to revenge from the one spoken
inst. Remember, it is a sinner speaking against a sinner, and it is a
ier who answers! Such confrontations are graceless conversations!

From Slave to Son

le that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him
become *his* son at the length. Prov. 29:21.

It must be remembered that the Heb. and Gk. terms usually used
“servant” also meant “slave.” It was a fact that in the Roman
pire at times a slave became a son. The master “adopted” the slave
ervant and he became an heir of the estate. This is described in the
el “Ben–Hur,” was a fact in the Roman Empire. Cf. Rom. 8:12–23,
ch refers to the Roman “Adoption” by which a slave was made son
heir. Thus, we are made the sons of God in a two–fold sense. First,

are born into God's Kingdom through regeneration. God is our Father and we are His sons. Also God has adopted us as "sons" through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:4–7). The one final process of adoption is our glorification, which we wait for! (Rom. 8:23). Contemplate our position in Christ! Rejoice in it! Anticipate its complete realization in glory!

Pride vs. Honor

A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Prov. 29:23.

This Proverb is echoed by our Lord in the Gospels: "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be lifted." (Matt. 23:12). There are certain sins which are innate in every sinful man. One of the greatest is pride. Pride, however, cannot exist where the true fear of the Lord is extant, nor can covetousness, hatred, jealousy, deception and such. The true fear of the Lord exists in the context of grace, and true saving grace tempers the personality and brings out the opposite—truth, peace and humility. Humility is beautiful when it reveals itself in the context of Divine grace in the life of the believer! In the context of Divine Grace, humility is genuine, consistent and tempers the personality.

Companions

Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. Prov. 29:24.

This Proverb is directed to anyone of God's professed people who would establish a close relationship with a criminal. Scripture commands us not to form associations or friendships with such (2 Cor. 6:14). Such a relationship is only the beginning of compromising one's entire profession of Christianity! Mark the second part of our verb: "he heareth cursing and bewrayeth it not." He partners with a thief and thus with everyone who also partners with or befriends a thief. In such an atmosphere, there will be cursing and all manner of evil communications, but the compromiser must remain silent. To speak up would be to alienate himself from such society. He is completely silenced because of the wicked he has chosen as his friends. This situation can be extended in our day to sports, hobbies, social situations. The believer finds himself having to remain silent because he has chosen such company—and if he does speak up

inst cursing or some profane issue, he will sound like the hypocrite has become!

The Fear of Man

The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. Prov. 29:25.

Every man fears someone or something. Some fears are justified, others are not. The fear spoken of here is the fear of man, which is contrasted with the fear of God. This is cowardice, as it causes a person to deny God and obedience to His Word, and bow to man and authority as opposed to God. The Lord has called us to be faithful, which means obedient to His Word. There are no limits to such obedience and allegiance. We are to be faithful unto death! There is no point at which we can succumb to the fear of man and not sin against God. The fear of man always brings a snare; the fear of God, never! We must trust God to give us adequate strength and faith to stand for Him and be obedient. He gives sufficient grace! Consider the martyrs who gave themselves, often willingly, to the stake and flames. The fear of man could not dissuade them. What would it take to cause us to deny our Lord? God gives grace—sufficient grace—to those who stand for Him!

The Favor of Man

Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD. Prov. 29:26.

The previous Proverb dealt with the fear of man; this Proverb, the favor of man. The two are closely related. The first derives from fear of punishment; the second derives from the desire for personal advancement or advantage. Both of them imply disobedience to God by being unfaithful to His Word. The ruler's power is limited; the greatest disfavor he holds is physical torture and death. The Lord's favor is life (Psa. 30:5). What comparison is there between temporary favor and eternal life? Unbelief cannot make a valid comparison; it is ineffective. Only faith can consistently choose the Lord and life! Let us rather seek to live in obedience to the Lord and submission to His Word. If we never be blind to the disobedience and self-centeredness which leads to more disobedience!

The Words of Agur

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *even* the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, Surely I *am* more brutish than *any* man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither earned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. 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? Prov. 30:1–4.

The Proverbs of Solomon end with chapter 29. Chapter 30 is the work of Agur, perhaps one of the wise men of Israel. They are contained within the canon of Scripture. He freely expresses his inability and his ignorance of the mystery of God, as he seeks to ponder the Divine power, glory and majesty. Would we not be in the same condition as Agur? To contemplate the God of heaven is empowering! To contemplate Him as the God of all the earth finishes not from His majesty and power! From such a sublime description—by—inquiry, Agur begins to utter his Proverbs. What of our contemplation of the Divine? When our hearts are filled with the cares of this life and we seek the face of God in prayer, we need to empty our minds of earthly problems and issues and humbly begin at the beginning—with God! Contemplate His majesty and power, his greatness and rule—then we may settle our minds worshipfully to Him in to pray!

The Word of God

Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. Pov. 30:5–6.

Agur does not end his humble inquiry and worship with contemplating the majesty and power of God (30:1–4), but progresses to consider the very Word of God. God has spoke, and His Word is the basis of our reverent, humble and intelligent communication with Him! Had God not spoke and we did not have an understandable word of revelation from Him we would be at a tremendous loss and have to worship an “unknowable God”! It is through His Word that we truly know about Him and know Him. He has spoken, and His Word is final. We are to receive it without question. May we whole-heartedly receive the truth God has revealed and humbly revere it and live in obedience to it!

Agur's Prayer

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with food convenient for me: 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*. Prov. 30:8–9.

A man may be truly known by his prayers. Agur's prayer is right—he gets right to the point, a sign that he has a profound grasp of God and true spirituality. Second, Agur's prayer encompasses the whole life of man—truthfulness, prosperity and sincerity. Agur's prayer reveals that he can summarize the issues and essentials of life succinctly. He is a profoundly thoughtful person. He encompasses the many needs of both body and soul from a spiritual perspective. How we pray? Do our prayers wander about touching on many things yet failing to deal adequately with them? What are our main concerns? Do we have a firm grasp of the essentials of a godly life? Contemplating Agur's prayers may well give us lessons to learn which will enhance our prayers.

Each Ungodly Generation

There is a generation *that* curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. *There is* a generation *that are* pure in their own eyes, and *yet is* not washed from their filthiness. *There is* a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. *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. Prov. 30:11–14.

The Description given here by Agur is tragically true of each generation since the Fall of man. Agur saw it in his day; we see it in ours. Though at times somewhat stifled by custom and attempts at social decency, we have exposed here the true heart of sinful, fallen mankind. We have here disrespect and open rebellion against parents—the breakdown of society. Self-righteous and deceived. Consider the criminal behavior of many labeled today as “protests” to mask their wickedness. Violence fills the land, often for a cause which seems to justify such lawlessness. Class warfare which pits one element of society against another. Does this not sound like the generation in which we live?! Such is fallen, sinful man separated from God and His Word! How the world needs the transforming truth of the gospel in every generation!

From Nature to Man

The horseleach hath two daughters, *crying*, Give, give. There are three *things that* are never satisfied, *yea*, four *things* say not, *It is enough*: The grave; and the barren womb; the earth *that* is not filled with water; and the fire *that* saith not, *It is enough*. 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. Prov. 30:15–17.

Agur now surveys nature and describes the wickedness of sinners through a description of nature. The suggestion is that the attributes of nature are applied to fallen, sinful mankind by implication. Animal creation is not fallen as is man, but suffers from the results of the Fall through man's sinfulness. Consider the comparison, though unspoken. Nature acts as God created it; man does not. The Fall has affected all creation, so when fallen man observes creation, he can attribute the blame of nature to himself and his kind. The horseleach greedily sucked blood. As all men die, the graves are never full. The barren womb and disappointment of the husband and wife who want children. The dry, parched soil which sucks in the moisture. The fire, which devours anything it touches. He then moves to consider the evil eyes of a rebellious youth who has no true love for his parents who bore him and judgment which shall follow. Such are the disturbing realities in a world cursed by sin. How different is the believer in both his life and its effects in such a world! Let us live for God's glory as a testimony to His grace!

Wonders

There be three *things which* are too wonderful for me, *yea*, four which I know not: 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. Such *is* the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. Prov. 30:18–20.

The world in which we live is filled with wonders to the close observer. The majestic flight of the eagle, a serpent upon a rock, coiling itself and ready at a moment's notice to slither into a crevice crack. A ship in the sea, with full sail and no path, tossed by waves, yet keeping its course. A young man with his love. How it lays out his ardent passion and a tenderness unseen before. Agur adds a fifth—the behavior of an adulterous wife, who breaks her marriage vow, then returns home deceitfully to profess innocence.

re are mysteries throughout creation. Some are beautiful, some are gerous, some are awesome, some are attractive and some are ked. Man naturally judges or evaluates almost everything he sees. is an moral, rational being and is meant to discern much. Let us y creation and its creatures, taking proper precautions. Let us not deceived concerning the sinfulness of broken marriage vows. God either bless or judge His creation. Let us view all things aright!

Disquieting

For three *things* the earth is disquieted, and for four *which* it cannot year: For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with neat; For an odious *woman* when she is married; and an handmaid hat is heir to her mistress. Prov. 30:21–23.

Agur was an astute observer of human nature. He observed what ations or persons caused problems: A servant who becomes a iter or ruler. Often these are given to revenge, or at least become easonable because of their past experiences. The fool was worse n he had a full belly and nothing to keep him from meddling or ing uninhibited. The odious woman is hateful or repulsive. She is a at and baneful burden to her husband and family. The handmaid o is heir to her mistress is often given to revenge, pride and cruelty. ce subdues our human nature. This is necessary to salvation, or we lld wonder at converting grace! Every sinner is a tragedy before version! God must save us from ourselves or all will be lost! Praise Lord for His saving grace and mercy!

Observations

There be four *things which are* little upon the earth, but they *are* exceeding wise: The ants *are* a people not strong, yet they prepare heir meat in the summer; The conies *are but* a feeble folk, yet make hey their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, yet go they orth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is 7 kings' palaces. Prov. 30:24–28.

As the image-bearer of God, man has an interest in the creation ut him. Ants, rabbits, locusts and spiders all have something to h man, if he will only set himself to observe! Ants make a nderful study, even if they are in one's house! Observe their nization, cooperation and strength for labor! Almost unequaled! e coney was a rock badger [some say a rabbit] which dwelt along cliffs. The locusts move in bands, engulfing the land by the ntless millions until the sky is darkened. They consume literally

rything! The “spider” [Heb. lizard] could be found even in king’s ices. There are lessons to be learned from each of these creatures. y are part of God’s creation and serve to teach man something of I’s rule and purpose. We should observe and learn, especially when Lord Himself uses these for illustrations in His Holy Word!

More Observations

There be three *things* which go well, yea, four are comely in going: A lion *which is* strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom *there is* no rising up. Prov. 30:29–31.

Agur abounds in observations! He must have been a keen observer of nature, and he has left us with some fitting observations. Now writes of a stride or strutting or running. First, the powerful, and stride of a lion—the slow, majestic walk of a lion, the greatest beasts. the greyhound [Heb. uncertain], with its speed, a male goat ram which would strut, and a king who held sway over all hisemies. And what can be said of God’s people? What are our characteristics? Not pride! Not self-importance! But humility, obedience to God’s Word and submission to proper authority. Boldness in evangelism, fervency in prayer and faithfulness in obedience to the Word of God. There are given characteristics for all God’s creatures and believer are no different!

Controversy

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, *lay* thine hand upon thy mouth. Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the wringing of wrath bringeth forth strife. Prov. 30:32–33.

Sadly, and historically, Christianity has been filled with controversy. It would seem that, as demanding as true faith is, that we should not have time for controversy! Yet differences in doctrine and practice have characterized Christianity from the very beginning. The issues are many. Unconverted, merely professing Christians, the entrance of paganism into true religion, divisive doctrines, degeneration into a mere external religion with no internal spirituality, etc. Our observation will only deal here with personal options. If we are responsible for something said about which convictions are varied and strong, we must seek peace if it will not lead to compromise. We should discuss and even debate differences in

trine and practice, but not to the point of division. Contending for faith should seek to unify, not divide. Humility goes a long way in ping discussions civil and spiritual! It must be and remain evident we are brethren who love one another!

The Words of Lemuel

The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. Prov. 31:1.

We arrive at the closing chapter of the Book of Proverbs. Chapter contains the words of Agur, an ancient wise man; chapter 31, the words of King Lemuel which his mother taught him. She must have been a very wise woman and taught him some of the most beautiful practical words about a godly wife and mother in the whole of scripture! Although the man is the God-ordained head of the home, wife and mother is the center of the home and family life. A man is as marked by his mother's influence as his father's. Every great man owes much to a loving, kind and strong mother! As Christians, we must understand the place of the wife and mother in the education of children. She is usually the most immediate influence in the child's

He is closer to her in his youngest years than his father. A godly mother is one of the greatest influences upon a man from his earliest years. God has ordained it so to His own glory and the child's good!

Lemuel's Mother

What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink into him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.* Prov. 31:2-9.

We know nothing of King Lemuel, as with Agur. But evidently common thought it proper to include the sayings of these men in the Book of Proverbs. This final chapter, which is comprised of Lemuel's mother's admonition and then the blessing of a godly wife and mother, precious! The mother of Lemuel was a very godly and practical woman and mother. When she taught these words, she was already the Queen Mother and her son was already a ruler. What we have learned

childhood often needs repeating when we are grown! He not only his mother's memory, but her very words while she was yet alive, remind him of the proper behavior of a ruler. How blest we are if parents' godly admonitions remain with us throughout our lives! Truly counsel is often God's blessing unto future generations!

An Observant Mother

What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. *It is* not for kings, O Lemuel, *it is* not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink into him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Prov. 31:2–7.

King Lemuel's mother was an experienced woman, and, perhaps, wise. Her warnings concerning immorality and intemperance may have been developed through years of observation in the royal court. Signs of folly are more evident in rulers than others. How careful must kings and leaders! And what of believers? We are children of the Most High, kings and priests unto our God. Shall we sin against our God by loose living? The kingdom of God will suffer through our sin and shortcomings! Let us be holy and without blame, and we shall see glory of God! Let us live as God's people and loved ones!

A Compassionate Mother

Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. Prov. 31:8–9.

The final counsels of Lemuel's mother to her son as king. Here we learn that a ruler must be compassionate, understanding and equitable. A Monarch must be known for his righteousness in judgment for his subjects to love and honor and trust him. He must not be a ruler who is aloof and distant from his people, but one who shares their burdens and is compassionate. What an exception from most ancient monarchs! Even a ruler will necessarily endear himself to his subjects and he will be loved and obeyed, not only out of fear, but out of loyalty and love. Consider our Lord and Savior—is He not the ideal King, High Priest and Lord? And is it not His love and redemptive work which binds us to Him and Him to us? How blest is that people whose God is the Father..." (Psa. 33:12).

The Virtuous Wife

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. Prov. 31:10–12.

The closing verses of this Book of Proverbs (31:10–31) is a portrait of the virtuous woman, probably the words of the mother Lemuel continued. Here we have a woman's assessment of the perfect wife and mother! What a summary and description! How practical! What insight and wisdom! What industry and faithfulness! Love encompasses all these together for her husband and family! This is the inspired description—the ideal—for every wife and mother! She is beyond value. Rubies were the most prized jewels in ancient time. The marriage relationship is bound by trust and there is neither room nor place for an immoral relationship [“spoil”]—their marital union is healthy. This wife will do her husband good and not evil throughout their marriage. What a blessed portrait of a godly man and wife—balanced and blessed, holy and practical!

The Industrious Wife and Mother

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. Prov. 31:13–16.

Being a religious person does not necessarily mean that one becomes passive to the world, shutting one's self up to hours in prayer and religious duties. The wife and mother in our text is an active, practical person. Her religion is expressed in good works and manifest practicality. Had a man written these words, some might accuse him of making this woman too good to be true, too active to be holy and occupied with daily chores and household work to be consistent in religion. But these words were not written by a man, but by a woman—and a woman of note! She was a Queen Mother. We cannot imagine that she was a contradiction to what she had written here. The moral lessons seems to be that true godliness and sanctity is not contradicted by a life of activity and hard work. We not only live unto God and seek to serve Him, but we also live in this world, and this means a practical approach to things. One may pray and commune with God during his or her daily work, meditate on godly realities

le performing daily tasks. May the Lord sanctify our daily labors
in prayer and meditation!

The Clothier

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her
hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for
all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself
coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple. Prov. 31:19–22.

Here is a very capable woman who does not allow her housework
home to confine herself only her family. She helps the poor and
dy. True religion and godliness cause us to be concerned for and
ch out to those in need. Further, she does not neglect her own
ily and does not allow herself to be personally unkept. Her
earance is neat and worth of note. The service of God is often
anding, and both body and mind tend to grow weary—after all, we
but human—and all of us have our liabilities. But we can
omplish much without overexertion if we are organized. Godliness
disorganization are not compatible. We must realize our own
abilities—and most of us can do more than we are doing!
ctifying time and energy is part of mortification as surely as
eloping godly habits and leaving off those things and habits which
act from a practical religion!

The Influencer

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders
of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles
into the merchant. Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall
rejoice in time to come. Prov. 31:23–25.

The city gate was where the elders of the city sat to transact
business and sit together as the town council and municipal court. How
godly woman enabled her husband to spend time with the leaders
of the city! Not only so, but she occupies some of her time with home
projects which she has turned into a business! She is a very capable
woman who takes advantage of every opportunity for doing good!
Remember, it was a woman who wrote these words! A Queen
whose life had to have been well-known and could not have
been contradictory, or it would never have been included in Scripture!
at a testimony to succeeding generations of wives and mothers to
do their best with what energies and resources the Lord has blessed

n! The Lord does not judge us by comparison, but by our faithfulness to His Word. He knows our strengths and weaknesses—we must know the power of His grace!

The Kindly Wife

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. Prov. 31:26–28.

The administration of a household can make a person very able and impatient, but not our ideal wife and mother! She retains composure and her kindness. What an exceptional lady! She must be considered idleness to be sinful, because she always seems occupied with activity of some kind—meaningful work in which she find great pleasure. The context here seems to imply that she took good care and gave attention to her family. She had won their hearts so it would not be surprising that they took a hand in helping with the work of the household. Indeed, such would be this dear lady's purpose and art, as training up children to be industrious and practical is a godly work. Blessed are children whose parents teach them responsibilities which prepare them for adulthood!

The Fear of the Lord

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates. Prov. 31:29–31.

The Queen Mother of Lemuel freely confessed that this wife and her was exceptional and worthy of the utmost praise! She revealed true religion, when it is true and vital, is not fit for the cloister, nor pious behavior for the recluse! The genuineness of true religion is that it is seen before men and noted in public. Blessed wife! Blessed mother! Blessed family to have such a one to form the center of the household and in loving kindness manifest such loving attention and example to the family circle!

Ecclesiastes

Vanity of Vanities

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. Eccl. 1–2.

Solomon is the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Some think he wrote Proverbs earlier in life and Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. No one knows for certain. The term “vanity” here means “vapor,” “wind,” “emptiness.” It points to the frail, fleeting nature and futility of this earthly life. Mark the meaninglessness or “vanity” of which fallen, sinful mankind pursues: The “vanity” of mere human wisdom (2:15–16), the “vanity” of human labor (2:19–21), the “vanity” of human purpose (3:6), the “vanity” of human envy (4:4), the “vanity” of the human desire for more (4:6–7), the “vanity” of human fame (4:13–16), the “vanity” of possessions and riches (5:1), the “vanity” of human righteousness (6:9), the “vanity” of human frivolity (7:6), the “vanity” of human honor (8:10, 14). It must be marked that whatever is or seems an end in itself is an idol (Cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). Not all idols are made of wood, metal or stone; there are idols of the heart and mind which are just as real and controlling. For the believer, however, this may be full when lived for the glory of God and in obedience to His Word!

What Profit?

What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? Eccl. 1:3.

Living in this world with its disappointments, sickness, disease and the transience of life, may become depressing. We must beware that we do not get seduced by the philosophy which is negative and nihilistic. This earth is under a curse. Much of human life is frustrating and much remains unfulfilled for those who seek to find fulfillment and meaning in this present life. This life is not the end for the true child of God! If we live only for this present life, we will live in frustration and disappointment. We will be tempted to do what we can to get as much as we can from everyone else and heap to ourselves riches and honor. But this is to the end! We look forward to spending eternity with our Lord in glory! We may take what is lawful in this life and enjoy what the Lord has given us, but we live with the anticipation of the life which is to come!

The Circle of Life

One generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuit. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea *is* not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. Eccl. 1:4–7.

The circle of life—the repetitious nature of life on earth—is to say monotonous: day after day, sunrise to sunset, year after year, birth and death, generation after generation. But this is what God has ordained for this life and world. What gives life true meaning is a right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Creation under the curse; believers are free to a great extent through saving grace. We live in this world to effect spiritual changes by the grace of God in other people's lives. The gospel goes forth and transforms the lives of many. Some day the Lord will destroy this present world and this circle of life and re-create it anew. Sin will be extinguished and righteousness will reign! The new heavens and earth will be for a holy righteous people. Serve the Lord now; the end is not yet! And when it is, there will be a new beginning! (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:14).

Nothing New

All things *are* full of labour; man cannot utter *it*: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The thing that hath been, it is *that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. *There is* no remembrance of former *things*; neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with those that shall come after. Eccl. 1:8–11.

The natural man—the unregenerate person devoid of spiritual life—is ever in search of something new. He finds great dissatisfaction living under the restraints which God has subjected this present earth as a result of the curse. He feels constraint, and rebels against the divinely established order. Some pursuits are legitimate. Over the centuries explorers have opened up vast parts of the earth through exploration. Scientists have developed new elements and compounds which help relieve the sick and diseased. Philosophers have plumbed the depths of knowledge. Missionaries and evangelists have circumvented

globe with the truth of the gospel. The trouble with the natural man is that he is legitimately dissatisfied with the status-quo, but that he lives in rebellion against God and the truth of the gospel! Peace and satisfaction can only come through the Lord Jesus Christ and a saving relationship to Him!

Fallen, Sinful Man

I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. *That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.* I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. Eccl. 1:12–18.

Solomon experienced great frustration as he sought wisdom in the ancient world. He sought meaning and wisdom in a cursed world and found it not. Think about what Solomon would do if he returned today to our modern world and looked about! He would be more than amazed! How far we have come since the ancient world which Solomon knew. Even fallen, sinful man is capable of much technologically, scientifically and medically. We have not, however, been able to improve man spiritually. He is spiritually incurable apart from the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Lord God provided the one and only cure in and through the gospel! Rejoice in God's provision and look not beyond it or away from it! We can do better than rejoice and accept God's provision of grace!

Pleasure

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore I enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also *is* vanity. I said of laughter, *It is mad:* and of mirth, What doeth it? Eccl. 2:1–2.

Many seek fulfillment in this life. They err in taking something which is legitimate and seek to make it central to giving meaning to life. Some seek fame or fortune, possessions or wealth, popularity or power, or some sport or occupation. There are many things which can and do bring pleasure in this world, despite the curse and

fulness of this world, this life and all its disappointments. The problem is that some things are made the center or motivating principle which gives life meaning. Consider the drunk, the preemonger, the criminal, or the sports figure or investor. These take something—illegitimate or legitimate and make it the central issue which makes life worth living. Consider pleasure. Life in this world has its legitimate pleasures, which are allowable in their place, but never as the reason to live. They prove illegitimate when they are idolized and worshipped as “god.” Whatever is first in one’s life in is or “god.” We give such things our priority and spent ourselves and substance on them, our time and energy. This must become inevitably a perversion of life. Solomon tried pleasure and found it failed to achieve what he truly wanted and needed. Only God can fill the need!

Things or God

I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits: I made me pools of water, to water herewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *here was* no profit under the sun. Eccl. 2:3–11.

After indulging himself with pleasure and finding that it did not satisfy his longing for meaning and fulfillment in life, He gave himself all sorts of projects and endeavors. His catalogue of endeavors and possessions encompass about everything which men would consider success and which would give meaning and satisfaction to life—and he remained unfulfilled. He was looking in the wrong place. Only

I can fill that need! Man was created as the image-bearer of God
he can only find peace and fulfillment when that inner need is
satisfied with a right relationship with God!

The Philosopher

And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity. For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is* in these days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise *man*? *is* the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity. Eccl. 2:12–19.

Solomon, after exhausting every avenue of fame, fortune and accomplishment, began to play the philosopher and look beyond the surface to the reason and cause, the end result of such a life and found it essentially empty. We cannot look to anything or anyone in this life or his world to find fulfillment and peace except in God Himself. Satisfied is the man who is a believer and knows God savingly through His Word! He alone has found fulfillment!

Adjustment

Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This *is* also vanity. *There is* nothing better for a man, *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*, more than I? For *God* giveth to a man that *is* good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may

give to *him that is good* before God. This also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. Eccl. 2:20–26.

The final answer of Solomon to the issues of this life and finding and final rest and fulfillment are to adjust to realize the limitations of his life and live in them. This life and this world offer much, but all is temporary and unsatisfying. We must look elsewhere for lasting peace and contentment—we must look to God and to that life which is to come. To have salvation is to be prepared for eternity. This world and this life may be enjoyed or endured, but the ultimate fulfillment for man is in the life to come!

Times

To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. Eccl. 3:1–8.

Solomon has ceased his struggles concerning God's order for this world and this life by the end of chapter two. Now he contemplates God's order concerning time. If we could but realize God's order for this world and this life, we would more at peace. Sadly, some want to change the times, and so fight against God's order for this world and where we now live. May we have grace to live in this world and to obey and seek to serve and honor the Lord in all things, living in obedience to His revealed will.

An Instinct for Eternity

He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God hath done from the beginning to the end. Eccl. 3:11.

Having come to peace with the present world and with God's order, Solomon reasons beyond to how men ought to live in God's world. Mark the words: "...he hath set the world in their heart..." The word "world" is the ages or forever, i.e., eternity. God has set eternity

the heart of man. Remember that man is the image-bearer of God and has been made for eternity! And only in eternity will man find his true and lasting meaning and fulfillment. Man has an instinct for eternity! He has a sense that he will continue to exist once this life has ended. How this must aggravate the unrepentant sinner! He does not want to die, but beyond death....there is this sense that he will face divine judgment! Remember to press this when we seek to evangelize those who refuse the gospel. We are declaring the truth to those who do not have a sense of eternity in their hearts!

The One True God

Know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him. Eccl. 3:14.

Unconverted mankind, being willfully ignorant of the God of the Bible, have conjured their own idea of God. This “god” is the god of their own imagination. They envision Him with various limits and restrictions so they do not have to reckon with Him or think of Him as He really is. They live their sinful lives. They close their minds to His reality and seek to hide their sinfulness before Him and seek to appease Him with a mere, external religion. He is a terrible caricature of the one true God! At times, however, they must face reality and come to terms with the one true God! He is absolutely sovereign over all His creation, over life and death. He is omniscient and omnipresent and immanent. He is absolutely holy, righteous and just. And He is also gracious and merciful. Unsaved people cannot bear to think about or even to hear about the one true God with Whom they have to do! But this changes everything. May we be bold to lovingly confront sinners with the truth of it—it may be to their salvation!

Judgment!

That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past. And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that* wickedness *was* there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity *was* there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work. Eccl. 3:15–17.

After Solomon’s coming to grips with the Lord’s rule over His creation and the out-working of His purpose for this world

orically, he settles down and begins to view things here in a better t. He is drawn to the final judgment. Man knows instinctively as image-bearer of God that here must be a judgment. Man was ted as a moral and intellectual being. He is responsible to God to in this world. He will be judged as to his use of time, his moral avior and the place he gives to God in this life. Mankind is divided · two classes according to their relationship to God and His Law: righteous and the unrighteous. Should a final day of judgment ry us? Only if we have sought to live apart from and without rence to God. Those who live in obedience to Him and His Law e nothing to fear!

Men and Beasts

said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God night manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are easts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even ne thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they ave all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a east: for all *is* vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all urn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore perceive that *there is* nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that *is* his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him? Eccl. 3:18–22.

After observing both brute creation and fallen, sinful mankind er the sentence of death, Solomon concludes that men are just like beasts—they both have limited lifespans. When viewed apart from l and man as His image-bearer, fallen, sinful mankind is very h like brute creation. They both live and then die. They breathe the e air and are sustained by the same food. Any difference? One. · spirit of man goes up and back to God and the spirit of the beast s into the earth. There is no resurrection for brute creation. We do l to remember this. We will live and then we will die—just like the sts. But our spirit will return to God while the spirit of the beast s into the earth. Spiritually, we are forever separated from brute ition—we must live like it! We must be prepared for our return to l!

Our Earthly Plight

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under he sun: and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had

no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better *is he* than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. Again, I considered all travail, and every night work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit. Eccl. 4:1–4.

Now Solomon considers the oppression or the injustice of man to
1. He sees the unjust way between the oppressor and the oppressed.
2. This leads him to praise the dead, which are done with the inequities of
3. life. Then he thinks upon those who have not yet lived! He
4. concludes with those who work hard and sees that these are envied of
5. their neighbor. All seems vanity and vexation. We must not allow the
6. inequities of this life among men to cause us to stumble. We are to
7. remain humble and obedient to God, to help our fellow man, and live
8. in obedience to God's Commandments. Life in this vain world is to be
9. added to the glory of God—this never changes!

Quietness

The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. Better *is* in handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit. Eccl. 4:5–6.

The fool misses out on life and lives at best in a suffering mold
1. because of his ineptness, laziness and inability to sustain himself in
2. this sinful world. The believer seeks to sustain himself and his family,
3. to help others. He seeks to live as the Lord has commanded.
4. Although or prosperity may mean travail and vexation, but the Lord has
5. led us to live in obedience, and this means to be industrious and
6. able, helpful to others and faithful to God. It is quite possible to
7. have a satisfying life in this fallen, sinful world if we obey God in all
8. things. How blest are those who live unto God! Their goal is to please
9. God.
1. Their kindness helps others. Their lives are selfless. Their
2. testimony is sealed in heaven, and their testimony shines in this
3. renewed world!

Loneliness

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one *alone*,
and *there is* not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet *is*
here no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches;
neither *saith he*, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?
This *is* also vanity, yea, it *is* a sore travail. Eccl. 4:7–8.

Solomon considers the lonely person, the one without friend or family, yet who must labor continually. And with whom will he share riches or to whom will he leave them when he dies? We must be indeed that life does not consist in the abundance which a man possesses, but in faithfully serving the Lord! For the believer, the Christian, he is never without a family! He may not have one naturally,

he has another spiritually, comprised of brothers and sisters in Christ! He is never without someone with whom he can rejoice and share his living and his joys and sorrows. Do we enjoy our spiritual brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus? What a privilege to help care for them and share in their love and kindness!

Two better than One

Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that* is alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Eccl. 4:9–12.

God made man a social being, in addition to being a moral and intelligent being. And man was meant to live in a social context. Two are better than one, as Solomon expounds on practical companionship. There is greater strength in a good companionship. This is especially true if this relationship is spiritual, and not merely socially worked out. It is a blessed relationship if that relationship is spiritual. There is usually another believer who becomes closer than others, a true right-companion in Christ, a prayer partner and beloved friend. Such are very few in number but are the most blessed relationships one can have in this life!

A Wise Child & a Foolish King

Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also *he that is* born in his kingdom becometh poor. Eccl. 4:13–14.

This statement is complex. The first part is self-evident: a poor and wise youth has learned much and will hopefully learn even more, whereas an old and foolish king who will not be corrected is a plague on the entire kingdom. The second part, many think, refers to the

ng man who comes out of bondage to become king. He must not cumb to the failures of the old king who was born in that kingdom. ver and influence are blessed when they promote godliness, but are eful when they are dissipated through arbitrary behavior. Often es advancement among men brings out the worst in a man's onality, and those traits which should be cured and abandoned are

er increased until the personality is recalcitrant. How necessary it or those in leadership to be godly men! This is true both in the ddom of men and in the kingdom of God!

The Second Youth

considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. *There is* no end of all the people, *even* of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall ot rejoice in him. Surely this also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. Eccl. 1:15–16.

The second young man replaces the first. The struggle for power the right to rule are endless. The one generation anticipates the t and hopes for better times. After a man's reign, those who follow criticize his policies and reign. This seems inevitable—and it is iral. We criticize those who have ruled in time past, and those who ow us shall criticize the leaders of our day, be it the political arena he church. They criticize without knowing or experiencing the es and problems which we face in this generation. They know only ain facts, but they were not in the midst of the battles. So it is with e and human nature. Let us be courageous for the Lord and let our ord stand. If the next generation misunderstands it, it is their olem. Let them know that we were faithful in our time and never promised the faith. Some will find that there are great tests of faith every generation—and none is exempted. We are not to be luated by the battles of the last century or the next century, but by battles which must be fought now!

Do not be Rash!

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready o hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they lo evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: herefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the

multitude of business; and a fool's voice *is known* by multitude of words. Eccl. 5:1–3.

Serious worship of the one true God, a consciousness of His presence and power, and a sense of His awesome exaltation should lead us to put our hands over our mouths and say nothing! Our God is indescribably awesome! He is holy, righteous, almighty—is everywhere present and knows all things! Unless we are overcome by awe, we have not risen to the level of true worship! Our words would be few! This is no time for rashness or an irreverent familiarity. We are often intimate with God as our Heavenly Father, this intimacy cannot be irreverent! We may speak of Him as closer to our closest friend, but such cannot become degenerate and lack consciousness of His awesome holiness, righteousness and justice! It is in this elevated and overpowering consciousness that we may dwell upon His grace and mercy! If we can but say “Father” we shall be able to pray!

Vows

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are* also *divers* vanities: but fear thou God. Eccl. 5:4–7.

A vow is a promise made to God, that if He will do something for us we shall respond by doing this or that for Him. A vow must not be made lightly or in a time when we are too distraught to think straight. It must not lie to God! And to renege on a promise made to God is the same as a lie! The Lord will hold us accountable, and we must be careful on our part to pay the vow (1 Sam. 1:11; Lev. 27:18; Numb. 30:2; Psalms 66:13–20; Psalm 76:11). Vows are serious commitments, and they are made to the Lord; they must be honored. Vows were mostly Old Testament practice. Are there times when making a vow is proper for a New Testament believer? Yes, but the same rules apply. There are only two occasions when a vow is mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 18:18; 21:23). So the practice remained. Remember, a vow is a very serious matter!

No Activism

If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is higher* than the highest regardeth; and *there be* higher than they. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field. Eccl. 5:8–9.

This statement has to do with observation, not action. The ruler of a province perverts judgment, and the prince who is higher sees it. The king sees it also, and even he is served by the labor of the field. But the most important reality is that God Himself sees the injustice and oppression! So, this is not a call, as we have it today, for “activism,” meaning to right the wrongs; it is sufficient that God knows and God sees. God regards such, and thus He will take action. Nowadays, people take it upon themselves to right the wrongs of society. They become “activists,” and even commit crimes in the name of “social justice.” The Lord stands against such! He will deal with injustice.

Riches

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this *is* also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good *is there* to the owners hereof, saving the beholding *of them* with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man *is* sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. Eccl. 5:10–12.

Those who seek riches never have sufficient; they are never satisfied; they always want more. And the more they have, the more senses they have! Such as would be or are rich have trouble sleeping because of their worries. The one satisfied with God’s provision sleeps soundly. Are we satisfied with God’s provision for our lives? If we are honest and have sufficiency to support life, we should rejoice to be satisfied. This is a leaning upon God’s providence and His care for us; seeking wealth, more and more, robs us of trusting in our God thus of living by faith! Does our wealth or seeking after such harm Christianity?

Riches or One’s Portion?

There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil

ravail: and he begetteth a son, and *there is* nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also *is* a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness. Behold *that* which I have seen: *it is* good and comely *for one* to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it *is* his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this *is* the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart. Eccl. 5:13–20.

In this passage there is a contrast between the unsatisfied rich and satisfied poor. One never has enough; the other has sufficient to and is satisfied. Neither shall take of this life to the grave and on. Both entered this world naked and shall leave the same. One must be content with what the Lord has providentially given him through his labor. There is one thought that sheds some light upon this and its relation to the next: "...and their works do follow them." (v. 14:13). We will leave this thought for others to consider. Our text says that we should be satisfied with our portion. The believer's interest focus lie elsewhere. Not on riches, but on the will of and service to God. Here is lasting value! Our labor sustains wife, family and life; service to the Lord sustains everything else! On the Day of Judgment when all is weighed out, how will we fare? Hopefully, we will rejoice we have invested in eternity and the work of God!

Untapped Wealth

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it *is* common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil disease. Eccl. 6:1–2.

First, it is evident from the providence of God and His care for mankind, that riches come from Him. It is God who gives wealth and honor. Second, a man might be the blessed recipient of such and yet be able to enjoy what God has given, but it is given or taken by sinners through deceit, war, conquest or some evil conspiracy. How tragic! How disappointing! Think of the refugees who are forced to leave their home countries, leaving all behind them and suffering

tations of the worst sort. Consider those who have been the objects of some financial scheme and have lost everything with no recourse to win any of their wealth. Think of some who have had everything destroyed by some great disaster such as a tornado or forest fire. How, indeed! Then consider how gracious God is to His own who are protected and provided for in His providential care and blessing! May we never be unthankful for God's blessing in giving what we need and much, much more!

A Strange Comparison

If a man beget an hundred *children*, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also *that* he have no burial; I say, *that* an untimely birth *is* better than *he*. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known *any thing*: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice *told*, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place? Eccl. 6:3–6.

The comparison Solomon describes here is between a very blessed man in material wealth, children and a prolonged longevity with a medically aborted fetus. The one finally dies bereft of good and without burial, evidently forsaken by all; the other dies in the womb, having never experienced a natural birth or independent life at all. This one, Solomon states, is better than the other—a very strange comparison! Now we ought to give God thanks for His goodness to us in giving us normal birth and adequate life and the love of parents and relatives! We will die, but we will have also lived and enjoyed what the Lord has given in His kindness and goodness. How thankful we ought to be that gracious God has set His love upon for good!

Disappointment

All the labour of man *is* for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit. Eccl. 6:7–9.

Solomon here deals with the frustration of gaining wealth, but not advantage which it was hoped such wealth would give. All men do labor, but few are ever satisfied. Learning to live in this world without always grasping for more has its own satisfaction. Being able to see and enjoy the gift of sight is better than coveting what is seen.

Can we enjoy this life with its varied sights, beautiful things, wonderful vistas and the lovely realities of creation rather than simply wanting what we see and desiring to possess it? Such desire robs us of peace and contentment. A covetous spirit never finds rest nor appreciates the beauty and glory of creation.

Living for the Present

That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it *is* man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what *is* man the better? For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun? Eccl. 6:10–12.

Solomon now considers the man who lives only for the present. His present life is very short. Most dream far beyond its realities and desire far more than this present life provides. Some have been Empire Builders, and have wanted to rule the world! They make war, seek kingdoms and live to make a name for themselves. Most miserably

These seek to “play god” in this present life, but they, too, shall not die and their influence will wane. Man will never live and die any more content than when he lives and dies in obedience to the Word of God. He fulfills his ordained life in this world and dies content in having fulfilled the will of God in his time by faith. Have come to terms with living only for God and seeking to live by faith His Word? Divine Providence may raise us up for some great industry or work, or we may live rather insignificant lives for His glory. We may serve Him in some field of labor which will benefit countless others, or produce things which will lighten the burden of many. Only God knows. If we seek to faithfully serve our God, He will enable us to glorify Him!

A Serious Consideration

A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. *It is* better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that *is* the end of all men; and he living will lay *it* to his heart. Sorrow *is* better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth. Eccl. 7:1–4.

Solomon points out several serious realities for consideration in this passage. First, a good name and reputation as a godly person is

er than perfume. It blesses and positively affects others. Second, day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. All trials, ptations and adversities have passed, and the soul is resting with ist forever. Third, it is better to observe one who has passed ough this life faithfully than be taken up with pleasure and a isure of thoughtlessness—a serious contemplation! This ministers the heart. The house of mirth has a present respite from ightfulness and seriousness, but one must return to the seriousness ife very soon. The person who will live for God as a believer and ain faithful in this life will have times of serious reflection on the ificance of life, the reality of death, the after-life in the presence of Lord and the short, temporary times of mirth and social brations. Believers are joyful and serious followers of our Lord.

The Wise vs. the Fool

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the aughter of the fool: this also is vanity. Eccl. 7:5–6.

This passage is occupied with the better of two alternatives. Better ear the rebuke of the wise than the song of fools. The first may be -transforming or at the least extremely profitable, while the second f no use or profit. The most common firewood for cooking in that ient time was thorn bushes, which were had in abundance (Psa.); Psa. 118:12; Isa. 33:12). The empty laughter of fools is likened o a fire of thorns under a pot. No one likes to be rebuked, but if n comes from a very wise person and is meant for our good and fit, then it has a good intention and wil prove profitable. The ghter of the fool is worthless; simply noise. As believers, we need ous, profitable conversation and not the prating or humor of the l. The world is filled with the latter!

Oppression

Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. Eccl. 7:7.

The term “Oppression” means extortion. Extortion makes a wise n act unreasonably, and a bribe destroys the heart. How easily even ise man may be greatly offended or disturbed by those who would c to extort him or tempt him with a bribe. A man is approached ording to his character. To attempt to deal thus with a wise man is ibly offensive. How do people view us? Do we seem to others as

who could be extorted? Are we that weak? Or that we could be led? Do we seem that dishonest? The greatest things a believer possesses is his testimony and character. If these are tarnished, he has little left. One's character is all-inclusive. Both the wicked and the righteous recognize it. One's testimony, though perhaps misunderstood by the unbelieving world, stands with his character. And we have both before this ungodly society in which we live!

Need of Patience

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Eccl. 7:8-9.

We need patience for any project or purpose. Impatience grows when our plans are interrupted or obstacles and disappointments arise the way. If pride caused us to declare the task easy and quickly accomplished, and is now disappointed, we tend to become angry and say something negative or act foolishly. Strange it is that even in our spiritual endeavors, we may sin by being disappointed or defeated in the endeavor. When it is the work of God or work done for Him, it is our testimony to lose our tempers in anger and play the fool before others. Imagine—we seek to do God's work, we believe that we are doing His will in a given ministry—then fail or succumb to unforeseen opposition. We become fools through our anger. How faith and patience are needed in the service of the Lord! We must not be unprepared for spiritual opposition, which can paralyze best endeavors. Are we prepared to face things consistently as believers?

“The Good Old Days”

Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this. Eccl. 7:10.

It is common to talk about the past and describe the past efforts, plans, purposes and endeavors as “the good old days.” Why do we say these things? Perhaps the past had great blessings which are missing in the present. Remember the great days of revival and spiritual awakening! Maybe the conditions were better then. But, if taken as saying usually is, we simply forget many of the trials and hardships of the past, and so our defective memories recall only the good or positive things. Our memories are selective, and if put back in the same conditions, we say that we forgot this or that concerning the difficult or bad things were! This is a common fault among men.

And it is even true in matters concerning the work of God. We / forget the opposition we experienced, the negative attitude of /rs in our evangelistic attempts, or the disagreements between /kers. Our service for the Lord is always in the present, and the past /t be left with the Lord. If not we may be overcome with regret and /ouraged by the way. Remember, it is God Who must finally /uated the work!

Wisdom as an Antidote

Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance: and *by it there is* profit to them that /ee the sun. For wisdom *is* a defence, *and* money *is* a defence: but the /xcellency of knowledge *is*, *that* wisdom giveth life to them that have it. /cccl. 7:11–12.

A goodly inheritance may prove to be a great blessing to the /g. But wisdom is needed to properly manage the estate. Without /om, all or much may be lost! Consider what use an inherited /te might be to a believer and his family. /ith riches come a /titude of burdens and temptations. Money has ruined many a life / many a family! The children may be properly edified and trained / the service of Christ. Time usually spent in labor may be dedicated /urther the Kingdom of God. The poor may be helped with a blessed /el motive and purpose. All these things necessitate much wisdom! /pproached with wisdom and a generous spirit many may be helped / the Kingdom of God furthered through the service of many one / enabled. Any believer who is blessed with worldly possessions / be used in the practical ministry and service of our Lord!

The Balance of Providence

Consider the work of God: for who can make *that* straight, which he /ath made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of /dversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to /e end that man should find nothing after him. Eccl. 7:13–14.

God has made some things crooked. Does this sound strange? God /rdained days of opportunity and days of opposition. These /nce out in His providence lest we become discouraged on the one /d or presumptive on the other. If all were conducive to God's work / blessing, how discouraged we would be with the slightest /osition! We need times of discipline to drive us to God in prayer

cause us to reset our spiritual bearings, and also times of antage for us to make headway and receive His blessings. Both e a wise and mature Christian! He is prepared to make the best gress in times of blessing and to stand fast in times of adversity. If were positive and fulfilled without effort, would we be given to er? Would we become prayer warriors? Would we rather become itually slothful and presumptuous? By God's grace we may thank Lord for both!

Wisdom and Providence

All *things* have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just *man* that erisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that rolongeth *his life* in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; either make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be ot over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die efore thy time? *It is* good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall ome forth of them all. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten ighty *men* which are in the city. For *there is* not a just man upon arth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. Also take no heed unto all vords that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For ftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast ursed others. Eccl. 7:15–22.

Solomon is not suggesting a middle-of-the-road approach here to dom and folly or righteousness and wickedness. We are to serve Lord in wisdom and in obedience to His revealed will and Word. is speaking against a self-righteousness which rests in itself and so else and vulnerable. Our righteousness is the imputed righteousness he Lord Jesus Christ appropriated by faith. Self-righteous makes us lish. Neither should we think for a moment that we can indulge in kedness without dire consequences! We are not perfect, but we are iteous, and we must also be wise! We must not speak against ther lest we be guilty of cursing another in a moment of weakness.

must not judge every man or every word spoken, as no one is ect. And being overly-righteous is being self-righteous and out grace! Has our righteousness made us gracious? —It should!

Wisdom is Rare!

All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far om me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out

wisdom, and the reason *of things*, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness *and* madness: And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be aken by her. Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, *counting* one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions. Eccl. 7:23–29.

Solomon desires to find the true source of wisdom and to trace the source of man back to their source. He finds that God alone is the true source of wisdom, and He made man upright. The source of evil and why he also finds in men and women as now fallen and sinful. When he entered the human race, it began to manifest itself in a multitude of ways. Every human being [Solomon concentrates his study on women] exhibits a wide variety of sinful behavior. The work of Satan has been widespread and effectual within the confines of the human race. We must devote ourselves up to God without reservation and cling to Him by faith to escape the vast variety of sinful realities which plague the human race! Obedience is ever the path to true peace!

Wisdom in Action

Who *is* as the wise *man*? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. I *counsel thee* to keep the king's commandment, and *that* in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever he pleaseth him. Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man *is* great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? *There is* no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither *hath he* power in the day of death: and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it. Eccl. 8:1–8.

After the conclusion of chapter seven, Solomon considers how wisdom acts with regard to the king, the uncertain future and the certainty of death. How are we to live as wise people? We need in this to obey proper authority, as we necessarily live in the context of human society and its government. We also live in an uncertain world,

great future issues of life remain hidden from us until they come to pass. Finally, one thing remains certain—we will die. Thus, we must live wisely. As believers in our day, we must live according to the Word of God—wisely! Obedience may cost us dearly, but we have no alternative. The best and most blessed of lives is to live in obedience to God through His Word!

A Sad Study

All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: *there is* a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: *this is* also vanity. Eccl. 8:9–10.

Solomon had given himself over to the study of human nature, especially of rulers, as he himself was a ruler. “These live like gods, like men and are soon forgotten as the beasts.” How vain is life if dedicated unto one’s self! Everything is sacrificed for a short time of power and fame. Unless a man lives to glorify God and live in obedience to His will, what does it profit? Actually, he will but heap up judgment to himself! Fallen, sinful man tends toward judgment with every thought, intention and action! This is inescapable. He suffers from the noetic effects of sin and remains blinded to his own significance, believing himself to be someone great when he is in reality nothing. James summarizes it thus: “For what is your life? It is no more than as a vapor that appeareth for a little time, then vanisheth away!” (James 4:14). Only the life lived to God and His Word is of value!

Fearing and not fearing God

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. Eccl. 8:11–13.

Fallen, sinful man is by nature spiritually insane. He lives unto self and cannot perceive himself in the context of the world in which he lives. The prolongation of time before he is judged is interpreted to be no judgment at all! He is so prone to sin that he seeks every occasion to fulfill his lusts, and does not comprehend that judgment must certainly fall from the decree of a righteous, just and holy God! He does not believe that judgment must fall at some point when he will stand before God condemned—this is certain! He rather believes that judgment presently adverted is judgment remitted. He understands the nature of God, Divine providence and the inevitability of judgment against an evil work. Because the true man ever knows God, he is not misled by such error! How blest are those who live by obedience to God's Word!

Contrary Providences

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just *men*, into whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked *men*, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also *is* vanity. Eccl. 8:14.

Solomon now gives himself to consider contrary providences. The righteous suffer evil and the wicked experience good. Does this contradict the purpose of God? Of course not, but when experienced in our lives, we may doubt God and His love in our unbelief! Why the righteous suffer is a question which deserves an answer. They may suffer through persecution for their faith, which is understandable. There may not be a tangible reason, but be assured that in the end, God will be glorified and His purposed fulfilled. The suffering of believers does not rule out Romans 8:28! The wicked may experience great blessing, but it makes their unbelief all the more unreasonable and damning. The God of all the earth will do right, and this we believe with faith and trust in the promises of God. We must not faint in adversity, for the Lord has a good purpose in this, and will be glorified!

Living for Pleasure

When I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun. Eccl. 8:15.

This saying, partially repeated in 1 Cor. 15:32, must be considered two ways: First, the way of the ungodly. When considering the brevity of life and its shortness, and the inevitability of death, let us align ourselves for tomorrow we die. This is an animal-like life with no thought of God or final judgment—simply self-indulgence until death takes us to final judgment—a fatalistic, nihilistic view of life and death. On the other hand, the import of our passage is that we can and should enjoy what the Lord has given us of temporal enjoyment meant for this life. If our souls are secure with God, then we can enjoy what the Lord has given for our enjoyment—if we partake in thankfulness to His glory.

Incapacity

When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also *there is that* neither day nor night ceaseth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek *it* out, yet he shall not find *it*; yea further; though a wise *man* think to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to find *it*. Eccl. 8:16–17.

Solomon plays the philosopher at this point. He seeks to grasp the scope and intricacies of the Divine government throughout the world. It rendered him sleepless at night as he pondered God's purpose in the government of this world with all its activity and complexity. Is there a key which causes all to fit together? a discernable pattern? a principle which will unlock the secret of the universe? His conclusion: simply beyond man! He is left to trust God and live by faith, and leave the control and purpose of God to Him alone! This is the attitude of faith! We ourselves are often perplexed. We seek the face of God in vain. We want answers ourselves—and none are revealed. We are to persist on trusting our Lord and walking in obedience—it is enough that He knows!

In God's Hand

For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by all that is* before them. Eccl. 9:1.

This passage (9:1–10) is a continuation of the preceding subject in chapter 8. Man cannot grasp the totality of God's work in this world—far beyond him. (See paragraph on 8:16–17, "Incapacity"). But in

first ten verses of this chapter, Solomon recounts what he did learn, his sleepless hours of inquiry were not for naught! He emphasizes the common end of all men—death. As he introduces this section, he declares that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. What a comfort in this world of confusion and sinfulness! We may be confused about many things, but some things are a certainty—this is a great comfort! And the Lord may bring good out of evil and blessing out of sinfulness! We are not alone in this wicked world. The Lord is with us, and he will never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5 is a quotation and the culmination of several Old Testament passages. It uses the strongest expressions possible in the Gk. for our assurance and comfort!): “I will never, no never you [emph.] leave, I will not, will not you [emph.] ever forsake!”

The Certainty of Death

All *things come* alike to all: *there is* one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner; and he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath. This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; or the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion or ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun, Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. Eccl. 9:2–10.

Solomon sees that both the righteous and the wicked will die, both rich and the poor, both the wise and the foolish. This is the end of men—the termination of this earthly life. His advice is to do what can, be diligent, enjoy the legitimate things, but slack not to be industrious. The reason: everything ends in the grave. With the full

t of the New Testament, we elevate Solomon's conclusion to the next degree! Be faithful! Live in obedience to God's Word! Reflect the gospel in our lives! We shall die—Yes!—but we shall also live forever in the presence of God and inhabit the new earth—a world characterized by righteousness (2 Pet. 3:7–14), a world without the curse and curse of sin! Our labors will be fully rewarded and we shall inherit paradise!

Contemplating Life

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.* Eccl. 9:10.

In the previous section, Solomon had been contemplating death; now he contemplates life! What time we have left before our demise should be put to the best possible use! God never teaches a passive life or laziness. We are to be occupied with the best possible activities because of the shortness of this life and the inevitability of death. Make the very best of our circumstances! Someday we will stand in judgment for how we spent our time. Joyful will be those who spent their years in this fleeting earthly life in serving God and enjoying His blessing! God knows our potential and expects our lives to be lived with purpose and for His glory!

Death Unexpected

...I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so *are* the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it shall be suddenly upon them. Eccl. 9:11–12.

This passage discusses the untimeliness of death as to time. It may come at a time unexpected; thus we must be ready at all times and be prepared in heart and mind for the ultimate experience! Yet, we must not live in constant fear of death! Some things must be left in the hands of God. If we seek to live righteously, we can live without fear! The text implies an unexpected time which takes one at unawares and at convenience. Oh! To be and remain prepared that at any season we would be ready to receive the great summons, "Come up hither!" We

e a lifetime to prepare for death, yet most will be utterly repaired—let us not be of that multitude, but be reminded every day commit ourselves unto the Lord to sweeten our anticipation daily 1 thoughts of His sudden return!

Prepare for Disappointment

This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it *seemed* great unto ne. *There was* a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: how there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom *is* better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom *is* despised, and his words are not heard. The words of wise *men are* heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good. Eccl. 9:13–18.

There are instances in ancient history where this actually happened—and the results were what Solomon foretold! How sad! In the highest wisdom is easily forgotten and counted as nothing! A military battle will endure in the minds of men for centuries, but wisdom will soon pass away and the wise man will be forgotten! Such is the thinking—or unthinking—nature of sinful, fallen mankind! This principle is also active in the spiritual realm. Most will highly value which is sensational, but fail to appreciate that which is truly wise spiritual. Such is man. Let us do all for the glory of God and leave carnal judgment to others! God knows. He cares, and He rewards servants faithfully.

Wisdom and Folly

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: *so doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom *and* honour. A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom *saileth him*, and he saith to every one *that* he *is* a fool. Eccl. 10:1–3.

In a man considered to be wise, a little folly is extremely noticeable! Folly is expected of the fool but is not expected of the wise, but sadly at times, folly is mixed with wisdom to the detriment of the wise! This makes even a little folly very noticeable! It is likened to dead, poisonous flies that cause the ointment to stink and sends

h a stinking savour. How the wise must take care to be consistent not give way to inconsistencies or foolishness! Yet we are all ers, and some foolishness may reveal itself in an unguarded ment. Even among Christians, such happens occasionally to our ne! There must never be a time when we allow the evil one to gain othold—Our testimony may be at stake!

Even Rulers Err

f the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for ielding pacieth great offences. There is an evil *which* I have seen under the sun, as an error *which* proceedeth from the ruler: Folly is set n great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon orses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. Eccl. 10:4–7.

No one in our sinful ace is without sin and error. If we remember we will be able to humbly take the higher ground and appease the er of the ruler. Rulers, are also subject to passions and err at times. her than turn away and exacerbate the situation, we must be the onable one and seek appeasement. Once his embarrassment has d, he will respect us. Thus, we have honored him and also bled him. In church situations, this is applicable. Leaders are often sed and even attacked. The godly man, who desires the best for all, appease the situation without compromise. What a blessing when l gives wisdom to those in low estate for the good of God's people!

The Unexpected

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a erpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: ut wisdom *is* profitable to direct. Surely the serpent will bite without nchantment; and a babler is no better. The words of a wise man's outh *are* gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The eginning of the words of his mouth *is* foolishness: and the end of his alk *is* mischievous madness. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot ell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? The abour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth ot how to go to the city. Eccl. 10:8–15.

This passages describes the unexpected while toiling in legitimate r. At times everything goes wrong. The Preacher then makes lication to the fool and the wise man. Evidently the fool does not eise due caution in his labors! The work of God must be done fully. It is not enough to be astute in God's work. It must be done

yerfully and carefully. Whenever others are involved, the work of
l tends to become very complex. Hurt feelings arise, animosity
rges, and competition at times injures the work. Sadly, Satan takes
advantage of such things! Let us make certain that he cannot get
foot in the door, as it were! How best it is when God's people get
ig and there is harmony in the work!

Blessing and Bane

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king *is* a child, and thy princes eat in
he morning! Blessed *art* thou, O land, when thy king *is* the son of
obles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for
lunkenness! By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through
dleness of the hands the house droppeth through. A feast is made for
aughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all *things*. Eccl.
10:16–19.

Some would translate this as “childish,” referring to the
aturity of the ruler. It is noted that the deviation from maturity and
/ came down the royal order to the princes, who reserved the
noons and evenings for drunken revelries. The example of the
r had an ill effect upon those who ruled under him. Such is human
ire without the grace of God. What of leadership in a church? If
pastor or elders are indulgent, will not their influence affect the
re leadership, and then most or all of the men of the congregation?
must remember the pull of human nature and its unsanctified
uence! Sad it is when the leadership pushes the limits of “Christian
rty” to and even past the limits! Let us strive to be blameless
re all men and before the world!

Secrets Revealed

Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy
bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which
hath wings shall tell the matter. Eccl. 10:20.

Speaking behind someone's back is always dangerous. This easily
omes a habit which is addictive. Some are always saying negative
gs, critical things and derogatory things about others. Such
icism, just or unjust, will eventually make itself known and cause a
idal. This is certainly true in a church context! Lives are all but

ied, and churches even split and families lost to the congregation
ause of a loose tongue! Some, it seems, have nothing good to say

ut others. Such a habit is foreign to a Christian and to a church member. Remember, Satan is waiting to take such and destroy the church if he can! On the other hand, how blessed it is when members speak well of each other, pray for one another and seek to edify one another! Let us be of the number who speak well of others and seek to encourage them!

Wasteful?

Sow thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Eccl. 11:1.

The correct translation might be “bread corn” or grain. Handfuls of wheat were sown in the Nile delta when the waters receded and brought in a great harvest. The sower faithfully performed his task, trusting himself to the providence of God for a harvest after many seasons. He sowed in all types of soil (Matt. 13:1–23). Such is true discerning the gospel. The Word of God must be faithfully sown throughout the expanse of our world. It will not return unto us or the seed is fruitless, but it shall bear fruit. The Lord has ordained this! If we are obedient, we can expect God’s blessing. Nothing done for God will be wasted! The seed sown will bear a harvest according as the Lord has ordained. We have His promise regarding this!

Living by Faith

Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall* be alike good. Eccl. 11:2–6.

Christianity is known for its bountifulness; the world for its selfishness; Christianity for its charity, the world for its churlishness. The world fears for the future; the Christian is to trust God and His promises. The motives for Christian benevolence are much different

from the world. Christians always seek a gospel motive—to gain a hearing for the gospel, to seek an opportunity to tell the gospel to

ers. This is the highest of motives! A gospel outreach through-
ing also is a blessed example of faith in Divine providence,
eving that the Lord will supply one's need. If so, then our
evolence will be blessed, indeed!

Light and Darkness

Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes to behold
he sun: But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all; yet let
him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that
cometh *is* vanity. Eccl. 11:7–8.

We are to rejoice in the bright, sunny days of our lives. The Lord
given us time for enjoyment and blessing. He has also ordained
s of darkness, sorrow, trials and sickness. We must understand our
s in the context of God and our existence in this life. This life is
porary. Our eternal state will be far different than this present state.

this is something that we must experience and pass through. We
st seek to contemplate this as real, true and actual! We must not
w this life to govern our lives or our anticipation of the future. Our
ire is bound up with God—our gracious heavenly Father—Who has
ained an eternal day of light for His own!

Do not Forget!

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the
lays of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight
f thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee
nto judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away
vil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity. Eccl. 11:9–10.

There are two types of enjoyment and pleasure by which men may
oy themselves—legitimate and illegitimate; godly and sinful. The
acher here refers to the former—legitimate joys and pleasures. But
also warns of those which tend toward sin and judgment. For young
1, the one may easily run into the other! The temptations of youth
great and many, and great care must be taken to avoid those which
l into sin. God will winnow the soul and make inquiry as to the
ire of all such joys and pleasures. Blessed is the man whose joys
holy and blameless! Sadly, there is a “practical atheism” among

istians! Consider Psalms 14:1, “The fool hath said in his heart, there is
God,” i.e., “God is of no consequence” (Heb.). Many a Christian

with little conscience because his concept of God is inconsequential!

Remember!

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; Eccl. 12:1.

This introduces the final section of Ecclesiastes—a graphic orial presentation of old age and death (v. 1–7). Godliness in the s of youth are blessed, indeed—and rare, it seems. Serious liness usually comes later in life, when, through various means, the hs of the gospel are brought home and the seriousness of salvation separation from the world are learned from the Word of God. The ptations of youth have been somewhat stilled, and the mind begins hink about eternity more, and this life with its pleasures are inning to dim. But the Preacher declares that godliness in youth is ecially blessed. Considered man of the men about whom we read in rich history. Some were converted in later life, such as John vton; others were godly from their youth, such as Bunyan. Ceyne and Spurgeon. Much may be said about dedicated living for l when one is young! Seek the Lord even now! Do not live for self or pleasure, believing that some day you will become serious about gion. Blessed is the man who has the fewest regrets before God!

Old Age

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Eccl. 12:2–7.

A graphic description of old age and death. “Darkened.” The sight is fading. “The keepers of the house” refer to hands, now old trembling. “The strong men bowed down” refers to the legs, now weak and bowed. “The grinders” refer to the teeth, now “few.” “He will rise up at the noise of a bird” refers to sleeplessness. “The

gthers of music” refer to loss of hearing. Then follows fear of ghts and instability and fear of falling. “The almond tree” refers to white hair. “The grasshopper shall be a burden” refers to physical kness where once the man had great strength. “Desire shall fail” rs to the lack of sexual desire and ability. The remainder refers to th and a funeral. This one way of viewing human life, old age and th. For the believer who has spent his life in the service of Christ, it ar different spiritually! We simply wear out in the service of our d and He takes us home!

Death

nan goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ver the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the itcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall eturn unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is anity. Eccl. 12:6–8.

We finish what we began in the last section: “His long home” rs to the grave. “The mourners going about the streets” refers to funeral. The silver cord may refer to spinal cord these words and se which follow them refer to damage that cannot be undone. Then, m dust to dust,” and spirit shall return to God Who gave it. What is dealt with is the way the life has been lived. If in the faithful vice of Christ, it is beautiful and precious! Let our lives be such and for the glory of God!