

Exposition of the Book of Proverbs, Volume 1- George Lawson

EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME 1

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INTRODUCTION

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 But the necessity of our imitating this part of his conduct, has been in a great measure superseded by that Spirit of truth, under whose guidance Solomon wrote his Proverbs, and transmitted them to future ages for their instruction in righteousness.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

Proverbs 1

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

Proverbs 1:1. The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

This book consists of **proverbs**, which are **wise, and short sayings of great use to direct us in the conduct of life**

Proverbs were much valued in ancient times.

But no proverbs deserve so much esteem and attention as these, for they are the proverbs of Solomon, another name almost for wisdom. In his days he was honoured like an angel of God, for his understanding. All kings that heard of him, admired him, and thought themselves happy if they could hear some of his wise instructions. The Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear his wisdom; although she had not heard the one half of what she found to be true concerning him, yet even these imperfect accounts were such as to exceed her belief (1 Ki 10:1-13, 2Chr 9:1-12). Did she come so far, upon uncertain reports, to hear his wisdom? and shall not we receive with gladness his instructions, since he is come to us, to be our teacher? We have no need to cross dangerous seas, and travel into distant countries, to hear the lectures of this divine teacher,—He cries to us in our streets, he talks with us in our closets. He died some thousands of years ago, but He yet speaks.

Though Solomon had been the son of an Ahaz, or of some poor herdsman, his wisdom would have entitled him to our respect. But

this wisest of men was the son of the best of men. He that was raised on high,—the anointed of the God of Jacob,—the man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22),—was his father. This wise son enjoyed all the advantages to be expected from the instructions and the example, the prayers and the blessings, of so good a father. Solomon was a prophet, and the son of a prophet,—he was the son of the best of kings; and of the many sons whom God had given to David, he was chosen to fill his father's throne.

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

These words are the instructions of that king, who excelled in wisdom and grandeur all the kings of the earth. This great prince is our teacher; but not he alone,—the only wise God here condescends to become our Instructor;—**he, then, who disregards this book, despises a greater than Solomon.** (Mt 12:42, Lk 11:31) This book is the work of a noble writer, and truly it was written with a noble design—

Proverbs 1:2. To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,

To give us the knowledge of wisdom, and that instruction by which knowledge is conveyed into our minds; for man is born without wisdom, and without instruction must continue foolish all his days. The words of understanding are the instruction of wisdom, and this book will lead the simple and inexperienced to perceive these words. But what sort of wisdom is it that Solomon means to teach in this book?

The best kind of wisdom—

Proverbs 1:3. To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity;

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

They thought themselves happy that were admitted to hear the discourses of this great philosopher, while he lived among men. But the best of his instructions are left on record for our benefit. The best knowledge is the knowledge of God, and of Christ, who is his representing image to men, and holiness, which is the image of God in men.

The most necessary truths are first to be learned, and these are clearly represented in this little book.

But who are the persons that may receive benefit from it?

This you may learn from the next verse—

Proverbs 1:4. To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,

Plato wrote on the door of his Academy, "Let no man unskilled in Geometry come hither." Solomon writes the very reverse on the door of his school: "Let the simple man who is easily deceived come hither, and he shall learn that subtilty which is necessary to preserve him from the snares of the destroyer, and is yet fully consistent with integrity. Let the young and inexperienced come and learn knowledge and discretion."

Which of us does not need subtilty to preserve us from the wiles of the great deceiver and his agents? (Eph 6:11) This book not only teaches, but gives subtilty to the simple.

When its truth enters into the soul, and takes possession of the heart through the grace of the Spirit who dictates the Scriptures, and makes use of them as his instrument of illumination, then the simple are made wise, and the hearts of the rash understand knowledge.

It were our happiness if we understood our own simplicity, that we might thankfully receive the instructions of wisdom, and fervently pray for the Spirit of God to open our ears and seal our instructions. **If any man would be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.** (1 Cor 3:18)

Persons to whom books are dedicated, may be expected to give them a careful perusal. Solomon dedicates this book to the **young**, as well as to the **simple**. He knew that young people stand in great need of advice and direction, and earnestly desired to do them

good; and could they be persuaded to accept of Solomon as their teacher, he will speak to them with the kindness of a father, and communicate to them knowledge and discretion.

But is this book of no use but to the unwise and the untaught?—It is of great use to the **wise** also; and if men are truly wise, they will value it above much fine gold, and by the diligent use of it, will greatly improve in wisdom.

Proverbs 1:5. A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,

This book contains wise counsels for directing a man under every perplexing difficulty in the way of peace and safety, and enabling him to give the most seasonable and prudent counsels to others. How precious are wise counsels! (Ps 36:7, 139:17, Pr 3:15, 12:27, 20:15, 24:4, 2 Peter 1:4) and what a treasure is a wise counsellor to his friends and neighbours!—

This book will also enable a wise man,

Proverbs 1:6. To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.

The dark sayings of fools and triflers are not worth a thought; but the dark sayings of the wise are worthy to be studied till we obtain a complete knowledge of their meaning; for they are dark at first hearing only, on account of the sublimity of their views, and the force of their manner of expression, which contains much useful instruction in small compass.

Are we old or young, wise or unwise? Here is milk for babes, and strong meat for those that are of full age. (Heb 5:12-14) Here are plain instructions for the ignorant, and depths of wisdom proper to exercise and enrich the minds of the most intelligent.

Let us attend, and learn, and practice.

It is Solomon the son of David, and king of Israel, that speaks. He speaks to the **simple** and **inexperienced**, and to the **wise**. He speaks of the most important points of truth, and a greater than Solomon is here. Christ spoke by his Spirit in the prophets, and He still speaks from heaven to us. He speaks by His word and by his Spirit (cp John 6:63). He opens the understandings of men, that they may understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). Christ is the Word (John 1:1) and the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), and He is made to us wisdom (1Cor 1:30KJV). Let us depend upon Him as our wisdom, that His Spirit may write in our hearts (cp Pr 3:3, 7:3, Jer 31:33, Heb 8:10, 10:16) the things written in this book: so shall we be the epistle of Christ, written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God (2Cor 3:2,3), and **our conversations (lives) will be living commentaries on the proverbs of Solomon.**

Some of the most necessary parts of wisdom are explained and enforced from Proverbs 1:7-17.

The first of these is, that—

Proverbs 1:7. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The fear of the Lord, so often recommended in this book (Pr 1:7, 29, 2:5, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27, 14:26, 27, 15:16, 33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17) is not that **fear** which hath torment in it, and is excluded by love; but that **fear** which is joined with faith, and keeps it from degenerating into presumption, whilst faith keeps fear from sinking into despondency. It is a lively impression of the excellency of God upon the soul, whereby a man is disposed to walk before him unto all pleasing (Col 1:10, 1Th 4:1), and to put far away every thing provoking and offensive to the eyes of his glory. It is therefore justly made to signify the whole of religion in the heart and life of man.

Great commendations are bestowed on this grace in Scripture. It makes a chief part in the noble characters of Abraham and Job, and here Solomon tells us that it is the beginning, the ground-work, and the comprehensive sum of all true knowledge.

He that lacks the **fear of the Lord** does not know Him; and he that knows not God, knows nothing as he ought to know it. He knows neither his business in life, nor his happiness (**Ed**: Nor his sadness in death!). (cp the eternal gospel message in Rev 14:6, [7-note](#)) A rational creature without the fear and knowledge of God, is like a soldier that never saw a sword, or a lawyer that never read an act of parliament. But he that knows the Lord so as to fear Him, knows Christ, through Whom we see those glorious perfections that are the object of our reverence. He knows his duty and happiness, and he is on the plain road to the knowledge of every thing necessary to make the man of God perfect.

Let no man say that this kind of knowledge deserves not our study, because it is generally despised; it is indeed despised, but by whom? The wise man tells us,

Who would despise a pearl because an idiot would not give his rattle for it? It is no dishonor to the divine wisdom to be despised by any man; but it is the utmost dishonor to any man to despise the wisdom of God. He is an unreasonable and foolish man that

has not the faith of Christ and the fear of the Lord*. (2 Thess. 3:2)

The next part of doctrine taught by the wise man, respects the reverence due to the instructions of parents.

Proverbs 1:8. Hear, my son, your father's instruction, And do not forsake your mother's teaching;

This exhortation speaks to us as unto children; Solomon is entitled to the authority, and addresses us with the tenderness of a father. If such, then, be the affection with which he addresses us, surely we owe him the reverence of children. God is our heavenly Father (Ed: But only those in His family are "children of God" - John 1:11-13, 1John 3:1-3). All his precepts are the expressions of divine goodness, and we are unnatural to our Maker if we forget them.

It is here supposed that parents will instruct their children. They are monsters rather than parents, who do not love the fruit of their own bodies (Ed: cp "the last days" - 2Ti 3:3 where "unloving" = [astorgos](#)). Love will dispose persons to do all the good they can to the objects of it; and the best thing that can be done for children, is to teach them **the fear of the Lord**. To be careful about providing the supports of life, or raising portions for children, **without taking care of their souls**, is like taking care of the clothes, and being indifferent about the body that wears them. "O ye people," cried an ancient philosopher, "why do ye toil in raising estates for your children, and neglect to prepare them by needful instructions for enjoying them?" (Ed: How many rich and successful fathers today need to hear and heed this question!)

Mothers are to instruct their children, as well as fathers. Solomon gratefully remembered the instructions he received in his younger years from Bathsheba; and the last chapter of this book contains the noble instructions which a wise king had learned from his mother.

Perhaps the reason why the names of the mothers of the kings of Judah are recorded along with their characters is, because the lessons and example of their mothers had a considerable influence in forming their behavior. (cp 1 Ki 1:1, 2:13, 22:42, contrast "the way of his mother" in 1 Ki 22:51,52)

Children are required to **hear**, and **reverence**, and **obey** the instructions of their fathers. Next to the duties we owe immediately to God, the commandments require us to obey our parents in the Lord* (Ex 20:12, Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20). He that despises his earthly father, is no doubt a despiser of the Father of spirits. A proper regard to the wise and godly instructions of parents, gives a happy presage of good behavior in after life. Vice and ruin, on the other hand, are the ordinary consequences of irreverence to these natural guardians of our tender years.

The sages of heathen antiquity, though themselves born of women, usually held them in such small respect, that they almost confined to the father precepts that regarded filial duty. The more enlarged wisdom of Solomon, however, pleads the cause of the mother in forcible words. The instructions of a mother are to be considered by us as **a law that we are never to forsake**. When old, she is still entitled to our respect; and we are never to leave those good paths into which her affectionate care has directed our steps.

But what advantage is proposed to us by attending to the voice of parental admonition?

Proverbs 1:9. Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, and ornaments about your neck.

Young people are generally fond of fine clothes, and of ornaments to their bodies; but with regard to this, Solomon here sets their notions right. Reverence to parents, a dutiful regard to their instructions, and the wisdom which is learnt from them, is by far the most beautiful ornament. It will make the face to shine; it will be a chain to the neck; it will be a graceful ornament, more beautiful than a crown of gold, to the head. With such ornaments was our Lord himself arrayed, while he dwelt among us. He was subject to his parents, though himself their Maker and Saviour*. (Luke 2:51,52)

Young people are generally disposed to hearken to advice; but because human nature is in a corrupt state, **they are generally more prone to follow bad advice** than good. Having therefore exhorted them to reverence and to obey God and their parents, he now proceeds to warn them against hearkening to the enticing words of seducers to sin, Pr 1:10-19.

Proverbs 1:10. My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.

Sinners have generally so much of the venom of the old serpent in them, that they do not wish to go unattended to hell, but desire to make others as much the children of the devil as themselves (1 John 3:8., 10-[note](#)) Sinners, after complying with the suggestions of their tempter, generally proceed from evil to worse, till they become devils themselves, and aid their master in ruining others.

The young ought to remember, that they will meet with ill advisers; and if so, how firmly should they resolve, through the grace of

God, to hold on in the way of virtue, and to refuse the least compliance with that advice which causes to err from the words of knowledge!

Solomon arms us against these deceivers, by making us acquainted with their devices.

Proverbs 1:11. If they say, “Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause;

These are not the express words of seducers, but a translation of them into the language of truth. They will say, ‘Come let us pick the pocket of some covetous miser, who has made himself rich by cunning, and scraped money together by such cowardly practices, as cannot expose him to the vengeance of the law.’ Solomon tells us not the express words of the tempter, but puts into his mouth such language as expresses the real meaning and tendency of his solicitations. When transgressors varnish over their crimes, it is our part to pluck off the false covering, and to represent sin to ourselves in its true colours, and in its tendency to other iniquities of higher aggravation. When the drunkard invites us to go to the tavern, and drink a cheerful glass with him, let his words sound in our ears as if he had said, ‘Let us go to the tavern, and **there drown our reason, and make ourselves monsters.**’ When another desires us to take a hand at cards, let us take his meaning to be, ‘Come, let us rob our friend of his money, without incurring the pains of law.’

Perhaps those men whom the tempters here spoken of wish to rob or kill, may be like themselves, strangers to every good way; but they are innocent in comparison with those pests of society, who plot against their property or their lives. The treasons of Abner and Amasa, did not exempt Joab, their murderer, from the guilt of innocent blood. (2 Sa 3:30)

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

Proverbs 1:12. Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit;

We shall manage matters in such a manner, as that there cannot be even the possibility of detection. So well concerted shall our plans be, that the thing will be as effectually concealed from public view, as those bodies which are covered by the grave. Vain hopes! can men flatter themselves that they shall escape the righteous judgment of God? Even in this life, murderers seldom escape punishment. But what though men neither see nor suspect, conscience sees, angels see, the great Avenger of blood sees; the assembled world shall know their crimes, shall hear their sentence, and witness their punishment. (cp Nu 32:23, Pr 26:26)

The devil told our Lord, that he would give him all the kingdoms and glories of the world, if he would comply with his persuasions (Luke 4:5, 6). The ministers of Satan in like manner endeavor to persuade men that they will obtain much advantage by sin, that the gains of it shall fill all their treasures, and every corner of their houses.

Proverbs 1:13. We shall find all kinds of precious wealth, We shall fill our houses with spoil;

These promises are lies; or if such treasures be procured, they will last but for a moment. What profit had Judas the traitor in his thirty pieces of silver, though paid him to the last farthing? Though thirty thousand talents of gold had been his reward, they could not have soothed his racked conscience (Mt 27:3) , they could not have retained his breath when his own hands had applied the [halter](#) (Acts 1:16-18) , they could not have preserved his separated soul from going to its place. The profits of sin are the worst of losses*. (Rev. 10:3. Mt 16:26.)

These wretches, abandoned as they are, have yet the [effrontery](#) to pretend a regard to honesty, and a generous disinterestedness in their mutual dealings—

Proverbs 1:14. Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,”

Let the security and profit of our way of living induce thee to join our society; we shall lead a merry life, we shall faithfully share our gains, and none shall want while another has.

In what manner ought a young man to act when offers so tempting are made to him?

Proverbs 1:15. My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path,

Let us attend with filial regard to the kind advice of a venerable father, who tells us, that we must not only shut our ears against these **ensnaring words**, and resolve to keep the path of innocence, but shun their company, and avoid those places which they haunt. If we knew a place that was said to be a haunt of ghosts and [infernal](#) spirits, we need not shun it, for these terrors are but creatures of fancy; but places frequented by men who have the devil in their hearts, and who hire him their tongues for the purpose

of deceiving their fellow-men,—such places are dangerous indeed. All of us have corrupted natures ready to be inflamed (Jer 17:9, Mt 26:41); how [infatuated](#) the man who, carrying gunpowder, enters a smith's shop, where the sparks fly from the anvil in every direction!

But may we not take a single turn with them? No.

Proverbs 1:16. For their feet run to evil, And they hasten to shed blood.

Let us never forget the evil that is in sin. However men may dress it out in beautiful colours, it is the very quintessence of naughtiness. All men see a great deal of evil in some infernal crimes, but the God whose judgment is always true, sees more evil in the least sin, than we are able to do in the greatest. It is a dangerous and detestable thing for a man wilfully to transgress the smallest commandment of the law of God. But the men of whom we now speak, are desperately bent upon sin. Their feet run to evil, and that of the most damnable sort, for they make haste to shed blood.

Perhaps it will be said, that they have no design to load their souls with such bloody crimes, but only to cheat or rob somebody that well deserves to be plundered. But let us remember, that no man becomes desperate in wickedness all at once. Hazael had no intention to murder the king of Syria, or rip up women with child; he would have abhorred the thoughts of such wickedness, till interest and ambition uniting, gradually hardened his heart, and prepared him for perpetrating without remorse deeds of darkness and of horror. Young sinners are like travellers, who at first setting out cannot bear a speck of mud to alight upon their clothes, but who in the course of their journey become inured to bad roads, and can suffer themselves, without feeling uneasiness, to be all bespattered with mire.

They are like silly birds, who suffer themselves to be ensnared by the arts of the cunning fowler.

Proverbs 1:17. Indeed, it is useless to spread the net In the eyes of any bird;

Birds have not the gift of reason, to warn them against the snares of the fowler. But how lamentable is it, that men, whom God hath made wiser than the fowls of heaven, should be as easily deceived as the silliest of these animals, and that in matters of greater importance! Do not reply, that the snares are set, not for the sinner himself, but for those whom he intends to destroy. It is for his own life that a sinner spreads his nets.

Proverbs 1:18. But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives.

It is not the sufferer, so much as the doer of evil, that is hurt. Whom did Judas destroy by his treachery? The death to which Jesus was sold was glorious to himself; the treason which Judas wrought was his own destruction. Abel lives and speaks, and his name is embalmed in the memories of the good; the life which his murderer led was more miserable than death, and his name is remembered only to be execrated. The sinner designs mischief to his neighbour; but all things are under the direction of the just Lord, under whose administration mischief recoils upon its author, bringing him to the scaffold here, or to hell hereafter*. (Mt. 7:2. Ps. 7:11–17, 9:15, 16)

But is such the natural tendency of covetousness?—Yes.

Proverbs 1:19. So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors.

“Take heed and beware of covetousness,” said he who knew the heart of man, and the native tendency of every vice. It is a mother of abominations and miseries. They that are determined to be rich, would have money by honest means if it could be got, but at any rate they must have it. If it cannot be had to fill their desires (which indeed are insatiable) by fair means, it must by chicanery and cunning. When the conscience has been brought to this, it is prepared for advancing in wickedness, till at last it offers but small resistance, even at the commission of crimes, from the very thought of which their author would once have shrunk. The last step in vice, is less painful to a man than the first departure from honesty†. If the eyes of these pests of society were not altogether shut, they would see that a man's life depends not on the abundance of his wealth. In their own hands it becomes a sword to slay its owner; and can they anticipate comfort in that ill-gotten wealth which has proved fatal to its honest possessor?

We must therefore flee from unrighteousness, and stand at a distance from the way of sin. Every one that would tempt us to evil, is to be looked upon as a factor for Satan.

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

Proverbs 1:20, 21. Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square; 21 At the head of the noisy streets she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city, she utters her sayings:

How can wisdom cry? Is not wisdom a quality, and not a person? Wisdom cries to men when God speaks to them, for he is the

fountain of wisdom. The words of men may be wise, but when God speaks, Wisdom itself addresses us. He opens his mouth in infinite wisdom, and speaks to us by him who is the Word and Wisdom of God. He who despiseth that wisdom which is from above, despiseth the Father and the Son, and brands with the imputation of folly the emanations of unsearchable wisdom.

Wisdom desires to be heard, and therefore speaks not in secret; she whispers not in the ears of a few favourites, but in the public places of resort, she proclaims to every one that will listen her interesting truths. She crieth without, in every place where a crowd is likely to be collected, in the streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the gates, the place of judgment, and in every part of the city.

No disobedient sinner can make a valid excuse for his conduct. The voice of wisdom is heard every where. It sounds from the pulpit. From every creature it is heard*. (Job 12:7, 8) The word is in our very hearts (Dt 30:14, Ro 10:8), and conscience echoes the voice to our souls. Let us go where we will, we must hear it, unless we wilfully shut our ears. And what does she say?

Proverbs 1:22. “How long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, And fools hate knowledge?”

Had I a mountain for a pulpit, and a voice capable of reaching to the ends of the world, (said a venerable father), I would preach on that text, **“O ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanity?”** ‘ Wisdom proclaims the like words to all the world as far as her voice is heard.

If persons ruin themselves by their folly, it will be no excuse to them that they were cheated by the great deceiver. Who will excuse Eve for hearkening to the voice of the serpent (Ge 3:1-4), or Adam for hearkening to the voice of his wife, in opposition to the voice of God? The simpleton and the fool are justly condemned, because they love simplicity and hate knowledge. So strongly are they bent upon their foolish courses, that every suggestion of the devil meets with a cheerful compliance. Sin is loved with the whole heart, and those truths which might be the means of salvation, are the objects of extreme aversion.

Many are so mad upon their idols, that they take pleasure in scoffing at holiness, and at the preachers and professors of it; some run to such a pitch in wickedness as to jest with the word of the Most High, though safer far it were to sport with fire and death.

Were the Physician of souls like earthly physicians, he would leave such creatures to pine away in their sins till their obstinacy terminate in eternal death. But O how merciful is He! He is in earnest with them when he urges them to admit of his salutary medicines. It is a grief to Him that they will not come to Him for health. He cries to them,

Proverbs 1:23. “Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

The lovers of folly must turn or perish; for Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour from sin and wrath, but He will deliver none who continue in abominations:

“Except ye repent, ye shall all perish.” (Luke 13:3,5)

The lovers of sin, and those that delight in scorning, are graciously called by him to turn,—a plain evidence that there is pardoning and saving mercy for these worst of sinners*. (Isaiah 55:7) Even scoffers at religion are among the number of those sinners whom the Son of Man called to repentance, when he came to seek and to save the lost.

Such profligates have for the most part an intention to turn from their evil ways at some future but indefinite period; but if they turn not at present, they refuse to hear the voice of wisdom. “Turn ye,” says the Wisdom of God, “at my reproof.” “Today,” says the Spirit, “if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts.” (Ps 95:8, Heb 3:8, 15, 4:7)

We harden our hearts when we intend to take our pleasure in sin today, though we resolve to hear the voice of God tomorrow.

The **reproof of wisdom** is a means of alarming us, and of impressing our souls with a sense of the necessity of turning. If we harden our hearts against these reproofs while they are sounding in our ears, the impression is not likely to be deeper or stronger when the bustle and noise of the world have helped us to forget the awful admonition.

It is at the reproof of the word of God that we are called to turn (2 Ti 3:16 [note](#)). It is brutish for a son to despise the reproof of a parent. It is devilish for a creature to despise the reproof of its Creator. It is a sin which devils could never commit, for a guilty creature to shut his ears against the reproof of a Saviour, who addresses us in earnest and affectionate language, and calls us to turn our feet from the paths of death.

But how can fools turn?—Are they not infatuated by sin?—are not their affections possessed with the love of it?—“Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you,” says the Saviour. By his influences you shall be enabled to understand my words, and to comply with them. —Let not sinners imagine that it will excuse them to say, they had no ability to repent. They were not called to turn by any power of their own, but in the strength of divine grace. They were unwilling, and therefore unable. Their sins were so dear to them, that they

disliked the reproofs of Christ, and resisted his Spirit. Our Lord does not make a jest of the lovers of sin, when he calls them to turn. His words do good even to sinners, or the fault is their own*.

Do we then feel the necessity of turning, and yet an unconquerable aversion to it in our hearts? Let us plead for the abundant communications of the enlightening and renewing Spirit. If persons are made heartily willing to submit to his influence, it is a happy presage that he will be granted, or rather a sign that he has already begun to work†.

But there are many so foolishly devoted to sin, that they reject the counsel of God, and instead of welcoming the good Spirit, resist his motions till they provoke him to depart. The doom of such persons will be very terrible, but very just.

Proverbs 1:24–27. Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no one paid attention; 25 And you neglected all my counsel, And did not want my reproof; 26 I will even laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, 27 When your dread comes like a storm, And your calamity comes on like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come on you.

Do none then, or next to none, regard the admonitions of wisdom? Strange. Are men enemies to themselves? are they in love with destruction? Is it their joy to please the devil, and to cross the benevolent intentions of a Saviour? Was the devil crucified for them? or do they think the burnings of eternity, and the pain of condemnation, more tolerable than the tears of repentance or the self-denial which Jesus prescribes?

John's disciples complained to him, that all men went after Jesus, but John complained that so few believed his report: "No man receiveth his testimony." How wonderful is that grace, which continues to deal with men when it is so ungratefully despised!

The sin of unbelief and impenitence is exceeding great. Various are the forms of expression by which in the passage before us the wickedness of it is intimated, and the offence which it gives to him who comes in the name of the Lord to save us, pointed out. It is a refusal of divinely gracious offers and advices; a disregard of the most earnest importunities of the wisdom of God; a sovereign contempt of all the counsel of that wonderful Counsellor who is given to be the leader and commander of the people; a stubborn opposition of the will to the most needful and salutary reproof. Hear, O ye heavens, and be horribly afraid! Rational creatures rebel against the Father of spirits. Diseased sinners scorn the great Physician, and refuse to accept of that sovereign cure for all their maladies, which he so graciously offers. Abhorring, as they do, the name of devils, they yet spurn at those compassions which devils can never experience.

But let sinners remember, that there is justice as well as grace in the Most High. Justice shall avenge the contempt of mercy. Sinners feel some presage of that vengeance in their own guilty conscience. Fears of punishment often make them uneasy. They would gladly persuade themselves that these are but the terrors of a distempered fancy; but the day is coming when they will find them to be terrible realities; or if they want truth, it is because they are nothing to that vengeance which is their object. No passion is so tormenting as fear, but no fear can equal the power of God's anger.

The fear of sinners shall come upon them, and their feet shall slide in due time. It shall come like a desolating judgment, which with resistless violence lays waste a country. It shall come like a raging tempest, and a furious whirlwind, at once sweeping away every comfort and every hope. Then shall distress and anguish seize upon the mind of the stubborn transgressor, when he feels himself involved in remediless sorrow. This threatening will have its great accomplishment in the everlasting world, when the torrents of wrath shall swallow up the impenitent sinner, and the whirlwind of fury shall beat upon him with ceaseless violence. Wrath and indignation shall press him down in the lake of fire. Anguish and despair shall prey upon his soul, without the intermission of a moment; no ray of hope shall ever enter the abodes of darkness and of horror.

But will the poor victim of suffering find no pity from the Saviour of men? No! says the Spirit of God, "I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes." With relentless eye shall he behold that terrible vengeance which now overtakes the wicked. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they should turn and live; yet he will take pleasure in the death of them that turn not, for in this manner is his justice glorified, and the dishonours done to his love repaired. God sometimes laughs at the trial of the innocent. He took pleasure in bruising his own Son. He is comforted in the rain of the wicked*.

But may not prayer avail in this deplorable condition? By no means.

Proverbs 1:28. "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me,

The prayer of faith is ever heard, and they that seek God shall find him, when they seek him with all their heart. But the prayers of these desperate rebels, are like the howlings of a dog. They are cries extorted by strong necessity, and intolerable anguish. They are the cries of such as sought not the Lord whilst he was to be found, nor called on him whilst he was near.

Sinners miserably delude their own souls by proposing to live in the indulgence of their sins, and die in the exercise of repentance. True repentance is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true. Christ is not every day hanging on the cross, nor are thieves

every day converted, and sent from the place of punishment to the paradise above.

Prayers are of no use in the eternal world. The day of grace is at an end, and the wretched shall cry in vain to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lord God and of the Lamb. Behold, now is the accepted time, now the Lord waits to be gracious; but the day is coming that is cruel with wrath and fierce anguish; no place shall then be found for mercy, though sought with an ocean of tears. But why does he who takes pleasure in the voice of prayer, and listen so graciously to the cry of the supplicant,—why does he refuse to accept the petitions of those who are reduced to such an extremity of distress? The reason is,

Proverbs 1:29, 30. Because they hated knowledge, And did not choose the fear of the LORD. 30 “They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof.

The punishment is indeed tremendous, but the sin that causes it is atrocious. It is no less than a contempt and hatred of the counsels of the Lord. What is this but an undeniable proof of enmity against God himself? and will not God ease himself of his adversaries, and avenge himself of his enemies?

When men do not chuse the fear of the Lord, but prefer to it the base pleasures of sin, they give plain proof of their hatred to every thing that is good, and how can they escape the damnation of hell? If we think that the punishment is greater than the sin, the reason is, that we are under the power of iniquity. Self-love disposes the malefactor to prescribe to his judge. Let us impartially consider what malignity lies in impenitence, and what a complication of wickednesses is contained in the rejection of the great salvation, and we must acknowledge that the ruin of sinners is entirely owing to themselves. God is not to be blamed, but on the contrary, he will be eternally glorious as their avenger. His insulted mercy will be glorious in the punishment of its despisers. His justice shall shine in dispensing to the workers of iniquity the reward of their works: “They despised all my reproof”—

Proverbs 1:31. “So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, And be satiated with their own devices.

They laughed at God’s threatenings, as if they had been idle tales; and God shall laugh at them. They despised his counsels, and he shall despise their prayers. They were always the same, and continued unchanged after all admonition; and God will prove an immutable avenger, and will pay no regard to their cries for help. They took pleasure in sin, and God will take pleasure in punishing on account of it.

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

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

Proverbs 1:32. “For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them, And the complacency of fools shall destroy them.

The sins of men, unless pardoned through the blood of Christ, shall be their destruction; for he that turns away from God and his law, turns his back upon happiness; and he that cherishes iniquity, warms in his bosom the most venomous of serpents*.

Sinners owe their ruin to

their wilful hardness of heart,

their abuse of mercy, and

their indifference about salvation.

It may be alleged, that sinners often prosper; but their prosperity is a part of their misery, for it will increase their guilt, and render their damnation terrible. It nourishes their vicious affections, and tends to inspire them with pride and insolence, with sensuality and earthliness of mind. It is so strong a temptation, that our Lord has declared it almost impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. This saying has been justified by fact. In times of persecution, the prosperous have been ordinarily the apostates who made shipwreck of faith, while the poor loved the world less, and stood out more firmly against temptation.

If the prosperity of fools leads them to the indulgence of sin, and the neglect of holiness, it renders their damnation more certain and more dreadful. Their provocations are like those of the Israelites, who provoked God, by turning the Egyptian gold and silver, which he had given them, into an idol of jealousy. They are like the impious ingratitude of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, whom God raised to a throne, but who degraded God into the image of a four-footed beast. When the favours of God are turned into means and instruments of unrighteousness, Oh! what wrath is then treasured up against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous

judgment of God!

But the prosperity of the wise has a very opposite tendency. When they act like themselves, it excites their gratitude; it stimulates them to serve God more effectually, and to do good to men more diligently. Wisdom teaches those who hearken to her voice, to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; so that while riches serve to expose the folly of the foolish, they prove a crown to the wise. But though the disciples of Wisdom should never attain prosperity, they are happy; for says Wisdom,

Proverbs 1:33. "But he who listens to me shall live securely, And shall be at ease from the dread of evil."

They that love knowledge, and choose the fear of the Lord, and value the instructions of wisdom more than thousands of gold and silver, are the men that hearken to Wisdom, Pr 1: 29, 30.

Many of these once loved folly, and took pleasure in scorning; but they have received the atonement, and all their unrighteousnesses are blotted out. They now share in the privileges of the children of wisdom, and while prosperous sinners are set in slippery places, they dwell safely, for they dwell in God, and God dwelleth in them. They are safe from the devil, and from the power of sin, from death and from hell. They may endure tribulation in the world, but in Christ they shall have peace. They enjoy quiet consciences, and pleasant hopes. They are quiet, not only from evil, but from the fear of evil. They may indeed have fears, but they are clouds that shall soon be blown away, and succeeded by everlasting serenity. Even while these fears continue, they have a refuge where they can find safety, and hopes sufficient to give them such happiness as worldly men cannot enjoy amid their ill-grounded confidence. Paul had often fightings without, and fears within; but this was his comfort, that nothing could separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

Let us examine ourselves impartially, whether we are the despisers or the lovers of wisdom. The question is not, whether we attend the means of grace, and make a profession of religion. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things. Ananias and Sapphira parted with a considerable share of their substance.

But do we choose the fear of the Lord?

Do we value Christ above the whole world?

Do we prefer holiness, in its most painful exercises, to the most pleasant sins?

Are we yet despisers of wisdom?

Let us tremble at the vengeance threatened. Let our prayers ascend up on high, that the Lord by his Spirit would open our hearts, that we may attend to the dictates of heavenly wisdom.

Are we lovers of wisdom?

Let us bless God who hath opened our ears to discipline, and sealed our instruction. Let us thankfully rejoice in the blessings that Wisdom bestows. Let us testify our regard to Wisdom, in the manner directed in the succeeding chapter. In vain do we pretend to religion, unless that which we call by this honourable name, be approved by that word whereby we must be judged.

Proverbs 2

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

How shall we get wisdom? The wise man answers,

Proverbs 2:1–7. My son, if you will receive my sayings, And treasure my commandments within you, 2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; 3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, And discover the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, It is not enough for us to attend the public ordinances of God, and to read a chapter or two of the Bible at home every day, but we are required to receive the words of wisdom, to keep them in our hearts, and to apply our souls to them.

We are to receive the words of our heavenly Father, with reverence and love, with faith and diligent attention. No gift is so precious as that knowledge which God imparts to us in the scriptures, and we ought to receive it with eagerness, like that which the covetous man shews for gold and silver; and as he who receives money is careful to lay it up where he may find it when he has occasion to use it, so in like manner it becomes us to lay up in the midst of our heart the instructions of wisdom, collecting and hiding the

precious treasure, till the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom. When we give due attention to the word of truth, it will dwell in our minds, dispelling ignorance and error, and communicating that light which is necessary to direct the whole of our conduct; in our memories, affording a constant supply for spiritual meditation, ready for use on every emergency; in our wills, to guide their choice and inclination; in our affections, to direct their motions, to curb their extravagance, and to inflame their ardour towards spiritual objects; and in our consciences, to preserve alive the impressions of the divine law, and to direct them in judging of the spiritual state of the soul.

The ear must be inclined to wisdom, that we may learn it. The senses of the body minister to the soul. The eye, surveying the wonders of God's hand, furnishes the soul with apprehensions of his power and wisdom; but the ear is that learning sense by which the richest treasures of spiritual knowledge are admitted into the soul. As the mouth tastes the food of the body, so the ear receives and tries those words that nourish the soul. We attend to our friends or neighbours when they are informing us of some new thing; we count it a piece of good manners to listen, when nothing is to be heard but dulness and insipidity: shall we not, then, attend to Him that made the ear, when he condescends to speak to us, and to disclose truths of eternal moment?

Whilst our ears are attentive, our hearts must be applied to wisdom. Angels, who are so much our superiors, apply themselves to the learning of it. They are already replenished with the stores of truth, and yet they desire to pry deeper into the mystery of wisdom. Great as was the measure which Solomon had received, he still continued to apply his heart to it; surely, then, the wisest of us ought to apply our whole hearts; for what is so needful to us, and so valuable in itself?

But after all our application, we have understandings so dark, that the Bible must remain a sealed book unto us, unless our eyes are enlightened to discern the wonders of God's law. With our instructions, therefore, earnest prayer must be mingled, that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation may illuminate our understandings, and fit our souls for receiving and retaining the truths of God. David was wiser than his teachers, and yet he still lifts up his voice for wisdom to the Father of lights, and pleads, with fervent importunity, that God would open his eyes, and not conceal his laws from him, nor take the word of truth out of his mouth. Let us, in imitation of such a holy example, earnestly pray that we may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God; and particularly, that we may be furnished with all that wisdom and knowledge that is requisite for directing us in our respective stations and circumstances. Solomon was already a wise man, yet when commanded to chuse what he would have, he chose a greater measure of wisdom, of that wisdom especially which would be most useful for him in governing the kingdom of Israel. With this petition God was well pleased. He gave him not only what he requested, but everything most highly valued by men.

But while we cry after wisdom, and depend on God to bestow it on us, it would be presumptuous to neglect the means of obtaining it. We must seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasure. We every day see with what anxious diligence men seek for silver. They fatigue their bodies, and waste their spirits; they destroy their health, and expose their lives; they even wound their consciences, and expose themselves to shameful deaths and everlasting misery, that they may load themselves with shining clay. Shall the professed disciples of the great Teacher set less value upon knowledge, than other men set upon silver? David well knew the value of this knowledge, and esteemed it above thousands of gold and silver. Job prefers it to every thing that dazzles with its lustre the eyes of mortals*.

It is therefore highly reasonable, that we diligently and carefully use all those means which God hath appointed for this end; that we hear sermons with earnest attention; that we read and search the word of God, and make it the subject of our frequent meditation; that we make use of edifying conversation; that we go to the wise, who have the law of God in their hearts, so that their mouth speaks wisdom, and their tongue talks of judgment. To the use of such means of improvement as these, we must add prayer for the divine blessing, to render them effectual to our instruction and salvation. Truth is like a mine, more precious than that which is the depository of gold and of diamonds. Had any of us such a precious treasure as this in our garden, we would not travel over the ground for pleasure, but employ ourselves day and night in digging, till our houses should be enriched with the precious store. Why, then, are we careless about that which will enrich us to eternity, and fill all our treasures?

You see the means to be used by us for attaining wisdom. Our ears and hearts must be employed in the search. We must lift up our voices to the Author of wisdom, and seek for it with all the desire of our souls, and with such earnest endeavours as men use in digging for hid treasures. Through the blessing of God the search shall not be unsuccessful; for "then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." It is plain that those who employ themselves in the diligent pursuit of wisdom, have been already blessed with some degree of true knowledge; for how could they value so highly that with which they were altogether unacquainted? He is already wise, who prefers wisdom to every earthly object; and he shall be wiser still, for to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly.

The fear of the Lord, and the sound knowledge of God, are inseparably connected. Religious fear is not a blind and tormenting passion of the soul, but a holy and delightful grace, founded in true apprehensions of the awful and lovely glories of the divine nature, and disposing him who possesses it, to walk with God. The knowledge of God regulates this fear, and preserves it from sinking into terror, or degenerating into superstition, but guides it to express its power in checking and subduing every corrupt

affection, and animating the soul to every instance of obedience.

If men are careless about wisdom, and use no diligence in seeking it, they make it evident that they are destitute of the knowledge and fear of the Lord. They have not, and from them shall be taken even that which they seem to have.

The efficacy of every means of knowledge is from God, for "the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." Every beam of reason in men, is communicated from the wisdom of God*. The simplest of the mechanical arts cannot be acquired unless men are taught of God†. How, then, can we expect to understand the mystery of the divine will, without spiritual light communicated from that God who is the Father of lights, and the author of every good and perfect gift!

Knowledge and understanding cometh out of the mouth of God. By his Spirit he bestows upon us this blessing through his word, for it is the inspiration of the Almighty that giveth understanding to men. Experience, however long, observation, however close, human teaching, however skilful, can do nothing to supply us with true knowledge, without the influence of that Spirit which rested upon Christ as a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and which is given by him to all his followers in their measure‡.

The wisdom that God in his kindness bestows upon men, is sound and substantial. There are many kinds of knowledge of little importance. The knowledge which some possess tends only to vex and disquiet them, or to inspire them with vanity and self-conceit. How different the knowledge that God imparts to the diligent students of wisdom! Far from perplexing or elating, it fills their understanding with the most pleasant truths, and directs them in the way everlasting.

But who are the blessed persons that are favoured with this divinely excellent wisdom? "The Lord lays it up for the righteous." God is said to teach sinners in the way*; for man's unworthiness does not exclude him from divine mercy. Saul the persecutor had the Son of God revealed in him by divine grace, and neither his stubborn prejudices, nor his cruelty to the church of Christ, could shut out the beams of heavenly light. Sinners are invited to Christ as the light of the Gentiles, and the salvation of the lost‡; but here it is said, he lays it up for the righteous. Sinners and fools may have it, but the righteous shall have it. They are already made sensible of their need of it, and desire it more than silver and gold. They ask it from God, who giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given them. The Lord layeth up this wisdom for them. There are infinite stores of it in his possession, and they are all treasured up in Christ, and out of his fulness shall the righteous receive supplies suited to their exigencies.

To encourage God's people to expect all needful supplies of wisdom from him, let them consider his peculiar regard to them, and the constant protection he has engaged to afford them.

Proverbs 2:7, 8. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, 8 Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones

Whoso hearkeneth unto wisdom shall dwell safely, for God is a sure defence to those that walk in wisdom's ways. There are many adversaries that would destroy them if they could, and these are too strong for them; but there is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, that rideth on the heavens in their help, and in his excellency in the skies. While therefore they are walking to their eternal home, they may sing in the ways of the Lord. Mighty is their protector; in the shadow of his wings they may trust, and to his faithfulness they may look as their shield and buckler.

The most dreadful enemies of them that walk uprightly, are those that endeavour to turn aside the way of their paths; but against these enemies God is a mighty defence, for he keepeth the paths of wisdom and righteousness. He is a fence about their ways, and a wall of fire around those that walk in them. The devil casteth his fiery darts, but they are safe from the arrow that flieth by day, and from the noisome pestilence. No weapon formed against them shall prosper. They are commanded still to trust in the name of the Lord, and their faith is like a shield that will quench every fiery dart. The world displays its terrors and its charms to terrify or allure them into the paths of sin. Against this, as well as the adversary formerly mentioned, they must exercise vigilance. Still, however, in the hottest part of the combat they may be of good cheer, for the Captain of their salvation hath overcome the world, and shall make them through their faith to share in his victory*.

Their own remaining corruptions give them many alarms. Nor is it wonderful that they feel alarmed when ready to halt by its influence, or powerfully solicited to turn aside unto the flowery but destructive paths where poisons grow and serpents haunt. But their fears shall not overpower them, for the spirit lusts against the flesh, and shall prevail. What says their Almighty guide? "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

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

Let us ask for these good old ways, and walk in them, and we shall find rest and safety for our souls. They are safe paths when God guards them, and preserves the way of those that walk in them. No lion, no ravenous beast is found there; and the wayfaring man,

though a fool, shall not err therein. But it is our duty, while we trust in God to guide and preserve us, to make use of our eyes. None of Zion's travellers shall be found wanting in the end, but many too that thought themselves in the good way shall fail of the end of their hopes, because they entered not in at the gate, neither trod the narrow path. He that is born of God keepeth himself, that the wicked one toucheth him not. We cannot by our utmost care keep ourselves in safety; but a true dependence upon God will dispose us to be as sober and vigilant as if we had none else to keep us, while we yet trust entirely in God, and not in ourselves, knowing that if left to ourselves one hour, we must perish.

You see that the lovers of wisdom are furnished with the best wisdom, and led into those paths of holiness where safety is to be found. In order to persuade us to hearken to the instructions of wisdom, the wise man adds—

Proverbs 2:9. Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course.

There is no end of the commendation of the ways of wisdom. The fear and knowledge of God is not only the beginning, but the perfection of wisdom. But the lovers of wisdom have those instructions also which are necessary for guiding them in their behaviour toward men. They are taught how to walk justly and wisely, and in what manner to behave in every affair.

When a traveller is going to a distant place, it is pleasant to him to be informed that his way is safe, and that it may be found without difficulty. Now, as the way of holiness is the way of peace, so the scriptures give us sufficient directions for every step of it. Are we at a loss about our duty in any case? We may then safely infer, either that we have forgotten what our directory says, or that we are not skilful in applying it. Our carelessness in the study of this rule of life may often put us to a stand, therefore we ought to have it daily in our hands, and to meditate on it day and night, so shall we find it a counsellor in all our straits.

The Spirit is promised as our guide through this world, and he directs us by his word, opening our minds to understand it, and directing our conduct in the way that it prescribes. Is the saint at a loss with regard to the way of duty in any particular instance? Let him pray, as David did in such cases, and like this holy man, he shall be led in the way of truth*.

Solomon has instructed us how to obtain wisdom, and in part shewn the advantages of it. He insists on this last point through the remaining part of this chapter, telling us that it will preserve us from the snares of wicked men and women, Pr 2:10–19. and lead us in the way that has been traced by the saints in every age, who have found it to be the way of happiness and joy, Pr 2:20, 21, 22. Wisdom will be a preservative from the worst dangers.

Proverbs 2:10 For wisdom will enter your heart, And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you,

That we may enjoy the advantages of wisdom, it must enter into our heart, which is naturally disposed to entertain sin and folly; for man, however fond he may be of the reputation of wisdom, is born like the wild ass's colt. Some receive the words of wisdom into their ears, but understand not what they hear; others hear, and form clear apprehensions of what they hear, so as to be able to talk of them, like Balaam or Judas, and instruct others. But the children of wisdom not only hear and understand, but love the truth. The Spirit of God writes it in the inward part; then it comes to them in power and in the Holy Ghost, and the testimonies of God are received by their spirits with pleasure and joy. Knowledge becomes sweeter than honey dropping from the comb, and is esteemed more than necessary food. Paul counted every thing but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. When Jeremiah found the word of God, he did eat it, and it was to him the joy and rejoicing of his heart.

The pleasure that saints take in knowledge, is very different from the transient affection experienced in the word by those hearers whom our Lord compares to stony ground. These false believers were moved and transported by the novelty of the truth, by the prospect of deliverance from hell and possession of heaven which it presented to them, but they had no spiritual apprehensions of its divine glory, nor any deep-rooted affection to it. They still loved the world more than the testimonies of God, and this reigning earthliness of spirit in time choked the beautiful springing of this seed in their souls. But those into whose hearts wisdom enters, have their eyes opened to see its glory, and their affections sanctified to relish its genuine sweetness. They rejoice in the truths that oppose their most darling corruptions. They take pleasure in the way of God's testimonies, as well as in the glorious prospects which they present. They heartily esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and delight in the law of God after the inward man, because it is pure and spiritual. They delight in it, though it forces them to confess that they are carnal, sold under sin.

This wisdom entering into their souls, furnishes them with understanding to see their way, and discretion to manage their affairs with prudence and judgment to the end*.

This understanding and prudence is an antidote against the poisonous infection of evil men and strange women.—It is, first, a means of preserving us from the snares of bad men.

Proverbs 2:12–15. To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; From those who leave the paths of uprightness, To walk in the ways of darkness; Who delight in doing evil, And rejoice in the perversity of evil;

Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways;

Such is the portrait drawn by Solomon of those bad men by whom his pupils are in danger of being seduced, unless furnished with wisdom to avoid the snare. They speak froward things; they pay no regard to truth, but bend their tongue like their bow for lies. Among these pests of men, none are such virulent pests of every thing that is good, as those that once made a profession of religion, but have left the way of uprightness to walk in those miserable and gloomy paths, which begin in the darkness of the mind, and end in the darkness of hell. The stings of conscience which such persons experience, instead of reclaiming them, tend only to irritate their spirits, and inflame them into fierce enmity against religion. If, instead of being pierced with such stings, they are cursed with the conquest of their own consciences, they are hardened enough for the blackest sin, and prepared not only to do evil, but to work it with both hands greedily. They rejoice in the service of Satan, and no greater pleasure do they know than that which arises from seeing that his interests flourish, that his kingdom prospers. Such persons are crooked in their ways. The only straight way is the way of uprightness, but that sinners leave, and wander into paths where they are bewildered and lost. They know not whither they go, because darkness hath blinded their eyes. One sin leads them on to another, and that to a third, till at length they run into wickednesses, of which they could not have thought without horror when first they set foot in these deceitful paths.

These miscreants are froward and stubborn in their ways; and why? Custom has become a second nature to them, their hearts are become impenetrably hard, and proof against admonition. Yet look back to their early days, and you shall find them to have evinced tempers and dispositions very different. They would then have abhorred gross impieties, and were not without impressions of the necessity of virtue and holiness. But the unwearied adversary of mankind spread his toils around them, and employed such men as they are now become, to efface every good impression, and to lead them on, by slow and imperceptible degrees, to those lengths in wickedness at which they have now arrived. Had they been armed with the instructions of wisdom, and employed these in their own defence, what different persons might they now have been! Whilst they would mislead us by their persuasions, let us learn instruction from their miserable situation, and thankfully improve those means which God has afforded, to keep us out of the paths of destruction. God is our preserver, but he has been pleased to appoint the instructions of wisdom as our great defence against these instruments of mischief. The knowledge of the truth, and the cordial love of it, will open our eyes to our danger, and possess our hearts with a settled aversion to the practices of the ungodly. As our Lord repelled every temptation of the devil by the word of God, so when it abides in us, it will enable us to meet every temptation of the old serpent, and of his instruments, with safety and stedfast resolution*.

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

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

Proverbs 2:16–19. To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words; That leaves the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God; For her house sinks down to death, And her tracks lead to the dead; None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life.

It is a great happiness for young people to escape the snares of the harlot, in which so many have been entangled and lost. A true love to the word of God is eminently fitted to secure such a happiness.

There is no viler object in nature than an adulteress. Her beauty is but a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. Though born and baptized in a Christian land, she is to be looked upon as a heathen woman and a stranger; and as self-made brutes are greater monsters than natural brute beasts, so baptized heathens are by far the worst of pagans.

Her words may be sweet and soft to the inexperienced ear of a thoughtless youth, but she is only flattering with her lips. Honey and milk seem to be under her tongue, but it is the cruel venom of dragons.

She is a monster of ingratitude to that husband who was the guide and protector of her youth. All the fervours of her first love are forgotten. She returns the most cruel treatment for all that fond affection by which he bound her to him in the most endearing obligations.

But her profaneness is still more shocking; for she violates that sacred bond which was instituted by him whom she presumes to call her God, and regards not the marriage-oath which she swore by his great and awful name.

Shall a woman unfaithful to the best and kindest of friends,—a wretch that commits perjury without remorse,—prove faithful to any man? When she speaks fair, believe her not, for there are seven abominations in her heart.

Miserable are they who trust to her alluring professions, for there is scarcely a hope that they will recover themselves from the snare of the devil. Her house is full of the pestilence of sin, and will infect every one that enters with a mortal and almost incurable distemper. The mind is darkened, and the conscience deadened; the affections, too, are by uncleanness sunk into sensuality. How then can they again take hold of the paths of life? No doubt there is virtue in the blood and Spirit of Christ for the remission of the greatest sins, and the purification of the most defiled souls. It is even admitted, that whoremongers have been made illustrious

monuments of the power of divine grace*; but let it be remembered that these are miracles of grace. Who would cast himself into a deep pit, in the hopes of coming out alive, when almost all that fell into it were dashed in pieces or buried alive!

Whosoever pleaseth God, shall escape from this devouring deep. Let us therefore cleave to God's judgments, and follow their direction, and keep at a distance from the place of temptation. How worthy of our imitation is the example of Joseph, who was tempted day by day, but hearkened not to his mistress to lie by her or to be with her, because he would not sin against God*.

But wisdom will not only keep us from the paths of the wicked, it will also lead us in the way of good men.

Proverbs 2:20. So you will walk in the way of good men, And keep to the paths of the righteous.

It is not enough to refrain from wickedness, we must also work righteousness. We profess to be the servants of God, and it will be no sufficient excuse for a servant that has slept all day, to say that he did no mischief. There are two ways, in one or other of which all men walk,—the narrow way that leads unto life, and the broad way that leads to destruction. In the former way few walk, but it has been trodden by the feet of all who are worthy of our imitation. In it Abraham, and Job, and David walked, whilst those whose memorials are now perished, or whose names are remembered only to be execrated, were travelling in the broad way that leads to destruction. Which of these classes of persons would we chuse to follow in our course of life? If the former, we must take our directions from the wisdom taught by Solomon, and the other inspired writers. Those venerable men who have obtained a good report, and who through faith and patience inherit the promises, were close students of the word of God, so far as they enjoyed the benefit of its instructions; and by faith in its doctrines and promises, and a constant regard to its precepts, they obtained their good report. Happy shall we be if, like them, we esteem the word of God more than our necessary food, and keep the judgments of God still in our view;

Proverbs 2:21. For the upright will live in the land, And the blameless will remain in it;

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

Proverbs 2:22. But the wicked will be cut off from the land, And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

Must not the righteous leave the earth too? Yes: But the earth is a very different thing to the righteous, and to the wicked. To the latter it is all the heaven they ever have; to the righteous it is a place of preparation for heaven. Death is a kind messenger sent to the righteous by their heavenly Father, calling them to the possession of their eternal inheritance; to the wicked it is a messenger of wrath, summoning them to the abodes of misery. It is almost the beginning of happiness to God's people, but the final conclusion of all that the wicked counted their happiness. To the righteous, death is a translation to a better life. To the wicked, it is destruction and woe. And is it all one to us whether we share with the wicked in the miseries of their latter end, or with Zion's travellers in those everlasting joys that shall crown them when they attain the end of their faith*?

Proverbs 3

THIS chapter contains a variety of useful precepts, enforced by the strongest motives.

First, To remember and keep in our hearts the things written in this book, Proverbs 3:1, 2.

Proverbs 3:1. My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments;

This inspired teacher is to be revered as a spiritual father. His word is to be regarded as a law published by Solomon, but binding on us by the authority of God*. We must never forget this law, but make it familiar to our memories, that we may have a guide ready to direct us in every situation in which we may be placed; and when we treasure it up in our memory, we are to keep it in our heart. Richly does it deserve to form the object of our constant love, and the subject of our meditation all the day. Our obedience to it must proceed from the heart. What is the difference between good men, and false pretenders to religion? To the latter, the religion which they have is a burden, to the former a pleasure; to the one the law is a disagreeable restraint, to the other God's commandments are not grievous, for they rejoice in the way of his testimonies, more than in all riches. Interest dictates to us the propriety of keeping God's commandments—

Proverbs 3:2. For length of days and years of life, And peace they will add to you.

A long and happy life is the desire of all men, and riches and good physicians appear to them the most likely means of obtaining it. But religion is better than all the gold and physicians in the world, for it has the promise of this life, as well as of that to come.

Solomon knew well that good men sometimes die young, while the wicked live, become old, yea, mighty in power; but still he asserts and often repeats the promise of long life which belongs to godliness. Surely, then, it is not without meaning and truth. The godly shall enjoy life as far as it is really a blessing in their particular circumstances, and the meaning carried beyond this would convert the blessing into a threatening. Peace is enjoyed by the godly, even that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and it keeps their hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Outward prosperity is enjoyed by them, as far as it is consistent with their spiritual interests. Tribulations and enemies they may meet with, but they live in peace. Though slaughtered by the hand of violence, or the sword of war, they die in peace; and when they die, they enter into everlasting peace.

The second precept in this chapter, is one requiring us to live in the exercise of mercy and truth.

Proverbs 3:3. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Mercy and truth are to be exercised by us in every part of our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, however defective they may be in the practice of these virtues to us. They are to be tied about our necks as a precious ornament, to be worn through life, and made visible to all men. Our light should shine before men, not for our own praise, but for the glory of our heavenly Father.

But it is not enough to practise mercy and truth, so as to obtain a character for fidelity among men. Our outward acts must proceed from the heart. As the law of commandments was written upon tables of stone, so is the law of Christ written on the fleshly tables of the Christian's heart, by the Spirit of the living God. As workers under the Spirit, we are required to write the law of kindness and of truth upon the tables of our heart, by maintaining deep impressions of it, by meditating upon the peaceful motives that should excite us to that virtue, and by endeavouring, through the grace of Christ, to have our hearts habitually disposed to all those duties which are the natural fruits of love and integrity.

Proverbs 3:4. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.

God is well pleased, not only with the reverence and love which his people shew to himself, but with that generosity and mercy, that sincerity and faithfulness, which they evince to their fellow-men. Mercy and truth are glorious perfections in the Deity,—perfections which shall be for ever praised as the springs of our felicity. Of these, the mercy and truth found in wisdom's disciples, are to be regarded as a faint imitation. To find in his children this his true, though imperfect image, the Deity is greatly delighted. To the merciful he will shew himself merciful, and they that deal truly are his delight. He not only smiles upon them with the light of his countenance, but gives them favour in the sight of men also. Kindness and truth are qualities so amiable as to engage the esteem even of those who are too selfish to practise them. They attract the good-will of men. They procure that good name which is better than precious ointment. For a good man some have even dared to die.

That understanding which is good in the sight of God and man, is another fruit of the constant practice of mercy and truth. A good understanding appears already in this behaviour, but it is also promoted by it; for the practice of what we know, tends greatly to render our knowledge more clear, and certain, and extensive*.

The next precept is, to depend on God, and not on our own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding.

To trust in God, is to depend on him for bestowing on us every needful blessing, and preserving us from all evil.

Faith in Christ for eternal life is included in this dependence on God, for by him we believe in God. But we are commanded to trust in God for every thing necessary for us in this life also; for the Lord God is a sun and shield, he will give grace and glory, and every good thing. O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee!

This dependence on God is to be exercised with all our hearts, our judgments being persuaded that God is the only and the all-sufficient object of confidence, and our souls resting with full satisfaction in his power and faithfulness. This holy exercise is fully and clearly exemplified to us in many of the psalms of David†.

Whilst we trust in the Lord, our hearts must cleave to him, and renounce every sublunary dependance. To divide our confidence between God and the creature, is to lean with one hand upon a rock, and with the other hand upon a broken reed. David charges his soul to wait upon God only, for his expectation was from him, and from none else.

We must not make our own understanding a staff to our hearts.—Dependance on our own wisdom, will lead us from trusting in God, to make lies our refuge, and to adopt unhallowed means for the attainment of our wishes. When men reject the testimony of God concerning Christ, when they depend on their own righteousness and strength instead of Christ, or on creatures rather than on God for help in difficulty, or when they expect to obtain pleasure or profit by sinful means, it is evident that they are departing from God, through an evil heart of unbelief, and trusting for the direction of their behaviour to their own corrupted minds.

Do we trust in God, and not in ourselves? It will then give us much pleasure to know that we are directed and encouraged to make known all our affairs to God, according to the following words of the wise king,

Proverbs 3:6. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

God is well acquainted with all our affairs, and yet he graciously requires us to present them to him in prayer, and to ask from him direction in the management of them, that we may be guided by his providence and Spirit, according to his word. The saints have found much relief in their perplexities, by spreading their case before him, and petitioning his interposition for their help*. But times of distress are not the only seasons in which we ought to apply to him. "Be careful for nothing, (says Paul,) but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make known your requests unto him." We are every day to pray that our steps may be so ordered, as that we may not be led into temptation. Joshua in the midst of his prosperity erred, by neglecting to ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord, because he thought the matter so clear, as that he might safely trust to his own understanding.

Our encouragement to this duty is a promise that our path shall be directed. Having shewed to God our way, we must wait on God for direction, not by a voice from heaven, or by a new inspiration, but by his Spirit enabling us to understand his word, and apply it to particular affairs, and by his providence making the way where we should walk clear before us. Thus will our path be so directed, as that we shall be preserved from falling into sin, from meeting with temptations that might prove too hard for us, and from being subjected to more than needful calamity.

What a pleasure is it to have a wise and kind friend to consult with in all our affairs! but how much sweeter the pleasure, that we know where to find God, that we are invited to go even to his seat, and to utter all our words before him! When we interest God in our affairs by prayer, we may cast away every care, and walk on cheerfully, believing that he will guide every step of our journey; for his eyes are not only upon the way of his people, but upon every step of it*.

But when we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, let us be sure to do it with self-diffidence, and with sincere resolutions to adhere to that way that will be pleasing to God.

Proverbs 3:7. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

Vain man would be wise, although man is born like the wild ass's colt. The world is full of wise men, or of men that would be thought wise. But we cannot be truly wise unless we become fools, renouncing all dependence on our own wisdom, and depending with humility upon the Lord, for those supplies of wisdom that are necessary for enlightening our minds and directing our paths. When we pretend to ask counsel from God, whilst we have a secret dependance upon ourselves, and a reserved determination to pay no regard to his word or providence if it should cross our own humours, we play the hypocrite with God, and cover over that self-confidence which he abhors, with false professions of faith and resignation to the will of God. Johanan and his proud companions were terribly threatened for this dissimulation by the prophet Jeremiah*.

A high opinion of men's own wisdom is so dangerous, that Isaiah pronounces a heavy woe upon it. We are not indeed to pull out our own eyes, to renounce our own understandings, or to believe contradictions; but we ought certainly to keep our rational powers in subjection to the word of God, to be sensible of our great liability to err, and of our absolute need of the divine direction, especially in those matters that concern religion†.

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

The fear of God preserves men from bodily disease, as well as from sin.

Proverbs 3:8. The navel is a useful part of the body, being a sort of ligament to knit the bowels together;—the bones are the strength and fence of the body. The fear of God is health to the outward, as well as to the inward man. Health is an object of great desire to all, and the wise man will not only use medicines when sick, for the restoration of it, but will attentively consider what food and what exercise are the most proper for preserving health in the navel, and marrow in the bones. The spiritually wise will remember, that in God's hands is our life, and breath, and all our ways,—that diseases are his servants, which come and go at his pleasure,—and that the surest way to health is to walk before him unto all pleasing. Does he then enjoy health? he has a blessing along with it. Is he the victim of disease? it will be more beneficial to him than is to the wicked his unsanctified health.

Religion has a natural tendency to impart health and vigour to the body, because it preserves a man from those distempers which proceed from unsubdued lusts, and diffuses over the mind that calm serenity and heartfelt joy, which even upon the body exercise a medicinal influence.

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

Proverbs 3:9. Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Earthly substance is necessary for the use of our bodies, but we are called to make a nobler use of it than the mere service of the outward man. We are to honour the Lord with it, making no use of any part of our increase, till we have set apart a reasonable proportion of it for the service of God. God needs nothing at our hands; but for our own benefit, he will have us to render back a part of all he gives us for the decent support of his worship, and for the maintenance of the poor. Is it any hardship to give a part to him from whom we have received all? Can we make a better use of our wealth, which is often a snare and a trap to men, than by serving God, and thus making to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness?

By this means we honour the Lord. He is the Creator and Redeemer of our souls and bodies, and therefore we are to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his. Our substance is his also, and we must honour him with it by a liberality in his service, proportioned to the extent of his bounty. By the practice of this duty, we shew our faith in his providence and promises, our love to God, our gratitude for his goodness, and our preference of his service to that of mammon. In this manner we justify our profession of the gospel of Christ, and others are made to glorify God, while they enjoy the benefit of our ministrations to this purpose.

By the neglect of this duty, we are guilty of robbing God himself of that rent which he requires from us as his tenants. We dishonour him by shewing that we love the world better than his service, and that we trust more to our chests, or to our bonds upon our fellow-creatures, than to his promises; for has he not assured us, that instead of being losers, we shall be great gainers by what we bestow upon him? Liberality on God's account brings down the blessing of providence to such a degree, that our barns shall be filled, and our presses need enlargement. God has the sun, and winds, and rain, and creatures of every description, in his hand; and these he manages in such a manner, as that none shall be a loser by him, nor a gainer by withholding from him. Robbers of God are visited with a curse, which like a moth wastes, or like a fire destroys, their substance*. Liberality opens the windows of heaven, destroys the devouring locust, and turns the barren field into a delightful land†.

Health and riches are the advantages that attend the fear of the Lord, and liberality in his service; but we must not imagine that these blessings are promised without a reservation of the cross, when God sees it needful for us, nor suppose that God is unfaithful when he administers correction to his children. This truth is inculcated in the next instruction of the wise king, which teaches us how to behave under afflictive providences.

Proverbs 3:11. This exhortation, like many of the others, speaks to us as unto children; and it is a piece of ingratitude in the children of wisdom to forget it, by suffering it to be obliterated from their memories, or to produce no practical influence‡.

We are here warned against despising divine rebukes, or fainting under them. The rebukes of providence are despised, when persons regard not the supreme hand that afflicts; when they consider not the design of God in afflicting; or when, through stupidity of mind or hardness of heart, they neglect to comply with it. This is a great affront to God. It is as if a child should say to his father when he strikes him, 'I do not care, do with me what you will, I shall behave no better than I have done.' Ahaz was a very wicked man, but nothing shewed the stubbornness of his heart so much, as his walking contrary to God, when he sent sore distress upon him*.

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

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

Weariness under the divine correction is another common fault, which we must avoid with care. Our hearts must not fret against the Lord, nor suffer reflecting thoughts to spring up, for God never exceeds the due measure in distressing us. No ingredient is poured into the cup of affliction, but by infinite wisdom and grace; nor shall the rod of Jehovah rest upon the lot of the righteous, longer than need requires. Weariness will make the heart to sink like a stone, and produce harsh suspicions of the divine goodness. It will disqualify the mind for relishing the consolations of God, and answering the designs of the Almighty.

To keep our minds from fainting, let us consider who it is that corrects us. It is the Lord, and all flesh must be silent before him, and receive what evils he is pleased to appoint, with reverence and resignation. It is the Lord, let him do unto us what seemeth good in

his sight. He is excellent in judgment, and in plenty of justice, and cannot do wrong to any of his creatures. But it is a sweeter consideration, that he is a Father, and chastens us in love.

Proverbs 3:12. For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father, the son in whom he delights.

He intends, not to destroy but to reform, and correction is one of those privileges that belong to the family of God. Christ himself, though a Son in an infinitely higher sense than we, though altogether free from the need of correction, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Christ was the first-born among many brethren, and we are predestinated to be conformed to him in sufferings and in holiness, and the sorrows which we endure are means appointed for making us partakers of God's holiness. Earthly fathers correct their children, in order to drive away folly from them; and that misguided lenity which withholds the rod, is but cruelty in disguise. Now, we yield reverence and submission to earthly parents; how much more do we owe it to that heavenly Father, who exercises love infinitely wiser and greater than theirs! He knows the greatest afflictions have not so much bitterness as the least sin, and he loves his children too well to spare correction, when it is requisite to purge away their sin.

The best commentary we can have on this text, is that given by Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews*. Did we understand it aright, we should bless God for correction, as well as for smiles; and the wormwood and the gall of our miseries would be turned into honey and the honey-comb.

Whatever corrections the children of God suffer, they are still happy, and it is our duty to believe them so. Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth! Nothing can make that person unhappy who is possessed of wisdom, as the inspired philosopher tells us in the next part of this chapter. In it he again recommends wisdom to our esteem and pursuit, Proverbs 2:13–26.

Proverbs 3:13. How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding.

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

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

Proverbs 3:14. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, And its gain than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her.

Silver is much esteemed by men, and gold is almost adored by them. Rubies are still more precious, and perhaps there are some things still preferred to these shining stones. But none of them all are to be named in one day with wisdom; and he has no true judgment of the real value of things, who would give a grain of true wisdom for a mountain of diamonds.

Earthly riches are for the body, wisdom is for the soul; the former may enrich a man for the space of threescore and ten years, the latter for numberless millions of ages. Gold and rubies are the true riches in the eyes of erring mortals, wisdom and grace in the eyes of Christ; and if we follow his judgment, the diseased beggar Lazarus was incomparably happier than the rich man who was clothed with purple, and who fared sumptuously every day.

A venerable father, when he saw Rome in its splendour, took occasion to contemplate the ineffable glories of the celestial city, compared with which Rome itself was but a pitiful village. The Scripture teaches us, when we are charmed with the lustre of earthly riches, to consider how incomparably these are surpassed by the excellency of wisdom.

He is not a true Christian who would not wish to be rich in faith rather than in silver and gold; for every one that partakes of heavenly wisdom is enlightened by the Spirit of God, and disposed, in his judgment of the value of things, to listen to the instructions of God in his word.

The excellency of wisdom further appears in the gifts she bestows. She is a munificent princess, holding in both hands the richest presents, to be given to her servants.

Proverbs 3:16. Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor.

A happy life extended to old age is given to the lovers of wisdom; or if cut off in the midst of their days, they are no losers. They cannot even in this case complain that God is unfaithful to his promise, for in another world they enter on a state of life which excels the present as much in value as in duration. If a man promises to give us threescore and ten acres of ground in a barren country, and instead of them gives us ten thousand in a fruitful soil, watered by the river of God, and blessed by the smiles of heaven, he is not worse, but a great deal better than his word.

Riches and honour are given in the same sense as length of days. When Solomon testified his high regard for wisdom, God bestowed upon him the riches and glory of this world. But experience taught Solomon that these things did not make him wiser, or better, or happier. Let us, from the history of the wise man, learn to implore the accomplishment of this promise in a spiritual sense. There are eternal treasures and unfading diadems reserved for the wise in another world. There they will be so rich, that the streets of their city of habitation are paved with pure gold,—so honourable, that they shall sit with Christ himself on his throne.

But great as are the advantages, splendid as are the honours which wisdom confers, the world is generally prejudiced against it, and prepossessed with the idea of its being burdensome and unpleasant. Worldly pleasure appears so desirable, so essential indeed to human happiness, that for this sole reason multitudes abhor the thoughts of becoming religious. In order to remove this mischievous prejudice, Solomon assures us, that religion is not less conducive to pleasure than it is to honour and wealth.

Proverbs 3:17. Her ways are pleasant ways, And all her paths are peace.

Call not religion Marah, but call her Naomi, for she is in every respect desirable. True, indeed, it is no rare occurrence to find a religious man leading an unpleasant life, but this is to be ascribed to his own mistakes and dispositions, and not to religion, than which nothing tends so much to render the present life a scene of happiness.

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

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

There is peace and pleasure in repentance, which is sweetened by the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ; so that the true penitent enjoys more satisfaction in one hour's mourning, than the votary of worldly pleasure in twenty years' carnal gratification. There is pleasure in self-denial, for he that practises it knows that he is the true self-seeker; and of this he is assured by the word of Christ*. There is pleasure and peace in bearing the cross of Christ, for it is made light by the Spirit of Christ, and the prospect of sharing with him in his glory†. There is pleasure and peace in tribulations, because when they abound, consolations abound much more by Christ‡. There is peace in fighting the Lord's battles against the mightiest enemies, for the Christian soldier fights under the banner of the Prince of Peace. His feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. The God of peace will bruise every enemy under his feet. More exquisite is that pleasure which the subjugation of one sinful affection produces, than that which results from the gratification of a thousand.—Should the Christian be called to die a violent death, there is peace in his latter end, as we find there was in the death of the good Josiah when he fell in battle.

The pleasures of the world are like the gleams of a wintry sun, faint, and feeble, and transient. The pleasures of religion are satisfying and eternal. The calamities of this life are not able to interrupt, far less to destroy them. This is verified in the experience of every one whose soul is under the lively influence of that faith which constitutes an essential part of religion. David, though in deep waters, yielded not to desponding thoughts, believing that the Lord would yet command his loving-kindness; though about to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he saw no ground for the fear of evil.

All the exercises, all the privileges, all the hopes of religion, are full of pleasure. Even the trials to which religious men are exposed afford pleasure, if not whilst they are felt, at the farthest when they come to a period||.

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

Proverbs 3:18. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

Nothing in the present state of the creation is sufficient to furnish out a proper emblem of the happiness that wisdom affords, and therefore the wise man goes back to the state of the world under innocent Adam, comparing the delights of religion to the fruits of the tree of life. For the sin of Adam we were driven from Paradise, and our approach to the tree of life in the midst of the garden for ever prevented. But a second Adam has opened our way to a better paradise, in which is the tree of life that bears every month twelve manner of fruits. The branches of this wide-spreading tree bend down to this lower world, and those that are wise unto salvation sit under its shadow with great delight, while its fruit is sweet to their taste.

If we wish to eat of these delicious and soul-reviving fruits, we must take fast hold of wisdom, and keep that hold against all the enemies that would tear it from us. To wisdom we must cleave with purpose of heart, when the devil and the world would persuade us to forego some part of truth or duty, or to make some small compliance with sin, in order to serve some worldly end*. "To him that overcometh, [i.e. to him that keepeth Christ's works unto the end,] will he give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God†."

To all the great things that have been said of wisdom, let us add the glory which belongs to wisdom, as it appears in creation and providence.

Proverbs 3:19. The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens. 20 By His knowledge the deeps were broken up, And the skies drip with dew.

Knowledge and wisdom belong to God in their highest perfection, and shine forth in all his works. By his wisdom he established the world, and formed every creature beautiful in its kind. By his knowledge, the heavens and the earth, and all their inhabitants, were formed into one universe, which incessantly proclaims the greatness of its Creator's wisdom. The language of every creature when considered by itself, and especially when viewed as part of the grand system, is, "We come forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom." The world could never have afforded us a convenient dwelling-place, had not the depths by the knowledge of God been broken up, and the waters separated from the dry land, to be laid up in the vast repository of the sea, or to flow along in rivers for our benefit. It is wisdom that draws up the moisture from the earth in waters, and exhales it in vapours, forming them into clouds, and again distilling them in dew, or pouring them down in rain, that food may spring out of the earth for man and beast.

This wisdom calls for our gratitude, and praise, and imitation. We cannot pretend to make or govern a world, but we are enjoined to manage our own concerns with wisdom. The God whose understanding is infinite, hath dignified us with rational powers, and directed us to that wisdom which is proper for us. When he displayed the wonders of his infinite understanding at the creation of all things, he said unto man, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." He is the giver of wisdom, and he gives it from his own exhaustless stores. Every beam of wisdom in man is a ray from that eternal Sun; and the divine image, which we lost by our folly in departing from God, begins to be renewed in us when we attain that knowledge and wisdom so earnestly recommended by the royal teacher.

Is wisdom so incomparably useful and excellent? let us then listen with reverence to the instruction that again speaks to us as unto children.

Proverbs 3:21. My son, let them not depart from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion,

There are some kinds of wisdom highly esteemed by the world, yet of these some are so far from being useful, that they are brutish folly. No wisdom is sound but that which is taught by the word of God, and approved by him who is the Author of wisdom, and who has given us plain marks for distinguishing it from that which is earthly, sensual, and devilish*. This sound wisdom makes us discreet and prudent, and guards us against that selfish cunning which has so often assumed its name.

This sound wisdom and discretion must be like frontlets before our eyes, that we may keep them always in our view. Then will our steps be ordered in God's word; for by what means shall we purify our way? By taking heed thereto, according to God's word.

There are many adversaries that would rob us of this treasure, and we are but too ready to let it slip. The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. arts. For this reason, we need to be frequently reminded of our duty to keep it. If we retain it on our minds and hearts, if we uniformly exhibit it in our practice, we shall certainly find that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

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

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

Proverbs 3:23, 24. Then you will walk in your way securely, And your foot will not stumble. 24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

hilst we keep wisdom and discretion, we are safe by the protection of the Almighty. We are safe whether we walk in the way, or sit in the house, or repose on the couch. There shall no evil happen to the just; even those events which are evil to others, are sanctified and blessed to them.

"He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways, (says the scripture), lest thou shouldst dash thy foot against a stone." Happy it is to be the care of angels, but happier far to be under his protecting eye who is the keeper of Israel.

We must remember, that this promise has a direction embodied with it, "Thou shalt walk in thy way." Satan endeavoured to cheat our Saviour out of this important part of the promise, that he might cheat him out of the benefit of it altogether. But Jesus knew well the

regard due to every jet and tittle of the word of God. We are required still to keep the way of the Lord, and in the affairs of life to attend to our own concerns, shunning the character of busy-bodies, by not meddling in the affairs of others. In the calling wherewith we are called, let us abide with God, and we shall dwell in safety under the shadow of the Almighty.

Sleep commonly flies from the victims of wretchedness and calamity; but quiet and peaceful are the slumbers of those who Can lie down in safety, because the Lord sustaineth them. Even in the prospect of danger and distress, they can repose in calm serenity, for Jehovah giveth his beloved sleep. Such were the calamitous circumstances of David, when exiled and pursued by the unnatural Absalom, that all the people who were witnesses of his banishment, wept for him. Yet what says David himself? "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." When the most prosperous sinners lie down to rest, they want covenant protection, and know not but they may open their eyes in hell. The servant of God knows, that when buried in the arms of "Nature's sweet restorer," he is under that guardian eye which neither slumbers nor sleeps.

There may be seasons in which the good man cannot enjoy pleasant slumbers. But what does he lose, if, by the thoughts that Wisdom suggests, he enjoys a feast of holy contemplation, more refreshing to him than sleep is to others*!

In order to enjoy this tranquillity of mind, we must believe the promises of God, and by the exercise of holy confidence, banish those fears that would distress the soul.

Proverbs 3:25. Do not be afraid of sudden fear, Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; 26 For the LORD will be your confidence, And will keep your foot from being caught.

Sudden fears are attended with a stupifying influence upon those that want faith, but far different is the fact with regard to the righteous. The righteous man is bold as a lion, for he knows, like the three children in Babylon, that the God whom he serves is able to deliver him, or to render him happy, though the desolation of others should involve the destruction, not only of all his outward comforts, but of his mortal life*.

The Lord is a sure ground of confidence in the worst of times. Our proper exercise in such seasons, is to trust in the Lord, and to pour out our hearts before him, knowing that he will be a refuge for us. This comfortable doctrine is illustrated and enforced in almost every Psalm.

May not one, then, exclaim with the royal philosopher, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding!" The way in which wisdom leads us, is attended with every blessing, and free from every evil; or if there be any evil in it, so wonderful is the providence of God, that it is turned into good. Thus is Sampson's riddle verified to every afflicted saint. May our lives be those of the righteous, and our last end their's!

The wise man next directs us, to make no unnecessary delay in the performance of any good work.

Proverbs 3:27. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.

To do justly, is one great point of religion; and we ought not unnecessarily to delay giving every man his due, for the delay of justice is temporary injustice. When we owe money to our neighbours, which they require from us at present, and we, though able, defer payment till afterwards, we are plainly guilty of injustice; for a man has the same right to his property now, that he will have a year hence. We find men reprov'd and threatened for keeping in their own hands the hire of the labourer. The same censure may be applied to those who refuse to pay just debts, or to restore to its rightful owner any piece of lost property which they have found; for we are not to do what we will with that which is not ours, nor are we to owe to another any thing but love.

We owe love and the proper fruits of it to our fellow-creatures, according to their necessities and characters, and our connection with them; and we transgress the rule of righteousness, if we withhold even from our enemies that which is due to them by the law of Christ; for many things are to be reckoned just debts from us on his account, which they have no title to claim for their own sakes. It may be difficult for us to render to others what is due to them by the laws of justice or charity; but the question is not, whether it is easy, but whether it is in the power of our hands, to render unto others that good which is due to them. The fruits of love are often labours, but they are not such labours of love as those which our Redeemer cheerfully performed for us, nor is any man a loser by them*.

What is in the power of our hands to-day, may not be in our power to-morrow, and therefore we ought not to delay the performance of any good work†.

Proverbs 3:28. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you.

Delays in any part of duty, furnish a strong presumption that we do not perform it cheerfully. We are commanded, not only to do good works, but to be ready to every good work; not only to shew mercy, but to shew it with cheerfulness. He that gives speedily, gives twice; but he that gives with slow reluctance, gives in part a denial. Much of the benefit is often lost to the receiver, and much of the gratitude to the giver, by telling our neighbour to go and come again.

There is a manner of giving that but ill accords with that humanity and mercy which should dispose us to give. Airs of superiority assumed even to the meanest of our fellow-creatures, are unbecoming; for however inferior to us in point of station, they are still our neighbours, and God commands us to love them as ourselves. God often delays answering our prayers, but he is infinitely and essentially superior to us; yet his delays are all in wisdom and love. When it is fit that his petitioners should receive what they ask, he gives before they ask, or whilst they are yet speaking he hears.

In one case, the wise man allows us to defer giving. When we have it not by us, and when we cannot give at all in a consistency with more urgent duties, we may refuse to give; but still we must have hearts to give, were it in our power. And if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.

The next direction is against doing evil to our neighbours.

Proverbs 3:29. Do not devise harm against your neighbor, While he lives in security beside you.

Our fellow-men are our neighbours, and we are destitute of the love of God if we feel no love to them. If the practice be an index of what passes within, we must conclude that man to be wholly destitute of love, who can wilfully hurt those whom he is required to love as himself. Such a man cannot surely pretend to religion; or if he does, he is at best like a tinkling brass, or a sounding cymbal, for his professions are emptiness and hypocrisy.

At the day of judgment, they shall be doomed to hell, who did not serve their neighbour in love; where, then, must those appear whose practice was quite the reverse?

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

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

Proverbs 3:30. Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm.

If a man has injured us, we ought to forgive him. Do we believe that God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us ten thousand talents, and shall we reckon it a hard matter, at Christ's command, to forgive our brother a few pence?

If the unforgiving shall never enter into heaven, what curses shall for ever lie upon those who are guilty of unprovoked injuries? Railers and revilers stand excluded from the kingdom of God, and the admission of injurious persons, like Saul the Pharisee, into the kingdom of God, is to be regarded as a miracle of mercy.

It may possibly be alleged, that injurious persons are often prosperous in the world. It may be so in some circumstances, yet,

Proverbs 3:31. Do not envy a man of violence, And do not choose any of his ways.

Imagine not that a man can be happy in the enjoyment of that which he has gained by dishonest means. Envy or admiration of his success, might lead us to imitate his unrighteous behaviour. Though his wine sparkle, let us remember that there is poison in the cup.

Proverbs 3:32. For the crooked man is an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright.

That man who is detested by the Lord, is so far from being happy, that he is miserable and accursed. Can he know true happiness, who is looked upon with an angry countenance by him whose smiles are heaven, and whose frowns are hell? Such is the situation of oppressors of every rank, from the mighty Nimrods of the world, who employ themselves in general massacres and desolations, down to the petty parish oppressors, who grind the faces of their poor neighbours, and by adding field to field, to the ruin of many families, endeavour to plant themselves alone in the countryside*.

"But his secret is with the righteous." They enjoy a fellowship with God unknown to the world. He discovers to them the secret mysteries of grace, refreshes their souls with the manifestations of his special love, and blesses their substance by the unperceived workings of his gracious providence*. God not only enriches them with his goodness, but treats them as friends, and to them all his paths are mercy and truth.

The blessing of God upon his people, and his indignation toward his enemies, spread through their dwellings, rendering them happy

or miserable. The cottage of the just is a quiet and pleasant habitation. The palace of the wicked is blasted by a secret curse.

Proverbs 3:33. The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.

And happiness or misery lies in the blessing or curse of God†. When you behold the magnificent structures in which sinners dwell, let not your thoughts be lost in wonder, or your hearts rankle with envy. They are fabrics, stately indeed, but not solid. You may pronounce them cursed. Eliphaz saw the wicked taking root, but suddenly he cursed his habitation, for his children are far from safety. The curse of God has often destroyed the timber and the beams of the most towering palaces; often has it kindled a fire, by which they have been destroyed to the lowest foundation. Such dwellings as these are houses of infection, for the leprosy of sin has taken possession of them, and it can be ascribed only to wonderful mercy, if the children and servants in them escape the plagues prepared for their lords.

By the blessing of the Lord, the meanest cottage is converted into a dwelling of joy and praise. We read of whole houses that have been blessed for the sake of godly servants; how much more may the divine blessing be expected, where the masters are pious, and make their dwellings a little church, where the melody of thanksgiving and the voice of prayer are daily heard! The blessing of God, that is daily asked, shall not be refused; and the members of the family are blessed with instructions and examples that must produce good effects on them, unless they harden their hearts like an adamant. The holy conversation of good wives may be a means of winning their husbands; and many children and servants have found the greatest reason to thank God for the appointment of their dwelling in a family of saints.

From among the wicked, we find that proud and haughty scorers are singled out as signal monuments of the vengeance of God.

Proverbs 3:34. Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.

It is pride that makes men scorers. When men have an overweening conceit of themselves, they are likely to behave insolently to others, and contemptuously to God himself*. But on such arrogant worms of the dust, Jehovah looks down with contempt, and makes them objects of derision to all men. We read in scripture of many, whom the pride of their heart and countenance brought to the lowest disgrace. Nebuchadnezzar, and Haman, and Herod, and the proud Pharisee, are set forth for examples, to shew us that these men stand not on an even place, whose hearts are not kept low by that grace which cherishes humility. That God whose eye turns away with disdain from the splendour of haughty princes, and the diadems of imperious kings, looks with kindness upon the meanest of those who walk humbly with their God†. He visits them in mercy, and refreshes their spirits with his love‡. He gave them that grace which makes them humble, and he giveth more grace. God bestows grace on men, that he may be glorified; and the lowly, who are made sensible of their emptiness and guilt, are the persons who will ascribe praise to him, for the least of his favours: In them he will display the excellency of his love, and enrich them with his blessings in this, and in the everlasting world. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." With the lowly is wisdom, and,

Ver. 35. Some by their birth and fortune inherit high sounding titles, and celebrated kingdoms. But if they are not wise, their lofty situation is the theatre of their dishonour. Those who are blessed with sound wisdom, have an inheritance of glory in reserve, compared with which the crowns and sceptres of the world deserve not a name. The prudent are even at present crowned with knowledge; but the happy day is coming when they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that have turned others to the wisdom of the just, as the stars for ever and ever.

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

CHAPTER 4

IN this chapter, Solomon renews his exhortations to us to get wisdom, ver. 1–13, and to avoid temptations, ver. 14–19. The chapter concludes with a short sum of practical religion.

In his exhortation to wisdom, he makes use of many of the same motives by which he had already recommended it. Solomon had a heart filled with knowledge, beyond all the sons of men; and he could have charmed and astonished, by the discoveries of new truths in every sentence; but he had wisdom to manage his knowledge, and therefore prefers those discourses which are solid and useful, to those which, by their dazzling brilliancy, are fitted only to produce admiration and surprise. He desires not our applause, but our benefit; and his aim is not to shine, but to instruct. He was a wise householder, instructed into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and brings out of his treasure things old as well as new.

God speaks to us more than once or twice by this inspired penman, and shall we not listen to his voice? We have precept upon

precept, and line upon line; and if we do not receive instructions pressed upon us so warmly, we must go and fall backwards, and be broken, and snared, and taken. May God open our hearts to hear what is said by him who was the wisest of men, and who spoke under the guidance of unerring Wisdom.

Ver. 1. Our Lord teaches us to pray to God, as children to a father. Have we such confidence toward God, and shall we not attend with the reverence and love of children, to him who addresses us with the infinite tenderness of a heavenly Father?

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

Ver. 2. The many say, "Who will shew us any good?" But they know not what is good for them, and suffer themselves to be deceived with shadows. Here God shews us what is good, and gives it to us. All the things that the sons of men can desire, are not to be compared to good doctrine.

But is it becoming in a wise man to commend his own discourses? Solomon might well commend them, for they are not his, but God's, and God is graciously pleased to commend them to our acceptance. He calls us to buy wisdom without price, and discovers as much earnestness in recommending this precious merchandize, as if he were to be enriched by the price.

Were a thousand volumes to be written in commendation of this book, they could not say so much for it, as it can say for itself in a few words. God is not only the author, but the recommender of it. He calls it good doctrine, and requires us not to forsake it in our practice. To despise it, is to despise the authority and love of him who guided the pen of Solomon in writing and commending it to us. To forsake his law is to forsake the king's highway, which is ever under his eye and protection, (chap. 2:9.) and to turn into those paths which are haunted by ravenous beasts.

The words of Wisdom here sounding in our ears, are the words, not only of Solomon the wise, but of David, the man after God's own heart. He delivers to his children, what he heard from his blessed father, by whom also the Spirit of the Lord spake.

Ver. 3, 4. His parents had, in his tender years, instructed him in the principles of religion; and the reason why they did so, was, that they loved him; for the best evidence of parental love is to instruct, and when necessary, to correct children. Solomon was the best loved son in the family, and the greatest pains were employed in training him up in the way wherein he should go. Of him, accordingly, we find, that his parents had more joy than of all the rest.

His mother gave him instruction, as well as his father. Her crime had lost her a child, but her religious care was rewarded with double comfort in the best and dearest of her sons. Were there more women of the spirit of Bathsheba, and Lois, and Lemuel's mother, we might hope to see a greater number of Solomon's, and Timothy's, and Lemuel's in the world. Solomon was a wise and good king, but his mother's name was Bathsheba. Rehoboam was a bad king, and his mother's name was Naamah, an Ammonitess. It was peculiarly creditable to Asa that he behaved well, though Abijah was his father, and Maacha his mother, or grandmother.

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

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

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

Ver. 5. How earnestly are we called to seek after wisdom, till we find it! It would be a happy token of getting it, were we so deeply convinced of its value, as to make the attainment of it our grand concern; for blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled. If we cry for wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding, our cries shall not remain unanswered. The success of Solomon's petition is recorded as an encouragement to our prayers and our hopes*.

It is not enough to get wisdom; we must also use it, and walk in its ways. They are all pleasantness and peace, but pain and misery will meet us, if we turn either to the right hand or to the left.

Ver. 6. There are some who think it necessary, in particular cases, to forsake wisdom, lest their strictness should expose them to damage. But David here tells Solomon and us, that this must be a dangerous error. The way of duty and of safety is still the same. Those who walk by faith will believe this, though it appear to such as walk by sight, an absurdity contradicted by a thousand facts. It is incomparably safer and happier, to lose our credit and our life, by cleaving to the truths and ways of Christ, than to preserve both

by base compliances with the enemies of the truth*.

That we may not forsake wisdom, we must embrace and love her. A miser will never forget where his treasure lies, and he will lose his life sooner than be robbed of his precious store. The love of wisdom will in like manner induce us to lay it up in our hearts, and to keep fast hold of it in defiance of every danger. When persons receive not the truth in the love of it, they provoke God to leave them to the influence of strong and soul-ruining delusions. When we receive it into our hearts, it makes us strong and victorious over the wicked one†.

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

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

Ver. 8, 9. All that truly know wisdom, must embrace and exalt her. The only reason why any treat her with indifference, is that they are entire strangers to her. None knew her better than David and Solomon, and we hear how eloquent in her praises they are.

We must prize wisdom as a pearl of inestimable value, and we must testify our regard for her, by growing in grace and in knowledge; by improving every means and opportunity afforded us of increasing this divine treasure; by valuing, for the sake of wisdom, the teachers and lovers of it; by earnest endeavours to make our friends and neighbours sensible of its value; and, in a word, by giving it the throne of our hearts, and the government of every action of our lives.

They who honour wisdom, obtain the noblest honours, for by wisdom they are promoted. Their heads are adorned with a diadem of beauty, and a crown of glory is delivered to them.

None are so apt to be vain of earthly honours as those who, like David, are unexpectedly raised to the possession of them, or who, like Solomon, surpass in majesty all their contemporaries. Yet we find, that neither David nor Solomon was greatly charmed with the lustre of a crown. The reason is obvious,—their eyes were open to the glories of true wisdom, and all the glories of earthly kingdoms were lost in the superior brightness. They would rather have exchanged conditions with the poorest saint in Israel, than with the most magnificent monarch in a land where God was not known.

Solomon received and readily assented to his father's good doctrine; we need not wonder therefore that he prayed for wisdom rather than for long life, or glory, or power. He had learned not only that wisdom was a nobler possession than any of these things, but that it brings these along with it. If we receive in faith and love these instructions of the holy man, our desires will be like his. He that is told of a rich treasure hid in his ground, will soon make it appear whether he believes the report. He who believes the report of God concerning the excellency of wisdom, will dig for it as for hid treasure.

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

Ver. 10. Who is the man that desires to live long, that he may see good? Let him hear and receive the sayings of David* and of Solomon. There are few men that do not wish to live long, but there are few too that can trust as much to the counsels of the sovereign arbiter of life and of death, as to the counsels of a good physician; for all men have not faith. Many shorten their days by seeking to the physicians rather than to the Lord.

A wise man would not chuse, for the sake of a long life, to expose himself to guilt and misery. But Solomon, in his prescription, consults our innocence and happiness, as well as the length of our lives.

Ver. 11–13. In our journey through life we have great need of one to guide us, for it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. God only can lead us in a safe way, and he does it by his Spirit through his word. This inspired writer does not only teach, but guide us. He is like a companion in our journey, who points out every step that we should take, and every step that we ought to avoid.

The way in which he leads us, is the way of wisdom, for we are taught to keep our great end constantly in view, and to adopt the proper methods for reaching it. It is a right way, for our interest and duty are jointly pursued; and every point is gained, when these two most important objects are combined. Our duty to God and to man, and to ourselves, are all clearly explained by this divinely instructed teacher.

It is a straight way,—a way in which we shall not be straitened, and in which we shall not stumble. They that walk in the ways of sin and folly, imagine themselves the only persons that enjoy liberty. But how vain the thought! They are very slaves, for they are in bondage to impetuous passions, which prescribe service hard and impossible to be performed. One of these tyrants contradicts the orders of another; and though one should gain the sovereignty, and crush every insurrection of the rest, the servant of sin is still straitened, because conscience terrifies him, or divine providence crosses him in his pursuits. He, on the contrary, that walks in the way of God's precepts, walks at liberty; for though he is in the strait way that leads to life, that way is broad enough to allow him all the room that a reasonable being can desire.

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

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

Let us therefore receive the instructions of life with all the desire of our hearts. Let us value them as our life, and abhor sin and folly more than death.

That we may keep fast hold of instruction, and walk in this straight way in which we shall not stumble, it is necessary to keep out of the way of evil men.

Ver. 14, 15. We must not have fellowship with bad men. Their course and company are to be avoided*. We must not so much as enter into their path, or if we have entered, we ought instantly to turn out of it. Their path is to be avoided by us when we are at a distance from it. It is unsafe to pass by it, lest we should be tempted to take a step or two in it. When we find ourselves near, it is our duty to hasten away till we get at a distance from danger.

This wise leader calls out to us with a loud voice, to keep at a great distance from the way of evil men. He calls as if it were a haunt of robbers and murderers; and so indeed he may, for they that would rob us of our innocence and peace, are more dangerous than those that would rob us of our money. The sins to which they would tempt us by their example and persuasions, may prove the destruction of our comforts and our souls.

We pray to be kept from temptation, and our practice ought not to contradict our prayers; otherwise it is evident, that as one man mocketh another, so we mock, God, by asking from him what we wish not to have.

No wonder that the wise man is so peremptory in urging us to avoid the society of the wicked,

Ver. 16, 17. They are faithful servants of him who is a murderer from the beginning, and their pleasure lies in doing mischief. It is their meat and their drink to do the will of the wicked one. They subsist on robbery and spoil, and if they have not been eating the bread of wickedness, they retire to their beds with the reluctance of those who have been unable to procure for themselves necessary food

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

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

There are many whom it would be difficult to persuade to manifest the same zeal in the service of righteousness, which these profligates discover in the service of iniquity; but it may reasonably be expected that we should flee their company when their character is laid before us. Let us not form the mistaken idea, that the worse they are, we are in the less danger of imitating them, for the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Of little sins we are not afraid, but say within ourselves, "These sins are attended with little danger, are they not little ones? surely our souls shall not die though we fall into them." We are as little afraid of great sins, because we think them so shocking that we cannot fall into them. Frequently does it happen, that labouring under such misapprehensions as these, men lay down their heads upon the lap of temptation, and awake like Sampson in the hands of their enemies. By these enemies they are carried captive at their will, and to this punishment God has given them up for neglecting to follow his counsels, and preferring to them the instructions of those who cause to err.

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

Ver. 18, 19. The righteous man possesses an understanding brightened by the rays of divine truth, for the Sun of righteousness hath shone into his soul. His heart is beautified by the light of purity, diffusing a pleasant lustre around him in his conversation; and his spirit is cheered with the light of joy and consolation from the countenance of God.

This light is not like that of a taper which burns itself away into darkness, but like that of the morning sun, which shines brighter and brighter, till it blazes with meridian splendour.

Christians increase in knowledge, and grace, and happiness, in this world, and are perfected at death and the resurrection. Clouds may indeed obscure their brightness, and thick darkness may occasionally cover them. Their progress may be suspended, like that of the sun in the days of Joshua; or they may go backward, as the same glorious luminary did in the days of Hezekiah, but these

days of threatening aspect shall not extinguish their light. The Lord will make their light to spring forth speedily, and their darkness as the noonday. He will remove or turn back in their progress the causes that obstructed them, and he that began the good work in them will perform it until the day of Christ. Then shall they shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, for the Lord shall be to them an everlasting light. They shall see God as he is; they shall love him to the utmost extent of their capacity, and enjoy full satisfaction in the presence of him with whom is the fountain of life.

The wicked travel in darkness all their days. This is true, not only of those rebels against the light who abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, but of all who follow not him who is the light of the world, and live without that charity which is the distinguishing mark of the disciples of Christ*. Unbelievers may have some glimmerings of light in their minds and consciences, but these are not sufficient to keep them from walking in darkness; their eyes are evil, and their whole course of life is full of the darkness of ignorance and error, of misery and sin.

So great is this darkness, that they often stumble and wound themselves without knowing the cause of it, or even that they are wounded; and hence arises their ignorance of their need of, healing. The wise are not ignorant of Satan's devices, and when they fall they are instructed to avoid the stumbling-block by which their fall was occasioned; but it is the misery of fools walking in darkness, that being insensible to the means of their seduction into sin, they fall again and again by the same instruments of temptation. Instead of learning caution by their sins, one fall is the occasion of another, and perhaps a worse.

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

If, after all that our wise instructor says, we still chuse the path of evil men, let us hear the sentence of our Judge†.

This chapter is concluded with a short but comprehensive sum of practical directions; but before addressing them to us, the preacher again summons us to attend.

Ver. 20–22. When a preacher has truths of great importance to communicate, and sees many of his hearers asleep, he endeavours to rouse them up; so this wise man, knowing that we are dull of hearing, frequently renews his calls to us to hear and treasure up his words.

It is our duty to be frequently summoning the powers of our souls to attend with reverence to the words of God, our Maker and our Judge, and to pray to God that he may open our ears to discipline, and seal our instruction.

He that hath ears, let him hear. Let him place these necessary instructions before his eyes, that they may be a rule to his life, and let him lay them up in the midst of his heart, believing them to be the faithful sayings of God, and loving them with a cordial affection, because they are more precious than gold, and sweeter than honey from the comb.

The motives that call for our attention are exceedingly powerful. It is a father that speaks. The things which are spoken are of quickening and invigorating virtue. They are life to such as find them, and health not only to the soul but to the body; not to a particular part of it, but to all the flesh. A medicine effectual to the cure of a single member might soon enrich the inventor of it. Here is a medicine for all the flesh, and yet the physician that prescribes it without reward, finds so few willing to make use of it that he must proclaim its virtues again and again. He speaketh once and again, but man perceiveth it not. Are we then dead not only to every generous principle, but to every feeling of self-interest? Are life and death become matters of indifference to us? Is it all one in our eyes whether we enjoy health in our bodies and spirits, or pine away under the power of deadly distempers? Here is healing balm. Here is a physician of infinite value. Attend to the directions which he gives for the management of our whole life.

He that is born of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not. The Lord is our keeper; and in the history of Peter we are furnished with a melancholy proof, that unless he keep us, our care of ourselves will be unavailing; but if we commit the care of ourselves to God by a lively faith, it will not make us careless about ourselves, for God keeps us by his power through faith, by putting his fear into our hearts, and by exciting into activity those beneficial graces. If God keeps his fear alive in our hearts, we shall be powerfully disposed to guard our hearts and tongues, our eyes and feet from evil. We are here instructed by Solomon in what manner to manage this important affair.

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

We ought carefully to keep our tongues and hands, our eyes and feet; but above all, we ought to keep our hearts. This will be the best means for keeping all the rest, and without this, however well our external behaviour is regulated, we are but corrupt and false-hearted professors of religion*.

That our hearts may be kept, we must observe them with a watchful eye, and endeavour to be well acquainted with their leading principles and their inward workings. It is a shame for one who knows many things not to know himself, and the chief thing about ourselves to be known is the heart.

With a strong hand must the heart be ruled, and it ought to be our constant endeavour to subject to the word of God every imagination and reasoning, every opinion and thought, every inclination and affection. A neglected garden will not be so full of weeds, as a neglected soul of vain thoughts and exorbitant passions, hateful to God, and dangerous to our own happiness and peace.

The heart must also be guarded against those dangers that perpetually threaten our best interests. It is like a besieged city attacked by mighty and cunning enemies, and in danger of being betrayed by a treacherous party within.

It is a great encouragement to us in performing this difficult duty, that our labour shall not be in vain. Numerous are the promises made to us of assisting grace*, and if we suffer from a surprise of the enemy, Christ prays that our faith fail not.

The tongue is that member of the body which communicates most readily with the heart. For this reason it is to be regarded as its most active instrument, either for good or evil service; therefore, in the next place,—

Ver. 24. A wry mouth is a great deformity to the countenance; a perverse tongue is a more ugly blemish to the conversation.

The tongue is a world of iniquity, and needs a world of care to manage it. We must not only refrain from evil discourse, but put it far from us, avoiding every thought and feeling that might set an evil tongue in motion, and refusing to listen to evil speakers, that we may not be tempted by them to retail their infamous slanders.

It is a sad thing to think evil, for that corrupts ourselves; but if we have done foolishly in thinking evil, let us lay our hands upon our mouths, lest we corrupt others also.

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

The commandment of God must also give direction to our eyes.

Ver. 25. Sincere views in the course of our life to the great end of our being is a necessary part of religion, and without these there is no truth in our religious profession. The Pharisees abounded in prayers and giving of alms; but the praise of men was in their eye, and our Lord tells us that they had their reward. Their desire was to be seen and honoured by men; that they no doubt by their religion obtained, but it was all that they obtained by it. Jehu thought himself a very zealous man, but he took not heed to walk in the way of the Lord with all his heart; and it is testified of him, that he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam all his days. He did many good things, but his eyes looked aside to his honour and profit. All the splendid actions he performed, were but so many splendid sins.

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

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

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

Our actions must be all ordered in the word of God.

Ver. 26, 27. Consideration is one of those things in which man excels the irrational animals, and it is absolutely necessary in the religious life. If we shew not ourselves men, we can never please him, who made us wiser than the beasts of the earth! If we walk not circumspectly, we can with no propriety be numbered among the wise || .

Our actions will be weighed by God in an even balance at last, and it is necessary for us to weigh them now in the same balance. As we ought to compare our past actions with the word of God, in order to know what occasion there is for repentance; so in like manner those which we design to perform, that we may know whether it be lawful to perform them or not.

This is necessary for the direction and establishment of our ways. They that ponder not their paths are like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed; but in the hearts of such as receive and apply it to the cleansing of their way, the word of God has an establishing efficacy*.

Our ways ought to be stable and consistent. It is disgraceful for men to have their religion modelled and varied by their company and circumstances of life. Let us resemble, not the osier, but the oak. Our goodness, if like the morning cloud, is no goodness at all, for the path of the just is as the morning sun. To be unstedfast in God's covenant, is to be treacherous to God. The truly righteous man is faithful unto death. His frames of mind may vary, and his steps may sometimes be seduced from the straight way, but the good Spirit of God will restore his soul, and make him again to walk in the paths of righteousness. David slipped with his feet, and he once turned aside, yet could he say in truth that he had not wickedly departed from his God. He finished his course with joy, and received the crown of life.

It is dangerous to turn either to the left hand or the right from the way of God's commandments. On each side of the King's highway are those crooked paths, which are full of precipices and pitfalls. Men may be destroyed by being righteous, as well as by being

wicked overmuch. The Pharisees in the days of Christ's flesh, sinned as much by adding to God's law as by taking from it. To add to God's precepts, is a reflection upon the wisdom of the Lawgiver; to violate them, is an insult upon his authority. It commonly happens, that when men have the presumption to make some new articles of religion, they make compensation to themselves for their additional restraints on their liberty, by straitening the law of God in some other points, and thus make it on the whole much easier to flesh and blood, than it was made by God.

Our foot must be removed from all evil. Sin must not be indulged in thought, word, or action. No degree of this abominable thing is to be allowed in our practice. Saints have fallen into some of the greatest sins, but it is inconsistent with holiness to take liberty in the least*. Even the garment spotted by the flesh must be hated by us.

From this whole directory, we may see our need of pardoning mercy; for which of us can say, "We have made our hands clean, or kept our tongues from every evil thing?" But the blood of Jesus is a fountain opened to cleanse from all sin.

Without renewing grace, our labour in guarding our hearts, and restraining our tongues and feet from evil, will be as vain as to attempt washing an Ethiopian white. The old heart cannot be reformed, but God hath promised to give us a new heart, and to put a new spirit within us.

With our vigilance, faith and prayer must be joined†.

CHAPTER 5

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

Ver. 1, 2. The wisdom which Solomon teaches in this chapter cost him dear; but if we attend to his instructions, we shall have them at an easy rate. It may save us much bitter repentance, and preserve us from some of the most dreadful dangers; for it will teach us that spiritual subtilty and discretion, by which, like David, we shall become wiser than our enemies, and be enabled to escape their snares.

Attention will enable us to keep knowledge in our hearts, for a wanton imagination, ever dictating corrupt conversation to the lips, proves the beginning of ruin to many of the sons of men. They accustom themselves to speak of things not fit to be named among Christians; and from foolish talking, and impure jesting, by which they corrupt themselves and their companions, they proceed to the works of darkness.

When the word of God enters into our hearts, it will banish all pollution from the tongue, and dispose us to entertain our companions with that discourse which is good for the use of edifying. Thus our own hearts will be more deeply impressed, God will be honoured, and other men guarded against the snares of the destroyer.

Now it is of great importance for men, especially in their younger days, to furnish themselves with preservatives, from that word which is able to keep us, against the snares of the strange woman. Solomon had already warned us against her; but he is directed by God to do it a second time at greater length.

Ver. 3. She talks of nothing but love, and pleasure, and perpetual delights. To hear her, one would suppose that she possessed the most generous and disinterested spirit. Her tongue is taught by him who betrayed Eve to paint the vilest sin with the most beautiful colours, and to conceal all its deformity and danger; but it is the part of a reasonable creature to look beyond the present moment, and to consider the end of things, as well as their beginning. There is sweetness indeed in the mouth of this strange woman,

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

Ver. 5. She is on the highway to eternal ruin, and thither she is carrying those that listen to her bewitching voice. Her house is in the suburbs of the place of destruction, and her steps take hold of hell. David was in great fear when he said to his friend, "As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between me and death." But there is not even this small interval between the steps of the strange woman and hell. They already take hold of it. But may not persons, when they see this danger before their eyes, make a timely retreat to the paths of life? No. In most cases this is not to be expected.

Ver. 6. When men enter into a course of sin, they have no intention to be damned. They intend only to indulge themselves in the pleasures of sin for a time, and then to return to the paths of life. Millions of souls have been seduced to everlasting destruction by this one temptation of the old serpent,—"Ye shall not die although you eat; grace is free, and there is abundance of time to repent." The wise man gives what may repel this temptation, by letting us know how foolish it is for men to flatter themselves with the hope, that they shall be truly disposed and enabled to repent of their sin.

"Her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them." She can form her mode of behaviour into a hundred different shapes, to

entangle the heart of the lover. She spreads a thousand snares, and if you escape one of them, you will find yourself held fast by another. She knows well how to suit her words and behaviour to your present humour, to lull conscience asleep, and to spread before your eyes such a mist, as shall prevent you from being able to descry the paths of life. If you ever think of the danger of your course, and feel the necessity of changing it, she will urge you to spend a little time longer in the pleasures of sin. If her solicitations prevail, if you linger within the precincts of guilt, your resolutions are weakened, and your passions gain new strength. What is the awful result? The devil obtains more influence; conscience, forcibly repressed, ceases to reclaim with so loud a voice; God gives you up to the lusts of your own heart, and leaves you to chuse your own delusions. Attend, then, to the wisest of men, who instructs you to keep free of these dangerous temptations.

Ver. 7. If a father saw his son walking on the edge of a precipice, how greatly would he be alarmed! how loud would be his cries! And if the adventurous youth Still kept his dangerous post, he would fly to him, and try to force him from the brink of destruction. No less earnest is this kind instructor to save us from impending ruin. His words are cries; they have life and power in them. He is deaf who will not attend; he is stubborn who will not comply.

Ver. 8. But what need is there for so much preciseness? May not a man be permitted to talk with her, merely by way of amusement? Is it unlawful to drink a glass in her house, and to satisfy our curiosity by observing what passes in it, and by what arts she contrives to seduce those who are less established in virtue than ourselves? Yes; it is unlawful to have the least correspondence with her. By the requirements of the ceremonial law, no man was to be in the same house with a leper. The moral law forbids us to enter into a house full of the leprosy of sin. Her house is full of snares, and her hands are as bands. The devil glances in her smiles, and lurks in her dress and in her motions. He is there, ready to discharge at you his fiery darts of temptation; and to aid his efforts, you have much combustible matter about you. Dare you then promise yourself that the fire of licentious passion shall not be kindled, and blown up into a flame that you cannot quench. The devil will tempt you enough without your own help. To tempt is his business. As you love your life and your own soul, give him no assistance in the work of destruction.

Ver. 9–11. A good name is better than precious ointment, but of a good name this abominable sin is the ruin. The credit of David and of Solomon was greatly sunk by it. By it has the honour of thousands been irrecoverably lost.

Life is a great blessing, and may be regarded as the foundation of every earthly blessing. But unclean persons part with every thing that renders life worthy of the name, and in a literal sense, they often give their years unto the cruel. Their lives are lost in the pursuit of this sin by the just vengeance of God, by its native consequences, or by the accidents to which it exposes those who practise it.

And for what are these years given away? Did men generously part with their lives in the defence of their country, or for the sake of a generous friend, the loss would be amply compensated by honour, and by the pleasure of a good conscience. But how infatuated are they who give their years unto the cruel, who conceal a selfish and malignant heart under the mask of love! All unlawful love is hatred, and all tempters to it are cruel enemies to our happiness. Shall we then gratify inhuman enemies, at the expense of honour and life, and every thing dear to us?

These false friends and malicious enemies rob you of your honour and life, with as much eagerness as if they could enjoy these precious blessings of which you are deprived. Their real views, however, are directed to your money or estate, and why should men give away the fruits of their own labour and toil? or if they wish to be rid of them, why should strangers be filled with them, rather than friends?

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

Poverty is still more distressing when it is attended by weakness and disease, the natural consequences which Providence has annexed to those courses by which men dishonour God and themselves.

When the body is tortured, and the spirits dejected by the loathsome distempers which sin brings in its train, their conscience, which was formerly trampled under foot, rises up and regains its power, and inflicts severe vengeance for the injuries it has received. Then, O profligate sinner! thou wilt mourn—

Ver. 12–14. Religion has received many testimonies in its favour from enemies, whose hearts have at last forced them to curse the day when they were so mad, as to turn a deaf ear to its friendly voice.

The word of God read and preached, is God's appointed means of keeping or reclaiming men from sin, and in a Christian land the votaries of vice are rebels against the light. They are, to their own loss, fatally successful in fighting against that God who opposes their wickedness by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, written by prophets and apostles, and preached by the ministers of God.

It is not in vain for ministers, and parents, and tutors, to use means for acquainting young persons with the Scripture, and imprinting it upon their hearts. The confession of profligates, when arrived at the end of their career, makes it evident, that if any thing would have proved effectual to preserve them from ruin, it would have been the instructions and reproofs of teachers. Such means have no doubt been the instruments of preserving many, and reclaiming some.

The confession of the wretch tortured by his conscience, is not introduced by the inspired sage as the humble confession of a penitent, who looks for pardon through the merits of Christ. How greatly are they deluded who think that misery can produce true

repentance, or that sorrow pressed out of the soul by distress of body and anguish of conscience, are signs of real grace! Persons may cry out of their folly, and warn others, and beg others to pray for them; and yet, like Simon Magus, remain all the while in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.

Sinners who will not comply with the calls of God, may now make them the object of their scorn; but at the latter end, when conscience shall preach with a voice louder than any minister, sorrow shall be their inevitable portion. Then, in the breasts of desperate sinners, despised admonitions shall burn like raging fire. Then shall multitudes of iniquities, once overlooked, present themselves like so many dismal apparitions to the eyes of the sinner, and make him a terror to himself.

The pleasure derived from the present moment is nothing. Our enjoyment is derived from the recollection of the past, or from the prospect of what is to come. Sensualists cannot flatter themselves so grossly, as to fetch any pleasure from that part of life which they have already spent, but their hopes are ever on the wing to seize on anticipated pleasure. It frequently happens, that when their course is run, and hope can no longer be indulged, their attention is forced back on the scenes of life, through which they have already passed. When in this manner they are brought to recollect the numberless sins, to the commission of which their various dispositions have led them, and to forebode the punishments that await them, their souls are convulsed with remorse, and horror takes full possession of them: "Wretched creatures that we are! Our impetuous passions have hurried us into all wickednesses, those only excepted which our powers were too feeble and narrow to add to the rest. Would to God we had been brutes, or could yet have our portion with them, to be turned for ever into earth and rottenness! O that we had been heathens, and had never heard the gospel of Christ, and the law of the Most Holy! Our abominable iniquities are dreadfully aggravated by the opportunities we have had of being present in the assemblies of Zion, and receiving the instructions and reproofs of life. Instead of deriving benefit from the ordinances of God's worship and the communion of saints, we have exposed ourselves to the reproach of the whole assembly of the pious. By our example we have grieved some, and caused others to stumble. Our hell must be heated seven times more than the hell of heathens!"

The words in the 14th verse may be translated, In a moment I am in all evil, &c. 'I am suddenly punished with all the plagues threatened by the ministers of God, and made a spectacle of misery and horror to the whole congregation.' It is an aggravation of that misery which is the fruit of a man's own ways, when publicity is one of its attendant circumstances*.

They who will not believe the threatenings of God shall feel them. There are no free-thinkers in hell, and but few on a death-bed. How happy are they who are preserved by the grace of God from laying up treasures of wrath against the last days, and planting thorns to line their death-bed pillows!

To avoid uncleanness, let every man have his own wife, and let him love her as himself. This remedy against such a vice Solomon illustrates in a beautiful allegory.

Ver. 15–19. Children are in the language of Scripture sometimes compared to waters*. We find Solomon in this passage comparing both wife and children to fountains; for there is as great a difference between the joys of lawful and unlawful love, as there is between the waters of a clear spring, and those which are drunk out of an impure and poisonous stream.

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

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

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

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

This cordial love in the married state, will produce pleasures far sweeter than were ever found in unlawful love; and what chiefly recommends them is, that they have no sting attending them, and give no offence to God, our Witness and our Judge.

Ver. 20, 21. Is it a pleasure to men to affront their Judge, and to provoke the vengeance of an Almighty arm? Will they prefer these poor, and spiritless, and unsatisfying pleasures which he forbids, to those pure delights which are licensed by his goodness? Remember, sinners, that God is present in your close retreats of wickedness! You see him not, because you are blind, but your stupidity cannot banish an omnipresent Deity; your bars and bolts cannot exclude him who fills heaven and earth. Darkness hideth not from him of whom it is said, "The day is thine, the night also is thine." Why should men dare to affront Jehovah, their Maker and their Judge, by doing that in his presence, which they would be ashamed to do in the presence of a child? God will not be mocked.

He will punish the wanton glance, and the lascivious thought. Where, then, shall they appear who indulge themselves in acts of criminality? Will a thief steal in the presence of the judge, and yet hope to escape vengeance? And shall abandoned sinners flatter themselves with the thought of escaping the damnation of hell, from Him who will come to judgment, and will be a swift witness against adulterers*?

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

Ver. 22. Sinners will find, when too late, if wonderful mercy prevent not, that the sorrow which springs from self-love, is a very different thing from repentance, and that it is not so easy a matter as the devil told them, to venture their salvation in the hands of a Redeemer. They look upon saints as slaves who live an unpleasant life, but time will convince them, since admonition cannot, that themselves are the slaves, bound in the strongest and most ignominious chains. They are fettered by vicious affections, and they have neither power nor will to assert their liberty. The cords of their own sins shall hold them fast, till they are cast into that prison from whence there is no release.

This is a wretched condition, but they may thank themselves. Their own hands forged the chains which are rivetted upon them. They refused that glorious liberty proclaimed to them in the word of Christ.

The sinner flattered himself that he did not refuse redemption, he only delayed the acceptance of it. But such delays are refusals in God's estimation. To the sinner they are for the most part fraught with ruin.

Ver. 23. He despised instruction during life, and he shall die without it. He expected, that when his mortal career should draw near its close, good ministers should attend him and pray with him. He shall either want that comfort, or it is to be feared that it will not be blessed to him. None but God can awaken a sleeping and stupified conscience; and when it is awakened, its clamours drown the voice of him who says, "Believe in Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

In his amazing folly, he goes astray in his crooked ways, and is led forth in the first rank of the workers of iniquity*.

Let those who are not yet tainted by this vice bless God, and let them watch and pray. Let the guilty tremble and mourn; yet despair not. The arm that rescued Solomon is not weakened. The blood that cleansed the Corinthian whoremongers has lost none of its virtue.

CHAPTER 6

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

The first five verses contain a warning against suretiship.

Ver. 1, 2. God graciously directs our temporal affairs by his providence, and condescends, in his word, to give us instructions concerning them. If we regard not these, we need not be surprised though his providence convince us, by dear-bought experience, of our folly and sin.

He forbids us to become surety, even for a friend, (except for some weighty reason,) and to strike hands with a stranger, in token of our becoming bound for our friend's debts. Men who think only of the present time, are generally too rash in undertaking; but they ought to remember, that the time to come is before them, and will be present time when the time now present is past. If the money were to be paid just now, they would hesitate and deliberate before acting, lest they should wrong their families; but Solomon tells them, that men may ensnare and entangle themselves with the words of their mouths, as well as with the works of their hands.

This consideration may alarm those who have already implicated themselves by such engagements. This kind teacher, therefore, puts them on a plan to get free.

Ver. 3. By rash suretiship, you put yourself into the power, not only of the creditor, but of the debtor, for whom you are bound. You lie at his mercy. He has it in his power to make you smart severely for your foolish kindness to him. The world is full of complaints about ungrateful men, who have basely abused, to the prejudice of their benefactors, the goodness they have experienced. Endeavour, therefore, by the humblest behaviour toward your friend, to induce him to take the proper steps to bring you out of your present embarrassed situation; for if you peevishly reflect on him as the means of bringing you into it, he may be provoked to use his advantage to your loss.

The wise man is very urgent with his scholars to take this step.

Ver. 4, 5. A roe and a bird are creatures destitute of reason, yet when entrapped by the arts of the sportsman, they will try every method of escape, and make no delay in using every effort for regaining their freedom. May not equal prudence and attention to their own interests, be expected from reasonable creatures!

But what is the great importance of this precept, that Solomon will not allow his disciple to rest till he is free from these rash engagements? Has this precept any connection with our spiritual interest? It has. It is a part of the eighth commandment, and though men regard it rather as a loss than a sin to endanger their outward estate, it is both a sin and a temptation. Men who once seemed upright in their dealings, have brought reproach upon religion, by living and dying in other men's debt, and by having recourse to unjustifiable methods, suggested by distress, to relieve themselves.

The effect of suretiship, even with the most upright men, has often proved hurtful to their souls, embittering their days, and unfitting

them for the cheerful services of religion. It has not unfrequently rendered them unable to perform those services to God and to his church, for the sake of which a competency of the good things of life is to be valued. We are the servants of Christ, and must not disqualify ourselves for his service, by making ourselves needlessly the servants of men.

The precept here given may remind us, how foolish it is for us to make ourselves debtors to divine justice, to please any friend in the world. When one tempts you to commit any sin, however small, consider whether it would be wise in you to make yourselves debtors even to man on his account.

As we are all in debt to God, let us give no sleep to our eyes, till we implore his mercy. How powerful must be that lethargy which closes in sleep eyes that shall awake in hell, if another day of life is not granted by the abused long-suffering of God! We may be ashamed to humble ourselves to our friends, or our applications to them may be fruitless. But God is equally glorious in majesty and mercy. He delights in forgiving thousands of talents.

The wise man next proceeds to warn us against the vice of sluggishness, to which he was a constant enemy.

Ver. 6. God has taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven. But the sluggard equals not in wisdom the least of insects. He complains that he is not able to work, but has he less strength than an emmet? "The ants, (says another wise man), are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;" they therefore shall be his judges.

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

Other creatures are teachers to us as well as the ant. Look on the whole brutal creation, O atheist! and confess their Maker. Go to the oxen and the asses, O unthankful man! and be wise to acknowledge thy Benefactor. Consider the fowls of the air, ye that are of little faith, and trust the providence of God!

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

Ver. 7, 8. The bees are a very industrious people, but they have a queen to require their labour, and if she dies they will work no more. The ant has no guide to set her an example, no overseer to inspect her work, no ruler to exact her task; and yet she neglects not a day in summer, when the roads are clean and the sky clear; or in harvest, when the grain can be had in plenty. She improves every opportunity to store up provisions, that she may spend in comfort the days of cold and scarcity. And what is the result of all her toil? In winter she enjoys plenty, when other creatures are pinched with poverty, or perish with cold and hunger.

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

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

There are sluggards who bring misery upon themselves in this world. There are far more who bring eternal misery upon their souls, by neglecting the happy opportunities afforded them by the long-suffering of the Lord, for securing their everlasting interests. They see many days of the Son of man, and enjoy the beams of the Sun of righteousness. They are called with a loud voice to arise and shine, but they are less concerned about an everlasting duration of happiness or misery, than the despised ant about the provisions of a few months. How will they mourn at the last, and say, "The summer is past, and the harvest is ended, and we are not saved!"

The sluggard will not awake from his sleep to go and learn wisdom, but the wise man goes to him to break his slumbers.

Ver. 9. It is a great waste of time, to spend in sleep more hours than are necessary. Yet from the practice of how many does it appear, that they have adopted the maxim of the Indians,—That rest is better than work, and lying better than sitting, and sleeping better than waking, and death better than life!

It is a shame for men to give up to sleep a third part of their time, but it is not less so to spend our waking hours in doing nothing, or in doing what is as unprofitable. All the world would despise a man who should keep his bed from morning till night, though in the possession of perfect health; but in what respect is he better employed, who trifles away in idleness every hour of the day? He is still worse, for want of employment and weariness of life will lead him to seek relief in impertinent and mischievous talk, or in sensual indulgences, or in meddling with the matters of others.

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

he should arise and walk, he pleads hard for a little delay.

Ver. 10. He forms some faint resolutions to awake, and it is only a short respite from that torment that he begs—"a little sleep." If that is too much—"a little slumber;" or if even that cannot be granted, "a little folding of the hands to sleep," is but a moderate request.

The sluggard himself cannot vindicate his sloth, and is resolved to shake it off, only he will not do it presently. From time to time he defers the hated reformation, and what is the consequence?

Ver. 11. The house of the sluggard is the haunt of poverty, and it comes not like an invited guest, whose visit is expected, but like a traveller, whose approach is unforeseen. It comes like an armed man, and gains an easy victory over the naked and slumbering sluggard. Had he been awake and busy, he might easily have defended himself against its assaults.

Sleep, sloth, and delay, are the thieves of time. By them vigorous bodies have been often enervated, shining talents covered with rust, estates melted into nothing; and what is a thousand times worse, millions of souls have been betrayed into perdition. The Spirit of God says, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice." The sluggard is not at leisure to-day, but he will hear it to-morrow. To-morrow comes, but the cause of this delay still exists. A thousand to-morrows pass away, and the sluggard is never awakened to wisdom. At last the king of terrors seizes him with irresistible violence, and hurries him to that place of darkness where there is no work, nor device, nor counsel. The soul must then appear before the awful Judge; and what excuse can be made for these delays of complying with the voice of the great God? If a king were to call us to come to him, in order to receive some great favour at his hands, we surely would not shew so little respect to royalty, and so little regard to our own interest, as to defer from day to day compliance with the kind invitation. Is the majesty of earthly princes so much revered by us? Yet to the majesty of heaven's great Lord, it bears only the same proportion that a spark does to the sun.

The idle man is bad, but the mischievous man is still worse; but indeed it generally happens, that he who is enslaved by the one of these vices, becomes in process of time the slave of the other also.

Ver. 12–15. The mischievous person casts off the yoke of God, but he remains the willing and active servant of the devil. He rebels against God beyond his might, and beyond nature presses the members of his body into the service of iniquity. He not only speaks, but walks with a froward tongue, making a constant trade of slandering his neighbours, and spreading dissension. His tongue is a world of iniquity, and yet it does not serve him sufficiently for expressing the wickedness of his heart. To supply its defects, therefore, he makes artificial tongues of his eyes, his fingers, and his feet. By winking with his eyes, by stamping with his feet, and by pointing with his fingers, he shews the scorn and the malice which he bears towards others, and conveys his instructions to his accomplices in wickedness.

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

What will be the end of a fiend like this? He shall, while dreaming of success in his hellish plans, fall a prey to some unexpected calamity. He may possibly flatter himself with the intention of repenting of his misdeeds, before called to that war in which there is no discharge; but he is suddenly and irremediably broken. He lived like a devil clothed with flesh, and his soul shall be chased out of his body, to dwell with its kindred devils. He that does evil to others, does a thousand times greater hurt to himself.

O my soul! come not thou into the secret of such creatures. Blessed be God, who checks that corruption which abounds in the hearts of men, and makes the earth a habitable world. Who could live an hour in peace, if God did not provide for our safety, by his all-governing providence? To this must our safety be all ascribed, since evil spirits, numerous and crafty, constantly traverse our earth, and men whose hearts are filled with all iniquity, abound on the face of it*.

The mischievous man is a compound of vices abhorred by the Lord.

Ver. 16–19. Every sin is hateful to God. The sins enumerated in this passage are not mentioned, because there are not others as hateful to God, but because they are nearly allied to that vice which had been last reprobated by the wise man, and are generally found in the character of the mischievous person. They are all abhorred by him who is the guardian of his creatures, and the avenger of injuries done to his saints.

Pride leads the van of this troop of iniquities. Its palace is the heart, but its throne is erected in the eye, whence it looks with disdain upon men, and lours defiance towards Heaven. The proud man is not only a rebel to God, but a usurper of his dignity. He would be a God to men, but the living and true God looks upon him with contempt and indignation, and spurns him into hell*.

A lying tongue is abhorred by men, because it tends to the dissolution of society. The devil was a liar from the beginning, and is the father of lies. It is by means of lying that this adversary of man carries on his work. The God of truth hates liars. He has barred the gates of heaven fast against them, for none of them are his people†.

Murder is a crime against which the first law enacted after the fall was passed‡. Providence seldom suffers it to escape unpunished in this world. Mighty tyrants, who shed the blood of the innocent without fear of human vengeance, escape not punishment from the King of nations. The wicked Emperors of Rome; and many persecuting and bloody kings, are instances of this truth. They shed the blood of men, and God gave them blood to drink. That murder which lies hidden in the heart, or breaks forth only in the tongue, escapes not the eye and the vengeance of the Almighty*.

The first motions of sin in the hearts of men are offensive to God. How greatly then must he abhor that heart, which employs itself in contriving wickedness, and forms deliberate purposes of sin! A royal chamber, filled, like that of Pharaoh, with frogs and vermin, is

not so loathsome as a human heart, that should be the residence of God, filled with evil imaginations and hellish contrivances. It may well be called, like Babylon in ruins, a habitation of devils, and a hold of every unclean and foul spirit.

Sin is bad enough when men venture upon it with reluctance and fear, but when they are cheerful in the practice of it, and thus run swiftly to mischief, it is a sign that they are veterans in the devil's army, and have in a great degree conquered their consciences. The feet of such transgressors shall slide in due time, for the things that shall come upon them make greater haste than their feet can possibly do, either to do evil, or to escape the punishment which is their due.

A false witness that speaketh lies, is the most dangerous pest of human society. Who can insure any man's life, or fortune, or character against his tongue, which is like a two-edged sword, or against his throat, which is an open sepulchre, to swallow up every thing dear to men? But the God whose awful name is profaned by these enemies of mankind, holds them in abhorrence, and will by no means permit them to escape punishment†.

The sowers of discord among brethren, are worse than those who set fire to the houses of their neighbours. They kindle flames which burn with unrelenting fury, and set on fire families and provinces, and sometimes even nations themselves. They not only sin, but, like Jeroboam the son of Nebat, they cause multitudes to sin, destroying that charity which is the soul of every commandment, and disseminating those corrupt passions, which prove incentives to all the works of mischief. The God whose commandments are all included in love, and who sent his Son to be our peace, cannot but abhor these sons of Belial. Surely he will make their mischiefs to recoil with an awful vengeance upon their own heads.

The wise man proceeds again to warn us against the snares of the strange woman; but first he renews his call to attend to those instructions which are the only effectual preventives from her dangerous artifices.

Ver. 20–21. The inspired writer takes it for granted, that the instructions of parents will correspond with the law of God. Can it be supposed that parents will give stones instead of bread, or serpents instead of wholesome nourishment, to their children? If they do, they are not to be obeyed, for they act not as parents, but as enemies.

The children of Jonadab denied themselves, for many generations, some of the pleasures of the land of Canaan. This they did from a regard to the advice of their progenitor. But when the commands of our earthly parents only enforce those laws of our heavenly Father which are designed for our own benefit, every motive of interest and duty, whether divine or human, concurs to enforce our obedience.

These laws ought to be bound continually upon our hearts, that they may be ever present to our souls. The ancient Israelites wore them on their garments, but let us wear them on our hearts, and tie them about our necks as the most precious ornament.

We must read the instructions of God, and hear the good instructions of men, with attention. We must transcribe them into our hearts, and meditate upon them, and make them the guide of our lives. Hereby much good shall come unto us.

Ver. 22. We derive much enjoyment and security from having a companion who can entertain us with agreeable conversation, direct us in doubtful paths, and protect us from impending dangers. All these valuable purposes are served by the word of God.

When we walk, it will be our guide, and enable us to avoid every bad step. It will lead us in safety to the land of uprightness, at which none can arrive, who walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of their flesh and their mind*.

When we sleep, it will keep us. There is nothing improbable in supposing that foolish and distressing dreams may be prevented, by the sweet composure which it imparts to the spirit. But be this as it may, we know well that the providence of God will perform the promises of the word of God. By it we shall be preserved from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and from the malicious snares of those invisible enemies who wake when we sleep, and who, when not checked by the power of God, have methods of disquieting our minds and destroying our peace in the season of rest. Job's fancy was harassed by the devil in his sleep. That, however, was an extraordinary case, and even then the rage of that cruel enemy was under restraints.

The word of God will be an entertaining and useful companion to us, when we awake from sleep. It will talk to us of the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the grace of our Redeemer. It will give us the best advices about the business of the day, and teach us to order every step with discretion. If we cannot sleep in the night, it will suggest meditations far more pleasant to our minds, than is refreshing sleep to the body of the worn-out labourer*.

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

Ver. 23. It is necessary to have a lamp, when one is in a dark place. The law of God is a lamp to dispel the darkness of this world, and to guide our steps in safety. But as it may be compared to a lamp, because it gives us light in the night, so also to the sun, because it is the light of the world. Christ, who is the Sun of righteousness, shines upon us by the word of his grace, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of every useful truth, and guiding us in safety to a better world. If we shut our eyes on this light, we walk in darkness; but those who walk under its beams, have the light of Heaven shining on their paths. The places that want it, are the dark places of the world; and the souls that receive not the rays of this luminary, are but dungeons in which the day-star has not risen.

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

Ver. 24. The insinuating language of a bad woman is nothing but flattery. She professes the fondest love, but she designs the gratification of her own detestable passions, and the serving of her interests, at the expence of what is most valuable to her fond admirer. Her tongue is full of falsehood. By her fair speeches the unwary youth, whom she wishes to seduce, is in great danger of being entangled, and is therefore in great need of some effectual preservative. Now, the only effectual preservative against the dangers of temptation is the word of God. A good education, a sense of honour, the principle of self-interest,—may have some efficacy for this end; but the great means blessed by God for this purpose is his own word, which is the sword of the Spirit, by which he enables us effectually to resist and baffle, not only flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. Every part of the word of God serves to promote purity in all its branches. No passages of it are more effectual to preserve us from fleshly lusts, than the warnings of Paul to the Corinthians*, and those of Solomon in various parts of this book.

Solomon knew well from experience, that it is extremely dangerous to give sin indulgence in the heart, though we design not to practise it. He therefore warns us against lusting after the beauty of the strange woman in our heart.

Ver. 25. The beauty that sparkles in the eye of a virtuous woman is a lovely ornament. The beauty of the strange woman is a temptation to the unwise, for to others it appears like a beautiful garment on a body covered with loathsome sores, or a jewel of gold in a swine's snout.

The lust of the heart is adultery in the sight of God, and it were better to have our eyes plucked out, than to have our hearts inflamed with lust*. But impure imaginations do not ordinarily rest in quiet. They push on the man that harbours them, to outward acts of sin. When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth misery.

Ver. 26. Poverty is the object almost of horror to the greater part of men. The desire of removing or preventing it, is the grand spring which keeps the world constantly in motion. But the adulterer drives on furiously towards it, for though as much afraid of it as other men, he is hurried along in his wild career by tyrannizing passions, that have blinded his eyes, and taken possession of his soul to such a degree, that he must have them gratified, though ruin be the inevitable consequence†.

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

Ver. 27–29. Sodom and Gomorrah are standing illustrations of this awful truth. You say, “The burning of these cities was a strange act, scarcely any thing similar to it has happened since.” But God hath set forth these cities as an example, making them to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire*; and impenitent sinners will find at the last, that they who despised the words of Solomon, and of Christ himself, shall suffer more severely than the cities of the plain, whose iniquities were not so terribly aggravated, by despised means of instruction and reformation.

Stealing is a detested sin, and exposes men to severe punishment; but it is much less heinous than adultery, nor will the punishment of it be so great.

Ver. 30–35. Theft is a sin deservedly abhorred, and they who are guilty of it expose themselves to contempt and indignation. Yet when necessity tempts a man to steal, he is the object of pity rather than of scorn. No necessity can excuse any sin, but apparent necessity may extenuate it. This plea, however, cannot be urged to palliate the crime of adultery, which is always the effect of a wicked disposition, and an impure imagination.

When a man steals, it is perhaps to satisfy his soul, and to appease the cravings of hunger, which is an appetite too fierce for human nature to oppose. But unclean actions are the gratifications of brutal lust, and tend not to the preservation, but to the destruction of the life.

Yet a thief must suffer, although he is pitied when hunger urges him on to steal. He shall restore manifold, according to the law; and if he cannot make the ample restitution required, he must give all the substance of his house. How then does the adulterer hope to escape a much more grievous punishment, for a crime which can admit of no reparation? A thief may steal for want of bread, but the adulterer sins because he has no understanding. He exposes himself to a deadly wound from a jealous husband, or an avenging magistrate. He contracts a blot upon his name which adheres to it indelibly, and spreads itself even to his children*. He may give all the substance of his house to the man whom he has injured, but it will not be accepted as an atonement for his life; for a fire of jealousy is kindled, which can be quenched only in his blood.

This argument may be supposed to have little weight among us, who punish theft more severely than adultery. But when crimes that deserve death escape punishment from men, God, the King of all nations, punishes them by his providence, and sometimes with greater severity, because his earthly ministers neglect to shew his resentment of them. Hophni and Phineas, Amnon and Absalom, gained nothing by the indulgence of their fond parents. David himself smarted severely under the rod for this sin, though divine mercy exempted him from death. Earthly magistrates often punish thieves and highwaymen more severely than adulterers, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. We may without presumption suppose, that even in this world he often brings them to a gibbet, by suffering them to imbrue their hands in blood, or to commit other capital crimes. The Bible assures us, that God often punishes one sin, by permitting the transgressor to fall into another; and particularly, that God has given up men to uncleanness, for the indignities they have done to his own name*, and along with it, to other iniquities that bring vengeance in their train†.

If these sinners escape outward punishment, let them remember how terrible that destruction is, which God has designed for them,

and how impossible it will be to escape from the Judge of all. They complain that they cannot extinguish their burning lusts, but it shall be more impossible to extinguish the fire that shall never be quenched†.

CHAPTER 7

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

We have in this chapter an affecting illustration of the danger of youthful lusts. The mode of instruction to which our teacher in the present instance has recourse, is the narration of a piece of history or parable, (for it matters not which), of the most instructive kind. Will any one dare to venture on temptations that lead to impurity, after Solomon has set before his eyes in so lively a manner, the danger of so much as going near the harlot's house? Then is he as inexcusable as the man who dances on the brink of a precipice, when he has just seen another, who ventured to display his courage in the same manner, fall headlong from his place, and dashed to pieces on the rocks below, perish the sad victim of his own rashness and folly.

The danger of vicious courses should mightily recommend to us the word of God, which is able to keep us from falling*, and to which self-ruined sinners give testimony, when they must acknowledge too late, that their misery began in their disregard to that blessed book. What would not men give for an antidote that could preserve them from every bodily disease? If any person, possessed of such a medicine, were to perish by some fatal distemper, in consequence of neglecting to have recourse to it, surely his fate would excite no commiseration.

Ver. 1–5. When a man has got possession of some precious jewel, he will deposit it in some place secured from the depredations of thieves. The words of God are infinitely more precious than diamonds, and ought to be laid up in our hearts, and kept with constant diligence and caution. They are to be kept as our life, for we are but dead men if we lose them, and they are the effectual instruments by which God is pleased to quicken men to newness of life, and to nourish, and strengthen, and preserve their souls. Without them, the life of the body is no better than a dream. It is our advantage that God has in view, in furnishing us with a rule of conduct. "Be holy," is the sum of the whole law; and its excellency is, that it is as good as it is holy and just. Those, therefore, who neglect it, regard lying vanities, and despise their own mercy.

God expresses that regard which he has for his people, and that compassionate care which he exercises over them, by affirming that he who touches them touches the apple of his eye. No less regard is certainly due on our part to that divine word of his, without which our souls must remain in darkness. The eye is a most precious member, and the apple of the eye is its most precious part. The Author of the body has guarded that part of it with a natural fence, and no less vigilance is exercised by us in its protection. We will not, if possible, permit the smallest mote to fall into it. With equal care ought we to observe the law of God, and to avoid every temptation which might induce us in the smallest degree to transgress its commandments*.

The law is to be fixed as a ring upon our fingers, that it may constantly present itself to our view, and deeply impress our hearts. These are the living tables, on which the statutes of the Lord are to be inscribed, that every inward power may be wrought into a suitableness unto them†.

We take great pleasure in the society of amiable friends. Wisdom ought to be our most beloved friend, and our constant companion. With this best of friends let us daily converse, and thus shall we be preserved from the danger of infectious company, and the allurements of seducers to vice. Those who love understanding, and call wisdom their sister, are acknowledged by our Saviour himself as his dearest relations*.

When we familiarize ourselves to wisdom, and treat her as a kinswoman, we shall find ourselves great gainers by it. She will preserve us from the strange woman, and from her flatteries. The charms of wisdom will sink her beauty into deformity. The music of wisdom's voice will render us deaf to the most inviting eloquence of her who would tempt us to forget the covenant of our God. Her lips drop as a honey-comb, but wisdom assures us that her end is bitter as wormwood†.

But those who reject wisdom, will find this tempter too cunning for them. Of this Solomon gives us a proof from his own observation. He was a wise observer of men and manners, and the result of his observation, as well as the wisdom which he learned by experience, he has communicated for our caution and instruction.

Ver. 6–10. Though this story were to be considered as a parable, the instruction it contains is grounded on the observation of Solomon. He was, no doubt, acquainted with many who owed their ruin to the arts which are here described.

Persons of every age, and sex, and condition, ought to watch against the temptations incident to their particular situations, for the great master of deceit knows how to suit his temptations to the different circumstances of men. Young persons, whose passions are warm and whose experience is little, are easily seduced into those sins which gratify the lusts of the flesh. The man whom Solomon

observed going towards the house of the strange woman, was a young man. He was void of understanding, for he had not supplied the want of experience on his own part, by the instructions of the aged, or of the word of God. If young men would be prevailed on to read and study the Book of Proverbs, they would not deserve to be classed among the simple ones; for it gives subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

This young man had no intention to pollute his body with acts of wickedness, (ver. 21.), but in the evening he wished to have a little amusement; and, forgetful of the danger of going near the dwellings of the wicked, he went in the way that leads to the harlot's house. We ought daily to pray that we may be preserved from running into temptation; for if we invite our enemies to spread their snares for us, how can we expect to escape?

The time of work was over; and for the purpose of recruiting our spirits, a little evening's relaxation is allowable. Those amusements, however, that lead us into the company of the wicked, are exceedingly dangerous. In our evening walks, let us avoid the places where we are likely to meet with devils, possessed indeed of human shapes, but not of human hearts. Isaac goes out at the evening-tide, to converse with himself and his God, and God sends him a virtuous wife. This poor simpleton goes out to walk in the purlieu of vice, and, behold, he meets with a common harlot, dressed out with that gaudiness of attire which befitted her wicked dispositions; for sometimes the dress of the female is like the sign-post hung out before the house, telling what is within. Her heart was subtle, for she possessed the art as well as the venom of the old serpent. Her manners accorded with her dress and her heart.

Ver. 11, 12. Her obstreperous tongue is the token of her imperious and stubborn spirit. She loves to reign, and cannot brook subjection to the guide of her youth; thus exemplifying a spirit completely opposite to those godly women who call their husbands lord. But clamorous and stubborn as she is at home, (where indeed she is seldom to be found), she has the art, when she comes abroad, to fashion her speech to her designs. With soothing words and insinuating flattery, she seduces the unhappy victim of her wiles. She is fierce, like a tiger, but when a purpose is to be gained, can assume all the meekness of a lamb.

She hates her own house, because she abhors useful labour, and holds her husband in detestation; but she is still roaming about those places where she may meet unwary passengers. Like a wild beast of the desert, she constantly prowls about those places where a prey may be expected.

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

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

Ver. 13–20. Modesty is the lovely ornament of the female sex, and nothing can be more hateful than a woman that hath renounced it. When this fence of virtue is demolished, profligacy is the natural and unavoidable consequence.

The words and the behaviour of this abandoned creature are alike shameless. Yet, with marvellous inconsistency, she pretends to a sense of religion. The feast which she intends for her lover, is that part of the peace-offerings which, according to the law, she had reserved for herself and her friends, after paying her vows to the Lord. It is strange to tell, and yet certainly true, that there are persons who endeavour to join together the service of God and Belial. They must have their passions gratified, and in all other things they will be obedient to the dictates of conscience. But those who think that they may sometimes eat a little poison, provided they take wholesome food at other times, and yet live and enjoy tolerable health, are not more foolish. God is glorious in shewing mercy to sinners, but he will shew none to sin*.

She pretends a special and tender regard for this miserable youth, whom she wishes to draw into her snares, and has the address to avail herself of an accidental meeting for the proof of it. Words are very cheap, and the warmest professions of kindness are for the most part the most insincere. The old serpent made use of this artifice to deceive our common mother. There is nothing that renders the young a more easy prey to deceivers, than their inexperience of the emptiness of the professions of many.

This abandoned woman artfully entangles the heart of the simple youth, by promising him every thing that can afford delight to any of his senses. She will entertain him with the delicate provision of which feasts were made, after performing the ceremonies of religion. His eyes shall be entertained with the sight of furniture, equally valuable for its materials and workmanship. The bed is decked with the finest linen, and the whole house perfumed with odours, emitted by the most fragrant herbs. All these pleasures, she informs him, may be enjoyed in the most perfect security, for the goodman (she takes care not to call him husband,) is gone far from home; and it is certain that he will not return till the time appointed, for he has a great deal of business to transact, and has carried a great deal of money with him, to bear his expences, and to employ in trade.

Beware of those sins that are represented to you as pleasant sins. They are more dangerous than others, because they most easily gain the heart, and most powerfully guard it against repentance. Eve found that the pleasure of forbidden fruit was only an introduction to horror and remorse.

Our hearts must be guarded against the admission of sin, by stronger motives than the fear of detection and disgrace; for artful solicitors to evil, will easily baffle such restraints as these. Joseph might have expected his master's favour by complying with the desires of his mistress, but the motive that induced him to decline her company was irresistible,—“How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

But the unhappy subject of the wise man's story was not a Joseph.

Ver. 21. There is a force in words, which it is often almost impossible to resist. Good words have a wonderful virtue in them to work upon the mind, and a great part of the good which we are called to do in the world, is to be accomplished by means of that little member—the tongue. But corrupt minds are often found to have greater influence in persuading men to sin, because human nature

is depraved, and needs only a temptation to draw men to the practice of the worst of evils.

No words have greater force in them to persuade men to sin, than the flatteries of the strange woman; and therefore the apostle Paul, who directs us to strive against sin, calls loudly to us to flee youthful lusts. Such lusts can scarcely be conquered but by flight, because the temptations to them, when they meet with a simple mind and an impure heart, are like sparks of fire lighting upon stubble fully dry.

The force that is in the tongue of the strange woman, will not excuse the deluded youth; for his yielding to her is to be attributed to the depravity of his own heart, which inclines him to prefer the advice of a bad woman, to the counsels of the Supreme and Eternal Wisdom. When a thief is arraigned before a magistrate, he is not suffered to escape punishment, because it appears that he had such a propensity to steal, that he could not find in his heart to resist the influence of a temptation.

Ver. 22, 23. Poor deluded creature! The cursed enchantress persuaded him that she would conduct him to a paradise; but he soon finds his feet entangled in the stocks, and bound with fetters of iron. He is more brutish than the ox, which will not without reluctance go to the place of slaughter, but must be forced and goaded onward by its driver. He is sillier than a bird, which will not sit to be shot, but flies from the appearance of danger: Whereas he wilfully sets himself up as a mark for the arrows of justice. A bird may indeed fly into the snare, for it has not the gift of reason; but for men to hasten into a snare, there is no excuse. God hath made them wiser than the fowls of heaven.

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

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

Ver. 24, 25. Let us give the most earnest heed to these calls, that are addressed to us with such urgent and repeated importunity, and let us guard our hearts and ways with all diligence. Indulgence given to any impure imagination, is an indication of a sensual heart, and an introduction to a licentious behaviour, which will in all probability lead to a miserable end.

Ver. 26, 27. When but one of the disciples was to betray Christ, all of them were anxious lest they should fall into such a horrid sin. When not a small number, but multitudes, have fallen by the force of temptations to impurity, and when the same depraved disposition continues in men, and the same temptations expose them to danger, shall we not fear, and depart from evil?

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

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

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

CHAPTER 8

THE grand question in this chapter is, What are we to understand by that wisdom which is here introduced, recommending her instructions to us? The fear of the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom*. But the wisdom that speaks in this passage appears to be a person; and it is disputed whether we are to understand it of Christ, the great Fountain of wisdom, or of the noble quality of wisdom, represented by a strong eastern figure under a personal character.

This wisdom has been generally understood in the Christian church to mean the Lord Jesus Christ,—the Word (Logos) spoken of by John, who ascribes to him under that name several of those glories which are here ascribed to wisdom.

There are some things spoken of men in the prophetic passages of Scripture, too great to be understood in their full meaning of any of the sons of men, except the man Christ. These we are taught by the Scriptures of the New Testament, to understand of him who is the glory of our race, to whom all the prophets bare witness†. Now, if Solomon say concerning wisdom things that are true to their full extent of signification in Christ only, may we not with good reason conclude, that the Spirit who directed his pen, meant to lead our thoughts to the personal Word of God, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom, and to whom the church of Israelites and Christians is indebted for all the discoveries that were ever made? The voice of Christ is the voice of wisdom itself. The wise will hear, and will increase their learning, and fools only will despise this wisdom and instruction; for surely they cannot be reasonable

creatures, who resist the fervent eloquence and the persuasive arguments addressed to us in this chapter.

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

Ver. 2, 3. If we hear not the voice of wisdom, we have ourselves to blame. Her pulpit is erected in the high places, and her voice is heard from afar. She preaches at the places of concourse, the gates of the city, and in the places where roads meet.* At our very doors we may hear her publishing her precious doctrines; and ignorance, when chosen and wilful, will by no means excuse us. If we are in darkness, it is not for want of light, but because we hate light, and by winking hard exclude its beams.

Why should we not use all due pains to find wisdom, when wisdom uses such pains to find us out, and to proclaim her necessary instructions in our ears? Surely our Lord Jesus was willing to communicate his saving instructions, when he preached in mountains and in fields, in public roads and in deserts, in synagogues and in ships, inviting men to receive his salvation, and pressing them to repent. Nor is the voice of wisdom in our days become more feeble, or heard in fewer places. Unless we are stupidly inattentive, we may still hear it sounding in our ears, whether we are at home or abroad, walking in the fields or sitting in the church. The voice of the gospel, the voice of providence, the voice of conscience, the voice of honest friends, is a cry of wisdom, to which we do well to take heed, for to all of us she speaks.

Ver. 4. The mercy of God is sovereign, and therefore the sons of Adam are called to repentance; while by the angels that fell, no voice of mercy was ever heard. They were nobler in their origin, and more excellent in their natures. But the Son of God loved us because he loved us, and was made of God unto us, and not to them, wisdom and righteousness.

There are many of the sons of Adam, that never heard the calls of wisdom; but all within hearing are called, and earnestly importuned to comply with the call. Let us not then give reason for that complaint, "Wherefore when I came was there no man, when I called was there none to answer." The disobedient and unbelieving shall be tormented in hell with a soul-rending remorse, which devils and heathens cannot feel.

Say not that the calls of wisdom are not to you, because ye are fools; for to such she speaks—

Ver. 5. Those that are easily seduced, those that live under the power of error and sin, are here called to hear the wisdom which is from above. Your case, O ye simple ones! is not hopeless. Eternal Wisdom is your teacher, and calls you to learn; and to none does wisdom say, Seek ye me in vain. The teacher is the Lord our God; and he teacheth to profit, because there is power and light in his words, and in the Spirit that accompanies them*.

Have you been foolish and disobedient? you are called to turn to the wisdom of the just; and there is pardoning mercy revealed to encourage you to turn to the Lord†, there is converting power in the words of wisdom‡. Your situation is bad, but not desperate||. Hear the words that are spoken to you, and let them sink into your souls; consider the excellencies of the words, and of the speaker of them.

Ver. 6. Where the words of a king are, there is power. The words of wisdom are the princely words of the eternal King. As the sun and moon, these works of God's hands, are more excellent than a machine or clock made by some curious artist, so is the word of God more excellent than the sayings of the wisest and greatest of men. The same divine excellency which appears to reason's eye in the works of God, appears to the eye of faith in the word of God. In the words of the wisest philosophers and most eloquent orators, there are some good and some bad things. There is dross mingled with their silver; but all the words of wisdom are right words, they are like silver seven times purified. They are spoken in perfect righteousness and faithfulness.

Ver. 7. Why do we not all believe the words of Christ? Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or tittle shall not pass from his word. Let us never again be so impious as to suspect the faithfulness of his promises, or the sincerity of his invitations, or the truth of his precious doctrines. We believe the word of an honest man; but Christ is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness. All lying is wickedness in his esteem, and is abhorred by his heart. If we believe the word of a man who will not lie, shall we disbelieve the word of him that cannot lie, nor suffer liars to stand in his presence?

We attend with diligence to the words of a man famous for wisdom and integrity; but all the words of Christ are the words of wisdom itself, and the things spoken are uprightness, even words of truth.

Ver. 8. One of the characters which our Lord takes is, "I that speak in righteousness." Eternal righteousness is in our Lord Jesus Christ, and shines in all his administrations and in all his words. God has given us in his word a representation of the righteousness of his own nature and will, and framed it as a rule of righteousness to us. Those are froward and perverse who walk in ways not authorized by this rule*; and by the degree of our conformity to it, are our improvements in righteousness and true holiness to be estimated. There is righteousness in the promises and doctrines, as well as in the commands of it. God's words of grace are spoken by him in his holiness, and are therefore to be received with an unshaken confidence†. Hath God promised us eternal life, and called us by his word to depend on his Son for salvation?—We may safely venture our souls upon the faithful word of Jehovah. To doubt whether these addresses to us are sincere or not, is to suspect that there is something crooked or perverse in the faithful sayings of God.

But is it possible for us to understand the words of wisdom? Yes.

Ver. 9. The words of wisdom are a great depth. In them are mysteries which cannot be fully comprehended; for we find that the all-wise God has laid up in every part of Scripture, stores of wisdom too deep for mortal minds to fathom. There are some passages of

Scripture, especially in that part of it which was written after the time of Solomon, in which are things hard to be understood; and yet all the words of wisdom are here said to be plain to him that understandeth. The meaning is, that every thing necessary for faith and practice is clearly revealed in the Bible by the great Author of it, who meant not to insult our ignorance, but to instruct our minds, by that sacred book. When we are puzzled with difficulties, we ought not to quarrel with the Bible, but to ascribe it to our own stupidity or sloth. If, after the due use of means, some parts of Scripture still continue dark to us, let us bless God that the needful doctrines contained in them are in other passages taught with sufficient plainness.

But if these words are plain only to him that understandeth, of what service can it prove for simple* and foolish persons to attend to them? Fools are called not only to hear, but to receive wisdom from our great Teacher, for none teaches like him. Socrates confessed that he could not make any man wise who was not furnished by nature with talents for acquiring wisdom, more than his mother Phœnareta could deliver a woman who was not pregnant. But the entrance of God's word gives understanding to the simple, and the Spirit of Christ makes them wise unto salvation, who were born like the wild ass's colt.

The words of God meet with reproach and banter from some, who would found a reputation for wit upon wickedness; but wisdom will be justified of her children, and her words will be esteemed to be right concerning all things by them that find knowledge.

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

Ver. 10, 11. We profess to prefer wisdom in our judgment to the most valued things upon earth; but we are hypocrites, if there is not a consistency between our profession and our practice.* If wisdom is better than silver, we must receive it rather than silver; and if it were put to our choice whether to be rich or holy, we ought not for a moment to hesitate in deciding.

It is actually put to our choice, whether we will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, or the delights of sense, and the riches that shine to the eye of flesh†. If we are resolved at any rate to be rich; if we value the means of enriching ourselves with gold above the means of grace; if we grudge the necessary expence that may attend the means of religious instruction; then we receive gold, and not wisdom. The truly wise have some degree of Paul's spirit in them, and are taught by God to count every thing loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord*.

Silver and gold are good things, under the direction of wisdom†. But they must not be the chief object of our esteem; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Luther, having received large presents from some princes of Saxony, protested that he would not have them for his portion. If gold or rubies are equal to wisdom in our judgment, we have not the mind of Christ.

That we may be disposed heartily to prefer wisdom to every thing that our eyes have seen, or our fancies have imagined, let us hear and believe what more can be said on wisdom's behalf.

Ver. 12. For a man to search out his own glory, is no glory; but for the Son of God to discover his own glory to us, is one of the innumerable instances of his condescending grace. Had he not manifested his own glory to us, we should, to our loss, have remained for ever ignorant of it.

Prudence is the companion of wisdom, and infinite prudence was from eternity familiar to the personal Wisdom of God, who abounded toward us in all prudence, in the contrivance of that glorious plan by which the wisdom of God is raised to the highest pitch in the salvation of men. For the Word was with God, and was a sharer in the glory of his eternal purpose of grace. Consummate prudence and divine invention shine with illustrious splendour in the whole administration of our Lord Jesus Christ, and out of his treasures we receive all that prudence and skill that is necessary for us, whilst sojourning in a world full of enemies and snares.

Who would not rather go for water to a fountain that ever flows, than to a brook that often disappoints the thirsty traveller? The Son of God has the fountain of life with him, and in his light shall we see light.

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

Ver. 13. Some men refrain from evil actions through fear of shame or punishment; but true wisdom teaches men not only to refrain from evil, but to hate it, through the fear of God. Then we are possessed of this gracious principle, when we abhor not only evil actions, but evil words and dispositions. Pride and arrogancy of spirit, wickedness in the course of the conversation, or frowardness in spirit, are equally abhorred by our Lord; and such as have received his instructions into their hearts, cannot love that which is declared in every part of his word to be utterly offensive to him*.

Were any thing deserving the name of wisdom to be found any where else, we might with less damage despise the word of exhortation; but Christ claims it as his peculiar excellency—

Ver. 14. Bildad had referred Job to the wise men that lived in the days of old, as the oracles of wisdom, for determining the disputes between Job and his friends. Job acknowledged that the ancients had some degree of wisdom, but would not implicitly submit his understanding to their maxims, because there was no comparison in this respect between the wisest sages and the Ancient of days*. What is the wisdom of philosophers, who frequently became vain in their reasonings, and spoiled men by their philosophy and vain deceit, to the wisdom of the Eternal Word? But why should we speak of wise men, when the angels are charged with folly?

There is no sound wisdom but in Christ, or from him, who is the Fountain of human reason, and the Author of that wisdom which has procured so high a reputation to some that were ignorant of the name of Christ. Whether these great men made their celebrated discoveries by the mere force of their own genius or by the help of tradition, it is plain that their light was but a beam from that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world†. Counsel is his, for he is the wonderful Counsellor, between whom and his

eternal Father the council of peace was formed, and who by his counsel conducts us in the right way to happiness. The very quintessence of wisdom is his. He is understanding itself, and his eyes penetrate to the bottom of the deepest mysteries. Blessed be God that such a person is made to us wisdom!

Wisdom is better than strength, and yet wisdom needs strength to execute its plans. The eternal wisdom of God is joined with omnipotence. The eternal Word is the Almighty, by whom all things were made, and all the purposes of grace effected. He gives courage and power to all that learn wisdom from him, so that a man of understanding increaseth strength. Where counsel to contrive and wisdom to propose the noblest end, understanding to discern the true nature and tendencies of things, and strength to execute, concur, there can be nothing wanting.

The wisdom and power of kings, and of those that have power delegated from kings, is derived from him.

Ver. 15, 16. Eternal wisdom has devised magistracy, and determined the persons to be entrusted with it. From the same source is derived all the majesty, and wisdom, and righteousness which ever appeared in the world, to adorn the thrones of princes. When David governed the people of God according to the good skill of his hands and the integrity of his heart,—when Solomon governed the same nation with wisdom and righteousness, they were indebted for all their noble qualifications to that Word of God, by whom all creatures were formed, and from whom all light is derived*.

When magistrates of inferior rank distinguish themselves by their wise and righteous administration, they owe their glory and usefulness to the same fountain of wisdom†.

Those princes that are strangers to the name of Christ are the ministers of his providence, and are furnished from his treasures with every ornamental and useful qualification which they may possess. If we admire the courage and fortune, the generosity and wisdom of Cyrus king of Persia, we ought to give glory to the King of Israel, by whom that heathen prince was guided*.

The histories of every nation, through the light of this text, may lead us to contemplate the excellency of the Son of God, from whom every good gift comes. All the wisdom in the world must be ascribed to him, but none of that folly which always attends wisdom in men. His treasures of wisdom are not diminished in the least degree. Let the simple ones apply to him with faith and importunity, and they shall be made wise unto holiness and salvation, for says Wisdom—

Ver. 17. All of us profess to love wisdom, but few justify this profession. We do not truly love that person whose friendship we do not seek to share, and whose company we do not desire to enjoy. We do not love Christ if we do not seek him with our hearts, and with all earnestness of spirit desire fellowship with him in his wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

They that seek him are accounted by him lovers of his name, and this love to him is a proof that they are loved by him. He loved them before they loved him. His good-will disposed their hearts to love him, and he takes pleasure in that love which was kindled by himself, and will not disappoint those ardent desires which were excited by his Spirit. He has been found of them that sought him not, and will he hide himself from them that seek him?

Young persons have good encouragement from this Scripture to seek wisdom. Christ was kind to those young children that were brought to be blessed by him. He loved a young man who came to ask him what he should do to inherit eternal life, although he neither asked a right question, nor shewed a proper regard to Christ's answer. It is mentioned as the honour of Josiah king of Judah, that when he was young, he sought the God of his fathers. The word translated seek early, may be rendered seek earnestly or diligently*.

All the true lovers and seekers of Christ shall find him, and find inexpressible happiness in him†. They are sharers in his fulness, and he opens all his treasures to them.

Ver. 18, 19. On whom do the kings of this world bestow their gifts? On their own friends, or on strangers and enemies? On their friends, no doubt, unless they are restrained by an interested policy. No motives of that kind can direct the managements of the eternal King. The silver is his, and the gold is his; and he would give silver and gold to all that love him, if he did not see it better for the greater part of them to want these perishing riches. It is not for want of riches and honours to bestow. It is not for want of love to his people, that he does not bestow on every one of them crowns of gold, and mines of precious metals. The riches of Christ are incomparably more valuable than gold and silver. His justifying righteousness, which is upon all them that believe, enriches them for ever, though formerly they were indebted millions of talents, and unable to pay one farthing to the justice of God. The grace of the Spirit enriches them above what the finest gold or the choicest silver could ever do. These shining metals glitter in the eye, but they cannot shed joy or contentment in the heart. The only use that riches can answer, is to help us to be content; but even here riches can do little, whilst godliness does all, and is justly esteemed great gain*.

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

Ver. 20, 21. Great was the favour bestowed by God on the children of Israel, when he conducted them through the wilderness to the land of promise by a pillar of cloud and fire. Had he left them to their own conduct, they must have lost themselves, and perished in that land of deserts, of pits and serpents, of drought and of the shadow of death. Nor could we find the way to the celestial city without the Captain of salvation, who is given by God to be a Leader to the people. He leads us in the paths of righteousness for his own name's sake, and in the midst of the paths of judgment, keeping us from every dangerous mistake, and preserving us from the snares which on each side of our way are spread for our feet.

Our great Teacher leads us in this way, to enrich us with the most precious substance. The followers of Christ shall be no losers by him. They shall not inherit the wind, nor possess for their portion those unsubstantial things, of which it is said—they are not†, because they are not the true riches; but they shall possess, by the right and tenure of the children of God, that which is durable and

solid riches. The fashion of this world passeth away, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever, and shall be for ever rich, for all his treasures are filled by the wisdom of God. In this world he receives every needful supply, and can say in truth that all things are his*. In the eternal world every craving shall be fully satisfied, and no uneasy desires shall remain.

Blessed are the lovers of wisdom, though the world may account them poor. Have they no silver or gold? The apostles for the most part had none, and yet they made many rich. The angels have none, and desire to have it as little as we desire to have our treasures filled with gravel. Saints are like angels, rich in heavenly treasure; and whilst God is rich, they shall not be poor. Here is a short way of becoming rich, and here covetousness is a virtue.

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

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

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

Ver. 24, 25. The antiquity of his existence, of his generation by the Father, and his appointment to be our Redeemer, are expressed in the same language in which the unbeginning duration of the Godhead is described†.

Ver. 26. The Wisdom of the Father was in the beginning, but had no beginning to his own existence. The Father himself did not exist before the only-begotten Son, and he that spread abroad the earth by himself, without the assistance of other beings, or the agency of instruments, did not create the world without the everlasting Word.

Ver. 27. Fashioning the great mass of earth and water by a divine architecture, into the most regular form.

Ver. 28, 29. The power and wisdom of God appeared in the order and stability which he gave to the various creatures, as well as in the formation of them. He separated the waters below from the waters above the firmament, and fixed both in their respective places. He confined the waters of the sea within their proper channels, and appointed foundations to the earth, that it might not be removed.

It is our duty to consider the works of God with attention, and to contemplate them in their different parts, which make one beautiful whole; and every one of these parts is fitted to excite our veneration for the great Author of nature,—the three-one God.

When we survey the earth and the waters, the mountains and the valleys, and consider that they had a beginning, we are led by the Scripture to adore the Word which was with God, and was God, when these creatures that make so good a figure in our eyes were nothing.

When we consider the wisdom and power that shine with amazing lustre in the fabric of the world, let us raise our thoughts to the Son of God, by whom God made the world, and by whom he has now recovered it from the ruins that were the fruits of our sin.

If we reverence the wisdom of the aged, what reverence is due to the unbeginning Word, who condescends to reveal to us the Father, and to disclose the secrets of his wisdom!

When we behold the immense repository of waters, and the spacious earth, when we lift up our eyes to the lofty mountains, and to the immeasurable circuit of the heavens, can we forbear saying, What is man, that he who is before all these things, and by whom they all consist, should regard him with such astonishing favour! and how ungrateful must we be, if we turn a deaf ear to the merciful instructions of our Divine Teacher!

But let us admire, with increasing wonder, the glory and grace of Him who speaks to us from heaven, when we hear him declaring his infinite happiness in the bosom of his Father.

Ver. 30. The blessedness of rational creatures lies in their fellowship with God. Those are blessed whom God makes to approach to himself; and the nearer the approach, the greater the blessedness. But there is infinite blessedness in the Godhead itself, and in that divine and incomprehensible fellowship which the Son of God enjoyed from eternity, whilst he was in the Father's bosom, as his only-begotten Son. The Father was in the Son, and the Son in the Father, and both in the Spirit, and the Spirit in both, and they were infinitely blessed in one another. These things are so mysterious to us, that it is safer to adore and wonder, than to speak. But one thing we cannot overlook, that when we consider the infinite happiness of the Son of God, in his oneness of nature with the Father, and in that infinite nearness of person to him, which must be inferred from the unity of essence, and mutual relation of the persons, we must be amazed to think that he bestowed a thought upon men,—upon creatures whose apostacy and wickedness were foreknown by him. Before the world began, he thought upon men with compassion, and rejoiced in the purposes of his love concerning them. Then, (says he,) was I by him,

Ver. 31. It was infinite goodness to rejoice in the prospect of those holy angels, whose dwelling was assigned them in heaven, beside the throne of God. But he delighted in the prospect of that grace and salvation that was designed for lost men, through the

sufferings to be endured in that human nature which was pre-ordained for him.

Did our Lord Jesus think upon us with compassion and love, before the foundation of the world? Let our thoughts be often employed in contemplating that amazing goodness, and in tracing up redemption and the blessings of salvation, to the fountain whence they proceed. Shall we, from day to day, put off the thoughts of Christ, and defer that regard and obedience which is so entirely his due, when he thought on us with pity, before we or the world in which we dwell had a being?

Ver. 32. We must not give unto him the hearing of the ear only, but the hearing of faith and obedience also. The blessing is upon those that are not forgetful hearers, but observers of his word. We are under infinite obligations, from the greatness and the eternal grace of Christ, to hearken unto him; and our duty and interest are here the same. Our observation of his ways is not the foundation or cause of our blessedness, for that was designed for us before we could do good or evil, and our holy dispositions are not the cause, but the effect of the purpose of grace in Christ Jesus*; yet because they are the effect, they are also a proof of our happy interest in it.

Are they blessed that keep the way of wisdom? Then,

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

Ver. 34. Those who desire favours from the great, attend their levees day by day, and think themselves happy if they can at length obtain a favourable answer to their suit. With how much greater reason do we wait at the posts of Wisdom's doors, in expectation of blessings the most necessary and important!

Happy were Solomon's servants, in the opinion of the queen of Sheba, because they enjoyed the privilege of daily hearing that celebrated prince. We are happy, if we knew our own happiness, who are admitted to hear the instructions of Him who is Wisdom itself. His palace is erected amongst us, and it is a greater happiness to stand at the door of it, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. David desired one thing, and what was it? Not that he might enjoy a long and undisturbed possession of his throne, but that he might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, and enjoy the blessed views and discoveries afforded in the sanctuary.

If we have long attended the instructions of Christ, and found little advantage from them, we must not say with the unbelieving prince, Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? The God of mercy waits to be gracious to us, and we ought to wait for him, attending those ordinances where he is pleased to display his glory and love, with unwearied diligence, earnest desire, and lively hope. The man that waited thirty-eight years at the pool of Siloam, was well rewarded at last, when he received vigour to his body. But they enjoy greater happiness, who wait for God in his appointed way. Christ is found of those that seek him, for to whom did he ever say, Seek ye me in vain? And blessed are they that find him,

Ver. 35. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul, but by sin he died, and we all sinned and died in him, and must have continued for ever in a state of death, had not another Adam appeared who was made a quickening Spirit; and whosoever believeth in him shall not die, but have everlasting life. Even in this land of darkness and death, believers enjoy a true and happy life, for they are delivered from condemnation, and entitled to the heavenly life. They are made free from that principle of corruption, which is called the law of sin and death, and made alive unto God and holiness. They enjoy that which is better than life,—the loving-kindness of the Lord; for through Jesus, the Father looks upon them with a pleasant countenance. The smiles of God make heaven, and they that obtain favour of the Lord have a heaven upon earth.

But miserable are the despisers of the wisdom and grace of Christ.

Ver. 36. They that despise Christ's gospel, or reject his salvation, are sinners against him who is the Supreme Wisdom, and the fountain of happiness to men. They are haters of Him who is love itself. Such ungrateful rebels are as great enemies to themselves as to Christ. They murder their immortal souls; they love those sins which are death and damnation in disguise.

Sinners against Christ shall receive a reward of vengeance suited to the blackness of their guilt, and shall, through eternity, have no room to complain of their Judge. Death and life were set before them, and they chose death, and shall for ever eat of the fruit of their own choice. Consider these things, O unbelievers! If ye will not now consider them, in the latter days ye shall perfectly consider them.

CHAPTER 9

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

Ver. 1. The church of Christ is a house, wherein he dwells and takes pleasure*. It must be a glorious edifice, for wisdom is the builder of it†. It is a strong and durable building, for it has many pillars, hewed out, not by the wisest of kings, but by the wisdom of

God. Here there is abundance of soul-nourishing provision; for,

Ver. 2. We shall surely be satisfied with the fatness of God's house, with that flesh which is given for the life of the world, and with that spiced wine which is the blood of the New Testament. Does Christ give us his own flesh and blood, to nourish and refresh our souls? what grace, what comfort, what privilege, will he withhold? He is most willing to communicate this provision to us.

Ver. 3. The servants of Christ are called maidens, because Christ himself is spoken of under the character of Wisdom, which in the Hebrew language is of the feminine gender. The followers of the Lamb are called virgins, to denote their purity*. Ministers also must be pure in their doctrine and behaviour. The voice of these maidens, is the voice of that wisdom which sends them. It is she that gives the invitation by their mouth; and she does it in the most public and audible manner, crying with a voice like that of a herald from the highest places of the city. But who are invited to this feast?

Ver. 4, 5. The simple and unwise are welcomed to this feast. They are called not only by the servants, but by the master of the feast, to partake of these precious provisions. The poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind,—they that have no money, and they that have spent all their substance for things that do not profit, are graciously invited to come, and eat and drink abundantly, by receiving Christ and his salvation, as they are freely offered in the gospel†.

But we cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils. When we come to Jesus by faith, and partake of his precious blessings, we must forsake the society and the course of the foolish.

Ver. 6. The companions of fools shall remain for ever in the congregation of the dead. But in the way of understanding there is life, and no death. Do we abhor death, and love life? Then, if we believe the words of Christ, we will forsake the foolish, and go in the path of understanding‡.

But may we not associate with the foolish, in order to reclaim them? There are two sorts of foolish persons. Some have naturally a pliable and modest disposition; though destitute of the grace of God, or though conversant in the ways of sin, they are not yet hardened in sin by long practice. There may be some hope of making good impressions on the minds of such persons as these. But there are others who are stubborn and determined sinners. To them, in ordinary cases, there is no hope of doing any good.

Ver. 7, 8. If we reprove the profligate sinners that mock at every thing sacred, we are not likely to benefit them, but to procure hurt to ourselves.

Such men, when we have irritated them by our admonitions, will pry into our characters with all the keenness of malice and revenge. Few characters can stand the scrutiny of a malicious eye; so that instead of serving them, we shall be in danger of losing much of our usefulness to others, by making them our enemies*.

Yet reproofs are like pearls when they are administered with the meekness of wisdom, and met with an obedient ear‡.

Ver. 8, 9. There is scarcely a man so wise and holy as not to need instruction and reproof. The difference between wise men and fools lies not in this, that the former are above reproofs, but that they know their need of them, and are disposed to receive them with meekness, and to improve by them, and to love and thank their reprovers*. The wise and the just man are the same in the view of this wisest of men, for this is a fundamental maxim in his writings—

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

Ver. 11. It is not for God's benefit, but for ours, that he invites us to receive wisdom‡.

Ver. 12. God can receive no additions of blessedness by our wisdom, though he delights in it. He cannot lose his glory by our contempt of his gospel and laws||. The ministers of wisdom will rejoice in our compliance with their calls, but the profit or the loss of our behaviour under a dispensation of the gospel, must be felt by ourselves§. Life and death are set before us. May God grant us a disposition to chuse life.

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

Ver. 13. She is foolish, ignorant, and stupid to the last degree, for she buys a moment of empty delight at the expense of everlasting burnings. She is impudent and clamorous. The damned in hell are afraid that their companions should come to their place of torment. But this shameless creature earnestly calls others to share with her in those pleasures which are followed by everlasting sorrows.

Ver. 14, 15. They are evil times, when tempters to sin are permitted to hunt so avowedly for prey. Let well-meaning persons, in such a time, watch and pray against temptation. These are the persons whom the foolish woman solicits, and too often with success.

Ver. 16, 17. They are surely stupid, who believe that there is any pleasure in those things that are forbidden by God, and afraid to appear in open day. Yet such is the corruption of the hearts of men, that they relish doctrines so contrary to reason, as well as to Scripture. We are naturally prone to things forbidden, and till our souls are renewed by the grace of God, can taste an unaccountable sweetness in that which is poison to the soul. But when we are restored to a sound mind, those delights only will be relished, which consist with a pure conscience, and the dignity of a rational and immortal soul.

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

Ver. 18. We are naturally starving creatures, and cannot find happiness within ourselves. As every man must have food to satisfy the natural cravings of hunger, so every soul must have some gratification to its desires of happiness. Wisdom and folly do each spread a feast for men. The question is, Whose guests shall we be? And did we possess any wisdom, or any true and well-directed self-love, it might be easily decided. The entertainments of wisdom, are soul-quickening provision. They that hear her calls, shall eat that which is good, and their souls shall live for ever. The guests of wisdom are in the heights of heaven. They feast on the hidden manna, and on the fruits of the tree of life. The provisions of the foolish woman are a deadly, though perhaps a slow poison. Her guests have their portion with the wicked giants, who brought on the world a universal deluge, and with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, who are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Let us consider where Joseph now is, and what blessings are come upon the crown of the head of him, who so bravely resisted temptations the most alluring, and the most threatening. Let us, on the other hand, remember Sodom and Gomorrah, and chuse our portion with the one or the other. Be astonished, O heavens! that men should be so cruel to their own souls, as to deliberate a moment in so clear a case. To-day let us hear the voice of wisdom.

CHAPTER 10

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

Ver. 1. The first nine chapters are a prefatory address. Now begin the proverbs, (or masterly sayings,) properly so called. Weighty sayings deserve and gain regard. But how shall we sufficiently esteem the proverbs left us by Solomon, which is almost another name for wisdom itself! By this inspired philosopher, Divine Wisdom speaks to every generation.

Were the first of these proverbs to have its due influence on mankind, the world would be greatly reformed and blessed by its efficacy. A great part of our race are parents,—all mankind are, or have been children; and by it both parents and children are directed. Parents are instructed to use all possible means to make their children wise. But how shall they effect this? Is it not the prerogative of God to give wisdom? No doubt. But he makes use of proper and appointed means for this purpose. Would you then derive comfort from your children? Instruct, reprove, exhort them, pray for them, recommend religion to them by your example; for thus saith the Author of wisdom, "Train up a child in the way wherein he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." But if in some rare instance he should, your souls will not on that account be stung with self-accusations.

Remember, ye that are children, how greatly you are indebted to your parents, and how much their comfort is bound up in you. Be wise, seek useful knowledge, and search for it as for hid treasure. Walk in the fear of the Lord. Let prudence and discretion, (such as Solomon teaches,) appear in every part of your conduct; so shall your father and mother greatly rejoice, and bless the Lord on your account. But if you are foolish and unruly, you grieve their spirits, and wound the souls that love you with the dearest affection. Consider that your mothers bore you with sorrow. Why should your lives also be a continual source of pain to their tender hearts! or why should the anxieties of your fathers on your behalf, be rewarded with the cutting view of your ungodly lives! "A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish man despiseth his mother*." Though he should in no other way express his contempt for her, his foolish behaviour is a plain proof that he values not her happiness.

Ver. 2. Ill-gotten riches are called treasures of wickedness. It is an opinion generally held by men, that riches, in whatever way procured, will do them great service. If, therefore, they cannot come at the possession of them by honest means, they will scrape them together by any means in their power. But here the Spirit of God tells us, that if a man should heap up immense riches to himself, they will profit him nothing. And how can they? They are cursed to him. If a moth in his substance, and stings in his conscience, and the damnation of hell, can bring any advantage to the robber and extortioner, let them rejoice in their portion.

———But righteousness delivereth from death.

No righteousness but that which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, delivers from eternal death. However, he is a gross deceiver of his own soul, who pretends to be clothed with it, while he continues to live unrighteously.

By righteousness, we give to every one his due; first to God, and next to men. This righteousness is a preservative from death and misery of every kind. How? Through the gracious protection of him that keepeth the path of the righteous, as the wise man tells us in the next words:

Ver. 3. But was it never known that the just man perished by want? Are ravens always commissioned to feed the people of God in times of famine? God has them at his command, if he sees it proper to make use of them; and when he pleases, he can administer to his people's necessities as easily by miracle as by the use of ordinary means. Let them, then, joyfully commit the care of their bodies to his mercy. So long as his infinite wisdom shall see their continuance in life meet for them, their bread and their water shall be sure; and though their bodies should in some rare instances be pinched with hunger, he will nourish their souls with bread which the world knows not of.

But the wicked are not so. Whilst the righteous are sure of being satisfied in days of famine, they are near to ruin in their greatest abundance; for the Lord casteth away that which they call their substance. Many of them will take care not to spend it upon riotous living, and harlots. None of them will part with it, from motives of generosity and charity. But whilst they grasp it fast with both hands, God will pull it out from between their fingers, and toss it irrecoverably from them. Should they even be permitted to hold it all their days, death, that terrible messenger, shall at last drag them from it; nor shall their glory descend after them to the grave, but that wickedness by which they acquired it, shall lie down with them in the dust, and torture their souls in hell.

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

Ver. 5. Idleness was never designed for man. Adam in paradise, was to dress the garden. Why should men expect any good from slothfulness, since that doom was pronounced, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread!" Show me a slothful man, and I will show you a wicked, a poor, and a miserable man.

"But the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Riches are dispensed by God at his pleasure, and he commonly gives them to the man employed in honest industry. How then do we see some men laborious, and yet poor! Perhaps they trust too much to their own labour. Perhaps they are earth-worms, abhorred by God. Or if they fear the Lord, and look to him for a blessing on the labour of their hands, he sees that riches are not convenient for them. To prevent pride and vanity from being increased in them by the wealth of the world, he keeps them poor, designing to bestow upon them the better and enduring substance. Would you complain of one, who promised you one acre of ground, and gave you instead of it an hundred in a better soil?

But are not some indolent persons enriched by unexpected means? No; at least their wealth is not substantial nor enduring. It is worse than poverty.

Let us, therefore, be at once fervent in spirit and diligent in business; and if we would deserve this character, we must carefully improve the proper seasons of profitable labour; for,

Ver. 5. Summer and harvest are the fit seasons for rearing and gathering in the fruits of the field. He who improves these and similar opportunities for honest gain, does honour to himself, and to those who had the care of his education. He who neglects them, is like one who sleeps all the time he should be working. It would be a shame for a man in health to spend all his days in bed. The idle man might as well be there, for any thing he does out of it. He brings disgrace to himself, and to his father, who ought to have trained him to habits of prudence and diligence.

Are prudence and diligence so commendable, when employed about the bread that perisheth? How much more necessary and profitable are they, when we are called to labour in the strength of divine grace, for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life! He that trifles away the acceptable time and the day of salvation, is a thousand times more distracted, than the man who defers the reaping of his fields till the end of December.

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

Ver. 6. The just man is not only commended by men, but by God. He not only expects, but possesses blessings. He is not only enriched, but crowned with blessings coming down from the Father of lights. He shall not be confounded, but his mouth is opened to bless the Author of his blessings.

"But violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." The covering of Haman's face, was a badge of his condemnation. The violent man is condemned already, and when the Judge of all shall return his violent dealings upon his own head, his face shall be covered with confusion, nor shall he be able to open his mouth in extenuation of his crimes.

The happiness of the just and the misery of the wicked is not confined to this life. The just man shall not all die. His spirit is life because of righteousness; his body shall sleep in Jesus; and,

Ver. 7. His name shall live when he is dead. The remembrance of him is dear to his friends, and honoured by the wise. And what signifies an empty name? It brings honour to God, and prolongs the influence of his good example who has left it. His good works not only follow him, but live behind him. As Jeroboam made Israel to sin after he was dead, so the good man helps to make others holy whilst he is lying in the grave. Should it so happen that his character is mistaken in the world, or should his name die out among men, it shall yet be had in everlasting remembrance before God; for never shall those names be erased from the Lamb's book of life, which were written in it from the foundation of the world.

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

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

——"But a prating fool shall fall." Loquacity is a sure sign of vanity and folly. This kind of fool, in his endless talk, speaks many vain and sinful words, for which he must give an account; many proud and senseless words, which bring upon him contempt; many rash,

malicious, and provoking words, which lay him open to hatred and mischief. Sooner or later, his ungoverned tongue must fall upon him with unsupportable weight, and hurl him to ruin.

Ver. 9. Men's characters are discerned by their conversation. The good man walketh uprightly, for he regulates his steps by the unerring rule, and constantly endeavours to follow it, unbiassed by interest or honour, persuasion, terror, or example. He abhors dissimulation in his dealings either with God or men, but speaks as he thinks, acts as he speaks, and makes the example of Christ his constant pattern. This man walks surely, or confidently. None of his steps shall slide. If he should fall, he shall not be utterly cast down. If he meets with enemies, and tribulations, he receives joy from the testimony of his conscience; and the name of the Lord is a strong tower, to which he runs and is safe.

The dissembler walks in crooked paths. Like Judas, who put on a cloak of charity to hide his covetousness*, he conceals the selfish principles which regulate his behaviour under the appearances of piety, prudence, and other good qualities. But he cannot hold the mantle so tight about him, as to conceal from the wise observer his inward baseness. It will occasionally be shuffled aside, it will at length drop off, and he shall be known for what he is, abhorred by all men, and punished with other hypocrites.

Ver. 10. He that winketh with the eye, either in derision of his neighbour, or to give a signal to his associate in mischief, is the cause of sorrow to another, which shall return upon himself; for he that does a bad thing to others, in whatever way he does it, is doing a worse to himself. Better to suffer an hundred wrongs, than to commit one. "And a prating fool shall fall." Such a fool is often boasting that he is no dissembler, and indeed he has no talent for dissembling and carrying on his schemes by policy; but his plainness is no virtue, nor shall it make atonement for the follies of his mouth. The scorner, the plotter of mischief, and the prating fool, shall be involved in equal misery.

Some ancient translations, particularly that of the LXX. read the verse thus: "He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow; but he that reproveth causeth safety."

In this contrast, winking with the eye is the gesture of one that hides his eyes from his neighbour's fault, because he is unwilling to risk his favour by administering necessary reproof. Such a man is not a true friend, for he suffers sin upon his brother, when he might, by faithful admonition, have prevented it. And he that does not prevent sin when it is in his power, is the cause of grief, the sure consequence of sin; but he who faithfully reproves, causes safety to his friend, and shall, in the end, receive more thanks than he that winked with the eye, and flattered with the mouth.

Ver. 11. Much is spoken by the wise man about the government of the tongue, but not too much, for he that learns effectually to bridle his tongue is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

The mouth of a righteous man utters words which are refreshing to the mourners, as cold waters to a thirsty soul. His wise and edifying conversations, through the Divine blessing, promote the spiritual interests of the hearers. Let our speech, therefore, be always with grace, seasoned with salt.

The mouths of others are like a standing pool; nothing but insipid trash is to be found in them. They are too frequently like a poisoned fountain, tending to corruption and death.

But the violence breathed from the mouths, or executed by the hands of the wicked, shall bring upon them condemnation, or stop their mouths with shame*.

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

"But love covereth all sins."—All sins! What a strange word is that! We think it a great deal to cast a mantle over seven offences of our brother: to hide from our eyes, and drop from our remembrance, not a few nor a great number of offences, but all sins, is a hard matter. Yet what are all the sins of our brother, by which he has offended us, compared with our sins against God? Why should not he to whom ten thousand talents are remitted, readily forgive his brother a few pence?

Examine yourselves, whether love or hatred reign in your souls.

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

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

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

Ver. 15. Can this be true? Yes, if you will believe himself. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit*. It is not a strong city, but his strong city. He thinks it will prove a sufficient defence to him from that destruction which his mouth has merited. You see how justly the worldling is called an idolater, for he makes not God his confidence, but trusts to a thing of nought; for his riches, if they are a city, are not a strong city, but a city broken down, and without walls. How hard is it for rich men to obtain an entrance into that city that hath foundations, when it is a miracle for a man that hath riches, not to trust in them! But are we to suppose poor men exempt from the temptation to idolize gold and silver? No; for

—The destruction of the poor is their poverty.—That was a good prayer, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Poor men, by envying the rich, by cringing to them, by discontentment with their lot, by despondency and fear of ruin, do often make themselves as wretched and vile, as the rich who boast of their wealth.

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

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

Reproofs are necessary for us on many occasions, and the wise man that keeps instruction, will receive them with meekness and thankfulness, and improve them for his humiliation and correction. But he that refuseth reproof erreth from the way of life. He is like a sick man to whom a kind physician prescribes some medicine of powerful virtue, but bitter to the taste; so infatuated, however, is he, that he will rather risk his life, than follow the prescription.

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

Ver. 19. And that of many different kinds. Expressions of vanity and pride, of ill-nature and impiety, of rashness and inconsideration, never fail to proceed from the lips of a man who loves to hear himself talk. Even foolish talking, and inconvenient jesting, and idle words, are sinful, being forbidden by God. If we profess wisdom, we must govern our tongues, and think before we speak. Time and place must be regarded by us, and we must sometimes refrain our lips even from speaking good. Men often sin by a multitude of words in praying, in preaching, and giving advice;—

—But he that refraineth his lips is wise.

He discovers his modesty and self-command. He keeps himself innocent from much sin, and prevents many dangers to which perpetual talkers expose themselves.

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

Ver. 20. His conversation is useful, and very precious, not only like silver, but choice silver, which has been well purified in the fire. Our tongues deserve not this praise, unless they are refined from vanity, malignity, and falsehood, in all its diversity of forms.

How eagerly would we court the conversation of a man possessed of endless treasures and unwearied liberality, freely imparting to every petitioner! The conversation of a wise and righteous man, is still more valuable, for he distributes treasures of knowledge, more precious than gold and rubies.

If his tongue is like choice silver, his heart is still richer in value, for that is the good treasure out of which he brings good things.

—But the heart of the wicked is little worth.

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

Ver. 21. Food is better than silver, which is useful as a medium of commerce, but which cannot satisfy hunger nor preserve life. Useful discourse is precious like the finest silver, and nourishing to the soul as food to the body. Knowledge, faith, charity, and every holy disposition, is increased by it. The righteous man feeds many with knowledge, for he finds it sweet to himself, and wishes not to eat his morsel alone. His heart is a storehouse of provision for the soul, and like a hospitable landlord, he delights in distributing it to others. But the wicked die for want of heart. Knowledge is no less necessary to the soul than the heart to the body, or food for the preservation of life. Fools therefore are in a bad condition, for they neither have knowledge nor hunger after it, otherwise they might

be supplied from the lips of the wise. Therefore go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge. But abide by the righteous, for the words of their mouth, when they speak like themselves, are better than necessary food.

Ver. 22. Men generally wish to be rich. But what is the surest way of having such a wish gratified? Diligence is necessary, but not to be depended on; for without the blessing of the Lord on our labours, we may rise early and sit late, and oppress our bodies with toil, and our minds with anxious care, and after all continue in want; but the blessing of the Lord is that which alone makes a man rich. If it should not enrich him that enjoys it with gold, it will enrich him with what is far more precious—wisdom and grace. This blessing confers riches and preserves them, without exposing to harassing cares, their natural and common attendants. When riches bring with them vexations and fears, we would be better without them. Who would chuse to lie on a golden bed with thorns spread under him, and thorns for his covering? But the blessing of the Lord is a hedge about all that a righteous man hath. His labours are pleasant, his gains are safe. His portion is beyond the reach of danger, and his heart is preserved from vexation, in getting, or keeping, or using, or loving the world, because the Lord is his confidence.

The belief of this proverb would sweeten our toils, and make us spiritually-minded about earthly things, and eradicate every dishonest disposition. No man can, look for the divine blessing on the work of fraud.

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

—But a man of understanding hath wisdom.

And therefore it is impossible that he should be so awfully infatuated. He is deeply sensible of the misery and ruin that is in sin, but his delight is in holiness; and in the exercises of it he experiences that heartfelt pleasure, which the sweetest sins could never afford.

Ver. 24. It is scarcely supposable that a wicked man can wholly rid himself of fear. His terrors may be suspended, but they are like a sleeping adder, which will awake and pierce his heart with a venomous sting; and his fears are not fancies. Ten thousand times greater misery than he can apprehend is appointed to him for the portion of his cup, by the irreversible sentence of his Almighty Judge. His guilty conscience does sometimes torment him with fear where no fear is, but if he escapes the hand of man, he shall fall into the hands of the living God; and if he is not struck down by the storm of lightning, his day will come to drop into hell. But let not the righteous be afraid; his desires are pure, being regulated by the will of God revealed in his word, and the God that hears prayers will grant them, if not at present, yet at the time most suitable in the judgment of Infinite Wisdom. If what he wishes is not allowed, his desire is yet granted, for whatever he desires is with this reservation, "If it is agreeable to the will of God, and conducive, all things considered, to his best interest."

We read of righteous men desiring things which they did not immediately obtain; but they obtained all that was good for them at that time, and in another world were satisfied to the utmost desire of their hearts.

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

Ver. 26. On any errand. It is a great point of prudence to chuse proper persons to transact our business, especially if it be an affair of consequence. A man must feel great vexation when he finds his affairs deranged or ruined, and his wisdom called in question, through the stupidity and negligence of those whom he trusts. Solomon shewed his good sense by chusing for his service men of activity, as we learn from the history of Jeroboam.

This proverb is of use to direct us in the choice of magistrates, ministers, or wives; and to excite us to shake off slothfulness in the service of our Master who is in heaven, and who will cast into hell the unprofitable servant.

Ver. 27. Some sins have a natural tendency to shorten men's days; others bring men to the gibbet. All provoke the wrath of him in whose hand is our life and breath. The contrary virtues have an effect directly the reverse. But did not the wicked Jeroboam live to be old, whilst the only righteous person in his family died in youth? True, but the saint that dies in youth has lived as long upon earth as infinite wisdom saw it good for him, and his spirit is still life because of righteousness. Whereas, if the wicked man should live to be an hundred years old, he is accursed. Even in this case, his life is a shadow, and a thing of nought.

Could your physician give you a prescription for lengthening out your days to any term you please, you would think no price too high for it. Here is a tried receipt for making you live as long as it can be good for you to live. Shall we trust physicians more than the Sovereign of life and death?

Ver. 28. The hope of the righteous is in the Lord. From him they hope for every earthly blessing that appears to infinite wisdom really

good for them, and they shall not be disappointed*. But the great object of their hope is everlasting life†, and how can they fail of obtaining it? Their hopes are founded upon the word of a God that cannot lie, upon the inviolable oath of Jehovah, upon an all-sufficient Saviour, and upon a covenant that is everlasting, ordered in all things and sure. This hope shall be gladness inexpressible and inconceivable.

Great things are said of the joys and glories of the heavenly world, but they are spoken in the language of men. The tongue of angels could speak greater things, but angels themselves cannot conceive that fulness of joy which ages hence the blessed shall possess.

The hopes of wicked men are contracted within narrow bounds. The objects of their hope are things which the unerring word calls vanity and vexation of spirit. They may obtain the body of their wishes, but alas! without the soul. Happiness is the object of hope to all of us. With a view to this, we seek the riches and honours, the pleasures and friendships of this life, but should we possess the richest abundance of these things, and not find happiness in them, what doth it profit? But if the wicked man should have his belly filled with worldly treasures, and should rejoice in them, his expectation shall nevertheless perish. Misfortune or death shall rob him of all that he placed in the room of God, and the remembrance of former pleasures shall greatly embitter his miseries. There is one dreadful ingredient of torture which the poor man that goes to hell will not experience,—the remembrance of prosperity enjoyed and abused.

Does the wicked man expect heaven? How terrible will be the punishment of his presumptuous hopes, when he shall be hurled down headlong into the depths of despair*!

Ver. 29. Christ is the way, into which the upright man enters by faith, and he walks in it by holiness of conversation. He hates all guile, and hypocrisy is an abomination to his soul. Whilst other men strengthen themselves in their own imaginations by fraud and cunning, he derives all needful supplies of grace from him in whom all fulness dwells. The testimony of his conscience emboldens and invigorates his soul, and he waxes stronger and stronger. He is weak in himself, but his dependance is not on himself, but on God; out of weakness he thus waxes strong, surmounts every difficulty, and turns to flight armies of aliens. How weak was Peter when he denied his Lord! but the way of the Lord was Strength to him, and when near the end of his pilgrimage, he looked forward to the death of the cross with as much composure as a man does to putting off his clothes when retiring to rest†. Upright men, when feeling the weakness of their own strength, are sometimes filled with anxious thoughts, lest they should become weary and faint, and fall before their enemies; but through the grace of Christ their strength shall increase, and shall be suited to their needs. They shall reach in safety the end of their journey, and be more than conquerors‡.

But what shall be the end of those that walk in crooked ways, and endeavour to secure their wishes by hypocrisy and iniquity? Destruction shall be their portion. Destruction and misery are in their ways. If they cannot now see this, they shall feel it at the end of their journey.

Ver. 30. The righteous man is founded upon the Rock of ages, for his dependance is placed upon a better righteousness than his own. He is guarded by Omnipotence. Death and hell may rage, and seem to prevail, but he is safe from every real evil. He may be removed to another land, or to another world; but heaven is his country, and the mightiest of his enemies are unable to prevent his entrance into it, or to banish him from it*.

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

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

Ver. 31. Our first care must be, to keep our hearts with all diligence; and our next to govern our tongue, which will otherwise be an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; and the tongue will best be governed, when the heart is well furnished with wisdom, for the mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom as naturally as a good tree bringeth forth good fruit. Wisdom is said to be a tree of life, and this tree of life bringeth forth the fruits of holiness in speech and behaviour, not once a year, but every day. How valuable would a tree be thought, that should bring forth the most delicious fruits in such abundance, and such frequency!

When our speech is with grace, and seasoned with salt, it ministers grace to the hearers, and keeps ourselves from mischief; whereas the froward tongue shall be cut out. It provokes God, and it oftentimes provokes men. Froward speeches may escape punishment from man, but they shall not escape God's righteous judgment, who will cut out their tongues, and make them fall upon themselves.

Ver. 32. How is knowledge ascribed to the lips of the righteous? Because their lips are directed by their hearts. They speak not thoughtlessly, but intelligently. Their lips are not devoted to flattery, nor do they slavishly comply with the sentiments and humours of men. But they know when it is fit to speak, and what is fit to be spoken. They know how to address persons of different dispositions, in a different manner, so as to please them, or what is of more importance in their estimation, so as to serve their best interests.

It is said of a certain General, that he had such a grace in his manner of behaviour, that a suppliant who had met with the refusal of a petition from him, returned better satisfied than he would from another who had granted the solicited favour. A prudent Christian has so much grace in his speech, that his reproofs and rebukes often gain him more favour and esteem, than others gain from their

insinuating address. But the wicked man speaketh the words of deceit and folly, for what can be expected from a bad tree but corrupt fruit? and what shall be the end of a corrupt tree, but to be cut down, and cast into the fire?

CHAPTER 11

Ver. 1. COMMERCE is a blessing of great value to men.* In the same light are we to consider the invention of weights and balances, by which it is facilitated. These are instances of the divine goodness, for God has taught discretion to the merchant as well as to the husbandman. But by corrupt men, these, as well as every other instance of the goodness of God, have been abused. Whilst God furnishes them with the means of practising justice, the devil teaches them to turn the instruments of righteousness, into the means of defrauding one another.

False balances are not only hated, but abhorred by God. They are abomination itself in his eyes. But what is the meaning of this? Is the Lord's indignation excited against pieces of wood or of stone? No; this manner of expression points out the greatness of his displeasure against such as use them, and shews that such instruments of iniquity should be dashed in pieces.

As money was weighed in ancient times, bad money comes within the compass of this proverb. But not to limit its operations, we must observe, that villainy of every kind, and that especially which is committed under colour of justice, is condemned by it. As no iniquity is so odious to God as that which is cloaked by religion, so that injustice is the most detestable in his sight which is masked by hypocritical pretences of fair dealing. How deep in the pit must that man sink who is borne down by this double load of guilt in one sin! or if this be not heavy enough, oppression of the poor, whose cause God hath promised to avenge, will fill up the measure of the sin.

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

Ver. 2. The contrast between the two branches of this verse gives us this meaning.—Pride is joined with folly, and ends in shame. The humble man is wise, and shall be exalted to honour.

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

"But with the lowly is wisdom." Humble men think of themselves as they ought to think. They desire that God may be honoured, even at the expense of their own honour; but they shall be exalted by him to the highest glory*. Christ humbled himself, and was highly exalted, and became the brightest example of what he so often declared, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

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

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

"But the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." Their deceitful conduct shall be, not only the cause, but not unfrequently the means also, of their destruction.

Nathanael was a man without guile. We accordingly find, that though prejudiced against Jesus of Nazareth, his sincerity appeared in the means which he employed to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, and he was led by it in the right way. Christ's enemies were men of perverse spirits. They crucified him with a view to maintain their honour, and preserve their nation; but by their perverse conduct both were destroyed.

Ver. 4. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing," said the wise man, in a preceding part of this book†. But mistake him not; he did not say that well-gotten treasures profit much. Though we should allow that they are of some little use in the time of prosperity, they are altogether useless in the time of calamity. When God punishes a land, riches only make their owners a fairer mark, and a richer booty to the spoilers. When conscience stings, its wounds are poisoned by reflections on the abuse of riches. They make death more terrible. To the wicked who possessed wealth, it shall be said at the last judgment, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat." Nothing of the world shall follow them to hell, but the bitter remembrance of the good things they possessed, and the guilt contracted by the influence of such a possession. "But righteousness delivereth from death." In Jerusalem's day, the poor and the righteous alone escaped. The righteous shall not be subdued by the first, nor touched by the second death.

Ver. 5. If the righteous man should turn aside from the right way, he shall not wander to destruction. His righteousness will rectify his

way. He cannot enjoy pleasure in the way of sin, for it is contrary to the tastes that have been excited, and are still preserved, by the Holy Spirit*. When Christ's sheep wander into the paths of sin and error, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and his grace shall reclaim them†. But the wicked wander from mountain to hill, till they fall irrecoverably into the pit of destruction.

Ver. 6. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Righteousness disposes men to walk unblameably and inoffensively, so that none but savages will hurt them. There are such savages among the sons of Adam, but their mischief shall come down on their own head, whilst the righteous are delivered from their malice; for they wait on the Lord, and keep his way, which is the way of life and peace. They cry unto God, and God delivers them, not only from their troubles, but from all their fears. Christ is the Captain of their salvation, and he will lose none of his soldiers. Though they should lose their lives in his cause, they are still overcomers‡.

Were it possible to obtain a medicine of universal efficacy, who would not endeavour to gain possession of it? or who would drink a poison always mortal, except when a remedy were speedily applied? There is no trouble from which righteousness does not deliver; nor did any one ever meddle with wickedness, but to his own sorrow.

Ver. 7. Men derive almost the whole of their happiness from hope. The wicked man laughs at the righteous, because he lives by hope; but the wicked man himself does the same, with this difference, that whilst the hopes of the one are coeval with eternity, those of the other are bounded by time. The expectation of the one has for its object things heavenly and durable, whilst that of the other is fixed on objects circumscribed by the present life. The present situation of the wicked man never yields him the pleasure which he wishes and expects, but there is ever something in view, in which, could he but obtain it, he would find rest. If his hopes are deferred, his heart is sick; if they are accomplished, he is still unsatisfied; but he comforts himself with some other hope, like a child, who thinks he sees a rainbow on the top of a neighbouring hill, and runs to take hold of it, but sees it as far removed from him as before. Thus the life of a wicked man is spent in vain wishes, and toils, and hopes, till death kills at once his body, his hope, and his happiness.

Wicked men may indulge themselves in hopes of eternal happiness too. They cannot deny themselves to be sinners, but they hope that they are not sinners of the worst sort, or at least that they will amend, and fly to Christ, and be as happy through eternity as those who are so foolish, or so timorous, as to come into the Lord's vineyard in the morning, and bear the burden and heat of the day, and have no better recompence in the evening, than those who began to work at the eleventh hour. Such hopes are highly pleasing to the devil, who keeps his slaves quiet by means of them, till they are brought into the same hopeless condition with himself.

Were the sun literally turned into darkness, and all the worlds now enlightened by his beams, into dreary dungeons, it would not be so shocking, as for one immortal soul that looks for happiness, to be drowned in eternal despair.

Ver. 8. Though Solomon celebrates so frequently the happiness of the righteous, he by no means insinuates that righteousness will exempt men from adversity. Christ himself suffered, and shall we claim, uninterrupted prosperity? The wicked often possess wealth and ease, when the saints of God are beaten with the storm of adversity; but it shall not be always so. The saints are delivered, and misery comes upon those that despised and hated them. But there is this difference between the troubles of the righteous and those of the wicked. The righteous have first their evil things, and when they receive their good things, the remembrance of former distress fills them with additional satisfaction. They rejoice, like the weather-beaten mariner who has escaped from the waves and tempests. The wicked have first their good things, and the remembrance of them envenoms their misery, and is oil to the fire where they are tormented. The wicked comes not again out of trouble, nor does the righteous come in his stead.

This proverb is often true in a more literal sense, for the wicked frequently comes into that very trouble from which the righteous man is delivered. The Philistines came into David's place, when Saul was pursuing him in the wilderness of Maon. Haman and his sons were hanged on the gallows designed for Mordecai; and the enemies of the Jews perished on that day which was expected to be fatal to the Jews. Herod thought to have destroyed Peter, but God put Peter's keepers and Herod himself in his place. The Jews, in the days of the apostles, persecuted the Christians; but the unbelieving Jews were put into their place, when the Roman eagle was brought into their land and sanctuary. These things are done by God, as often as he sees it proper for his own glory, and for the advantage of his people*.

Ver. 9. There are so many mischiefs in the tongue of a wicked man, that it is called a world of iniquity. None of them, however, is so bad as the deceit that is in the mouth of the hypocrite, whose tongue is like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Abner's hands were not bound when he was engaged in fair battle, and we find, that over Asahel, though a mighty and a swift enemy, he gained an easy victory. But how different was the fate of this victorious champion, when attacked by Joab! Then he died as a fool dieth, and for this reason; he was deceived by the ensnaring professions of friendship made by his treacherous assailant. Such is the difference between an open enemy and a false friend. Many souls have been ruined by the mouth of the hypocrite, whilst the servants of Satan have artfully disguised themselves in the dress of the ministers of righteousness, and by fair words, and saint-like speeches, deceived the hearts of the simple.

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

Ver. 10. The righteous fear God, and live in the practice of justice and charity towards men. These virtues procure the esteem, even of those who have no experience of the power of religion; and therefore, when it goes well with them, their neighbours rejoice; but when the wicked fall, there is shouting, because they were living plagues, and employed their prosperity and power for the gratification of their own selfish and unrighteous passions. There was great joy in Judah when righteous princes were raised to the throne‡, or good ministers entrusted with the management of affairs||. When bad kings perished, their memories were infamous, neither were they honoured with burnings, or with a place in the sepulchres of the kings.

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

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

Ver. 11. No wonder that the advancement of the righteous is a cause of public joy. Their prayers, their holy conversation, their counsels, and their example, is a public blessing, by which the city is exalted, for some of the sinners in it are reformed. The young are allured by the beauty of goodness, virtue is encouraged, vice is discountenanced, and the city becomes, as far as their influence extends, a habitation of justice; and righteousness exalteth a nation. But though inveterate corruptions should, in a great measure, obstruct their patriotic exertions, yet a city is preserved from ruin, or at least its ruin is deferred, on their account. A cloud of wrath hung over Judah in the days of good Josiah, and the corruptions of the land were too obstinate to be thoroughly removed by him, yet the threatened wrath was suspended till he was laid in the grave. God, as we are told, then sought for one to stand in the gap, to turn away his anger from the guilty land, but found none, and so his anger was poured out upon it to the uttermost.

“But the city is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.” Their mouth is a pestilence, which infects their neighbours, till the fatal venom of iniquity corrupt the body of the community, and ruin become inevitable; or else their counsels prove destructive to its welfare or existence.

Have we any generosity of spirit? Then it will inspire us with heartfelt joy to be instruments of happiness to all around us. Though we should be little better than savages, it must fill us with horror to think of ruining others as well as ourselves. Let us, then, depart from evil, and do good.

As far as our connections are within the compass of our choice, let us form them upon this maxim. It is good to have the heirs of blessing, and the instruments of blessing to others, for husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbours.

Ver. 12. No human creature is to be despised, for he is our neighbour. He is our own flesh, our brother, sprung from our common father, Adam. Honour all men. Men were made in the image of God; and though that image is now lost, it is still a sufficient evidence of the sinfulness of despising, as well as of murdering, our neighbour, that in the image of God man was made*, and that we cannot say whether the persons whom we are tempted to despise, are not in that happy number of the chosen of God, for whose sakes the Son of God hath dignified our nature by assuming it, and whom he will again beautify with that glorious image which was effaced by the fall.

Do you allege that your neighbour is worthy of contempt, on account of his poverty, or meanness, or some remarkable weakness, by which he is rendered ridiculous? I ask you whether he is a fool. You say, No. Then confess that your contempt ought to rest on yourself; for Solomon says you are one, and want of wisdom is far worse than the want of riches, or beauty, or polite accomplishments.

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

None are so contemptible as the contemptuous. They are so void of sense, that they make themselves the objects of scorn or indignation, by publishing their insolence in the disparaging of their neighbours; but “a man of understanding holdeth his peace.” He will not expose himself to the hatred of men, or to the condemnation of hell, by saying to his brother, Raca; and if he is insulted with the contempt of others, he returns not abuse, but pity. Should some mud stick to his clothes, he will not defile his hands by throwing it at his adversary, but rather leaves it till time makes it easy to be brushed off.

Ver. 13. Much of our wisdom lies in the prudent choice of friends. A well-chosen friend sweetens the present life, and assists us in our progress to a better. An unworthy friend will bring on us disappointment, vexation, and remorse. But what sort of persons are we to avoid or to chuse for our friends? We must not chuse one that takes pleasure in telling every thing he knows. You may be sure that such a one will betray your secrets; for though he should have no malignity of disposition, his anxiety to rehearse every private story that he has picked up, will prove to him an irresistible temptation to expose you.

The scripture, however, does not condemn all revealing of secrets. There are some secrets which the laws of justice and charity bind us to reveal*. But it is a proof that a man has no command of his tongue, when he can risk the uneasiness and displeasure of his neighbours, by publishing matters which can be of no benefit to him to whom they are communicated.

But that man is to be chosen as your friend, who is of an honest and faithful spirit. Your heart will be relieved of its sorrows, by pouring them into his bosom; and you may rest assured that he will cause you no uneasiness by blabbing what you would not have the world to know.

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

speaketh.

Ver. 14. In our private concerns it is dangerous to trust our own wisdom, and it is our interest to advise with wise and faithful friends, in every important business of life. But in the affairs of countries, public calamity must be the inevitable consequence of the sovereign's being not wise enough to know his need of asking and following the advice of wise men. If he asks the advice of wise men, and yet follows that of fools, he is no better than Rehoboam, who by such conduct rent his kingdom, and but for the kindness and faithfulness of God to David, in reserving two tribes to his grandson, would have lost it all.

Solomon had wisdom not only to teach, but to practise this maxim. He had wise counsellors under whom his kingdom flourished, and their counsels might have preserved the kingdom in the hands of his son. But God infatuates those whom he intends to punish; and there is not a plainer evidence of infatuation than when men presume on their own sense, or prefer the counsel of the vain and foolish to that of the sober and the wise.

Great is the judgment with which God visits a land, when he removes wise and faithful counsellors from the management of its concerns*. In our intercession for kings, then, let us pray that God may furnish them with good counsellors, and with wisdom to make a proper use of them.

Ver. 15. Friendship or charity may, on some rare occasion, make it our duty to become surety for one that is not a stranger†; but still our friendship must be guided by discretion, that our own peace, the welfare of our family, and our ability to pay our just debts, may not be brought into danger.

"He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it," for he will lose his money, and involve himself in difficulties, or at least feel many anxious thoughts till relieved from the rash obligation. Or should he escape all these misfortunes, the same levity of mind that induced him to become bound for another man's debts, will entangle him in new engagements, so that he must have extraordinary good fortune if he never smart for it. "He that hateth suretiship," on the other hand, is comparatively sure, for perfect certainty is not in earthly things. He is at least secure against those self-reflections which sting the mind of the thoughtless squanderer, who signed away his peace and property, the talent of beneficence entrusted to him, and the bread of a family dependent on him, because, forsooth, he could not utter the word no, to one that seemed to trust his generosity.

He that conscientiously observes this and other rules of Scripture about his worldly substance, keeps the way of the Lord; and the man who, while he does so, trusts in the Lord, has promises respecting earthly things, that impart a security to which other men have no parallel.

If the Scripture condemns those who risk their substance by a species of prodigality that has in it a tincture of generosity, how worthy of condemnation are those unfaithful stewards of providence who spend their Master's substance on cards, or on riotous living and harlots; thus using the bounties of God for the service of the devil, and for ruining their own souls and the souls of others!

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

Ver. 16. It is not a set of fine features, or a blooming complexion, that makes a woman gracious, but faith in Christ, and the fear of God; prudence and modesty, humility and attention to the duties which she owes to her parents, her husband, and her children.

A woman beautified with these lovely graces, is possessed of true honour, for such ornaments are in the sight of God himself of great price. If she is in the married state, her possession of such virtues will be the means of conferring upon her husband more happiness than a crown could bestow.

But the children of the serpent would rob the daughters of Eve of their honour. Partaking of the subtilty and malice of their father, they would, for the sake of a little contemptible gratification, turn the paradise of the gracious woman into a dreary desert.

As strong men will not suffer their riches to become a prey to depredators, so a gracious woman will hold fast her virtue against those villainous spoilers, who would rob her of the ornaments, with which, when compared, oriental pearls are like the mud in the mire, the diamonds of Golconda like the stones of the street.

That she may be successful in holding fast her virtue, she must commit herself to the keeping of the Seed of the woman, who was manifested to bruise the head of the old serpent, and to destroy the works of the devil. If Eve in her perfect state could not protect herself from the serpent when yet young, how shall the fallen daughters of Eve protect themselves against that old serpent, who, by the diligent practice of nearly 6000 years, has now become a proficient in the art of tempting!

She must read the Bible, guard against idleness, and shun the society of the bad, as she would a house infected by the pestilence. If in a single state, she must shew all deference to her parents, and care for the things of the Lord; if married, she must care for her husband how to please him, and by her dress and behaviour prove herself a daughter of Sarah*.

Let her, in a word, treasure up the instructions of Lemuel's mother. On them let her form her character, and by them regulate her general deportment. Then shall her husband and her children, her neighbours and acquaintances, yea, and her own good works also, praise her in the gates. Nor shall her honour be confined to herself, but her husband shall be honoured with her.

Ver. 17. It is the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to which we must look for eternal life*. He that has this hope in him will compassionate the distressed, and endeavour to imitate that mercy on which all his hope depends. And God is so full of mercy, that men shall be no losers, but great gainers, by that mercy which they shew to others. Though it should be considered in no other light than a debt which they already owed to God and to their fellow-creatures, yet the gracious rewards of the merciful man are rich in this world†, and at the last day they shall be so transcendently great as to fill with amazement the happy receiver‡.

That they may be losers by the exercise of mercy, and that they know not what they may need for themselves, are the only objections which men can urge against it. But if they really believed the Bible, they would shew mercy, because they know not what they may need, and would regard such loss better far than gain||.

“But he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.” Why did not the wise man say, “his own soul?” He knew that a cruel man cares nothing for his soul. If you would obtain a hearing from the merciless man, say nothing about his soul. He values it less than his dog. But if you could convince him that his want of mercy will be hurtful to his flesh, he would think a little about his ways. And it is evident from Scripture, that his flesh, no less than his soul, is under a fearful curse. He shall have judgment without mercy. How awful is this sentence, when even merciful men need infinite mercy to save them*!

But who is the cruel man? Scarcely any person will take with this detestable character. Julius Cæsar, who had been the death of many hundred thousands, did not think himself a cruel man. Hazael, a few hours before he murdered his master, could not believe himself to be such a dog as to be cruel. But the contrast in this verse teaches us, that to want mercy, is a sign of cruelty. He is not the only great transgressor who strips the naked, but that man also who gives not bread to the hungry, nor water to the thirsty.

Ver. 18. Solomon’s heart was large as the sand on the seashore. He could have amused and surprised us with new discoveries in every proverb, but he was directed by the Holy Spirit to seek our profit rather than his own fame, and to inculcate again and again the same interesting and necessary truths, that we may learn and practise them.

That sin is attended with extreme misery, and righteousness with great happiness, he has already informed us at considerable length†; and we here find him resuming the subject, dilating upon it, and exhibiting it in a variety of lights. If we consider our ways, we shall find that there is no vain repetition in his words, for none of us have been sufficiently attentive to them. If we had, no motives, however alluring or terrifying, would have reconciled us to any neglect or violation of the divine law. The ground that is particularly bad, must be ploughed over and over, to prepare it for a crop.

“The wicked worketh a deceitful work.” None would be so rich and happy as the servants of Satan, were his promises all performed; but the misery is, that he will promise kingdoms, though he cannot, like Chaldean robbers, have a single sheep without the divine permission; and what is worst of all, those that trust his promises are paid with fire and brimstone.

The devil was a liar from the beginning, and yet so infatuated are men, that they will trust him more than the God that cannot lie. The devil places pleasure and profit before them; God, by the threatenings of his word, sets an everlasting hell before them. But they will venture through it, in order to enjoy the vanities with which the great tempter allures them. They have the presumption to think, that by their plausible pretences they shall not only be able to cheat their fellowmen, but to elude the all-seeing eye of God, while, alas! the devil is cheating them to everlasting misery.

“But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.” All men are sowing seed in the course of their lives. Wicked men sow the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind. Righteous thoughts, and words, and actions, are seed that shall shoot up in happiness inexpressible. The sower must wait and exercise long patience, but the harvest shall abundantly recompense his patience and his toil. He may sow in tears, but he shall reap in joy. He may be at much expense, and so was Isaac, when he sowed much corn in a time of famine. The good patriarch might be a little straitened whilst his corn was growing in the fields, but the Lord gave him an hundred-fold, and will give much more than an hundred-fold to the sowers of righteousness,—an hundred-fold in this life, and in the world to come, life everlasting. Who would not expend more seed than he could well spare on so fruitful a field!

Husbandmen may be disappointed of their hopes, and through adverse providences, the harvest may become a heap in the day of desperate sorrow; but if there be truth and righteousness with God, or certainty in the word of the faithful Witness, the reward of the sowers of righteousness shall be sure*.

Ver. 19. Our best life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ, on whose righteousness our title to it stands. Our personal righteousness is the proof of our title, and our preparation for the possession of it. He, therefore, that lives in the practice of sin, that only evil, “does it to his own death.” It is natural to all men to hate the devil, and death, and hell; yet so infatuated are wicked men, that they willingly serve the devil, and love death, and push on towards hell, though God thunders in their ears this awful sentence, “He that pursueth evil, doth it to his own death.” And there must be truth in it, if God be the Sovereign of life and death; for,

Ver. 20. There is inexpressible malignity in sin, for the most merciful God threatens, and detests, and curses, and will destroy them that live in it. Uprightness is a noble quality, for the Lord greatly delights in it.

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

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

Ver. 21. If all the wicked on earth should combine with all the devils of hell, to prevent the execution of judgment, it would only be a combination of thorns fully dry against the devouring flame. Do sinners imagine that they shall be safe, though so many dreadful threatenings stand pointed against them? Let them read with horror that portion of Scripture contained in Deuteronomy, chap. 29. from the 18th to the 25th verse. The man that hardens his spirit against these words, is an infidel.

But upon mount Zion, and upon Jerusalem, shall be deliverance, and the righteous shall enjoy it, and their offspring with them. No believer in Christ can secure his unbelieving children; but present deliverances are often granted to the ungodly seed of the godly. That blemish in David's line, king Ahaz, was not utterly destroyed, because God would still give a lamp in Jerusalem to his servant David.

When some of Sir Thomas More's children complained to him that they could make nothing of their posts under him, because of his strict administration, he answered, "I will do justice to all men for your sake, and will leave you a blessing."

Ver. 22. Solomon does not deny that beauty is an amiable quality, for he compares it to a jewel of gold. But he denies that beauty without discretion can render a woman lovely. The nature of a swine is not altered by its being adorned with nose jewels, such as those which some of the ladies of Zion used to wear. It is still, with all its decorations, a swine; it loves the mire, and its ornaments, instead of concealing its ugliness, only render it so much the more an object of scorn and of ridicule. Every eye will be attracted by it, and every beholder astonished by so unnatural a conjunction of vileness and adorning. A beautiful woman may be admired for a time, but when her vanity and folly are detected, admiration is turned into loathing.

If beautiful women would gain and preserve the honour that belongs to the gracious woman, let them beware of those who are disposed to flatter. When their flatterers compare them to angels, and speak of their lilies and their roses, let them remember, that a wiser and more honest man compares beauty, without discretion, to a jewel of gold in a swine's snout.

Look to thy face in a glass, (said one of the wise men of Greece), and if thou hast beauty, disgrace it not by an unseemly behaviour; but if thou art ugly, make amends for it by the beauty of thy conversation.

Ver. 23. A righteous man will not indulge the natural desires of the flesh and of the mind, but will endeavour to limit his wishes by the rules of the Bible. In consequence, indeed, of the remaining darkness of his mind, and distempers of his heart, he may desire things not good for him; still, however, it is his wish that nothing may be granted him, inconsistent with the will of that God, who knows infinitely better than his people do what is good for them, and who will give them what is good though they ask not for it, and who will keep back nothing needful for them, however averse to receive it they may be.

For this reason it is that the desire of the righteous shall always end in what is good for them, for their desires are presented to that God who hath assured them, that if they ask any thing according to his will, he heareth them. No righteous man would for a World consent that these words, "according to his will," should be dropped from this promise of Scripture.

The righteous man is happy when his desires are either granted or refused, but "the expectations of the wicked," gratified or disappointed, "are wrath." The Israelites had flesh to satisfy their lusts, but leanness was sent into their souls, and the wrath of God soon squeezed out all the sweetness of their quails. They, at another time, desired a king, and God gave them a king in his anger, but took him away in his wrath. "The expectation of the wicked shall perish." Here is misery, but it is not all their misery. The perfection of it is, that their "expectation is wrath."

Ver. 24. Liberality is one eminent branch of the character of the righteous, but because there are many objections in the heart of man against the practice of it, urgent motives are here addressed to us. The instructions delivered in this and the four following verses, will, if they are but believed, be a sufficient answer to every objection.

There is that scattereth his substance by profusion and luxury. That man diminishes his substance till it comes to nothing. But he that disperses by giving to the poor, by liberal distributions for the support of the commonwealth in times of danger, or for the service of religion, shall increase his substance. He is like the husbandman, who sows with good will and unsparing hand, that precious seed which is to produce a joyful harvest. It is God who gives all that we enjoy, and by his secret blessing, or by remarkable interpositions of providence, the liberal man is often made to abound in riches, and enabled more and more abundantly to serve his fellow-men*. Abraham sat at his tent-door to watch for passengers, and those who came, he urged to partake of his bounty, with more earnestness than other men beg an alms. Job never ate his morsel alone; and the latter end of both these men did greatly increase. Of all the rich men that have come to poverty, I never heard of any that was ruined by a discreet liberality, but "there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Men may give something to the poor, and yet be impoverished, without being exceptions to the truth of this proverb; for though they give some small matter off their superfluities, yet they withhold more than is meet. They are like a husbandman sowing an acre with half a bushel of grain, who will soon reduce his substance to nothing†.

What will become of him who is so far from being generous, that he is not just? He withholdeth of that which is right, as the word may be rendered, and brings the roll of God's curses into his house, to consume the timber and stones thereof.

Ver. 25. He is not the truly charitable man who has an open purse, but not a charitable heart. The thoughtless prodigal, when he is scattering his money, may bestow his share upon the indigent; but though he should give them all he has, it will not prove him possessed of the grace of charity.

The good man not only gives his bread, but draws out his soul to the hungry. He knows the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was rich, and yet became poor for our sakes; and his charity, produced by this knowledge, is suitable to the design of the gospel, for it is out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.

The man of liberal soul shall be made fat. He prospers in his soul, and if God think it good for him, he shall prosper in his body and in his circumstances also. He waters others with the blessings of his bounty, and he shall be watered himself with the blessing of Divine mercy, till he become like a watered garden, or like a spring of waters, whose waters fail not*.

Say not, then, you would be liberal if you could. Every man who has a liberal soul, however little his purse be, shares in the

blessedness of the liberal. Two mites from a poor widow, will be as acceptable in the temple-treasury, as two pounds from one who abounds in wealth; and the poor who pour forth prayers for those distressed persons whom they have not money to relieve, are liberal in the sight of God; for if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.

Did not charity forbid, a Christian would be glad on his own account that there are very poor persons in the world, for in relieving their necessities, he does a thousand times more good to himself than to them. That saying of Christ is certainly true, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

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

Ver. 26. Bread is the staff of life. The king himself is served by the field. But the husbandman, or trader in corn, must not withhold or sell merely as it serves his own interests, but must consider himself as a steward in God's great family, and use that talent with which he is entrusted, for the benefit of others, as well as for his own advantage. He must not withhold his corn from the market in order to increase the price, and enrich himself at the expense of the poor, and the risk of their life and health. If he does so, he counteracts the kind design of Providence in making the corn spring out of the earth, and discovers a mean, selfish, and unfeeling heart. He grinds the faces of the poor, and tempts people to murmur at the allotments of Providence, and to utter imprecations against himself. Thus he at once shares in the guilt of their curses, and exposes himself to the effect of them; for though such curses are very sinful, the sin lies chiefly on the inhuman object who was the tempter to them, and they are not to be ranked among the causeless curses which shall not come. When defrauded labourers, or the oppressed poor, cry against the author of their distresses, the cry enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth: much more will he hear the cries of a whole province or people, against him who is the instrument of withholding from them the necessaries of life. "But blessings shall be upon the head of him that generously sells it," when it was in his power to enrich himself by withholding. Although he takes a reasonable price for this useful commodity, he yet exercises more useful and extensive liberality, than he who bestows his superfluities to feed a few of the indigent.

It is not said the people shall bless him. Men are more ready to curse their oppressors than to bless their benefactors. Besides, they may think it superfluous to give both a price and a blessing for their food. But we are not to serve men chiefly from a regard to their thanks, but to look above them, to that God who delights in goodness, and who will not fail to recompense it in its different expressions of giving, or lending, or selling.

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

Ver. 27. God is infinitely good, and is still doing good from heaven. He gives us rain and fruitful seasons; yea, he has bestowed upon us the inestimable gift of Christ, and salvation through his blood. Surely the consideration of this goodness might dispose us to labour diligently in promoting the good of other men, though in doing so we should be obliged to forego much happiness of our own. But God in his goodness hath provided a sufficient answer to all those objections against serving others, which are taken from our own interest. He that diligently pursueth good, may put himself to much toil and expense; but he obtains favour, and that is an abundant recompense for all the labours and sufferings of love. He will likely have the favour of men, for when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him; but he is sure of the favour and blessing of God*.

But when a man seeks mischief, it is questionable indeed whether he shall effect his malicious purpose, but it is certain that the mischief he does to himself is greater than that intended against his neighbour. The just Lord is known by the judgment which he executes, in causing the contrivers of evil to fall into their own snares.

Ver. 28. After all that Solomon can say, many will still trust to their chests and to their bonds, more than to the promises of God. Their money is their strong castle in which they hope to be safe, and the fountain whence, they expect supplies of comfort. A text in the Proverbs is not so good as a full purse, and therefore they will not part with their money to others, but will keep it for their own use. Confidence in money is a sin that has produced much sin, prevented many acts of goodness, and will, at the day of judgment, be found a general article in the charge against the wicked. The Scripture frequently warns men against this instance of idolatry†, and calls on ministers to preach against it. They that trust in riches shall fall like the flower of the grass, or like the leaves of a tree. Their riches shall leave them; or if they should die in the midst of their wealth, they can carry nothing of their glory along with them. Their wealth cannot keep them from falling into hell, or mitigate the horrors of the infernal lake; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. The righteous man trusts not in the unfaithful mammon, but in the name of the Lord*. He thinks the promise of God better security than the earth can afford, and trusts his money in the hands of him who says, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord; and he will recompense again what he hath given unto him." This man shall not fade like the leaves, but shall flourish like the branch of a tree‡. A branch may during winter appear withered, but it drops not from the stock, and in the spring it revives and grows. So the righteous man, though he meets with seasons of affliction, shall revive and flourish. He is ingrafted into the true Vine, and partaking of his vital influence, shall abound in the fruits of comfort and righteousness. At death he shall be transplanted into the celestial paradise, where all the trees of righteousness shall flourish in immortal beauty.

Ver. 29. The eye of God is still upon us, and he observes how we behave in our different relations. He punishes with disappointment, poverty, and disgrace, the man who is a scourge instead of a blessing to his own family.

A man is a plague to his family, when he is of a domineering and quarrelsome temper, bursting into passion at every trifling omission of his will and pleasure; when by covetousness he oppresses his servants and children with bondage and hard labour, scarcely allowing them to enjoy life; when by prodigality he wastes the bread and portion of his children; when, by his disregard to mercy and justice, he brings the curse of God on himself and his house; when, by irreligion, he neglects the spiritual welfare of his family, and encourages them in evil by a bad example.

The troubler of his house shall possess vanity, disappointment, and misery. The evils that he brings to his dependants are doubled to himself. Those who might be his best friends, he makes his enemies; and his vices, so troublesome to others, produce in the end torment and ruin to himself. He has all the marks of a fool, and through the natural consequences of his folly, and the merited judgment of God, is likely to be reduced to a slavish dependance on the wise of heart, who shew their wisdom by such a government of their families, as promotes the holiness and happiness of those whom Providence has entrusted to their care*.

Providence does not always bring these punishments upon men, lest we should forget that there is a judgment-day coming; but they are often inflicted as an earnest of what all persons of like behaviour are to expect at the great day of accounts.

Ver. 30. The righteous shall flourish as a branch, and they bear the fruits of the tree of life, for they are ingrafted in Christ, and derive supplies of spiritual influence from him. No fruit-bearing tree that is seen in our cursed earth, is a sufficient emblem to represent the excellency of the righteous man. He is like that noblest tree of paradise, which was planted by the hand of God himself, and was distinguished above all the trees in the paradise of God. His fruits are such as tend to produce and nourish a nobler life than any of the trees of the garden of Eden. Christ is indeed the life of souls, and those who are not united to him continue in death; but he is pleased to honour faithful ministers and edifying professors, by making them instruments of imparting his best blessings unto men. It is for this reason that diligent ministers are said to save themselves and their hearers. How excellent is the righteous man above his neighbours! His gracious words, his holy conversation, his prayers, his admonitions and instructions, are means of rendering service to others, more valuable than silver, or gold, or life itself. Let Christians therefore endeavour to be fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and labour to win souls to their Redeemer. Even women, who are not allowed to speak in the church, may by this means share the reward of those who turn many to righteousness. What know they but that they may save their husbands or neighbours, and allure to the faith of Christ those that did not obey his word*? They are wise who are wise unto salvation; how truly wise, then, are they who are instruments in converting and saving the souls of others from death†! They are by the world counted wise, who, by means of their skill in business, leave their friends rich. But they shall at the great day be declared by the Judge of all wise, who can say, "Behold I, and the children which thou hast given me." These are my joy and crown of rejoicing. Happy are all they who shall be able thus to speak on that eventful day, which seals the characters of men.

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

Ver. 31. This verse is introduced by a word that calls for our attention, and contains an observation which explains all the proverbs which express the happiness of the righteous and the misery of the wicked, and answers an objection against them which naturally springs up in our minds.

It is evident from experience, and Solomon himself observes it, that there is a righteous man to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked, and a wicked man to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. How, then, can it be said of the righteous, it shall be well with them; and of the wicked, it shall be ill with them?

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

Now, if the righteous are chastened so severely, how dreadful is the condemnation of the world! if fatherly corrections break the bones and drink up the spirits of God's people, what imagination can conceive the horrors of that inflamed wrath which is the portion of the wicked! Believers smart for sins committed through infirmity, fully forgiven through the blood of Christ, and sincerely lamented by themselves. But who knoweth the power of God's anger in crushing the wicked, when the day of grace is past, and the time is come to make the praise of God known in the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction! "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked and ungodly appear?"

CHAPTER 12

Ver. 1. PYTHAGORAS took to himself the name of Philosopher, or lover of wisdom, rather than the name of wise man, which had been assumed by the sages before him, because he thought that the greatest men might, with more propriety, be called seekers,

than finders of wisdom. If a man be a lover of knowledge, though much ignorance still remains with him, he is in the sure way of finding it*. But is there any man so foolish, and so like a beast, as not to love knowledge? Solomon tells us, that those who love instruction, love knowledge; but those who hate reproof are brutish. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves by this mark. The lover of knowledge will take pleasure in the Bible, and in sermons, and in conversation with the wise. He will be glad of reproofs, which serve to convey the most seasonable and necessary instructions, though in a manner so mortifying to human pride, that they are not relished but by those who prefer their real good to the applause of men. The lover of knowledge will count that man his real friend, who honestly tells him his faults, and would chuse to be a member of that family and church which is governed by the rules of Christ; for though he values liberty, he does not place it in being allowed to do evil when he pleases, without check.

But he who hates instruction, and cannot endure the reproof of charity, is brutish. He is like the horse or the mule, which bites and kicks at the man who performs a painful operation upon it, though absolutely necessary for removing a dangerous distemper; or like a dog, or sow, which will shew as much rage at the man that casts a pearl before it, as if he were killing it with a stone†. He is surely a brute, and not a rational creature, who has swallowed poison, and will rather suffer it to take its course, than admit the necessary relief of medicine, lest he should be obliged to confess his folly, in exposing himself to the need of it.

There is ordinarily in offenders a strong aversion to the administration of Christian discipline. They think, that by it their honour is wounded; but they ought to consider, that by their sin the wound is already given to their honour, and that a cheerful submission to this ordinance of Christ, is the only way by which it can be repaired.

There is an equal indisposedness among professors of religion, to receive Christian reproof. Drunkards and swearers often discover less displeasure against a reprover, than some that consider themselves first-rate Christians. The man, therefore, that ventures on the friendly office of admonition, must exercise much prudence, and shew, by his manner of dispensing it, that he is constrained by charity, lest he irritate instead of reforming.

Asa was a good man, and yet he was angry at a prophet of God for reproving him. He certainly ought to have made Asaph's confession, "Thus foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee.

Ver. 2. We are to shew forth the virtues of him that called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, by endeavouring to shine in the exercise of such Christian graces, as correspond to those attributes of God that shine with resplendent lustre in the work of our salvation. The exercise, therefore, of charity and goodness, is highly becoming those on whose account such miracles of goodness and love have been displayed.

A good man forms no devices for serving himself, to the prejudice of his fellow-creatures. Could a window be opened in his breast, you would see charity ruling in his heart, and disposing him earnestly to wish for the spiritual and temporal advantages of his neighbours, and to imitate our gracious Saviour, who went about doing good; for the Spirit of Christ is in him, and the fruit of this Spirit is in all goodness. He does not value himself on this account, as if there were any merit in paying a debt which he owes to men on God's account*. All his hopes are founded upon that infinite goodness, which provided salvation for self-ruined sinners; yet his goodness is well-pleasing unto the Lord, who blesses him with the smiles of his countenance, and will remember him concerning all his works, and all his thoughts and designs of love, according to the multitude of his mercies†.

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

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

Ver. 3. A man sometimes appears to be established, and often hopes to be so by wickedness; but it is all a delusion. Had Zimri peace who founded his throne on treason? A man may with more reason hope to build himself a sure house upon pillars of ice, than to establish his fortunes upon an accursed ground.

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

Ver. 4. A virtuous woman fears the Lord, reverences her husband, manages her house with prudence and care, behaves charitably to the poor, and kindly to all. To what should we compare such a woman? Should we resemble her to a bracelet, or say that she is a necklace of gold to her husband? Such comparisons would be quite below her worth. She makes him as happy as a king, and procures him such respect and honour, that she deserves to be compared to that royal ornament that encircles the head of Majesty. She is to her husband a crown enriched with those lovely virtues, which shine with more radiant lustre than the diamonds of the

East.

She is health to her husband's bones, for the sight of her amiable behaviour, and the pleasure of her society, inspires him with that habitual cheerfulness which doth good like a medicine. But the woman that wants virtue makes her husband ashamed, and is as rottenness in his bones. Her peevish temper or passionate behaviour, her extravagant expences or her sordid avarice, the levity of her speech or the scandal of her vices, make him the object of pity or scorn when he is abroad, and fill him with anguish at home. She is not a help, but a torment to him that hath made her bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. A man may get out of a fever in a few weeks; but the misery of this living disease is, that unless the Almighty grace of God work an uncommon cure, it will prey upon a man's bones and spirits, till the death of one of the married parties brings relief.

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

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

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

Ver. 5. As far as we are warranted or concerned to judge of the character of our neighbours, we must draw our opinion of them from their words and behaviour; but we are to form our judgment of ourselves, chiefly by our thoughts, which are the immediate product of our hearts; for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. The thoughts of the righteous are right. Evil and foolish thoughts often rise up in their minds, but they have vain thoughts, and will not allow them a lodging-place. Their love to God produces many delightful meditations concerning his excellency and grace, and constant desires to shew forth his glory. Their charity to men excludes ungrounded suspicion and evil surmises, and in their deliberations about their conduct, disposes them to consider not only how they may serve their own interests, but how they may contribute to the happiness of their neighbours. Should any plan be suggested to them that appears greatly conducive to their own advantage, it will be rejected with abhorrence, unless it consist with the happiness of those whom they are constrained, by the command of God and the love of Christ, to love as themselves.

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

Ver. 6. There is a ready communication between the tongue and the heart; when men's counsels are deceit, it may therefore be expected, that their words will be to lie in wait for blood.

There are passions in the hearts of wicked men, that are murder in the sight of God, and have a natural tendency to mischief and blood; but through the good providence of the universal Ruler, they are checked by the terrors of conscience, or the fear of punishment from men, or some other means, and the world is prevented from becoming a scene of universal outrage.

But some wicked men are so unprincipled, that the life of their neighbours is of small account with them, if they can accomplish their own cursed designs. Their tongues have the subtilty and poison of the serpent in them, and by their devilish arts, they draw men into dangers fatal to their reputation, their souls, and their bodies. "But the mouth of the upright shall deliver them." Their wise answers preserve themselves, and their wise counsels preserve others from ruin. Thus Mephibosheth preserved himself from the snares of Ziba; and our Lord Jesus Christ often preserved himself from the well-laid devices of his deceitful enemies*.

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

Ver. 7. There is a mighty difference between the evils that befall the righteous, and those that come upon the wicked. Evil shall slay the wicked, so that they shall have no more existence in that world where their hopes and happiness lay, and their existence in another world shall be an everlasting curse; but the righteous shall be established, and their seed with them*.

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

John the Baptist did not affect the praise of men, and yet we find that by the people he was commended greatly, and even held in respect by the king. The Pharisees and the Priests procured the esteem of the people, and yet we find that Pilate saw through their false pretences, when they delivered up Christ to him; and through the prevalence of truth, that veneration which they had engrossed, was in a great measure transferred to the apostles.

It is a great temptation to men to see wisdom despised, and qualities which have no necessary connexion with it applauded. The desire of respect is natural to men, and this prejudices them against that profession or practice, which makes them forfeit the good opinion of men. This hindered many from professing the name of our Saviour*, and others from believing in him†. But the apostles shewed their wisdom, by glorying in shame for the name of Christ. They knew that this shame would end in royal honours‡.

We should frequently think on the day of judgment, that day which will set the seal on all human characters. Then will the Lord

himself commend the wise in the face of the world, and the perverse in heart shall be a universal abhorring.

Ver. 9. Some people are such bond slaves to the applause and respect of men, that in order to make others think them happy, they render themselves miserable. For the sake of making a figure in the eye of the world, they live in constant straits and anxieties.||

By the inspired moralist, this piece of folly is here censured; yet it is still very common, and very mischievous.

When men, through the pride of birth or station, or some unaccountable vanity of mind, are determined to live in such splendour as their income cannot support, the ordinary consequence is, that they run into debt, defraud their creditors, lose all trust from men, and expose themselves to the devil, who is too cunning to let slip the opportunity that thus presents itself, of tempting them to have recourse to the gaming-table, that decent substitute for the highway, or should this resource fail, to the highway itself, as a relief to their necessities. Starvation, or a jail, or a gibbet, or something incomparably worse than all these, closes the scene.

Oh! how much better and wiser were it to reverence the providence of God, which fixes the lot of men, and to accommodate our minds to our circumstances, however narrow! In this way may we hope to enjoy the comforts, or at least the necessaries of life with composed minds, and be able to serve the Lord without distraction. If men should despise us because we cannot live as men of our rank do, it is not difficult to determine whether their opinion or our own peace of mind is to be preferred. Whatever men may say at present, yet afterwards shall a man be commended according to his wisdom.

To live above our income, that we may figure in the world, is to rebel against divine providence, and to forget him who used to feed on barley bread and fishes, while employed in accomplishing the work of human salvation. Paul travelling on foot, and living on the wages of a tent-maker, was more respectable than the pretended successor of his brother apostle with a triple crown on his head.

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

Heathens themselves were sensible of the mercy due to the animal creation. The Athenians excluded a man from a place in their government, because he killed a bird that fled to him for shelter; justly reasoning, that a man who could exercise cruelty to brutes, could not be safely trusted with the life or comfort of his fellow-men.

That God, whose goodness the righteous imitates, is good to all. In goodness he made and preserves the beasts. He would not suffer them to be all drowned in Noah's flood, and he considered them in sparing Nineveh. There are many laws in the books of Moses guarding us against wanton oppression; and these laws, inconsiderable as they may appear to us, are fenced with promises and threatenings. And what is equally worthy of our regard on this head, God on one occasion opened the mouth of one of the most contemptible beasts, to plead the cause of the dumb creation, and an angel took its part.

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

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

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

Ver. 11. The business of the husbandman is so honourable, that it is here used by Solomon to signify every useful profession. Kings themselves are served by the field, said the only two universal monarchs practised husbandry.

The Spirit of God here teaches us, that we ought to have a useful profession, and to follow it with diligence, minding our own business, and not intermeddling with affairs in which we have no concern. That we shall be satisfied with bread, is the encouragement held out to pursue such a course as this. Some people think that they cannot have enough, unless they have more than the necessaries and decent comforts of life; but we are here instructed that bread should satisfy our desires, unless God is pleased to bestow more upon us. Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. There are few that want these, and yet few are content.

There are others who think that they will not be able to live by their business, without over-reaching their neighbours, by means of those underhand practices which custom has interwoven with many professions; but says the wise man, "He that tilleth his land shall have enough;" and Paul tells us, that he may have something more to give to him that needeth.

To be satisfied with bread, is a happy temper of mind, and is commonly the portion of the man of industry, which not only procures bread, but gives it a relish unknown to men that are above labour. A dinner of green herbs is commonly a sweeter meal to the labourer, and followed by more refreshing sleep, than all the luxuries of high life to a man of fortune.

“But he that followeth vain or idle persons, is void of understanding.” The idle man deserves the name of a fool; nor can he clear himself of it by alleging, that the love of company, or the example of others, allures him to this course of life. It must be both sin and folly for a man, whatever reasons he pretends for it, to indulge himself in a vice by which he endeavours to elude the sentence passed upon fallen man, and breaks so many commandments of God; weakens the powers of his mind, and destroys the vigour of his constitution; exposes his mind as a prey to chagrin, and his soul to the temptations of the devil; wastes his precious time, and lays himself open to all the miseries of a self-procured poverty. In short, all the creatures in heaven, earth, and hell, proclaim the folly of the idle man. Let us, therefore, avoid it, as a nursery of vice and misery, and fill up our days with the useful labours of our calling, and the more important concerns of our souls.

Ver. 12. The original word, which in the 24th verse of this chapter is rendered slothful, signifies also deceitfulness, for slothfulness and deceit often accompany each other. Wicked men have more enlarged desires after earthly things than the righteous, and their hands often refuse to labour for necessary things. What, then, shall they do? Their lusts must be gratified at the expence of conscience and honesty, and so they desire the net of evil men, to ensnare others, and drag their property to themselves, that their portion may be fat, and their meat plenteous. But a righteous man is above the temptations that lead men to over-reach their neighbours, for he has an inward principle of integrity and contentment, which tends to moderate his desires, and directs to praiseworthy means for the enjoyment of them. Thus, by the blessing of God, he obtains what is needful for himself, and something also to give to him that needeth.

The life of a slothful man is full of the worst kind of toils, and is often a scene of guilt and wretchedness; whilst a good man, besides his happy prospects, enjoys much pleasure in those earthly things, which to others are vanity and vexation of spirit.

Ver. 13. As birds are suddenly seized by the gin, and cannot work their way out of it, so wicked men are often ruined unexpectedly and irretrievably, by means of their ungoverned tongues. Adonijah was spared for his rebellion, but by one presumptuous petition, he shewed himself a dangerous man, and brought vengeance upon his own head. Nabal, by his insolent language, almost destroyed his whole family; and as the corrupt tongue is set on fire of hell, so burning coals are its reward*.

A just man may be endangered by his own tongue, but through the mercy of God he shall be delivered, as David was, when he had engaged himself too far with the king of Gath; and Isaac and Abraham, when they had exposed the chastity of their wives, by their dissimulation at the court of the Philistines.

Nor will God ordinarily suffer the just to perish by the tongues of the wicked. Sometimes he has done it, as in the case of Abimelech the priest; but just men are not ruined by death itself.

Ver. 14. As a bad tongue is one of the worst, so a good tongue is one of the best things in the world. By a well-ordered tongue, we may be useful in winning souls to Christ; in teaching the ignorant, strengthening the weak, and making the mourners to rejoice. By our tongues we may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and spread the savour of that name which is so dear to every Christian.

When men use their tongues in this manner, they shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of them; for they obtain the friendship and respect of men, they enjoy acceptance with God through Christ Jesus, and the testimony of their conscience, that they have in some measure answered the end of their being. They are assured, that every word which proceeds from a pure heart, is marked down in God's book of remembrance.

David often reflected with pleasure on the restraints he had imposed on his tongue, or the charitable use he had made of it as circumstances required*; and at the last day, our Judge tells us, that by our words we shall be justified or condemned.

But our words will only prove us to be hypocrites, if they proceed not from sincere hearts, or are unattended with a suitable behaviour. Those trees will be cut down that produce no good fruit, though they should abound with the most beautiful blossoms; and therefore it is added, that the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.

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

Ver. 15. The greater fools are those that have the highest opinion of their own wisdom. Their self-esteem disposes them to neglect the advice of others, and to prosecute their own schemes, however foolish and dangerous, till they meet with fatal disappointments, which, after all, can hardly open their eyes, clean shut with pride and vanity.

The wisest men are they who are most sensible of their need to avail themselves of the wisdom of others; and most qualified to make a proper use of counsel.

This rule is to be observed, especially in the affairs of religion, for in none do men discover more folly, and a greater degree of self-confidence. Multitudes walk under the influence of delusion and error, who, instead of suffering themselves to be set right, despise those that are able to give them good advice. Multitudes that make a sound profession of religion, are strangers to the narrow way that leads to life, and would yet exclaim against such as would give them, from scripture, the clearest proofs of the danger of the mistakes under which they labour, and the insufficiency of the evidences which they think they can produce, of their being in the

right way.

We are not, however, to hearken to counsel without examination, because other men are liable to error as well as ourselves. Absalom was ruined by giving ear to treacherous counsel; and Rehoboam lost the greater part of his kingdom, by preferring the counsel of fools to that of wise men. In our spiritual concerns, the only infallible counsellor is he who is made of God unto us wisdom, to whose word we are carefully to attend, and on whose Spirit and grace we must exercise a daily and humble dependence*.

It is our wisdom to value the instructions and counsels of ministers, of parents and Christian friends, particularly of experienced and aged saints. But they must be able to prove the goodness of their advices by the Scriptures, which are the great and only rule to direct us to our chief end.

Ver. 16. The wise man here uses a very observable word, to express wrath. He calls it shame, for it is a shame for a man to suffer his reason to be tyrannized over by an unruly passion, which spreads deformity over his countenance, and hurries him on to expressions and actions more like those of one confined in bedlam, than of one who is supposed to have the use of his reason. A man would reckon himself debased, if the form of his body were changed into that of a wild beast; and is a man in a condition one whit more respectable, when reason is trampled under foot, and the government of his body and his tongue subjected to the spirit of a tiger?

A fool disgraces himself by giving way to the impetuous sallies of passion. He discovers his temporary madness, by his pale countenance, his quivering lips, and his flashing eyes. His tongue, having thrown up the reins of reason, pours forth torrents of rage, and perhaps of oaths and imprecations; thus announcing to every one that he meets, that he is a fool. It is with difficulty that his hands are restrained from doing that which in a short time would become the source of bitter and unceasing remorse.

“But a prudent man covereth shame.” When he finds his passions beginning to ferment, he does not give them full scope, but considers whether he does well to be angry, and how far it is lawful and safe for him to give way to this turbulent passion. He does not cover his wrath, that it may have time to work, and draw the powers of reason into its service, that it may break forth with more effect on some other occasion,—but covers it, that he may have time to suppress and destroy it, by considering its folly and wickedness, by meditating on the example and grace of Christ, and by fervent supplications for the support and assistance of the Spirit of meekness.

By such means as these the prudent man preserves his own honour, and covers the shame of his neighbour, who is likely to be gained by gentleness and meekness. Thus the noblest of all victories is gained, whilst the Christian subdues, not only his own spirit, but the stubborn soul of his adversary, and covers, by, his charity, a multitude of sins.

Ver. 17. Men, destitute of a principle of integrity, may be guilty of much iniquity in witness-bearing, whilst they flatter themselves that they are speaking nothing but the truth.

A true and faithful witness will deliver his testimony fully, clearly, and impartially. He will not only tell the truth, but all the truth that he knows about the point in question, as far as it will open up the merits of the cause. He will use no language that may be misunderstood by the judges, nor dissemble matters so as to favour even that cause which he supposes to be the right one. He will give no unfair representation of matters, to gratify or serve a good man, or one who is his best friend; nor will pity constrain him so to disguise, facts as to serve the cause of the poor man, or him who is in danger of being condemned. If one should offer him a bribe, he will shake his hands from holding it, and shut his ears against every attempt made to bias his mind.

“But a false witness sheweth forth deceit.” He utters falsehood, or turns truth into a lie, by his manner of telling it. Doeg, by a real fact misrepresented, was the death of eighty-five priests of the Lord; and they who bore testimony against our Lord, are called false witnesses, though they repeated our Lord’s words with but little if any variation, because the little difference in words made a complete change in the sense.

It is necessary for us to consider exactly what we say, when the character or happiness of others is at stake, and to be cautious whom we trust, lest by artful misrepresentations we be persuaded to do injuries to our neighbours, which we cannot repair.

Ver. 18. The slanderer and backbiter, the railer, the flatterer, the unrighteous witness, and the unreasonable murmurer, have tongues which may justly be compared to sharp swords, by which they wound or destroy the peace and comfort, the reputation and prosperity, or the very lives of their neighbours. The seducer to sin or error, has a sword in his mouth to destroy the souls of men. But the tongue of the wise has a healing virtue to cure the wounds inflicted by the wicked tongue, and other diseases that affect the comfort or safety of men.

It is not enough to refrain our tongues from evil. By them we should endeavour to defend the character of the injured, to pacify those that are offended by the slanders and revilings of others, to comfort the dejected, to instruct the ignorant, to reclaim those that err, and warn those that are in danger.

For these purposes, we must not only consider what is fit to be spoken, but when also, and to whom it may be proper to speak.

Job is an instance of the healing power of the tongue; his friends, of the bad consequences of misapplying the most certain and important truths. They were good men, and their words discovered much zeal for God, and concern for the welfare of Job, and yet to that good man they were drawn swords.*

Ver. 19. Let us always remember to speak truth one to another, for if we lose any thing by it, our gain shall counterbalance the damage. Our credit will be established, and we shall enjoy that confidence from men, on which our success and usefulness depend. Truth is the ornament of the great, and to poor men it is their stock and livelihood. Some small matter may be gained by lying, in the

meantime, but a great deal more is lost when men lose their character by it. Our Lord tells those that had left all for him, that they should have an hundred-fold more in this world, and in the world to come life everlasting. It may, on the other hand, be said of liars, that besides death everlasting, they shall lose an hundred-fold more in this life, than they can gain by such unhallowed means. The liar begins by making falsehood to be taken for truth, and ends in making truth to be taken for falsehood. Truth from his mouth is ever suspected, and will not in time of need serve that man who formerly made lies his refuge.

Hypocrisy is lying to God, but the fancied advantages of it soon come to an end. The hypocrite's profession soon withers, or by his behaviour is discredited. His character is lost, and his hopes perish; but that profession of the mouth which proceeds from faith and soundness in the heart, shall always flourish and bear fruit. Its honours and advantages shall endure for ever, and if it exposes men to present inconveniences, they shall be abundantly compensated at the judgment of the last day*.

Ver. 20. The more of art and contrivance there is in any sin, it is so much the more sinful, and exposes men to the more severe judgment. God has given us the endowments of our minds, as talents with which we are to occupy till our Master come; but if men hide them in a napkin, they shall be punished as unprofitable servants; and if they use them for doing mischief, their punishment shall be still more severe. If the servant is punished who is careless about his work, he shall be punished with much greater severity, who employs his thoughts in contriving, and his hands in executing, mischief against his fellow-servants.

Such persons have hearts full of deceitfulness, but their crafty devices shall recoil upon themselves, and they shall have no solid joy, but disappointment and disgrace, as the reward of their work. What did their father the devil gain, by employing his servants to bring our Saviour to the dust of death? Ruin to his kingdom. What was the consequence of his shutting up Paul in a dungeon? The furtherance of the gospel. Haman was rewarded with a gibbet, for erecting one for Mordecai; for it is the glory of God to force a tribute of praise to himself, out of the wrath and cunning devices of men.

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

Ver. 21. Are not sickness, and persecution, and death, incident to the just? or must we become Stoic philosophers, and imagine that there is no evil in pain? Solomon did not mean this. But the evils that befall the just are so inconsiderable, compared with their happiness, and have their nature so much changed by the grace of God, that it may well be said, No evil shall happen to them. These are not the unmeaning flights of a philosopher who sits in his closet, and when he feels no inconveniency of any kind, can declaim with great fluency on the inability of outward accidents to disturb the repose of a wise man. The primitive Christians were exposed to every thing that men would call evil, and yet they would scarcely admit that they merited the name of evil things to them; because they could not separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and because they bore no proportion, in weight or duration, to the glory to be revealed, and for which they were the means of preparing their souls.

But whatever may be the present situation of a wicked man, he shall be filled with misery and mischief. The calamities of the wicked, even in this world, are very different from those of God's people, for they are envenomed by the consciousness of guilt, unallayed by the comforts of faith and hope. Those things are killing to the wicked, which are trials to the righteous; and the time is speedily approaching, when the ungodly shall be for ever stripped of those objects which they looked upon as their portion, and filled with misery and horror, to the utmost extent of their capacity*.

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

Ver. 22. How terrible a thing is it to be abhorred by the Lord, whose loving-kindness is better than life, and his frowns worse than the most miserable death? What would it avail us to gain the highest advantages, or to insinuate ourselves into the favour of the mightiest prince, by a method that must provoke the indignation of Him from whom every man's judgment must come?

Lying lips are the objects of the Lord's abhorrence, though man design no evil to others by them; nor will he excuse a person for lying, even when he intends to serve the best and most friendly purposes by it. If God's own favourites should be so unwise as to adopt this crooked method of serving the gracious providence of God to them, the Lord will often make them to feel how abominable their lies are to him, even when he shews his favour to their souls. Jacob would have got the blessing without cheating his father, but it may be questioned whether he should have been cheated by his second father, had he not by his sin deserved it at the hand of God.

God's abhorrence of liars appears in the common course of providence, which generally deprives them of greater advantages than their lies could ever produce; but it shall be manifested with awful severity in the other world, when none that loveth and maketh a lie shall enter into the celestial city, but all liars shall have their part with their great pattern the father of lies, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

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

How presumptuous are they who think it no great evil to tell a lie, unless some farther degree of evil is intended? Is it all one

whether we provoke God or please him? Do liars imagine that God is a liar like themselves? and will suffer his faithfulness to be dishonoured, by exempting them from the punishment found written in his word?

Ver. 23. A prudent man will certainly publish his knowledge, when he finds a proper opportunity of making it useful to his fellow-creatures*. But he will conceal it, when to publish it would only display his own vanity and folly.

There is a time to be silent, and at that time it is a piece of prudence to keep our knowledge to ourselves. Elihu was a better speaker than any of the other friends of Job, and yet had the good sense to observe a profound silence, till they who had a better title to speak had finished all that they had to say. Our Lord had in him all the treasures of knowledge, and yet refused to speak before his enemies and judges, when speaking could be of no use; and did not even open up all the treasures of his wisdom to his disciples, when they were not duly prepared for the discovery of them; and he gives us a very necessary caution against casting our pearls before swine, or giving our holy things to dogs†.

But a prudent man will not conceal his knowledge, as the discoverers of some useful secret in the arts often do, to feed their pride, or to gratify a malignant disposition. He lays it up as a good householder lays up provisions in his storehouse, to be produced for use as occasion requires. "But the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness." The fool's mouth, under the direction of a foolish heart, is the herald of his own disgrace. He presumes to speak of those things of which he has a very imperfect knowledge, and to dictate to those that are much wiser than himself. He is confident where wise men speak with caution, and publishes what he actually knows, without a due regard to times, and persons, and places; and whilst he flatters himself that he has gained a character for wisdom and downright honesty, he is generally looked upon as an impertinent fool. A word spoken in season, how good is it! but out of season, it is a sign of folly, and a cause of mischief.

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

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

"But the slothful shall be under tribute." Like Issachar, who saw that rest was good, and bowed down his shoulder to bear, and became a servant to tribute; by their laziness they expose themselves to want, and reduce themselves to a slavish dependence on those who, through the blessing of God on their own diligence or that of their fathers, are in better circumstances.

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

Ver. 25. There is a necessity that we should be in heaviness through manifold temptations; but we must be aware, lest by giving free scope to anxious and melancholy thoughts, our hearts should sink in us like a stone, and our souls become altogether unfit to relish the comforts, or perform the services of life. Sadness of the countenance makes the heart better, but despondency of heart disqualifies men for thanking and praising God, for serving their generation, and for bearing the burdens of life. Life itself becomes burdensome, and is often shortened by excessive grief. There is nothing that claims our grief so much as sin, and yet there may be an excess of sorrow for sin, which exposes men to the devil, and drives them into his arms†.

"But a good word maketh it glad." Expressions of sympathy and friendship have a powerful virtue to soothe and allay the sorrows of the mind, and to prevent their dangerous effect‡. Job's complaints would have been fewer, had his friends shewed him that pity which he expected from them. But no words have such efficacy for this purpose, as the words of God. David had perished in the day of his affliction, unless the law of God had been his delight. His afflictions were many, his griefs often great; but they never overwhelmed him, for the statutes of God were his song in the house of his pilgrimage.

Would you comfort them that are cast down? Study the doctrines and promises of the Bible; make yourselves acquainted with the records of the experience of afflicted saints; and pray for the tongue of the learned, that you may be enabled to make seasonable applications from this spiritual dispensary, to the broken in heart.

Are you grieved in your minds? Remember that it is sinful and dangerous to brood perpetually over your sorrows. In order that you may have comfort restored, retire and read your Bibles, and see that ye resist not, by the indulgence of unbelief, that Spirit who is promised as a comforter. In the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John's Gospel, are contained those words of Christ, by which he conveyed strong consolation to his disciples, when sorrow had filled their hearts, because he was about to leave them. Can there be greater sorrows on any earthly account, or are there any griefs too desperate to be relieved by such consolations?

Ver. 26. The wise man does not say that the righteous is more excellent than the wicked, but gives the unrighteous man the best designation of which truth will admit, for after all possible allowances are made on the side of the unrighteous, the superior excellency of the righteous man is still unquestionable.

The righteous man is possessed with the faith of Christ, and this faith works by love to God and man. He is not selfish in his disposition, but makes it his settled principle of conduct, to glorify God and to do good to man. He is under the government of inward principles, that render him steady in his good purposes, and dispose him, not only to seek for glory, honour, and immortality, but to

perform conscientiously the ditties of his station, and of every relation in which Providence shall be pleased to place him. His neighbour may exceed him in many of those possessions and qualifications which are valued in the world, but the righteous man is still more excellent in every thing that is truly valuable. His neighbour may be able to perform more splendid acts of generosity, but he wants that charity without which it profits a man nothing to part with all his goods. He may possess wit, and the wisdom of the world; but that is foolishness with God, and can bear no comparison with that wisdom which is unto salvation. He may be very rich, but he has no interest in the unsearchable riches of Christ. He may be a duke, or a prince of the blood; but he is not a child of God, nor an heir of heaven. He may be clothed with purple, and fare sumptuously every day; but he is not clothed with the robe of righteousness, nor does he feed on the hidden manna. He may live in a magnificent palace, but he has no title to the house not made with hands, and to the mansions which Christ hath gone to prepare for his followers. He may be admired by men, but the righteous man is an eternal excellency in the eyes of God, and the Lord of hosts is to him a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty. Why then do men despise the righteous, and toil themselves in the chase of those things that are not to be compared with the objects that make the righteous so excellent? Because their way seduceth them. They are seduced by the devil and the world, otherwise they would not walk in such dangerous paths, and in their wicked progress their seduction grows upon them. They are more and more infatuated with the deceitful charms of the world, and despising the genuine worth of righteousness, are bewildered and lost in the pursuit of vanities and lies.

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

Ver. 27. It is a great happiness for a man to eat of the labour of his hands, and a great misery for a man to be deprived of the fruits of his industry. Disappointment of hope is a grievous thing, especially when that hope is the fruit of a man's own labour; and the disappointment is mingled with bitter reflections on the toils sustained, with a view to the expected advantage. But no disappointment of this kind is more grievous than that of the sluggard, to whom labour is a burden which nothing but necessity can render supportable.

If the slothful man took nothing in hunting, it would vex him; but to take, and not to roast,—this is altogether intolerable, and must make his heart sick; for his labour is vain, his hope makes him ashamed, and Providence fights against him, depriving him of what he had got, at the very time that he thought himself sure of enjoying it.

“But the substance of a diligent man is precious.” His toils sweeten his gains, and he enjoys them with pleasure and thankfulness. The blessing of the Lord infuses a sweetness into his substance, so that, (though little), it affords him more pleasure than the wicked and indolent can derive from great riches.

The substance of a diligent Christian, though small, is very precious to him, because it is not the fruit of his labours only, but of his prayers also, and he discerns in it the love of his heavenly Father, who, while he gives him the pardon of his sins, gives him also daily bread.

Ver. 28. Solomon knew very well that Zion's travellers must die, but it is a kind of happy impropriety to call the death of the righteous by its own name. Christ's death was truly death, but the death of them that die in the Lord is only a sleep*, for Christ hath abolished death, and secured an uninterrupted life to them that believe in him†.

There is nothing that can subject the righteous man to the curse of the first, or to the power of the second death. Nothing can deprive him of that life which is hid with Christ in God.

What man is he that desireth immortal life? Let him enter into the new and living way. There let him walk, and in it he shall find no death‡.

CHAPTER 13

Ver. 1. THE reason why so many will not regard instruction, and listen to rebuke with meekness, is, that they think it a disparagement to their good sense. But in what does man's wisdom lie? Not in being infallible, or in needing no reproof, but in being sensible that he is liable to error and sin, and in a humble disposition to reverence instruction even when administered in the form of reproof, and enforced by needful correction. He is an unkind father who never checks the froward inclinations and behaviour of his children; and he is a proud and haughty scorner who receives the rebukes of a father, or of any other wise person, with contempt and aversion. Eli's sons disregarded the mild admonitions of their father. Their father was punished in them for his excessive lenity, and they were destroyed for their stubborn contempt of advice.

If a wise son will regard the instructions and reproofs of a father, how much more should we be in subjection to the Father of spirits! and how fatal is the stubbornness of those who cry not when he bindeth them*!

Ver. 2. Trees are often planted by one man and dressed by another, whilst the fruit of them is eaten by a third. But the tongue of the righteous is a tree of life, that yields its most precious fruits to themselves. They enjoy the comfort, and credit, and gracious acceptance of their own holy and useful discourse; and these fruits are produced, not once a year, but every day. But the tongue of transgressors is like a poisonous tree, that bears fruit often hurtful to others, but mortal to themselves*.

Ver. 3. We must not only avoid speaking evil, but prudently beware of speaking good when it would be unseasonable. A certain philosopher being silent in company, and asked the reason of it, answered, "I have often repented of speaking, but never of keeping silence." Destruction from God, and sometimes from men, is the punishment of an ungoverned tongue, which in this respect resembles an untameable monster, that often destroys its owner. Nabal had almost ruined his whole family by his intemperate railing at David. The mischief was indeed prevented by the prudent tongue of Abigail, and yet the remorse of his own mind was one means of bringing him to his latter end.

Why does the wise man insist so much on this subject? Because the tongue is a most unruly member, and yet it is absolutely necessary to bridle it. Who is the man that desires ruin and misery? Let him give a loose rein to his tongue. Who is the man that desires peace and happiness? Let him say nothing that he will repent of having said, ten or a hundred years hence.

Ver. 4. Laziness has a double tendency to make men miserable, for it at the same time affords to the mind abundant opportunity to form boundless desires, and refuses the means of gratifying them. When men indulge an idle disposition, the desires of the mind are not idle, but enlarge themselves as hell, and grow into exorbitant wishes, which even the most successful industry could not satisfy. "But the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." He enjoys inward happiness, for his wishes are confined within the bounds of reason, and the success of his labours is sufficient to satisfy them.

Spiritual sloth is in like manner attended with poverty. There is no man that would not choose to be eternally happy, but the slothful man will not strive to enter in at the strait gate, or to walk in the narrow way. He has one mighty objection against heaven, that he cannot make sure of it in a morning dream. But the soul of the diligent Christian prospers, for he adds one grace to another, and is neither barren nor unfruitful. His corruptions are subdued, his graces are lively, his comforts pleasant, his usefulness great, and he has an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

Ver. 5. It is not said that a righteous man never lies. David lied more than once, and yet he could say with truth that he abhorred lying. Though he lied to Abimelech the priest, and to the king of the Philistines, yet his fixed hatred of sin was an evidence of piety, to which those can lay no claim who never spoke a lie in their lives, if their abstinence from this sin was caused by some other motive than hatred.

A righteous man hates lying in all its forms, because it is contrary to the nature of God, and an abomination to him. God hates all liars, and therefore a good man will not suffer such as tell lies to tarry in his sight*; and if temptation has hurried him into this sin, he loathes himself, endeavours to repair every injury that his lie has occasioned, and prays to God to remove far from him the wicked way of lies.

They that hate lying are valuable members of society, and are blessed with that good name which is better than precious ointment. But wicked men are loathsome to God, and come to shame. Whatever respectable qualities they may possess, they are destitute of a principle of truth and honesty. That falsehood which they sometimes use to serve a turn, is the same thing in their characters as a dead fly in a box of precious ointment, which causeth it to send forth a stinking savour. God and men agree in almost nothing but this, that a liar is detestable to both, and therefore he must sooner or later come to disgrace.

Ver. 6. No wonder that this truth is so often repeated. The righteous themselves retain not so lively an impression of it as they ought. In this case Abraham had not dissembled about his wife, nor had the upright Jacob had recourse to lying in order to obtain the blessing.

Let us never, to avoid danger, shun the path of duty, or suffer ourselves to be allured into that of sin, as though it were the way of rest and safety. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder; what God hath put asunder, let no man attempt to join†.

Ver. 7. Some who have nothing affect a splendid way of living, in order that others may believe them to be very rich. This is to love a lie, and to impose upon society, by exacting that respect which is commonly given to the rich, without any just pretensions to it. Such persons naturally run themselves into debts which they cannot pay, and thus ruin themselves and defraud their neighbours. They walk contrary to God's providence, and discover a worldly, proud, and unsatisfied disposition. They have spiritual riches, sufficient to satisfy the most enlarged desires, freely offered to them in the gospel. If they will be rich, why do they not seek after these true riches, which would fill all their treasures, and make silver and gold to appear as dross?

There are others who are rich, and conceal their riches under an appearance of poverty. These are ungrateful to divine providence, which hath bestowed on them this talent, not to be hid in a napkin, but to be laid out in serving God, in the exercises of liberality. They defraud themselves, and the poor, and God also, while they sacrilegiously retain in their chests what should be employed in his service.

Divine providence makes us either rich or poor, and it is our duty cheerfully to acquiesce in its disposal, and to suit our appearance and way of life to our circumstances, which are appointed for us by infinite wisdom. If we can make but a poor appearance, let us remember him that became poor for our sakes, and had not where to lay his head, while employed in procuring for us the true riches. If we are rich, let us be rich in good works, and remember that we are stewards, and must give an account.

These opposite faults, which are in this proverb censured by the wise man, originate in the same cause,—an excessive esteem of worldly riches. It is this that makes poor men pretend to have them, and rich men conceal them for the purpose of preserving them more safely. All men are sensible of the conveniences that wait upon riches, and the inconveniences that attend poverty. But we should remember that there are inconveniences also that cleave to riches, and that poverty, as the wise man teaches, possesses advantages peculiar to itself.

Ver. 8. Our Lord tells us that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God. This saying, if it met with implicit credit from us,

would have a mighty influence in checking our immoderate desires after riches. Do we really desire to walk in that way which leads to life? And would we not rather choose to walk where there are fewest dangers, than to travel in places infected with robbers and murderers?

But even in regard to the present life, there are great inconveniences that frequently attend riches. Rich men are the persons whose houses are broken into by thieves, who are attacked by highwaymen, and whose lives are sometimes brought into danger by false accusations. They are often meeting with losses of their property, and sometimes they would be glad to lose it, if it might ransom their lives, like the ten men that willingly parted with their treasures to Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, that he might spare their lives*.

“But the poor heareth not rebuke.” Money is sometimes a defence; but the want of it is a shadow under which poor men live unnoticed by the plunderers. A poor man can travel pleasantly in a road beset by robbers, when he that carries a full purse trembles in every joint. In public calamities, the poor are often suffered to escape without a blow or a threatening, when the riches of others cannot ransom them. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans, the poor were put into more comfortable circumstances than they had before experienced since the days of the good Josiah.

Whatever be the disadvantages of our condition, let us bear them like Christians, still thankfully observing its advantages. Neither riches nor poverty have the power of rendering us either happy or miserable; but, as we are taught, the righteous are truly happy, whilst misery is the sure portion of the wicked.

Ver. 9. The righteous have the light of comfort within their souls, the light of God’s countenance shining upon them, and sometimes the light of prosperity in their outward affairs. Their light waxes clearer and brighter, and fills them with increasing joy. Clouds may sometimes obscure their light, but it cannot be extinguished; for the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and therefore their sun shall go no more down.

The wicked have something that may be called light, but it is not the light of the star which shineth more and more unto the perfect day, but the light of a lamp, which would soon expire if it were left to itself, but is more frequently extinguished before it has time to consume away*.

In the other world, the righteous shall have no need of the sun or the moon, because the Lord God and the Lamb are their light; whilst the wicked shall not have the benefit of a candle to mitigate the horrors of their darkness, or a drop of water to cool their scorched tongues.

Ver. 10. Contention is the fruit of anger and injuries, of drunkenness and covetousness, but it is oftener the fruit of pride than of any of them. Quarrels seldom, if ever, happen without pride as one part of their cause, and they very often proceed from pride alone. Pride and ambition made the disciples to dispute among themselves which should be the greatest. Pride raised the war in Jephtha’s days, between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, in which so much Israelitish blood was spilt, that might have been more usefully shed in taking vengeance upon Israel’s enemies. Pride darkens the mind to one’s own faults and the virtues of others, and on the contrary, represents one’s own virtues and the faults of others in a very false and aggravated light. It produces contempt of others, and provoking speeches and insolent behaviour, and by these means is an endless spring of contentions and mischiefs. We can never live in peace unless we subdue our own pride, and keep ourselves as free as we can from all connection with proud men.

“But with the well-advised is wisdom.” The proud and contentious are neither well-advised nor wise, for they despise the advice of others, and are enemies to their own peace. The humble will not easily suffer themselves to be drawn into contention. If they are insolently treated by others, they consider whether and how far it is lawful and expedient for them to give place to anger. Injuries done to them are like sparks falling upon a rock; and they shew themselves to be truly wise when they will abate of their pretensions in point of honour or interest, to preserve peace, and to keep themselves and others from sin and trouble.

How wise was Abraham in consenting that Lot should have his choice of the pasture, though, for a variety of reasons, Abraham might have claimed the right of choosing to himself! But Lot was soon obliged to flee the pleasant fields he had chosen, and Abraham had the promise of all the land.

Ver. 11. The blessing of God is not in that money which is gotten by stealing and cheating, or by their polite substitutes, cards and dice, or by the exercise of professions prejudicial to the interests and morals of society; and where the blessing of God does not accompany riches, they will consume like snow before the sun. But he that gathereth by useful labour shall increase in substance, and therefore we must not only be industrious, but show a regard for the public interest in that calling in which we labour*. It is not enough to let alone stealing and to work, but we must work that which is good; so shall we have enough for ourselves, and something for others.

Ver. 12. If we would enjoy happiness, we must labour diligently to keep our passions and desires under restraint; for they produce, when not duly regulated, disappointment and misery. If we indulge ardent desires, and confident hopes of obtaining a thing, the hope produces a borrowed pleasure, for which, if our hopes are disappointed, we repay a high interest. What stings did the hopes of Absalom and Adonijah leave in their minds, when they failed in their attempts to obtain the kingdom of their father! When the object of hope is deferred, the heart languishes and pines. When hope is destroyed, the heart dies outright.

It is cruel to disappoint the just hopes of others. If we make the eyes of the widow to fail, or keep the poor from their moderate desires, we break that commandment which forbids murder. We must not withhold the wages of the hireling, for this reason, among others, because his heart is set upon it, and he will be filled with uneasiness if he does not receive it.

But when the desire cometh, the heart is revived and gladdened as with the fruits of a tree of life. But this is not the case if the desire was irregular and unlawful. Amnon enjoyed no pleasure by the gratification of his desire after Tamar, which was succeeded

by remorse and vexation. Desires of lawful things, when they are crowned by enjoyment, impart pleasure to the mind, but that pleasure is for the most part soon followed by weariness; and this proverb is verified chiefly in the righteous, whose desire is only good, and whose enjoyments far exceed their most sanguine hopes. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the fruits of the tree of life, which grows in the midst of the paradise of God; and they shall hunger and thirst no more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat.

Ver. 13. In many things we offend all, but we are not all despisers of the word of God. Good men have reason to lament their manifold breaches of the commandment, and yet they have a sincere love and esteem for it, earnestly desiring that their ways might be directed to keep God's statutes.

It was an evidence that Esau despised his birth right, when he sold it for a morsel of meat; and men discover a contempt for the word, when they disregard its precepts, to gain some advantage, and some indulgence for the flesh. A tree may be sound at the heart, and yet have its branches broken by a strong blast; but a tree must be rotten which is broken with a gale of wind. In like manner, a strong temptation may prevail against a sound and lively Christian; but he is not sound in God's statutes, who falls before every temptation.

He that pours contempt upon a single word of God, however inconsiderable it may appear to him, shall be destroyed by the vengeance of God; for every jot and tittle of the law is enforced by the awful authority of the Lawgiver*. He that despises his authority despises not man but God, and shall have his place among those to whom it will be said, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish." On the contrary, he who reverences the authority of the Lord, and earnestly endeavours, by the grace of God, to govern his steps, not by the fashion of the world, or with a view to serve himself, but according to the will of God, shall be rewarded with the gracious acceptance of God, and shall experience all that favour which God through Christ vouchsafes to such as fear his name†.

Ver. 14. Fountains of living waters are highly esteemed in a desert land; and the holy instructions of a wise man are equally to be valued in this world, which is a wilderness full of pits and snares. These instructions are agreeable to the word of life, because they are fetched from it, and may therefore be called a law to us, and a fountain of life, whereby the soul is refreshed and quickened. There is living virtue in the word of truth, even when earthen pipes are the channel of its conveyance‡.

In this desert land through which we travel, there are innumerable snares spread for us by the great enemy of souls, who wishes to entrap us for our destruction, like a bird in the snare of the fowler. It is by the word of God that we must keep ourselves from the snares of this destroyer*; and the word of God is seasonably applied to particular circumstances, by a wise counsellor, by which we are enabled to perceive these snares, and animated to keep the straight way, and to guard with resolution against the temptations that beset us. By the advice of the prudent wife of Nabal, David was preserved from bloodshed; and by the instructions of Nathan, he was delivered from a dangerous snare in which he was already entangled.

We should value the friendship and counsels of a wise man, as a happy means of promoting our spiritual life and comfort, and of preserving us from the snares of death; and endeavour to have our minds furnished, from the scripture, with that wisdom which will enable us to perform such important services to others. The tongue of a righteous man talketh of judgment, because the law of his God is in his heart‡.

Ver. 15. A good understanding lies not in dry apprehensions of spiritual things, but appears in that good way wherein it directs men to walk; for a good understanding have all they, and they only, who do God's commandments. This good understanding giveth favour in the sight of God and men‡. It is the grace of God that gives a good understanding to men, and grace is multiplied to them through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord||. God has the hearts of all men in his hand, and shews his favour to men of good understanding, by disposing others to favour them, as far as it seems proper to his infinite wisdom. He turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people; but when the set time was come, he gave them favour in the sight of these enemies, so that they enriched them at their own expense. God made Joseph and Daniel to be favoured in the season of their captivity; and the primitive Christians, at a time when they were mortally hated by the rulers of the nation. Let us keep ourselves in the love of God, and the respect of men will attend us, should it be necessary for us.

"But the way of transgressors is hard." Their practice is not only offensive to God and grievous to men, but unhappy to themselves. There are many present inconveniences that attend sin, so that sinners have a hell here as well as hereafter. They have restless minds, and unsatisfied cravings, and uneasy consciences, to torment them. They draw upon themselves the frowns of providence and the hatred of men, and through manifold tribulations they make their way to everlasting fire.

Let sinners be persuaded to enter into the way of life. It is a narrow but a pleasant way, and rest is found in it for the soul*.

Ver. 16. The wise man does not hide his talents in a napkin, but makes use of his knowledge to direct his choice and pursuits, and every part of his behaviour in life.

Knowledge buried in the head is like the miser's money, which he locks up in a chest, and which is of no use either to himself or others; but the knowledge that is joined with prudence, beautifies every discourse and every action. Those, on the contrary, who live at random, are constantly rushing into dangers and mischiefs, and are like an ignorant physician, who cannot distinguish between poisonous and medicinal herbs, and may therefore administer a poison instead of a cure.

Fools might be esteemed half wise, if they had sense enough to keep their folly to themselves; but they presume that they are wise, and talk of things of which they know as little as brute beasts, and meddle with things quite above their capacity. Thus they discover their pride and ignorance, whilst they imagine that every one must think them as wise as they think themselves.

Ver. 17. Persons under authority, often think that they do no wrong whilst they execute the commands of their employer, however unlawful these commands are; but the doers of evil shall fall into mischief, whoever they are that excite them to it. Those servants of Nebuchadnezzar, that cast the three children into the fire by their master's command, were consumed to death, and none pities them*.

Unfaithful servants of princes, are to be reckoned among wicked messengers. Such was Hazeel, who indeed obtained his master's throne by his treachery; but his new dignity led him into crimes, which will cause his name to be abhorred for ever. Such also was Haman, whose mischievous designs so signally recoiled upon himself.

Corrupt ministers are wicked messengers, who fall into the ditch, and draw others along with them, to add to their eternal disgrace and torment.

Even common servants who are unfaithful in a little, shall fall into mischief, as Paul assures them: He that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong done.

But a faithful ambassador is an instrument of procuring advantage and comfort to his master and to himself. Such was Mordecai in the king's court; Paul in the gospel ministry; and Joseph in the house of Potiphar and Pharaoh.

Let us undertake no business, but what may be warrantably executed; and having undertaken it, let us perform it faithfully as to the Lord.

Ver. 18. A man that follows vicious courses, and will not be persuaded to abandon them, must be left to himself. Disgrace and ruin will soon make him feel that which he would not believe; and then every admonition formerly given him, will be like an envenomed dart in his soul, inflaming his conscience with tormenting remorse.

Persons think it incompatible with their honour to receive reproof, but the dishonour lies in needing, and not receiving it. He, on the contrary, who regards it, and profits by it, shall be honoured as a man adorned with humility and meekness, and shall be turned from that course which disgraced him, into that way of life which is attended with true and solid honour*.

Ver. 19. The deceitful pleasures which fools think they enjoy, or the gratification of their desires, is a means of hardening them in their sinful courses. They find the life of their hands, and therefore their eyes are shut to the wretchedness of their state. Their minds are under an infatuation, from the influence of the pleasures of sin, and the god of this world. In consequence of this, their hearts cleave with obstinacy to those sins that effectually exclude true happiness.

No satisfaction of desire can give solid and durable happiness to a vicious man. The pleasures of sense lie in fancy, rather than enjoyment, which rather extinguishes than bestows real pleasure, because it destroys the pleasing imaginations that were produced by hope. For this reason, a bad man cannot possess real felicity, which cannot be separated from true holiness. His heart is filled with aversion to goodness, and he abhors the thought of forsaking his beloved lusts. His desires are so perverse, that the fulfilment of them cannot satisfy him, but must add to his misery. Sin poisons every enjoyment, and provokes divine justice to blast all his hopes, and what he desires shall utterly decay.

Ver. 20. Wisdom is so valuable, that those who know the worth of it, will take advantage of every opportunity of improving in it. And the society of wise men is a valuable means for attaining this. He who converses with the wise will learn wisdom from their words and example, which will have a powerful tendency to produce in him a resemblance to their goodness.

For this reason we ought to make the wise our companions and friends. David would not have a wicked servant in his house; and though he had learned much wisdom from God's testimonies, he was yet sensible, that, in order to preserve and increase his wisdom, it was necessary to avoid the fellowship of evil-doers, and to make those men his companions that feared the Lord.

For the same reason, we ought to attend the worshipping assemblies of God's people. Thomas would have been sooner cured of his unbelief, and recovered from his despondency, had he been present with the rest of the apostles when our Lord first appeared to them. David thought with deeper concern upon his exclusion from the place where the multitude kept the holy days, than his banishment from the royal palace.

But a companion of fools shall be corrupted, or destroyed. Bad company has a still stronger influence than that which is good, because the corruption of human nature readily complies with it. A healthy man cannot communicate health to the sick, but a person infected with the pestilence may communicate the contagion to a thousand. Our Lord safely conversed with sinners, because he was free from all danger of being corrupted; and it may on some occasions be our duty also to mingle with the wicked, that we may use means for reclaiming them: but in ordinary cases, guilt or grief is all that a godly man gets by the company of sinners. Lot chose the neighbourhood of Sodom for his dwelling, because it afforded pleasant pasture. He forgot that the Sodomites were impudent sinners, but he soon found that daily griefs were the best things he could expect from such wicked neighbours. The grace of God kept him unstained by their profligacy; but he was obliged to flee for his life, and to leave his pleasant possessions and his plenteous flocks behind him, that he might escape their punishment.

A church that is become obstinate and incurable in apostacy must be left, for this reason, that we may avoid her sins and plagues*.

Ver. 21. Mischief is allotted to such as obstinately persevere in sin. They perhaps do not feel their misery and danger, but enjoy the transient pleasures of sin and the world, and think themselves secure of a long continued term of prosperity; but Solomon here assures them, that misery is pursuing them, as the hound pursues his prey, and will not desist from the chase till it is destroyed. Sinners may flee away as on eagles' wings; but vengeance follows them on the wings of the wind. They may look for safety and deliverance; but their eyes shall fail, and escape shall perish from them, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost*.

If sinners desire to escape, let them flee to the Saviour of sinners, and cast away their transgressions†. Let them depart from evil,

and do good, while their day of grace continues; for, if they resist the calls of wisdom, their desolation will come like a whirlwind‡. “But to the righteous good shall be repaid.” Imperfect as their goodness is, not a single instance of it shall lose its reward. What can be less than giving a cup of water to a thirsty disciple of Christ? yet that shall be mentioned at the great day, to the praise of the followers of the Redeemer.

God is so abundant in goodness, that he gave a reward to Nebuchadnezzar and to Jehu, for services done to him from a principle purely selfish. Much more will he reward those services that are done from love to his name ||. Even the children, and the more remote descendants of the godly, have often experienced the overflowing kindness of God to their pious progenitors; for,

Ver. 22. A good man is ever righteous and merciful. He is blessed, and his children and grand-children are blessed after him. He leaves to them the good-will of men, and many precious promises; the influence of his example and instructions descends to his posterity, and they are enriched with substance for his sake. David left an inheritance to his children for seventeen generations, and they were not dispossessed of it, till by intolerable provocations they had extorted punishment from God.

But is this always true? It is to be remembered that the proverbs are often to be understood of what generally happens, though not always. But when this sentence is not verified, we may conclude that good men, by the defects of their goodness, have forfeited this blessing to their children, which was the case with Eli; or that divine wisdom sees some better method, in these instances, of testifying that kindness which God has for them.

It is better to be the son of a poor saint, than of a great lord, for every believer will acknowledge, that a single promise in the Bible is far better than a large estate; and parents that are anxious about the state of their families after their own death, if they believe the scriptures, will be more desirous of leaving them an estate in promises, than in land and money.

But many believe not this truth. They fill their brains with projects, and their souls are vexed with anxious cares about obtaining portions to leave to their children. In these labours they may be successful; but in the mean time the thoughts of eternity are banished from their own minds; and when they are inheriting the fruits of their earthly-mindedness, what pleasure can it give them, to think that their children are rioting in the enjoyment of wealth, and probably laying up to themselves treasures of vengeance!

But their success in worldly pursuits is very doubtful. Their posterity may fail, or be reduced to poverty; for the wealth of the sinner is laid up, not for his posterity, but for the just. Riches are still changing masters, according to the direction of God, who made the wealth of the Egyptians and Canaanites to come into the possession of the Israelites, and who still distributes the gifts of his bounty to them that are good in his sight*.

Ver. 23. Better is the industrious poor man, than the rich man who wants discretion and integrity; for though a man be poor, yet when he improves his little stock by honest labour, he shall not want, nor in the greater part of cases shall he need to beg, or to be put into the poors-roll. There is plenty of food in his tillage for himself and his family; and having food and raiment, he should be therewith content.

But some are ruined by want of integrity. They endeavour to increase their wealth by those dishonest and unhallowed means that bring the curse of God into their substance, and it melts like the Israelitish manna before the rising sun.

Others are brought to poverty by indiscretion. Frugality and economy must be joined with industry. Our Lord could feed men by miracle, and yet he would not suffer the fragments to be lost. The seven years of extraordinary plenty, could not have preserved Egypt from ruin, had not Joseph laid up the corn against the years of scarcity.

Ver. 24. Parents feel those lashes with which they are obliged sometimes to chastise their children; but they love them with no true affection, if they are not willing to endure the smart of them for the good of their children. There is not a groan of the believer, but is felt at the heart of Christ; but Christ does not for that reason spare his correcting rod: “Whom I love, (says he) I rebuke and chasten.”

The foolish fondness of too indulgent parents is accounted by them parental love; but the Spirit of God calls it hatred. That affection which is prejudicial to the spiritual interests of its objects is love in the language of men, but hatred in the language of the Holy Ghost. A parent would be accounted a hater of his child, were he to suffer him to keep a knife in his hands till he gave himself a mortal stab; and he deserves the same character, who by fond indulgence suffers his son to bring himself to a gibbet, or to expose himself to the damnation of hell.

But he who loves his son, chastens him as soon as he begins to discover that folly which is bound up in his heart. He will not, indeed, chastise him with blows, when words are sufficient to answer the end; but he will administer the rod, when words have small influence; and imitate the skilful physician, who prescribes medicines, neither too weak, lest the disease should remain uncured, nor too strong, lest the constitution should prove too weak to bear them.

The early days of childhood are a proper season for correction, because vice has not then obtained deep and firm root in the heart. A young bullock may be tamed, but if you suffer it to grow old in idleness, you will sooner break its neck, than break it to the yoke.

Ver. 25. God’s blessing gives to a righteous man food and contentment, but the wicked man wants one or both of them. The family of Jacob were well fed, when the Egyptians were almost starved; and Elijah had food to his satisfaction, when Ahab and his courtiers were obliged, with anxious hearts, to traverse the country for a supply of pasture to their cattle.

The righteous man must sometimes live on coarse fare, when the wicked riot in plenty. But Daniel was happier in his pulse, than the other servants of the king of Babylon in the luxuries of the royal table. The family of Christ, too, enjoyed more pleasure in their barley-loaves and fishes, than the rulers who despised them in their sumptuous entertainments.

If a righteous man has little, that little is better than the riches of many wicked. The wicked is often reduced to want by his own vices, and the judgment of God upon him; but if he has much, he Still wants the blessing of God, which alone can sweeten it, and therefore

in the midst of sufficiency he is in straits.

CHAPTER 14

Ver. 1. DILIGENCE in business is often recommended by Solomon, as a means of obtaining riches, or at least a competency; but he here informs us, that the care of the wife is necessary, as well as the industry of the husband.

A wise woman is frugal, and saves. She is industrious, and gains. She is religious and charitable, and brings down a blessing from heaven upon her family; for if the houses of Laban and Potiphar were blessed for the sake of religious servants, a house must be still more favoured by Providence, for the sake of a religious mistress.

“But a foolish woman plucketh it down with her hands.” As if it were a small thing in her eyes to suffer it to go to ruin, she uses her own hands to demolish it. The idle and careless woman uses one of her hands, but the extravagant makes use of both, in this ruinous work. How soon, in such a case, must a house become a heap of rubbish!

This verse directs men in the choice of wives. A woman may be rich and beautiful, and yet prove a plague to her husband and his family, for nothing is more necessary to ruin a house than a bad wife. But a wise and virtuous woman is a rich portion to her husband, though she brings nothing with her. Her father would give her a portion if he were able; but let it be remembered, that she is a daughter of the Lord Almighty, who gives a better portion of graces and blessings with her, than the wealthiest of earthly parents can bestow.

Ver. 2. Most men pretend to the fear of God, but pretensions go for nothing when they are confuted by facts. The scripture lays down plain marks, by which we may know whether we are really possessed of that truth of religion, which lies in an affectionate reverence to the Most High.

The truly religious man, is he that walks in his uprightness; and the faith that is not attended with godly sincerity in the heart, and endeavours after universal obedience in the life, is a dead faith, which gives no evidence of spiritual life.

The good man not only receives Christ, but walks in him. He not only enters in at the strait gate, but continues travelling in the narrow way, till he comes to the end of his faith and holiness in the heavenly world.

He walketh in his uprightness, shewing a constant regard, not only to the common duties of a man and a Christian, but to those also that are incumbent on him on account of the particular relations and circumstances in which he is placed.

Upright walking is a sure and true evidence of the fear of the Lord; for that fear consists in a deep impression of the divine excellency and authority, by which men are disposed to abstain from whatever God forbids, however pleasing to the flesh it may be, and to walk before him unto all well pleasing.

Men of corrupt minds and a perverse behaviour, may speak much to the praise of God, and profess a high veneration for him, but they are so far from fearing the Lord, that they despise him. Every wilful sin is a plain proof that they disregard his authority, and defy his vengeance; insult his patience, and turn the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jasciviousness.

Let stubborn sinners learn from this observation, the exceeding sinfulness of their perverse conduct. It contains in it a downright contempt for God, which is a crime that can scarcely be charged upon devils. What punishment is sufficient for such as despise the authority of their Maker, and pour contempt on the grace of a Saviour? To them it shall be said, “Behold, ye despisers! and wonder, and perish.”

Ver. 3. Pride is a root of bitterness, producing a rod of insolence and rudeness in the mouth of the foolish. By this rod they strike and wound their neighbours, who are better than they, but it proves also a rod of correction to themselves.

The wise man does not call the instrument of their punishment a sword, but a rod; meaning probably in this manner to intimate, that their pride shall be abased by punishment of an ignominious kind. They shall not die like heroes, but their punishment shall be that of slaves and fools, and shall yet prove destructive to them, for God can arm with vengeance the meanest instruments. Pharaoh was tormented by flies and frogs, and Herod was eaten up with despicable worms.

But the lips of the wise will preserve them from the rod which is in the mouth of fools, and from that vengeance which overtakes the proud. The humility of their hearts instructs their mouths in the language of meekness and kindness, and their piety and prudence preserve their lips from speaking evil*.

Ver. 4. As the wise man teaches us to be diligent in business, so the providence of God encourages us to practise this virtue. As he hath done so in giving us other animals to assist us in our labours, so we ought thankfully to employ them. Where no oxen or other beasts of husbandry are, there is no food for man or beast; but there is much increase by their labour. Oxen and asses testify, as Isaiah speaks, against the ingratitude of God's people; and here Solomon insinuates that they bear witness against the laziness of the sluggard also. If oxen do not employ their strength for our benefit, the fault is not theirs, but ours.

If oxen serve us so well, we should not grudge them that food which they earn by their labour, and which is necessary for the preservation of their strength. God would not have the mouth of the ox to be muzzled when he was treading out the corn. That law was in part, though not chiefly designed for the benefit of oxen; for the God who made all things, shews his regard and bounty to them in his laws, as well as in his providence.

We should praise God for his bounty to the irrational creatures, since they not only discover the riches of the Lord, but perform

useful services to us. What is man, that God should give us the dominion over so many useful animals, and keep them in subjection to us, even in our fallen state?

Ver. 5. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established; but the witnesses ought to be men of veracity, otherwise twenty witnesses are no better than so many ciphers. A faithful witness is one that will not lie; but a man who has no principle of honesty, will, on the smallest temptation, utter lies without scruple.

Judges, and juries, and elders of the church, must be cautious what testimonies they receive. Justice requires that no man should suffer in his person or character, upon exceptionable grounds. What man can enjoy security, if liars are to receive credit?

How mean a character is that of a liar! His testimony cannot serve his neighbour, and ought not to hurt him. In his mouth, even truth is suspected for a lie.

It is unjust and uncharitable to indulge suspicions against our neighbours, on the report of a liar, or even of common fame, which is generally a common lie.

Ver. 6. A scorner may seek wisdom, but he never seeks it with right views, nor does he seek after that wisdom which best deserves the name. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the scorner seeks wisdom to gratify a curious fancy, to feed his pride, and to enable him, by the display of his wit, to make a figure. But he cannot find it, and the reason is plain: He has not a due value for the wisdom that comes from God, and he seeks it not with that earnestness and humility without which it cannot be found. He does not resign his understanding to the instructions of God, nor can his pride suffer him to receive with meekness the instructions and reproofs that give wisdom. The Greeks sought after wisdom, but Christ crucified was foolishness to them. They were already too wise to admit of the preaching of the cross, and scorned a tent-maker who would inform them of new doctrines, which had never entered into their own minds, and who would prove them by other methods than their own favourite ones,—eloquence and reasoning.

“But knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.” For he knows the inestimable worth of knowledge, and seeks for it as for silver. Conscious of his own ignorance, he thankfully improves the means of knowledge, and daily depends upon Jesus, the great Teacher, to open his heart for receiving it. Reproof, as a means of wisdom, is precious to him, and the knowledge which he already possesses fits him for making progress in it, for to him that hath shall be given.

Ver. 7. We must not willingly enter into the company of fools, but if, through ignorance of their character, we happen to do so, we must not stay in it, lest we be corrupted by their foolish conversation. We are either like them whose company we frequent, or shall soon be like them. Evil communications will efface our impressions of the evil of sin, and corrupt our own manners. Lukewarm persons, who are perhaps the least dangerous of bad companions, will, if we take pleasure in their company, transfuse their lukewarmness into us. Ephraim mixed with the people, and he soon became a cake not turned.

But when are we to leave the company of a foolish man? As soon as we perceive that he has not the lips of knowledge. As trees are known by their fruit, so men are known by their words and works; but they are soonest known by their words, which are the most plentiful and the easiest products of the heart. We are not to suppose men to be fools without evidence, but profane or foolish words come from folly in the heart; for a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of his evil treasure, evil things.

Men may think themselves so steady in goodness, that they are in no danger of being corrupted by evil communications: but none are so ready to fall as those that think they stand. Let Peter be a witness, who on this ground ventured into temptation, and fell before it. But though we were secure against all danger to ourselves, our rashness might embolden weaker Christians to mingle with dangerous society, and so our practice prove a temptation to those for whom Christ died.

This commandment of God should strike terror into the wicked. God will not allow us to keep company with them, and is it to be supposed that he will admit them to his own eternal fellowship? Either God or they must change, before they can be received into heaven*.

Ver. 8. When men are acquainted with every thing but what they ought to know, they are only notable fools. If we had hearts large as the sand on the sea-shore, and filled with a world of things, whilst we remained ignorant of the way of attaining true happiness, we should resemble that philosopher who was busied gazing at the moon, till he fell into the ditch.

We are travellers to another world, and our wisdom lies in knowing the way that leads to the world of happiness. There is no way that will bring us to heaven but Christ; nor is any man wise to salvation who does not value the knowledge of a crucified Saviour above all other knowledge. We must endeavour to know the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God; to be acquainted with the difficulties of our way, and how to surmount them; to know the enemies that may be expected to oppose our progress, and in what manner to conquer them, and what refreshments may be met with in the way to animate our spirits in pursuing our journey.

It is a piece of necessary wisdom also, to acquaint ourselves with the business and duties of our own particular callings, that we may discharge them with honour and success. They are fools who know other people's business better than their own. Some people, if you will take their own word for it, could reign better than the king, and preach better than the minister. They know, in short, how to manage in every condition but their own. These are the busy-bodies and meddlers in other men's matters, who in scripture are condemned, and by their neighbours held in derision.

“But the folly of fools is deceit.” That which they call wit, the scripture calls folly. They mean to deceive others, but they deceive themselves worst by it. They may trick their neighbours out of their money, but they cheat themselves out of their souls.

All that wisdom of the serpent that is not reconcilable with the harmlessness of the dove, is folly; and every piece of deceit practised on our fellow-men, is a dangerous imposition on our own souls.

Ver. 9. Foolish men make a sport of their own sins, when they ought to be humbled to the dust on account of them. Because they are not presently punished, they think that punishment shall never come, or, like brute beasts, they consider not what shall be hereafter. But if eternal burnings are a serious matter, sin that kindles them can be no just matter of indifference or sport.

Fools sport at the sins of others, which is far less human than to laugh at the fits of a man convulsed with agony, or the pains of one giving up the ghost. Sin is the sport of devils only, and those who make it a jest are devils clothed with flesh. Some of them are so like their father, that they will tempt men to sin that they may laugh at them. Such laughter will end in weeping and howling.

“But among the righteous there is favour.” They have too much good-will to one another, and to all men, to make a sport at sin. They are affected with the sins of others, as a man would be if he were brought into a lazaret-house. A man of spiritual discernment perceives sin to be the most loathsome and dangerous of all distempers, and his eye affects his heart with tender compassion for their misery.

The righteous have a principle of charity, that disposes them to rejoice in the goodness and happiness of others as their own. Paul scarcely begins an epistle, without strong expressions of his joy in the prosperity of his fellow-Christians. This charity completed will multiply the blessedness of the heavenly state.

Ver. 10. The things of a man knoweth no man, but the spirit of a man that is in him. And a man’s own tongue cannot express the bitterness of the griefs that he often feels, or the sweetness of the joy he experiences.

We must not be censorious of the griefs of others. There are some who do not express that grief which we think they ought to feel for their miscarriages, or the adversities with which they have met; but they perhaps grieve more than they appear to do. Sorrow may fill their hearts when they are alone, though company spreads cheerfulness over their countenances. God is the true judge of the measure of our repentance for sin, or our humiliation of spirit under his afflicting hand.

This observation should lead us to compassionate the sorrows of the afflicted. They have inward uneasiness that we cannot feel. Their griefs are frequently too strong for them to subdue, and when they would comfort themselves against sorrow, their hearts are faint within them. Job’s friends would not have vexed him so much with their severe censures on his complaints, had they thoroughly weighed his griefs and calamities*.

It is a great comfort to Christians, that our Redeemer bore our griefs, and knows our sorrows, and is touched with the feeling of them. For this reason should the broken in spirit pour forth all their sorrows at the throne of grace, and firmly expect from it all needful succours.

There are joys that equally exceed the knowledge of a stranger, especially the joys of religion, which an unrenewed man cannot relish or understand. These are sometimes unspeakable, and full of glory. Christians do not now enter into the joy of their Lord, but streams of joy enter into their souls from the overflowing fountain of pleasures, and refresh their hearts amidst the sorrows of this wilderness to such a degree, that they can rejoice greatly in the God of their salvation, at the very seasons when they are pitied by the world, as of all men the most miserable.

Sinners cannot understand how all the ways of wisdom should be pleasantness and peace, but they should consider that they want those purified understandings and affections, without which spiritual joys cannot be relished. Let them believe the Scripture, and the experience of all good men. Let them taste and see that the Lord is good, and that there is no want to them that fear him. Christians do indeed feel sorrows peculiar to themselves, but these are the seeds of inexpressible gladness.

Ver. 11. The upright man is far happier in the meanest circumstances, than a transgressor in his greatest prosperity. Though a wicked man overtop his neighbour as far as the cedars of the mountain do the creeping shrubs of the valley, he shall be filled with the strokes of divine vengeance. Though he dwell in a magnificent palace, the tempest of indignation shall beat it down; but the righteous man, though at present he appear, like the incarnate Saviour, a tender plant, shall grow like the cedar in Lebanon; and though his dwelling-place is a tabernacle, it shall flourish, and prosper, and grow into a palace. It is far better to dwell in a cottage where the blessing of God rests, and in which is heard the melody of joy and praise, than in a palace which lies under the curse of the Lord*.

Ver. 12. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way; and happy is the man who understands it indeed, for many whose end shall be destruction, think that they are travelling in the ways of life.

The Jews in Isaiah’s time thought their way right, when they endeavoured to please God by multitudes of costly services, whilst they were mocking and insulting the Most High, by attempting to bribe him into a connivance at their injustice and inhumanity. The Jews in our Lord’s time walked in the like paths of self-deceit, in setting the traditions of the elders on a level with the commands of God, and seeking righteousness, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.

Some professing Christians would join their own works to the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of their acceptance with God. They stand with one foot upon a rock, and the other in a quagmire, and must sink in the mire‡. Others, on pretence of seeking justification by the faith of Christ, are careless about holiness, and consider not, that the faith which does not lead men to holiness will never bring them to heaven‡.

There are many who expect to please God by serving him, not according to the rule of his word, but according to the inventions and commandments of men, and suppose that they are serving him when they are breaking the second commandment, and provoking the Lord to jealousy.

Some are so perverse that they think they are doing God service, whilst they are doing mischief to other men, and indulging those uncharitable tempers which God abhors*.

We should always keep our eyes on the end of things, and learn with certainty what end we are to expect to our course of life. How terrible will it be for men to hear themselves condemned by the Judge of the world, for those actions for which they expected to hear these pleasant words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Let us give earnest heed unto the word of God, and compare our expectations and practice with it. Let us daily pray that God may lead us in that way of holiness, in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err.

Ver. 13. The joys of this world cannot make a man happy. They are often false, and they commonly end in heaviness.

It is very common for men to put on a face of joy, whilst the heart pines away with grief. Some put on the appearance of joy to prevent or remove suspicions about their behaviour, and endeavour to cover a guilty conscience with smiles. It would surely be far better to own their sins, and to seek after the pleasures of pardon, and then they may rejoice in God through the atonement. Others, from a pride of appearing happy, conceal their uncomfortable circumstances and dejected spirits under the appearances of mirth, when they ought to acquiesce in the providence of God, and to seek those pleasures which the world cannot give nor take away.

There are others still, who laugh when their hearts are sorrowful, from an ambition of appearing heroes, who cannot be subdued by misfortunes. They are like the Stoic philosopher, who, under a severe fit of the gravel, discovered at once his weakness and his desire of concealing it by these words: "Pain, thou mayest rack me, but thou shalt not make me confess that thou art an evil thing." An affected joy under tribulation, is as despicable as the triumphant joy of a believer is glorious.

The end of this, and of all worldly mirth, is for the most part heaviness. In this valley of tears our joys are few and weak, and pains tread upon their heels. Our greatest comforts are avenues to our bitterest calamities. Heaven is the land of joys, and the only joys on earth worth the naming, are derived from the hope of possessing them*.

Ver. 14. A true saint may slip with his feet, but his heart is ordinarily perfect with the Lord his God. The backslider in heart is the lover of sin, who departs, in the course of his life, from God and his laws with purpose of heart.

Such a man is never filled with sin, but takes so much pleasure in it, that he revolts more and more, adding drunkenness to thirst. He shall, however, be filled with sin, either in this world or the next, when he feels its painful consequences, and finds that God has marked all his steps, and will not acquit him from any of his iniquities.

This will be the end of all impenitent sinners, but chiefly of such as have not only forsaken the law of God, but also violated their own solemn vows, and after professing holiness, turned like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

Apostasy is a horrible affront to the ways of righteousness, and is commonly, though not always, the forerunner of final impenitence and despair*.

"But a good man shall be satisfied from himself. The springs of his satisfaction are in God, and he abhors the thought of glorying, save in the Lord, and in his cross; and yet it is true that he shall be satisfied from himself. His pleasure does not lie in comparing himself with those that are worse than he, but he proves his own work, and has rejoicing in himself and not in another. His soul is fitted for relishing true satisfaction, and filled with that holiness which is the same thing to the inner man, that health is to the body. His good works are not the grounds of his confidence, but through Christ they are accepted of God, and graciously rewarded. "Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings†."

Ver. 15. Readiness to believe what people say, being supposed to proceed from a good temper, is commonly regarded a small fault. But none has ever proved more mischievous to the world.

Daily experience shews that many have their fortunes ruined by giving too easy credit to those knaves who will say or swear any thing that serves their own interests.

History is full of examples of men who have lost their lives by means of their credulity, amongst whom were those great men Abner and Amasa. Others have by this means been robbed of their comfort, as was Jacob for the space of twenty years, though he may well be excused for believing the mournful tidings of his son's death, especially when confirmed by so many plausible circumstances.

Some have been betrayed into the worst of sins, by believing groundless reports of others, as Saul in the case of David, and we might almost add, David himself in the case of Mephibosheth. The nation of the Jews was threatened with desolation by the easy temper of Ahasuerus, who believed without examination the malicious suggestions of the wicked Haman.

Multitudes have been seduced into the most dangerous errors and damning sins, by seducers whom they believed, either from an implicit faith, or from want of care in searching the oracles of truth.

The whole world was ruined by the simplicity of Eve, and the easy credit she gave to the serpent.

A prudent man will therefore look well to his goings. He will not risk his fortune and happiness, his life and soul, by believing groundless reports, or receiving doctrines that are destitute of sufficient proof.

He will not withdraw his love from men, or do them hurt, because they have the misfortune to become the butt of slander.

There is nothing in which we are so ready to be deceived as in points of religion, and no errors are so dangerous as these. A prudent man will therefore call no man on earth master, but will look upon Christ as his only Master. The Scriptures he considers as his only rule, and the Spirit that dictated them as their great interpreter. He searches the Scripture, and seeks wisdom from God by daily prayer.

As Christ is the only way to the Father, the man that is spiritually wise enters into his religious course, and walks in it, depending on this Saviour alone for acceptance. As there is great danger in stepping aside from the path of God's commandments, he pays a strict regard to the least of them*.

Many deceivers are gone out into the world, and the old deceiver is still walking about, seeking whom he may mislead and destroy. The prudent man is therefore sober and vigilant. He informs himself of the devices of these enemies of his salvation, and whilst he guards against them by taking heed to God's word, he commits himself to the guidance of him who led Joseph like a flock through the desert, and arrives safely at that paradise where there is no subtle serpent to betray.

Ver. 16. A wise man will foresee apparent or probable dangers, and will guard against them. Nehemiah foresaw the danger he was in from the enemies of the Jews, and used every proper means to prevent their incursions, and this fear was very consistent with courage, for he scorned to use any mean shift for his own safety.

A wise man trusts in God's mercy; but this trust is consistent with fear, not with that tormenting fear which is cast out by faith and love, but with that reverence of God, and that necessary caution, which makes persons depart from sin, and to flee from it as they would from the devil and hell. Noah is an instance of this fear†. Paul himself, that noble believer, who was always triumphing in Christ, lived under the influence of this holy temper, and kept his body in subjection, lest when he had preached the gospel to others, he himself should be a cast-away.

A wise man indulges not anxious fears about the evils that may come at some future period, for he trusts in the gracious providence of God*. But he trembles at the word of God, reverencing its precepts, considering its threatenings with awe, and fearing lest he should seem to come short of the promised blessings. This fear is a bridle to the soul, to curb the workings of the passions, and to restrain it from every appearance of evil.

"But the fool rageth and is confident." Some are so foolish as to think it a sign of a brave spirit to live superior to all fear, as if it were men's glory to be like the leviathan, who is made without fear. Fools despise the threatenings of the Bible. They are filled with rage at those providences and reprovers which would check them in their course of sin; but their confidence is daring presumption, which hurries them on to those courses that end in despair. They will rush on in sin, if you should set everlasting burnings before them; but their haughty spirits will be tamed when they shall cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of the Lamb. The Assyrian monarch raged against God and his people, and was confident that God himself could not stop him in his victorious course; but he soon found a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws.

Ver. 17. Rash anger is a fruit and evidence of folly. Because another man has done me an injury, am I to do myself a greater, by suffering my passions to domineer over my reason, and expose me to the vengeance of God*? He that is soon angry speaks and does many foolish things, which may cost him many bitter thoughts through his whole life†. But a man of wicked devices is far worse than a passionate man, for he harbours malice in his breast, and his soul is the habitation of him whom malice makes a devil, though he was once a glorious angel. Wo unto the man of wicked devices, for he walks in the way of Cain, and is hated by God and men. Providence may keep him, by the restraints of fear, from embruing his hands in his brother's blood; but in his heart he daily commits murder, and cannot have eternal life abiding in him. Simeon and Levi procured reproaches from their father for this evil disposition, when the other tribes were receiving blessings‡.

Ver. 18. Folly is hereditary to men that spring from Adam, who lost to himself and to his posterity that excellent wisdom which beautified his soul in the state of innocency.

Folly is like a field that produces nothing but weeds and poisons, and brings forth in great plenty the grapes of bitterness. This is the inheritance of the simple who love simplicity, and will not hearken to the counsels of wisdom; with these fruits they shall be filled abundantly, but they shall never see the floods and the brooks of honey and butter.

The prudent have a royal heritage. They shall inherit glory, and their knowledge is not only a chain to their necks, but a diadem of beauty to their heads. It makes them honourable as kings, and prepares them for the possession of those celestial glories, compared with which crowns and sceptres are but yellow dust; for the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.

The most prosperous sinners are objects of compassion to the wise, because they are fools, and the fruit of folly are their inheritance. But the saint in rags is to them one of the excellent of the earth, for he is possessed of those glories that confer inconceivable dignity on a beggar, whilst an emperor without them is mean and despicable*.

Ver. 19. Bad men follow courses which have a tendency in their own nature, and by the appointment of God, to bring them to a state of slavery and dependance. Good men, through the blessing of God on their virtue and industry, are often placed in circumstances that enable them to relieve the wretched and unhappy, so that their favour is humbly courted by those that once despised them.

There have been instances in which this proverb was verified in a very remarkable manner. The Egyptians bowed down before Joseph, and Moses, and the Israelites. The proud king of Babylon almost worshipped the captive Daniel, and Elisha's favour was solicited by three kings, one or two of whom were bad men. But it is certain, from experience, that the reverse sometimes takes place, and good men are made to bow down before the wicked. It is, however, certain, that goodness infallibly conducts to honour, and wickedness to disgrace in the end†.

It is because men believe not the scripture that they shun religion in those branches of it that are under disrepute, or that they make any compliances with the wicked of the world with a view to honour from men. God is the King of nations, and the great fountain of honour; and those that honour him he will honour, but those that despise him shall be lightly esteemed. If at any time God's people

are under a cloud of disgrace, they have full assurance that it will be soon blown away. Christ himself was once a servant of rulers, but all things are now put under his feet; and it is a faithful saying, If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.

Ver. 20. The poor man's neighbour, in this place, must signify one that lives in his neighbourhood, or one that is obliged by the ties of relation to love him. All our neighbours of the human race have a title to our love, but those whom Providence has connected with us by the bonds of vicinity or relation, have a double title to our regard; and to despise or hate them, or to be indifferent to their happiness, is a very great sin.

Our love to our neighbour deserves not the name, if it is founded only upon his riches; poverty, or distress, instead of diminishing, ought to draw it forth into action. It is base to profess love to persons in the time of their prosperity, and to be cold to them in the day of their distress. All men censure Job's friends for behaving harshly to him at a time when they could not shew too much tenderness and compassion*.

The rich hath many friends, but little reason to place much confidence in many of them. They are generally not friends to himself, but to his coat and his table. Let him wear rags, and live on bread and water, and he will find who are his friends.

Let us try our love to our neighbours, for there is much hypocrisy in men's regard to their fellow-creatures, as well as in that respect which they shew to their Maker. Unfeigned love to Christ cleaves to him, whether religion be well or ill spoken of; and true love to our neighbours is the same, whether they are in adverse or prosperous circumstances, excepting that it appears most when there is most need to discover it.

The poor need not be discouraged because their friends have forsaken them. It is not true that their friends have forsaken them, if they have given them no other reason for it than becoming poor. They were not friends but dissemblers, and it is no loss to know their insincerity. They have reason to rejoice that Christ is the poor man's friend, and that he shews his friendship most in the season of greatest need*.

The rich man needs not boast of the multitude of his friends, for many of them are very probably dissemblers, who want to serve themselves at his expence. A man need not call himself rich, although he has many guineas in his pocket, if he has reason to think that most of them are counterfeits. The friendship of Christ is necessary for him as well as the poor man, and in that he may rejoice and triumph at all times. David was driven from his throne, and multitudes of his friends became his enemies; but his rejoicing was this, that he had one sure and all-sufficient Friend†.

Ver. 21. However common it is for men to hate or despise the poor, it is a great sin, and exposes men to misery. A man's poverty divests him not of that relation to ourselves, and to our Maker and our Saviour, which gives him a title to our love; nor does it weaken the obligation of that great commandment, which requires us to love our neighbours as ourselves.

We shew our contempt of the poor, not only by trampling upon them, but by overlooking them, or by withholding that help for which their distress loudly calls. The Levite and the Priest that declined the giving of assistance to the wounded traveller on the way to Jericho, were notorious breakers of the law of love, in the judgment of our Lord. The good Samaritan was the only man that performed the duty of a neighbour.

He is an unhappy man, who is chargeable with this sin*. "But he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." He needs, and he shall have, that mercy which he cannot merit†.

If those that do not shew mercy are punished, an heavy vengeance will fall upon the cruel and mischievous.

Ver. 22. The doers of evil are abhorred by the Lord, and the more of deliberation and industry that is found with sinners, the more severely will they be punished. The plotters of mischief promise to themselves success in their plans, and expect great advantage from them‡. But are they not grossly mistaken? undoubtedly they are. They shall be baffled by the wisdom and power of the God whose kingdom ruleth over all. They may bring their devices to pass, but they shall not be able by the accomplishment of them to gain their ends. Instead of doing hurt to the people of God, and disappointing the purposes of the Most High, concerning his own glory, and the happiness of his chosen, the wrath of man shall praise God, and promote the salvation of his people; and what remains of the wrath of God's enemies, beyond what would serve these glorious purposes, shall be restrained. Whatever profit wicked men propose to themselves, they shall find to be loss; and if they should triumph in the accomplishment of their devices, a moment will put an end to their boasting. The builders of Babel expected to make themselves a glorious name; but they made themselves a by-word to every generation. The proud king of Babylon expected to set his throne above the stars, and to be like the Most High, and with that view he ravaged the nations, and turned their countries into deserts: But how is he fallen from heaven! and great Babylon which he built for the honour of his majesty, become the dwelling of every loathsome creature!

If wicked men employ their thoughts to contrive mischief, and shew so much diligence in the service of sin, although they have such a miserable reward; let God's people exercise the same diligence in the service of righteousness, by seeking out and seizing opportunities for doing good, and their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

God's servants are oftentimes tempted to weary in well-doing, because they find they can do little good to others by their labours, which are frequently attended with much toil, and many disquieting and anxious thoughts to themselves. But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward at last, for his reward is not in the hands of men, but with the Lord, and his work is with his God. He cannot, indeed, pretend to merit any thing from the Lord, for he stands in need of mercy. But mercy shall not be denied to him; for he is interested in the promises that are derived from the grace, and secured by the faithfulness of God. If God so exactly fulfil his threatenings against the devisers of evil, the Father of mercies will not be slack to fulfil his words of grace to those whom he has beautified with his own likeness, and disposed to be faithful in his service*.

Ver. 23. Some men, if they cannot obtain employment of an easy or genteel kind, would rather be idle than descend below their fancied rank, or expose themselves to the drudgeries of a vulgar profession; and whilst they are busied in contriving plans for business more suitable to their taste and spirit, and talking of them, they waste their time in idleness.

But no useful business is to be despised, for in all labour there is profit, and the lowest professions in life may be a mean of procuring subsistence to him that is diligent in it, and to his family.

Men must not, however, expect success in their labour without the blessing of God; and therefore, to industry must be added a dependence on God's providence, a due regard to the service of God, and a disposition to contribute a proper proportion of the fruit of their labours to pious and charitable uses; otherwise God may blast their labours in righteous judgment, and then no diligence in business can be a security against want†.

As in religion it is not the man who speaks, but the man who does, that gives proof of his sincerity‡; so in earthly business, it is not the man who talks fluently, and lays down plausible schemes of business, but the man who labours, and does all his work, that has reason to expect the blessing of Providence. Those that wear their working instruments in their tongues, are always the most useless, and sometimes the most hurtful members of society. They work not at all, but are busy-bodies in other men's matters; and whilst they pretend to manage those affairs with which they have nothing to do, they bring themselves to poverty by neglecting their own. Like the sons of Jacob, when their father refused to send Joseph with them, they spend more time in deliberating about a thing, than they might have taken to perform it. If they are professors of religion, their slothfulness causes an offence against the good ways of the Lord; but with what justice, is plain from this text.

Ver. 24. Riches are far from being useless in the hands of a wise man. They place him in an eminent situation, so that he is like a city set on an hill, and his wisdom shines and gives light to multitudes around him. Abraham and Lot could not have afforded us so illustrious proofs of their hospitality, had they been poor men. Solomon was wise enough to chuse wisdom, rather than mines of gold and silver; but without riches his wisdom could not have executed plans of such advantage to the church of God, nor built a temple so celebrated in every age. When men have riches, it will soon be known whether they have wisdom or not; for wisdom will avail itself of riches, to make itself evident by the noblest acts.

But poor saints have no reason to be dissatisfied with their condition; it requires a greater degree of wisdom than perhaps they have, to overcome the temptations of wealth, and to make it a crown to them. And if their wisdom is despised among foolish men, yet God is well acquainted and well pleased with every good disposition of their heart, although they have not the means of displaying it in acts of goodness. Many that could never give any thing but a tear and a prayer to the distressed, shall be classed with Abraham and Lot in the kingdom of God, whilst others that exercised splendid acts of beneficence, shall be thrust down to the pit with the uncharitable.

If good men are spoiled of their wealth, they need not lament, as if they had lost their crown. For riches are an ornament of grace to the head of wise men, even when they are lost. Job's patience in the loss of every thing, did as much honour to him, as his extraordinary beneficence whilst he was the richest man in the East. We honour his memory still more, when he sewed sackcloth upon his skin, and defiled his horn in the dust, than at the time when judgment was his robe and his diadem. Riches are transitory possessions; but the crown of the wise is incorruptible, for the honours of charity and patience are eternal.

But the foolishness of fools is still folly, when they are in their best and highest condition. Riches give a man fair opportunities to serve God and man by his wisdom; but instead of making a fool wise, they make him seven times more a fool, and render his folly visible to the world. If Rehoboam had been in a lower situation, his folly would have done less mischief in his own time, and might have been forgotten when his eyes were closed. Men are generally eager in the pursuit of riches for themselves and their children; but if Solomon may be trusted, it is far better to want them, unless wisdom is first got to manage them; for they are instruments of good or evil, as men have, or want wisdom. An Athenian philosopher used to cry out to his fellow-citizens, O ye Athenians! why do ye toil yourselves to procure estates for your children, and yet take no pains to give them that education which will teach them to make a right use of their estates?—When you see drunkards, and debauchees, and oppressors, you have reason to pity them that they ever had the command of a single shilling.

Pray earnestly for wisdom, and leave it to Providence to determine your outward condition. Wisdom will make every condition good and pleasant.

Ver. 25. Some have an aversion to appear as witnesses in a court of justice, as if swearing were never lawful; but it is men's duty to bear witness when they have a call to it;* and by bearing witness, God may be glorified, and the lives and properties of the innocent preserved†.

But we must never lie on any pretence. Neither the preservation of our own life, nor a regard to the life of our neighbours, is a sufficient motive to induce us to dishonour God, by violating the law of truth. Rahab was approved, not for her dissimulation, but for her faith and her good works. We may redeem the life of our brother, in some cases, with our own life, but a lie is too dear a price for it.

But a deceitful witness speaketh lies, and these lies are often swords to destroy the innocent. The liar breaks not the ninth commandment alone, but frequently the sixth and the eighth also.

Ministers and professors of religion are God's witnesses, and it is of infinite importance to give faithful testimony for God. Whilst they hold forth the word of life, souls may be edified and saved; but the profession and preaching of false doctrine, is pernicious to the everlasting interests of men‡.

Ver. 26. Riches are a crown to the wise, but the fear of the Lord is incomparably better. The grace of fear is so great a point in religion, and so inseparably connected with every holy disposition, that it is ordinarily used to denote piety in all its branches. In piety there is strong confidence, for godly men are safe from every danger, and know, or may know, that they are safe. Neither earth nor hell shall be able to destroy them, for the place of their defence is the munition of rocks. They are the children of Jehovah, and their almighty Father is their sun and shield. Death itself shall not destroy them, but convey them to those mansions that are made ready by Christ for their reception in their Father's house.

By his children, we may understand the children of them that fear God. Our goodness can merit nothing from God for ourselves, far less for our children. But God is so abundant in goodness and truth, that he has spoken good, and has often brought it to pass, not only concerning his people, but also concerning their seed for many generations*. All men wish to do every thing that lies in their power for their children; but death will soon remove us out of the world, and what will we then do for them or ourselves? The estates that are left them, often vanish like snow in the month of March. The best thing we can do for our children, is to fear God, and whether we live or die, the word of God liveth, and his promise abideth for ever.

They that do not chuse the fear of the Lord, chuse death and ruin, but,

Ver. 27. The fear of the Lord includes in it the faith of Christ, and they that believe on the Redeemer, have in them a well of water springing up unto life everlasting. They enjoy true life, and every thing that can render life happy, and are preserved from those temptations and sins that are snares and nets to entangle and destroy those that have not the fear of God before their eyes. The fear of God is attended with every blessing, and a preservative against all misery. Happy is the man that feareth the Lord*. We may say to him as Abigail to David, "Thy soul shall be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; but thine enemies shall be like stones bound in a sling." But of those that reject the fear of the Lord, we may speak in truth what Bildad says, in a very unjust allusion to Job, "He is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare†.

Ver. 28. The wise king gives many good instructions to his brethren in office, and is thereby doing good to us all; for kings without wisdom are public calamities, but well-instructed kings, with their long arms, are the ministers of God for good to millions. In this passage he directs kings to govern in such a manner as to make their subjects happy, that they may not be tempted to leave their country, and retire to a land of greater liberty, but encouraged to rear up an offspring for the service of their king and country.

This instruction is conveyed in a powerful motive to enforce it, which is, that the glory and safety of a prince lies in the multitude of his loyal subjects, and his disgrace and ruin in the want of men attached to his government, and prepared to venture their lives in his defence. In the happy days of Solomon, the people enjoyed peace and plenty, and the children of Israel and Judah were like the sand of the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. In the miserable reign of Jehoahaz, the people of Israel were made like the dust by threshing, so that he and his kingdom were on the brink of destruction, when the God of mercy raised up saviours to prevent their extirpation.

It is the glory of the great King of Israel, that his subjects cannot be numbered for multitude; and the lovers of his name will contribute their zealous endeavours, by their holy conversation and their prayers, to increase the number of his subjects.

Ver. 29. Anger is a more ungovernable monster than the leviathan, and needs much more than a double bridle for curbing it; and more is provided by Solomon, who is constantly repeating his admonitions to us, to be on our guard against the incursions and ravages of this fury. Many people are in a gross mistake on this point, and imagine that meekness is a sign of stupidity, and an high and outrageous sense of honour an evidence of great spirit; but the inspired philosopher makes it his business to correct our false apprehensions of things, and assures us, that he is the truly wise man who keeps his passions in subjection to sanctified reason; and that the man who gives way to anger, upon every provocation, is not only a fool, but so far gone in folly, that he lifts it up to public view, and proclaims by his behaviour, that he has given to folly the throne of his heart.

Moses was the meekest, and he was for that, as well as other reasons, the wisest man of his age. Solomon was in the zenith of his wisdom when he spared those rebels Abiathar and Adonijah; but he was in his decline when he sought to destroy the man to whom God had promised a part of his kingdom.

A philosopher advised Augustus Cæsar, when he felt himself angry, to say nothing till he had taken time to repeat all the letters of the Greek alphabet. When we find ourselves provoked, let us check our passions, till we are able, with greater coolness than Jonah, to answer that question, "Dost thou well to be angry?"

Ver. 30. Most men will allow that religion is the best thing for the soul. But the body is generally regarded more than the soul, and they are prejudiced against religion, because it is considered as unfavourable to the interest and comfort of the outward man. This false apprehension, Solomon endeavours in many places of this book to remove. According to his doctrine, holiness is the health of the soul, and diffuses its influence over the body; but sin, which is the disease and death of the soul, is a slow poison also to the body in its present state.

A heart purified by the grace of God, and set at liberty from corroding and turbulent passions, enjoys the pleasures of a peaceful conscience, and a sweet joy, which gives a grace to the countenance, and communicates health and vigour to the bones. That cheerful heart which doth good like a medicine, is chiefly the gift of sacred wisdom; and that benevolence which inclines us to do good to others, is sure to do good to ourselves, so that the fruits of charity always begin at home*.

"But envy is the rottenness of the bones." It is a torment and punishment as well as a sin, so that uncharitableness, as well as the virtue opposed to it, begins at home. The envious man is impoverished by another's riches, and tormented by another man's

happiness; and every person that seeks his own happiness, is endeavouring to make the envious wretch miserable. A certain author speaks of a woman who was dissected after her death, and a serpent found in her heart. But the envious man has a serpent in his heart whilst he lives, that is constantly tormenting him. He is not only disfigured by his evil eye, but pines away under a distemper that consumes his bones, and is a greater enemy to himself than to any other man. He has a hell within himself, and is on the road to that hell which is prepared for the devil and his angels,—where a place is allotted to him amongst adulterers and murderers*.

Envy in the devil was the occasion of our ruin; envy in the Pharisees brought our Lord to the cross; envy in ourselves is rottenness to our bones, and damnation to our souls. May the God of love free us from this baneful passion!

Ver. 31. To oppress the poor by taking advantage to ourselves from their poverty, is a monstrous iniquity: To oppress them by the refusal of that mercy which they need, is a less degree of wickedness, but sufficient to procure condemnation†.

He that oppressteth the poor, either by insults and injuries, or by neglect, reproacheth his Maker, who made man after his image, and by his providence allots to men their several stations in life, requiring the rich and the poor to be useful to one another; the former by kindness, the latter either by their labour, or if they are disabled from work, by their prayers for their benefactors. Oppression and uncharitableness make it evident that men revere not the works of creation and providence, but are atheists either in opinion, or at least in practice; and that the commandments, and promises, and threatenings of God, are despised by them as idle fancies. What would have hindered the oppressor of the poor from joining with the enemies of Christ, had he lived in Jerusalem near 1800 years ago?

Every man that places more confidence in the promises of God than in the bonds of men, and trusts more to the living God than to a piece of shining dust; every man that regards the authority of God in his precepts, and the providence of God in its administrations, will exercise mercy to the poor, and contribute to their relief; and if we say that we love God and hate our brethren, or if we say that we love them, and yet act as if we hated them, then we are liars, and the truth is not in us*.

Ver. 32. All must die;—but there is an immense difference between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked. This difference is not always discernible to observers, but it is real and wide, as the distance between heaven and hell. The wicked man is chased out of the world in which his portion lies and all his hopes are circumscribed, into a world of unmingled misery and unchanging despair. He lived in sin and dies in sin, and his sins lie down with him in the dust, and afford everlasting nourishment to the worm that shall never die, and fuel to the fire that shall never be quenched. If he should die as quietly as a lamb, that does not lessen his misery, but only suspends it a few moments; if he should feed his vain mind with the hopes of heaven to the last, yet he dies into hopeless anguish.

“But the righteous hath hope in his death.” He believes in Christ, and dies not in his sins*. His death is the destruction of sin, that gave him so much trouble in his life. He departs from this world, and from his own body, but it is to a better country, where he is absent from the body, and present with the Lord. His death is full of hope, for he expects to be with Christ, which is far better for him than the best things he could hope or wish for on earth. His hopes may be weak and languishing, but still he has so much hope in Christ, as to venture his soul in his hands; and if his faith is mingled with fears, these fears shall vanish as a thin cloud, and these anxieties, when he is leaving his body, will add to the triumphant joy which he will feel, when angels appear to convey his soul to the regions from whence fear and sorrow are for ever banished. Death is a grim serjeant to the wicked, sent to arrest them for their crimes; to believers it is like Joseph’s waggons sent to convey his father to his best-loved son.

The wicked are unhappy in their lives, for there is but a step between them and the king of terrors. The righteous are blessed in their lives, for their salvation is drawing nearer every day. They are most blessed in their deaths, for to them to die is Christ. Now they are saved by hope, then they die in hope, and through eternity they shall enjoy what they waited for in hope.

Ver. 33. Wisdom does not lie buried in the heart of the wise man, for his tongue bringeth it forth for the advantage of others on every proper occasion*. But it is hid in his heart, like a precious treasure that he wishes to preserve from those robbers that would deprive him of what he values above gold and silver. He does not make a vain and useless show of his wisdom to draw the applause of men, for he is not like those philosophers, falsely so called, who valued the reputation of wisdom above wisdom itself. He does not pretend to give instruction to those that are fitted to instruct himself, for he is readier to learn than to teach, except when he sees a proper call to instruct others; and he will not make his wisdom cheap, by casting his pearls before swine, and prostituting his holy things to dogs. Nevertheless he is willing and ready to produce some of his precious stores, when he sees a probability of doing good by them to others. He is like a rich and generous man, that takes no pleasure in boasting of his wealth, but still keeps something in readiness to serve his friends.

But that little sense which fools may have is soon known, and found to be what it really is, and not what they fancy it to be. If they know any thing, they think it useless till others know that they know it. This folly is wisdom in their own eyes, and therefore they publish it abroad, till all men know by their own testimony that they are fools. Some people are so weak as to think that much speaking is a sign of much sense, and silence a proof of ignorance. But a wise man is often known by his silence, and a fool by his multitude of words; whereas, if he could have held his peace, he might have been taken for a wise man.

Ver. 34. This proverb is verified in the whole history of the nation of Israel, and in those promises and threatenings that received their fulfilment in the events which befel them.

Some allege, that God dispenses no rewards and punishments to the nations, but such as are the native consequences of their behaviour, without any particular direction of providence, from a regard to their good or bad conduct; and that the history of the things that befel Israel as a nation, affords no ensample unto nations that are not under the Mosaic covenant. But, besides that

Providence has affixed prosperity or misery to virtue or vice, as their natural consequences, we find God punishing many nations on account of their sins, by calamities that were not the native results of their sins. The histories of Genesis, and Exodus, and Joshua, and the predictions of all the prophets concerning the heathen nations, might be quoted in proof of this point: and even under the New Testament, we find prophecies of the miseries that would come upon public bodies for their sins*.

Great is the regard which a righteous God has for righteousness. The virtue even of heathen nations has been rewarded with prosperity, and their vices have brought reproach and ruin on them. Righteousness, such as heathens could practice, made Greece and Rome to flourish, and exalted them to glory. But the last of these nations, after it was advanced to the highest pitch of worldly grandeur, was soon brought to extreme misery, and debased to the most wretched servitude, when corruption and wickedness, in opposition to the dictates of natural light, was become common in it. Let us all, therefore, if we love our country, oppose wickedness to the utmost of our power, for a remnant of righteous persons may sometimes prove for a time the pillars of a land*.

It is the interest of kings to promote righteousness, and to discourage iniquity among their subjects; and this they will do, if they deserve that noble title.

Ver. 35. Many kings have indeed erred in this point, but they have frequently been made to see their error, like Ahasuerus, who nourished in his bosom that serpent Haman, and overlooked the faithful services of Mordecai; but afterwards destroyed him to whom he had so shamefully given his confidence, and exalted the preserver of his life.

Solomon had told us that riches are a crown to the wise†, but here he tells us that poverty and mean circumstances will not hinder men from being crowned by wisdom. A servant that fears the Lord, and manages the affairs entrusted to him with prudence and faithfulness, obtains the favour of his master, although he be a king. A foolish servant is a shame to himself and to his master; and although for a while his folly and vices may be concealed, yet in the end they bring down that displeasure upon him which is often attended with vengeance.

Some masters may be so ungrateful, as to despise the best servants, or through prejudice they may be led to treat them with great injustice; but time will convince them of their mistake, and cause them to alter their conduct, as we find in the case of David and Mephibosheth; but if they prove so inhuman and wicked as to continue enemies to their best friends, let such servants remember how David was used by Saul, and consider whether he was a gainer or a loser by the persecutions he underwent.

The great King who reigns over heaven and earth, will reward faithful servants, who do honour to his gospel by the proper discharge of the duties of their stations; for he despises not the lowest services of the meanest men, but he is a severe Avenger of the wrongs done by men, to those with whom his providence has connected them*.

CHAPTER 15

Ver. 1. WRATH is a fire that burns unto destruction, and it is our duty to bring water to quench this fire. A soft answer to provoking words is like water to a fire. By gentle language, joined to liberal presents, Jacob pacified the fierce resentments of his brother. Esau. He prayed to God, and trusted in him for the preservation of his family, but he did not neglect the proper means of calming his brother's angry spirit. There are some tempers so untractable that they cannot be pacified, but these are rare, and seem to be under some powerful influence of the devil, like that of Judas Iscariot, who was not reclaimed by the kind words of our Lord from executing his bloody purpose; or those miscreants that seized on our Saviour, although to his ordinary gentleness he added his miraculous power in healing the ear of Malchus.

But there are some who cast oil upon the flame of anger, and make it to burn more fiercely by their grievous and provoking words. What can such persons expect, but to be consumed by their own rashness? Anger is a short madness, and when two mad persons are engaged in combat, they both are in danger of receiving deadly wounds. Let us, therefore, endeavour to bridle our passions, and guard ourselves by the meekness of wisdom from the fierce passions of other men, lest, by biting and devouring one another, we be consumed one of another. The fierce words of the men of Judah and Israel, when they were bringing back David to his throne, kindled a new war, which, without active and prudent management in David and his generals, might have produced fatal consequences*.

Ver. 2. The wise man knows when he ought to be silent, and when he should speak; and will not cast his pearls before swine, and give his holy things to dogs. His words are good, for they are spoken in due season, and he knows how to address himself in a proper manner to different persons, according to their tempers and circumstances. Gideon used very different language to the angry Ephraimites, from that which he used to the men of Succoth and Penuel, otherwise the end of the Midianitish war had been the beginning of a more dangerous civil war. But our Lord is the most glorious instance of the right use of knowledge. The different answers he made to his friends and enemies, whether open or disguised, whilst they give proof of his admirable wisdom, afford us a pattern of prudence, joined with inflexible integrity. But fools turn the little wisdom and knowledge they have into folly, by their way of using it; for the very instruction of fools is folly.

Their mouths pour out foolishness, as a fountain casteth out her streams. They are not masters of their tongues, but their tongues are masters of them. Whilst wise men have the fear of God set for a sentinel upon the door of their lips, their lips have neither a door nor a watch, but every thing that is within comes out; and as their hearts are little worth, their conversation is empty and vain*.

Ver. 3. The eyes of men can be but in one place, because themselves are circumscribed in one place. But the eyes of that God who fills heaven and earth are every where. Angels are full of eyes before and behind, but God is all eye, and darkness and the shadow of death hideth not from him. He is in heaven by his glorious presence; and that high and holy place is like a watch-tower, from whence he spies the evil and the good. Evil men flatter themselves that none sees or knows their wickedness, as if God could not see through the dark clouds; but he is a witness of what they speak and do in their bed-chambers, nor does a single thought of their heart escape his notice. "Beware, Cato looks on," was a proverb among the Romans; but a greater than any man on earth is still looking on us, and shall we do that before the eye of God, which we durst not be guilty of in the presence of a child? Alas! how is the God who sees all things despised and insulted by the sons of men! But he will not be mocked; he beholds and judges, and will punish the evil-doer*.

His eyes behold the good also; and this is their great consolation, when they are overlooked or ungratefully used by men. God knows their integrity, and beholds with a pleasant countenance their humble and sincere endeavours to please him, and to do good to men. Every thought of his name, and every good word that they speak, is written before him in a book of remembrance†. He beholds with an eye of pity all their secret sorrows, and puts their tears in his bottle; and not a moment does he withdraw his eyes from the righteous‡.

Good men need not fear that God will forget any of his gracious promises. They will be all accomplished to them in due season; for his eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in their behalf; and his providence is constantly employed to glorify his faithfulness, in fulfilling that word which he hath magnified above or upon all his name.

Ver. 4. The tongue that administers proper and seasonable counsels, comforts, and reproofs, is a wholesome tongue. Unmerited rebukes, reproaches, unkind words, and cruel mockings, are perverseness in that little member, which boasteth and can really effect great things. The advantages derived from a healing tongue are like the fruits of the tree of life,—the erring are reclaimed, the dejected are comforted, the weak are animated and invigorated by it. When Job was in deep distress, he was very sensible how pleasant these fruits were which he had no opportunity to taste, and tells his friends, that if they had been in his situation, he would have strengthened them by his words, and assuaged their grief by the moving of his lips. The words of God have a divine virtue for healing the diseases and the wounds of the spirit. This is the dispensary from which we are to derive healing words for the broken in spirit*.

But perverseness in the tongue is a breach in the spirit. It wounds and pierces, it breaks and bruises, the heart of him that is reproached by it. Job would not have exposed himself so much to the censures of Elihu, if his more aged friends had behaved more kindly to him. His patient spirit felt most sensibly the piercing edge of their unjust reproofs. David felt none of his afflictions more bitterly, than the keen reproaches and insults of his enemies. And our Lord Jesus Christ exemplified his unconquerable patience in bearing the contradictions of sinners, and enduring with all meekness, though not without afflicting sensibility, the indignities that were poured upon him†. When we are exposed to the scourge of the tongue, let us remember that He was tempted like as we are, and imitate his patience, and trust in him for the supplies of needful grace.

Ver. 5. A father's instruction proceeds from love, and it is folly and ingratitude to despise it; and yet some children are such enemies to themselves, and so unnatural to their best friends, that they break the spirits of their affectionate parents, by spurning at those admonitions that are needful for their own welfare. They are like froward patients, who are angry at the physician for giving them medicines which are salutary, but unpalatable. In a father's instructions there is authority. The authority of parents over their children has been acknowledged by the wildest nations, and is ratified in that law which was spoken by the mouth, and written by the finger of God. When they reprove their children, the authority of God is joined to the authority of parents, to enforce their admonitions; for they are expressly required to attempt the reformation of their children by rebukes and corrections. He that despises his father's reproofs, despises not only man, but God. This is folly in the extreme, and he that was a fool before he received instruction, becomes mad when he resists it.

If a fool despises his father's instruction, it is not to be supposed that he will pay much regard to the admonitions of other men; but a prudent man will receive correction, and be thankful for it, not only from a father, but from any person, though inferior to himself in station or wisdom, David suffered himself to be reclaimed by the wife of Nabal, and Sarah received with meekness the reproofs of a heathen king.

Persons may receive instruction, when it does not touch their pride, and yet have no solid wisdom; but he that receives reproof with calmness, and makes use of it for the correction of his life, gives, a sure proof of his prudence. There are many persons who come to church, and sit as God's people sit, and appear very attentive to the preaching of the word; but if there is any occasion to administer the censures of the church to them, they are like a horse or mule when their sores are touched; and the bit and bridle will scarcely hold them in from coming nigh unto their reprovers.

Ver. 6. That there is much treasure in the house of some righteous persons, is certain; but it is equally certain that some of those who are rich in faith, have no silver and gold, and can scarcely find daily bread. Solomon was not ignorant of this, and explains this proverb, ver. 16, 17. There is incomparably more of solid treasure in the little that a righteous man hath, than in the substance of many wicked. Another explication of this maxim may be drawn from chap. 14:11, 3:34. The blessing of the Lord is in the house of the righteous, and that is a more precious treasure than the gold and diamonds in a thousand mines. The riches of the wicked, in which they pride themselves, often consist of paper; and if bonds and charters make a man rich, the righteous cannot be poor, when they have bonds upon God himself for every thing they need, and the charter which shews their sure title to the everlasting

inheritance. The devil robbed Job, but he could not make him poor, for his chief treasure lay quite out of the reach of that enemy. Had he served God, as the devil said, for hire, he had been poor indeed; but a good conscience, and faith in the living Redeemer, could not be torn from him as long as he lived.

“But in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.” When good men have nothing, they possess all things; when bad men have much, they are in straits, for their craving desires are still larger than their possessions, and whatever they have, they want satisfaction, and are still crying, Give, give. They have, besides, a bad conscience, and a drop of that bitter ingredient is sufficient to swallow up an ocean of earthly delights. Do we wish to be rich? let us learn from the Bible what it is to be rich, that we may not spend our time and labour in the pursuit of feathers and vanities.

Ver. 7. The wise man does not boast of his wisdom, or make a vain parade of his knowledge, but he is far from grudging the benefit of it to others. He does not behave like that foolish man who grudges to the fields the precious grain, and keeps it shut up in his storehouses, till it is destroyed by vermin. He scatters the good seed of knowledge, where there is any probability that it will do good; and as the husbandman, although he will not sow upon the rock, will nevertheless commit his seed to that ground where he is not certain of a good increase, and is not deterred by every cloud from his work; so the wise man will endeavour to do good, even to those that may possibly disappoint his kind intentions, and prove ungrateful for his offices of love. He that disperses knowledge wisely, shall not be disappointed of a harvest of gracious recompences to himself*.

But the wicked man cannot disperse knowledge, for he has not a right heart. There is no good treasure in his soul to furnish useful instructions to others, but an evil treasure within, from which he brings forth evil things. He sows the seed of tares and hemlock, and shall reap destruction to himself.

Our tongues are our glory, and should be used for the glory of God, and for the good of men; and therefore we ought diligently to store our hearts with that knowledge and wisdom which will be of infinite advantage to ourselves, and make us useful to others.

Ver. 8. Wicked men may abound in the external acts of religion, as if they intended to compensate the defects of the inward man, by a double measure of bodily exercise. By this means they flatter themselves into dangerous and presumptuous hopes of the favour of God, and sometimes gain a name among the godly, who are neither qualified nor authorized to search the secrets of the heart. But God, who cannot be deceived, sees the insincerity of their hearts, and loathes their most splendid and costly services, as so many presumptuous attempts to bribe the great Judge into a connivance at their wickedness.

No man would chuse to put himself to a great deal of trouble to no purpose. But hypocrites not only lose the benefit of their services, but provoke God’s indignation by them. The wicked and their sacrifices are detestable to him; he counts them a trouble, and will not long bear with them. How miserable are unrenewed sinners! Their righteousnesses are abominable and provoking iniquities; what need have they to disclaim their own goodness, and seek to win Christ and be found in him, clothed with his righteousness, and purified by his Spirit!

But let not God’s people be afraid of this text, although they are often obliged to confess that they are carnal, sold under sin. They walk in the light, and have fellowship with God; and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth them from all sin. Their prayers are unworthy of divine acceptance, but through the Beloved they are well pleasing to him. Whilst the costly services of the wicked are detested by him, he delights in the meanest services of the upright. This was a truth to be believed, whilst the Old Testament ordinances were yet in force; how much more are we encouraged to believe this truth, who have so clear revelations of that great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, and appears in the presence of God, making intercession for us, and recommending our weak and imperfect services to his Father! Prayer is God’s delight, and should it not be ours also, who stand in so much need of the benefit of it? When God requires from us the severest instances of self-denial, it is our duty and interest to please God rather than ourselves; but when he delights in prayer, and takes pleasure to have his richest favours asked by needy creatures, shall we not come often to his throne of grace? He that commands us to pray, and delights in the voice of prayer, and hath appointed his Son to be our advocate, will not turn a deaf ear to the petitions of his suppliants.

Ver. 9. Wherefore do we offer sacrifices, and God sees not? Why do we perform the most splendid services, and meet with contempt, instead of thanks? will the hypocrites say. What does the Lord mean by requiring duties, and yet refusing to accept of them when they are performed? The fault is in the sinner himself; his hands are full of blood, or, at least, his heart is polluted with iniquity, and therefore he cannot reasonably expect acceptance to his most costly oblations*.

The whole course of the wicked man’s life is detested by God, who is of purer eyes than to behold sin, or to look upon iniquity. The sinner’s principles are corrupt; his thoughts are evil continually; his words are all vain, or vile, or hypocritical; his holy things are deeply stained with his pollutions, and he is a mocker of God when he thinks he is praying or praising. Not one of his innumerable iniquities are forgiven, for he is without Christ, and has no interest in the blood of atonement.

If the very heavens are not clean in God’s sight, how abominable and filthy is the man that drinketh iniquity like water! and how detestable is the course of his life to him whose glorious holiness makes the angels to cover their faces! Yet, detestable as sinners are to God, their situation is not hopeless, unless they make it so by stubbornness in sin and unbelief*.

Though God hates all sin, even in his own people, yet so rich is his grace, and so prevalent is the intercession of Christ, that he loves his people even in this world, where their righteousness is imperfect, and their course of life stained with many sins. At the best, they are but followers of righteousness. Paul himself could not say that he had attained, or was already perfect; but their hungerings and thirstings after righteousness are sure evidences of the love of God to them, and presages of that perfection which

they shall attain in due time. Like as a father pitieth his son, and takes pleasure to see his feeble efforts to please and serve him; so the Lord delights in every breathing of desire, and every aim to obey his will which he sees in his people. Their righteousness towards men, and faithful discharge of the duty of their stations, is accepted in his sight, as well as their praises addressed to himself†.

Ver. 10. When a traveller loses the right way, he is glad of one that can set him right. When a man is on the edge of a concealed pit, he will thank the person that pulls him back with violence, and tells him of his danger. But many men are such enemies to their own souls, that they cannot endure necessary reproofs and corrections, and would rather be suffered to go to the place of torment at their ease, than terrified with apprehensions of their danger, whilst there is time to make a retreat.

Let such persons consider, that however grievous correction is, yet hell is much more grievous; and that however they may get free of the former, there is no possibility of getting out of the latter. Who pities Ahab for his fall at Ramoth-Gilead? He was forewarned of his danger by Micaiah, but he hated the holy prophet for telling him the truth. Equally unpitied shall they be who perish for refusing reproof, and all the words of instruction which they heard in the day of grace, shall be like flaming thunderbolts in their consciences through endless ages.

Ver. 11. Hast thou seen through the gates of death, or have the doors of the shadow of death been opened unto thee? No. The world of spirits is hidden from the eyes of all living. Many vain disputes have been carried on by men about the place and state of the departed. But this concealed region is open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The outer darkness of the place of the damned is light before him. He knows perfectly every thought of his grand adversary, and is entirely acquainted with every design and every feeling of all the fiends of darkness. Why then do wicked men flatter themselves with the hopes of secrecy in their wicked actions? The most secret principles of their conduct, the most retired thoughts of their hearts, are bright as the day to his eyes. At the day of judgment there will be a revelation of the secrets of all hearts, and then it will appear, that not a single imagination of the thoughts of the heart was a secret to him whose eyes are like a flame of fire.

Wo to them who seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and whose work is in the dark*. But happy are they who labour, that whether present or absent, they may be accepted of him. He knows their hearts, he knows all the purposes that their enemies form against them, and will disappoint the most crafty devices of those that hate them†. God has saved to every creature that loathsome spectacle, the heart of man; but his eye beholds all the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of it. How astonishing is the patience that bears with such vile creatures! How wonderful that love which gave his Son to die for them, and gives his Spirit to sanctify them, and accepts of their services, though defiled with stains infinitely offensive to the eyes of his glory!

Ver. 12. Wisdom is necessary in a reprover, lest his reproofs meet with that cutting reply, Physician, heal thyself; and much skill is required in dispensing reproofs, that they may not irritate instead of reforming.

However wise the reprover is, a scorner will hate him, at least he will not love him; and as an evidence of his aversion, he will not go to him, but avoid his company as if he were an enemy, because he mortifies his pride; for the scorner is as impatient of rebuke, as if, like the Pope, he laid claim to infallibility.

Here is a trial of true wisdom. The seed that sprung up pleasantly for a time, but withered when the sun rose in its strength, was an emblem of those hearers, that cannot endure persecution for the gospel; and how could we endure persecution, if we cannot bear a friendly admonition, or a needful censure from the pastors of the church! The Apostle Peter received with meekness a sharp reproof from Paul, and we find him afterwards speaking of him in very friendly language*. David was a king and a prophet, yet he could receive with thankfulness a reproof from those that were by many degrees his inferiors†. Some think that he called one of his sons Nathan, in token of respect to the prophet of the same name, who reprov'd him for the blackest crimes.

The rebukes of Christ in his word and providence are fruits of the tenderest love, and the wise will love him the more on their account, and thank him for the necessary discipline of the covenant.

Ver. 13. There is so close a connection between the soul and body, that when the latter is pained, the former feels its pains; and when the mind is oppressed with grief, the body cannot enjoy its health and vigour. On the other side, a healthy body is of great advantage to the operations of the mind, and the joy of the heart spreads itself over the countenance. It makes the eyes brisk and sparkling, and gives a pleasant grace to the aspect in the eyes of every beholder. If one could paint as well as Jezebel, he could not make his face so lovely as it is rendered by the cheerfulness of the spirit.

Every thing that tends to promote a well-regulated joy in the mind is valuable, for it serves both soul and body at once. Meekness and contentment with our lot, peace and love, afford a continual feast to the mind, and make us agreeable to others. These virtues are not to be acquired, in their true excellency, but from God, for they are fruits of his Spirit, and are the property of the believer in Christ*. Christians should remember, that to rejoice is their duty, their privilege, and an ornament to their profession. The world has been too much tempted by Christians themselves, to think that there is little pleasure in religion. Why should we not constantly verify that saying of the wise preacher, "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine."

The effect of sorrow is often dangerous, and sometimes destructive. It blunts the edge of the understanding, impairs the memory, destroys the vigour of the soul, and if too much indulged, may utterly destroy reason, and sink a man into despair. There are indeed sorrows required by religion, but these have no danger in them, for they are mingled and attended with the sweetest pleasures. It is sin and not religion that makes sorrow needful, and religion forbids sorrow, even for sin, to be carried to a dangerous height, lest Satan should thereby gain an advantage; for we are not ignorant of his devices, and know that some of his most dreadful temptations are founded on that constitution of body or mind that disposes men to the entertainment of melancholy thoughts.

The kingdom of God is not a kingdom of darkness, but of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Ver. 14. Here the most intelligent men know but in part, and they are the wisest men that are most sensible of the imperfection of their wisdom, "I know nothing," said the wisest of the Greeks, "but that I know nothing;" and the wisest of Christians compares his present attainments to those of a child. Desires of wisdom, discovered in the ardent pursuit of it, are the best evidences we can give of our wisdom.

There are many that use the ordinary means of knowledge, and yet have no true wisdom; but their fault lies more in the heart than in the head. They are formal and careless in their endeavours to obtain knowledge, because they have not a cordial love to the truth. They read and hear, but they do not meditate and pray. If knowledge would drop into their minds as the dew upon the earth, they would be very glad of it; but they will not incline their ear unto wisdom, nor apply their heart to understanding. The truly wise have a higher esteem of knowledge than of gold and rubies, and their hearts are deeply engaged in the search of it. They use the means of knowledge, but will not be satisfied with the use of them without obtaining the end, and therefore they depend upon Christ as the great teacher, and earnestly plead for the illuminations of his Spirit, to brighten their understandings with discoveries of the truth, and to furnish them with that practical wisdom, without which they cannot be happy. Such seekers of wisdom shall not be disappointed; they shall know God to their joy in this world, and in heaven they shall know even as they are known.

But the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness, for they have no relish for wisdom; they can drink in vain and frothy discourse from morning till night, as if it were sweet wine; and when good men meditate by day and night on the law of God, the vain imagination of fools supplies them with thoughts suited to their corrupt minds, in which they delight as much as in their necessary food. God has provided marrow and fatness for the entertainment of our minds, but these foolish creatures rather choose to feed on wind and chaff. Their mouth poureth out foolishness, and they cannot do better, because they neither have, nor desire to have, any thing better within their hearts, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Ver. 15. To him that is afflicted, pity should be shewed from his friend, for none but those that have experience can tell what a gloom affliction uses to spread over the mind, and what unceasing sorrows it produces, when it is not soothed by the consolations of friendship, or alleviated by the vigour of the mind. The patientest of men tells us that his thoughts, disquieted by pain, and embittered by the unkindness of his friends, turned night into day, and made the light short because of darkness*. In distress the night cannot put an end to the fatigue of the day by the refreshments of sleep, and the pleasant light of morning can convey no cheering influence to the anxious mind.

But a good and cheerful heart is a continual feast. The pleasures of a peaceful conscience and a healthful soul, are sweeter than those which sensualists enjoy when they are revelling in all the pleasures that riches can give. The longest feast that we read of, lasted only six months†; but it was impossible that the nobles of Ahasuerus could be merry all that time. Feasting continued too long, becomes an insupportable burden; but the feast of a soul that enjoys well-grounded mirth never ends, and needs not suffer interruption. The mirth of fools, Solomon tells us, is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, and therefore it cannot be the mirth that is meant by him in this place. The joy of the Lord is the strength and life of the heart. When affliction makes a man to abhor dainty meat, the joys of God's salvation feed the soul as with marrow and with fatness. Paul was exposed to constant sufferings, and could safely protest that he died daily; yet every day he enjoyed those pleasures that were better than wine. The days of affliction could not suspend his happiness, for he was exceeding joyful in all his tribulations, and gloried in his infirmities, and sung praises in dungeons, and gave thanks to God, who always made him to triumph in Christ. This continual feast, which lost not its relish in the days of evil, was not peculiar to apostles. The first believers in Christ were so lively in the exercise of faith and hope, that the days of affliction were in general good and happy days to them*. How valuable is religion! what fools are they that seek or expect happiness without it! and how much are religious persons to be blamed, when they are sad from day to day, as if they were not the King's children, or their Father were unkind to them! The question that Eliphaz puts to Job without sufficient reason, may pierce into their consciences, "Are the consolations of God small with thee†?"

Religion is the soul of joy, it can cheer the afflicted, and will not suffer the poor to be unhappy.

Ver. 16. It is the blessing of God that makes any thing pleasant and satisfying. It is sufficient alone to make the beggar rich, and without it the man is poor who calls whole counties his own. And his blessing is upon his own people, and upon their basket and store, whilst the wicked and all they have are under his curse. It is God that gives both food and gladness, and without gladness, what good can our food do to us? and this gladness is ordinarily given to him that is good in his sight; but to the sinner he giveth travel, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God*.

If a Christian has but little, it is pleasant to him; because he considers it as the gift of his heavenly Father†, and tastes in it the love of his Saviour, through whose grace every thing is pure and sanctified to him. The wicked have their food from the providence of God which ruleth over all, the righteous have their bread by covenant and promise‡. If they have little in possession, they know that they shall have every thing necessary and good for them, from the possessor of heaven and earth; and when they are pinched with straits, it is not for want of good will in their heavenly Father, but because his goodness to them is directed by wisdom. If they have scarcely any food at all, they have promises on which they can feed, with a pleasure never tasted by the men of the world when their corn and wine do most abound||.

Trouble is the inseparable companion of great treasures, when they are not sanctified by prayer, and sweetened by the fear of the Lord. They are like water to a man in a dropsy, which doth not quench, but inflame his thirst. Anxiety and care, an ill conscience, and the uncertainty of present things, embitter the portion of the men of the world. Nothing can be really pleasant that wants the blessing

of God. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches, not of one, but of many wicked§.

The love that religion promotes, tends greatly to sweeten their outward enjoyments.

Ver. 17. Love is a pleasing affection of the soul, and diffuses cheerfulness all around it. It gives a relish to the scantiest and coarsest meal. Water is sweeter than wine, and dry bread more pleasant than fat things full of marrow, when this delightful affection gives a relish to them. Ruth and Naomi were happy when they lived on the gleanings of the fields of Boaz, and in the fulness of their satisfaction poured their blessings on the head of him that allowed them the scanty pittance. But selfishness, and hatred, and variance, makes every pleasant dish insipid or bitter.

The conversation of friends is far pleasanter than any dish at the table. Where hatred is, there is silence or sullenness, or at least hollow mirth, and tasteless ceremony; but where love and the fear of God is, the table conversation is delightful and useful. We find even an heathen poet reflecting with rapture on the pleasures of such entertainment*. How blessed were the disciples of our Lord, when they sat at meat with him! Barley loaves and fishes were probably ordinary fare with them, but they were entertained with divine discourse.

Such pleasure as they enjoyed in their Master's company we cannot now expect; but his religion is admirably fitted to promote our present happiness, for love is his great commandment. He enforces love between husbands and wives, as well as among friends, by motives which no Christian can withstand.

If love is necessary to sweeten our ordinary meals, we must never come to the Lord's table without exercising supreme love to Christ, and fervent love to our fellow Christians. We must consider ourselves as one body and one bread, when we are all partaking of one bread. Love is a pleasant passion, but let us beware of anger, which makes a man a torment to himself, and a plague to his neighbours.

Ver. 18. It will be our wisdom, if possible, to avoid the company of a passionate man, for it is almost impossible to live in peace with him. He is almost perpetually giving offence, and yet he cannot bear the least shadow of offence to be given to himself. You cannot act or speak so cautiously, but he will find or make some occasion for a quarrel, for tow is not more inflammable than a mind in which passion rules over reason.

But if you cannot avoid his company, be sure to keep a strict guard over your spirit, and by this means strife may be prevented or appeased. It is one of the amiable glories of God, that he is slow to anger; and considering how much we are indebted to his patience, we are strongly obliged to copy after him, as dear children.

A passionate disposition makes a man the firebrand of society; but meekness makes him a blessing to his neighbours. He that appeaseth strife, does us as much service, as he that quenches the fire that is burning down a house.

We must learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly of heart; so shall we find rest to ourselves, and pacify contentions, and enjoy a double blessing from the great Author of blessings. "Blessed are the meek,—blessed are the peace-makers."

Ver. 19. It is but little that a slothful man can be prevailed on to do; but that little gives him great trouble and fatigue. A diligent man finds himself easy and cheerful in the exercise of his profession; but the slothful man cannot be content, but when he is permitted to doze or sleep. When he is on the way of his duty he cannot proceed far, for he sees a hedge of thorns before him, and no opening to give him passage. Whatever business he is employed about, he finds unconquerable difficulties, and inextricable perplexities in it, so that he either leaves it undone, or slubbers it over, and does nothing to purpose. Such a man is fit neither for heaven nor earth. His dispositions do not at all suit the present state of mankind, to whom God has appointed labour and sweat; nor do they suit the law of Christ, which requires men to rejoice and work righteousness*.

"But the way of the righteous is made plain." The wise man mentions righteousness in this place rather than diligence, because the latter is included in the former, and is not sufficient without it, to make a man's way plain. The man that joins to industry the practice of justice towards men and piety towards God, may find difficulties in his way; but he is not diverted by them from his duty, nor discouraged from making progress. In worldly affairs, hard labour, with the blessing of God, conquers every thing. In the course of the spiritual life, difficulties and discouragements vanish away before faith, and mountains are threshed down to vallies, by that power on which faith relies†.

Ver. 20. Nothing can make a dutiful child happier, than to contribute to the happiness of his parents; and this filial disposition must not be confined to childhood, but dwell in us whilst either father or mother dwell upon the earth. If our parents should require us to do some great and hard thing for them, nature and gratitude would enforce our compliance; but all that they require is, that we should be wise and happy, for their felicity is bound up in our welfare. Surely he is an unnatural fool that will not gratify them in such kind desires.

Epaminondas, one of the best of the Greeks, having gained a glorious victory over the enemies of his country, said to them that complimented him on it, that his chief pleasure in it was the pleasure that the news would give to his father and mother.

Nature and Scripture condemn the folly of those that despise either father or mother. If our dependence is chiefly on our father, yet we have experienced more tenderness from our mother, and have cost her greater sorrows*.

Religion, if it had free course, would turn this earth into a kind of paradise, by making all men a blessing to one another. The duties we owe to human society, and to our respective relations, are enforced in the Bible by motives, which nothing but folly and impiety can resist.

Ver. 21. It is a sign of prodigious folly for a man to take pleasure in sin, which gives mortal wounds to the soul, provokes the

displeasure of the Almighty, and could not be expiated, but in the groans and blood of a Redeemer; and yet all wicked men take pleasure in it. It is with the utmost propriety that the wise man gives the name of fool to the sinner, and allows the character of wisdom to none but the godly.

We have in this verse a mark whereby we may know with certainty whether we are wise men or fools; and this mark is explained at great length by Paul, and illustrated by his own example*.

Wise men are not wise in every instance of their conduct, for weakness and temptation too often betray them into sin, yet they hate sin, and account their indwelling corruption a body of death; but sin is not only practised by the wicked, but it is loved by them. Folly is their joy, and therefore they sin even without a temptation. It is their meat and drink to sin, and they roll iniquity as if it were a sweet morsel under their tongue. They often feel stings of conscience from the word of God; but they hate not those sins that are condemned by it, but the word that condemns them. They dislike salvation itself, because it is a deliverance from sin.

But the wise man's employment is to cleanse his way, and make it straight. He hates sin that dwells in him, and loathes himself for his impurities. He takes pleasure in holiness, and loves the law of God, because it testifies against his iniquities. He joins earnestly with the Psalmist in that prayer, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" and instead of being satisfied with such a degree of holiness as may amount to the lowest evidence of true grace, he will not count himself completely happy, till his grace is completed in the glory of the heavenly state†.

Ver. 22. Wisdom is profitable to direct, and all our affairs must be conducted by it, and nothing done rashly and precipitately; for what is done too hastily, is generally repented of at leisure.

As we should endeavour to make our knowledge and wisdom useful to other men, so we should take the benefit of other men's wisdom, for we were designed by our common Creator to give and to receive, and by a commerce of wisdom to enrich one another.

The proud and selfish man, that thinks himself above advice, meets with disappointment and shame. But by a multitude of counsellors, (that is, of wise counsellors, for none else deserve the name), purposes are established and their success is generally ensured. This is so important a truth, that Solomon takes care we should not forget it, and therefore repeats it in this place, out of a former passage of this book*.

Solomon often speaks of the destruction of the proud, and the exaltation of the humble. This is chiefly owing to God's hatred of pride and love of humility; but the natural tendencies of virtue and vice serve Providence in this, as in other cases. The proud man takes the course that leads to disgrace and ruin, whilst he trusts so much to his own wisdom, that he consults with neither God nor man. The humble man acknowledges God in all his ways, and employs the wisdom of other men with his own, and his way is prosperous, because it is wise.

Ver. 23. It is not a good objection against endeavouring to do good by our words, that we are often unsuccessful in our endeavours to serve our fellow-creatures in this way; for although, by the perverseness of men, our kindness may be rendered unprofitable to them, yet a man hath joy by the answer of his mouth. It will be a pleasure to us to reflect, that we have discharged our duty, and used our tongues for the ends for which they were made. It can give us no true satisfaction, that we have gained the applause or good-will of men by sinful silence, or by flattering men's humours and prejudices; but if we have lost the favour of men by faithfulness to their best interests, the testimony of an approving conscience will abundantly counterbalance our damage. The joy that arises to a man from the answer of his tongue, will not be confined to this world; but at the day of judgment, those that have been converted by our words from the error of their ways, and edified in righteousness, will be a crown of rejoicing to us; and Christ himself will take a gracious notice of every word that has been spoken in his cause. Our Judge assures us, that by our words we shall be justified or condemned; and when the works of charity are mentioned with honour, the words which proceeded from that noble principle shall not be forgotten.

To make words really good, it is necessary that they be spoken in due season; for as the showers of rain in their proper season fertilize the ground, but at a wrong time drown the hopes of the year, so words have good or bad effects, as the time of speaking them is well or ill chosen. Abigail would not tell Nabal of his danger till he was sober; and Job's friends wounded his spirit in a cruel manner, by speaking things excellent in themselves, and very suitable to Job, if he had been the man they believed him to be. It is one of the properties of a wise man, that his heart knoweth both time and judgment.

A single word spoken in due season, is inexpressibly good. It may revive the desponding soul, preserve from death or save a soul, for death and life are in the power of the tongue*.

Ver. 24. All men are travellers either to heaven above, or hell beneath. The writers of Scripture knew nothing of the middle place, which perverters of Christianity have found out since their days, by the assistance of the ancient heathens.

There is but one way of life, and Christ tells us that he is that way, and no man cometh unto the Father but by him. Those only are in the way of life, that have received him by faith, and walk in him by a holy and heavenly conversation, to which true faith in Christ always leads him that possesses it.

This way is above, and they are great deceivers of themselves, who imagine that Christ will save those from hell that will not accept of his salvation from sin, which leads to hell. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord; and the faith which does not make a man heavenly in his affections and conversation, will never conduct a man to the regions of blessedness. The Son of God came from heaven to earth to purchase our salvation, and he is gone to heaven to plead for it, and the hearts of all that have the living hopes of heaven will follow him thither†.

Our everlasting abode must be either in heaven or hell. Salvation from hell is the half of heaven. The threatenings of hell are a fence

about the way to heaven, and whilst we are travelling in it, they are of great use to make us serious and earnest in pursuing our course; for how is it possible that we can flee with too much speed from everlasting burnings, when our flight is directed, not, like that of the manslayer, to a place of banishment, but to the world of happiness and pleasure?

Let us try ourselves by this mark of true wisdom. Do we mind earthly or heavenly things? If earthly things be the chief object of our regard, our way is below, and our names are written in the earth, because we forsake the fountain of living waters. If our affections be set on things above, then, when Christ our life shall appear, he will receive us into the celestial mansions, that where he is we may be also.

David and Paul explain this character of the wise man, from their own example, compared with that of worldly men*.

Ver. 25. We have already heard how detestable pride is to the Lord, and how it provokes his vengeance. Here we are told that God destroys the dwellings and families of the proud, as well as their persons. Proud men value themselves upon their magnificent palaces, their great riches, and their prosperous families, and provoke the Lord to destroy those things which are turned by them into idols, and used as the pillars of that creature confidence which he abhors. Nebuchadnezzar prided himself in the splendour of his palace, and the magnificence of his royal city. But he was driven from it to dwell among the beasts; and some ages after his death, his family, which he had exalted by his ravages, was rooted out of the world, and great Babylon, which he had built for the honour of his majesty, became a monument of the triumphs of God's power over the haughtiness of worms. Haman boasted of his riches and the number of his children; but Haman and his ten children were soon hanged, and his riches given to his hated enemy.

Let us never be vain of any thing, unless we wish to have it destroyed. God abhors pride even in them whom he dearly loves, and shews his resentment of it by humbling providences, that remove man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. David was proud of the vast numbers of his subjects, but God soon shewed him that great hosts save not a king, and that three days may greatly lessen the numbers of a people. Hezekiah's heart was lifted up, but he was soon obliged to humble himself, being assured that the treasures which he had so ostentatiously shewed to the Babylonish ambassadors, should be carried with his posterity to their own land.

God is terrible to the proud, but he is gracious to the helpless and desolate. Proud men often attempt to aggrandize their houses, by removing the landmark of the widow and fatherless; but the Lord establisheth the border of the widow. Let dying husbands leave their fatherless children and widows in the hand of God*, and let widows trust in him. If they are desolate and weak, and liable to oppression, that should not be a discouragement, but a strong motive to them to commit themselves unto the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort†.

There is often more meant than expressed in the words of God. Widows in this place are to be understood of those that are in desolate circumstances, and exposed to injuries of any kind. Their distressed situations make them proper objects of compassion, and infinite compassions are with God. He hath erected a throne of mercy, and the Redeemer sits upon it, and is exalted, that he may have mercy upon the poor and destitute*.

From the acts of terror and of grace here represented to us, we may take occasion to join in the song of the mother of our Lord: "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; he hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree‡."

Ver. 26. Solomon already told us that the way of the wicked is detestable to God; and here he tells us that his thoughts, no less than his words and actions, are abominable to him. Men see not the hearts of one another, and are too ready to imagine that they shall never be called to an account of what passes in their minds; but we must remember that the difference between God and man is infinite. Man looketh only on the outward appearance, and his rewards and punishments can reach no farther than his knowledge of the facts that deserve them. But it is the prerogative of the Father of spirits to search the hearts and to try the reins of the children of men, to render unto them according to their ways. The thoughts of the wicked are full of selfishness, impiety, pride, and impurity, and must be infinitely offensive unto the pure eyes of Jehovah; and whenever wicked men are, by the convincing operation of the Spirit, made to discern the secrets of their own hearts, they become loathsome to themselves.

Wicked men must forsake their thoughts, as well as their outward practices of wickedness; for what is the profit of making clean the outside of the cup and platter, whilst the inner part is full of impurity? God requires us to give him our hearts for his residence. A heart which should be God's habitation, if full of abominable thoughts, is like the royal chambers of Pharaoh filled with frogs.

If the thoughts of the wicked are abominable to God, their words cannot be pleasant to him, for how can those that are evil speak good things? If the words should be good when the thoughts are vile, they are like potsherds covered over with silver dross. God desireth truth in the outward parts, and abhors those that flatter him with their tongues, or seek the applause of men by making their tongues the instruments of hypocrisy.

But the thoughts of the pure are well pleasing to the Lord, and their words are pleasant in his ears. God is of pure eyes, and delights in those that are made pure by the blood and Spirit of his Son. Their hearts are cleansed from iniquity, and produce those holy thoughts and words which are acceptable in the sight of the Lord their God and Redeemer*. Their prayers and praises are a sweet odour in his nostrils. Their confessions are music to his ears†. Their common discourse, when it is seasoned with salt, and ministers grace to the hearers, is heard by him with delight. It is a solemn consideration, that God hears every thing that we say, and is pleased or displeased with it. He hearkens and hears what the wicked say, and his judgment of them is, that they speak not aright‡. When those that fear him speak one to another, he hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before him for them that fear the Lord, and think upon his name||. What have we to do on earth, but to labour that in our thoughts, and words, and ways,

we may be accepted of him*?

Ver. 27. The counsel of the wicked shall cast him down, for he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare. Instead of gaining what he expects by his iniquity, he exposes himself to those miseries which he most dreads, and that which he thought would be a shield to defend him, proves a killing sword. The covetous man is an instance of this truth. His heart is set upon gain, and he expects that it will render his life comfortable and happy. But he finds, by bitter experience, the truth of what he would not believe from the mouth of Christ, that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. He that is greedy of gain shall not live; so the wise man insinuates in the last part of the verse. He either shortens his days by his anxieties about the world, and those sinful methods which he takes to obtain the things on which he has placed his heart, or he embitters his life by his distracting cares. He designs to secure his family against want and contempt, and to raise it to eminence and honour; but he covets an evil covetousness to his house, and consults shame to it, whilst he sins against his own soul†. He kindles a fire in his dwelling, which shall consume the tabernacles of bribery.

If men could obtain what they seek by sin, it would be a pitiful compensation for eternal misery; but the same Almighty God that punishes the wicked in hell, reigns by his providence upon earth; his face is ever against the wicked, and if they prosper and flourish for a while, like the grass, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*; and they are the wretched instruments of mischief, not only to themselves, but to those whom they most love, and whom they mean to serve by their sins.

Money is a good thing when it is possessed by the wise, but the love of money is the root of every evil, and therefore covetousness is not to be named among the saints. If we love ourselves and our children, if we wish for quietness and peace on earth, if we cannot think without horror of dwelling in everlasting fire, we must take heed and beware of covetousness.

"But he that hateth gifts shall live," and his house shall stand. It is not enough for us to refrain from dishonest gain, but we must shake our hands from holding of bribes. This is the difference between the disposition of good and bad men, with relation to sin. Bad men may for many reasons abstain from the outward commission of it; but good men hate sin, and every thing that leads to it. He that hateth bribes is not a loser by his justice, unless a little money be more valuable than life, and the blessing of God to sweeten it. His family are great gainers, for the just man walketh in his integrity, and his children are blessed after him.

Jeremiah gives us several striking illustrations of this proverb†.

Ver. 28. The righteous man has a good treasure in his heart, out of which he bringeth good things; but he does not depend upon this good treasure, so as to speak any thing upon a subject that occurs most readily and easily to him. He wishes to speak nothing that may do hurt to others, or lead them into mistakes, but on every occasion, and especially in affairs of importance, to say what is best and most seasonable. He therefore considers what is fit to be answered to any man with whom he converses, and his words as well as his affairs are ordered with discretion. Without thought the righteous would speak like fools, as David did when he was provoked by the churlish words of Nabal, and in his fury vowed to destroy the house of Nabal, and cut off the innocent with the guilty.

In matters of great consequence that require delicate management, it is needful, in answering men, to lift up our souls to God in secret prayer for the direction of our tongues. Nehemiah prayed to the Lord in the presence of the king of Persia, before he answered his question; and it is remarkable with what insinuating eloquence he was taught of God to address the king, in such a manner as to obtain great favour for himself and for Israel.

But a wicked man has little sense of the importance of the government of the tongue, and wants the bridle of the fear of God to manage this unruly member, and therefore he pours forth evil things. But for all his vain and wicked words he must one day account.

Ver. 29. The Lord is not far from any man, for in him we all live, and move, and have our being. But as wicked men are far from God, through the alienation of their hearts, and the wickedness of their works, so the Lord is far from them, he will have no fellowship with them. The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them; but he does not hear the cry of the wicked, and beholds them afar off. Wicked men think they may safely go on in sin, and if trouble come upon them they will cry to the Lord, and all shall be well. Many have been ruined by such presumptuous expectations, and sad experience has at last convinced them that the Almighty was under no obligation to attend to their voice in adversity, when they would not hear his voice in the day of his forbearance.

The prayers of the righteous are graciously heard. God does not always give a present answer to them, but they need not wonder at that, for he did not give a present answer to his own Son crying to him in the days of his flesh. He will hear at the time, and in the manner, that appears best to himself. And wise heathens could see, that it is proper to leave it to the wisdom of God to determine what is best for us. If we do not obtain a speedy answer to our mind, we must wait on God, for he is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him. Our Advocate who presents our petitions is always heard, and the worthy name in which we pray is ever prevalent with God.

The blind man whom Christ healed*, made a noble use of the truth contained in the beginning of this verse. He drew from it an irrefragable proof of the divine mission of Christ. But there are too many that draw a very bad conclusion from it. If our prayers cannot be heard, say they, we may give over praying. The prophet Isaiah draws a very apposite instruction from this truth, teaching sinners to leave their sins, and not their prayers†. "When ye make many prayers," says God, "I will not hear; your hands are full of blood." What then must they do? are they for ever excluded from the favour of God? No; the Lord is far from the wicked, and yet brings near his salvation to them. He shows them a fountain of blood in which they must be washed and purged from their blood and filth, and then their prayers will come with acceptance before him‡.

Ver. 30. Truly the light is sweet, and we ought to give thanks every day to God, who makes the sun to shine, and formed that

amazing piece of mechanism, the eye of man, and contrived it so as to fetch in a thousand pleasures, not only from the objects that surround us, but from those glorious luminaries that are millions of leagues distant from the place of our abode. If Bartimeus was transported with gratitude to Christ when he restored to him his sight, why should we be less grateful to our Maker, who gave us this noble organ of sense, and has constantly preserved it, and made it the instrument of so many pleasures and advantages? It is very ungrateful to make our eyes the instrument of rebelling against our Maker, which is every day done by the adulterer and drunkard. On the contrary, when our eyes give joy to our hearts, it is highly proper to improve this pleasure into adoration and praise, by magnifying the work of God which we behold.

"And a good report maketh the bones fat," for the ear as well as the eye ministers delight and advantage to us. Pleasant views are cheering to the spirit, but glad tidings are no less reviving to the heart, and the pleasures received from them is marrow to the bones, and health to the whole man.

No reports have this effect so much as the glad tidings of salvation to lost sinners. We must thank God that we receive so many curious discoveries by means of the sense of hearing, but above all, that the gospel of his grace has reached our ears. Gratitude teaches us to turn away our ears from the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge, and from all corrupt and uncharitable conversation, and to attend with earnestness unto the voice of the Lord, addressing us from day to day. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Have any of us lost the sight of our eyes? That is a sore affliction, yet let us be thankful if the use of our ears remains to us, by which we enjoy the agreeable converse of our friends, and the opportunities of serving God, and waiting on him in his sanctuary.

Ver. 31. There are great differences among reprovers. Some reproofs are not the reproofs of life, and these deserve little regard from us. There are not wanting persons that will rebuke others for doing their duty, and curse them because they will not see with the eyes of their unjust reprovers. But in opposition to these gainsayers, and perverters of the right ways of the Lord, we must hold on our way, and never be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord.

But the reproofs of life are valuable. Our Lord teaches us to account them pearls, and Solomon in this expression gives them an equal commendation, and frequently lays it down as a mark of wisdom, to pay a proper regard to just and needful reproofs.

But how shall we know whether we have this character of wisdom? It is not by saying to that friend who reproves us, that we are obliged to him. Good manners will make almost any man to say that. But here is the trial of our submission to rebukes, "The ear that hears them abides among the wise."

If we have a just sense of the value of reproofs, we will count that faithful friend that reproves rather than flatters, a treasure, and frequent his company on that account. We will not passionately leave that Christian society with which we are connected, because the word of God is faithfully applied in it to the correction of vice, and discipline impartially administered, although we ourselves should become the objects of it. The servant that loves a faithful reprove, and truly regards his own soul, will chuse to live in a house where God is feared, and family religion enforced; and every man possessed of this humble disposition, will chuse that company in which he is most likely to be told of his faults.

Those that reprove others, ought to dispense their salutary admonitions with meekness and prudence, that they may not render this ordinance of God disgusting and offensive by their manner of dispensing it, and render themselves accountable for the mischief done by this means to precious souls.

Ver. 32. We are born like the wild ass's colt, and need not only instruction, but reproof, to make us wise; but some are such enemies to themselves, that they will not suffer themselves to be taught wisdom. The scorner hates his reprove, but he is the greatest enemy to himself, whilst he spurns at the physician for giving him those prescriptions that are absolutely necessary for his health, though disagreeable to his vitiated palate. He is more brutish than the horse or mule, for these animals, although they want the benefit of reason, and are stubborn at first, will rather be tamed than destroyed.

But the man is happy who suffers the word of exhortation and reproof, for though he is at present chargeable with many faults and follies, yet he is in the way of reformation, and takes the sure method of getting understanding. He is meek and teachable, and God will bless to his soul that word which he receives with meekness.

Solomon gives us frequent advices on this point, but they are all needful, for no duty is harder to our proud spirits, than receiving reproofs with calmness, and applying them to the correction of our lives.

Ver. 33. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it instructs men in every other branch of wisdom; for a right impression of the excellencies of God upon our spirits, will dispose us with due reverence to search the scriptures, and to acquiesce in the wise instructions which they contain; it will powerfully influence us to make a thankful use of Christ, as he is made of God wisdom to us, and to follow the conduct of the Holy Spirit.* The fear of the Lord will be a preservative to us from sin and folly, and an incentive to all holy conversation and godliness; and a good understanding have all they that do the commandments of God.

"And before honour is humility." For whilst we humbly renounce our own righteousness, and place all our dependence on the grace of God, we are exalted in imputed righteousness; and when we are pure in spirit, we are prepared for the kingdom of heaven. He to whom all judgment is committed, hath declared, and will make it good, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The honours of this world are so short-lived, that they are scarcely worth the naming. Sometimes the proud push themselves into high stations, and yet they cannot attain the summit of their ambitious aims, without the permission of that Providence from which promotion comes; and it is certain, that God hates the proud, and will not suffer them to rise into eminence for their real advantage, but rather to signalize his vengeance, by spurning them, in due time, into disgrace and misery.

Alexander and Julius Cæsar blazed for a time; but how much more illustrious and durable were the honours of David, who thought himself quite unworthy to be the king's son-in-law, and compared himself to a partridge and a flea, but was exalted by God to the throne of his kingdom over Israel, and to the greater honour of being a prophet in the church, and the sweet singer of Israel!

CHAPTER 16

Ver. 1. A MAN cannot put his heart into a proper order, nor manage his thoughts so as to be ready for any good word or work, by his own abilities. We cannot expel sin from our hearts, nor furnish them with holy dispositions; and when our hearts are purified by the grace of God, we cannot, without new supplies of grace, prepare them for praying, or speaking to the edification of our fellow Christians. One of the best of men tells us, that he was not sufficient of himself to think any thing as he ought. It is our duty to prepare our hearts, and fix our thoughts for every religious service to which we are called; and it is our sin when we are careless about it: but we must not attempt this work in our own strength. In every thing we must direct our eyes to God, the fountain of all goodness, praying to him, as David did for his people, that he may prepare our hearts unto himself*. To encourage us to apply to God for his needful assistance, we are here told, that the preparation of the heart belongs to him; and in other passages of scripture we are encouraged by his promises, to expect this favour at his hands†.

We must depend on God for every thing. The answer of the tongue is from the Lord, as well as the preparation of the heart. He fashions the hearts of men, and makes their tongues to speak what he pleases. He pressed Balaam's tongue, against his heart, into the service of Israel, and would not suffer Laban to speak to Jacob either good or bad, when he came to him with a full resolution to do him some mischief. Caiaphas was made to speak a noble truth, when he designed only to suggest a politic counsel; and Pilate had not power to pronounce the condemning sentence against our Lord, till it was given him from above.

However well our thoughts are ranged in our minds, yet we cannot utter them to the advantage of men, and the glory of God, unless the Lord enlarge our hearts and loose our tongues; and therefore David prays that his lips, which were closed, might be opened, and Paul begs the prayers of the Ephesians, that utterance might be given.

We must beg from God the gifts of the Spirit for ministers, and the gift of prayer and Christian conference for ourselves, under a firm persuasion that we are altogether unable of ourselves to think or speak, or perform any good thing, and that every good and perfect gift is from above, even from the Father of lights, who bestows his gifts freely, but requires the praise of them to be rendered back to himself.

The truth contained in this text must not slacken, but encourage our Christian diligence*.

Ver. 2. How different is the judgment which men form of themselves, from that which God makes of them! He looks down from heaven to see how men behave, and behold, he sees all men walking in ways that are not good. They are filthy and abominable, and yet so blind, that they generally think their way clean and pure. They will acknowledge that they are not free from sin, but they have no impressions of the evil of sin. Their great transgressions they account venial trespasses. Their lesser iniquities, which they daily commit, are accounted mere motes, not worth the minding; and every slight appearance of goodness, their vain imagination exalts into a shining virtue.

The reason of men's good opinion of their ways is, that they are unacquainted with their own spirits, and take no pains to be acquainted with the secret principles and aims that animate and direct the course of their life. No kind of knowledge is more necessary, nor seldomer sought after and obtained, than the knowledge of a man's self.

But it will profit us nothing to be pure in our own eyes, if we are abominable in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. The better that a bad man thinks of himself, he is the more abhorred of the Lord, who is the irreconcilable enemy of pride and self-conceit, and calls those men who boast of their goodness, a smoke in his nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

The Lord is our Judge, and our sentence must come from him. He weigheth our spirits in a just and unerring balance; and if they are destitute of faith in Christ, and love to God and holiness, he will condemn our way. The most splendid actions, and shining appearances of virtue, without purity of heart, will make us, in his sight, only like whitened sepulchres, beautiful without, but inwardly full of rottenness and dead men's bones.

Let us examine our own hearts and ways, under a deep impression of this truth, that God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. The word of God is the rule by which we must search and try ourselves, for God will judge us by it at last; and we learn front it, that none shall be able to stand in judgment with God, who have not been made to discern the impurity of their heart and conversation, and compelled to build their confidence upon him that saves the lost.

It is not impossible for men to attain a comfortable knowledge of their own sanctification. Although a ragged beggar, when he dreams of crowns and sceptres, thinks himself as sure of his fancied dignity, as if it were a reality; yet a king will not doubt of his royalty, nor imagine that it may be only a dream. But those who have obtained this precious blessing, of knowing assuredly that they are purified in heart and life, have, at the same time, an humbling sense of remaining impurities. Their dependence is not upon themselves, but upon Christ; and they would dread the thoughts of being brought into judgment with God on the ground of their own righteousness, knowing that no flesh can be justified before him*.

Ver. 3. The just God has appointed much toil to the sons of Adam, to be exercised therewith; and it often becomes a burden that makes us to groan and cry out for ease. And here God in his mercy directs us to a method of finding ease and comfort under the heaviest burdens. Roll (Heb.) thy works upon the Lord. But how shall we cast them upon him? Shall we ascend into the heavens to find him for this purpose? No; David explains this point of instruction at great length in the thirty-seventh Psalm, and tells us that we are to commit our work unto the Lord, by trusting and resting in him, and waiting patiently for the event. Paul directs us* to do it by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. And as Hannah, when she had prayed about her sorrows, went away, and was no more sorrowful; so when our burden is cast upon the Lord by fervent supplications, we ought to banish every anxious thought, believing that God is mighty and faithful, and will give a good account of that which is entrusted to him by his own direction. We must not, however, neglect the use of proper and warrantable means for accomplishing our designs, for it is presumption, and not faith, to believe God's promise, and disregard his command. Joshua was to depend upon God alone for victory over the Canaanites, and yet he was required to be strong and courageous, to fight with them, and observe all God's commandments; and he seems to have erred when he sent only 3000 men against Ai, to save toil to the people.

Our worldly affairs are to be committed to God, as well as our spiritual concerns†. In every thing we must depend upon God's help, ask his direction, and refer ourselves to his will. In the meantime, we must undertake nothing inconsistent with our duty to God and men, for it would be gross impiety to interest the most holy God in things opposite to his own will. Had David been employed in acknowledging God when he prepared his men for marching with the Philistines against Israel, the Amalekites would never have found an opportunity to destroy Ziklag. And yet David's encouraging himself in the Lord his God*, after he had felt the bad consequences of his rashness, teaches us this comfortable lesson,—that although we have been turned by our own rashness out of God's way, we are not excluded from the benefit of this gracious direction. David still committed his work to the Lord, and the mischiefs occasioned by his unadvised conduct were soon retrieved.

What a pleasure is it for a weary man to be allowed to cast his burden upon one that is well able to bear it! But it is our mercy, that we are allowed to cast our works and burdens upon the Almighty†. And we are assured that he will then establish our thoughts, and bring what concerns us to a comfortable end. Perhaps the event will not suit our present views; but in that case it will appear that our views were not agreeable to the gracious intentions of God, and in that case it will be our happiness to have them disappointed. The will of the Lord be done, and let our own will be done as far as it consists with his. It was a prayer of a famous divine, 'Let my will be done, O Lord,—my will, because it is thine.'

Ver. 4. Every rational agent has some end of his work in view. And God, in all his works of creation and providence, has the noblest of possible ends in view,—the glory of his name, and the manifestation of his divine excellencies. He is infinitely blessed, and needs no glory from us; but he is infinitely wise and holy, and he will be glorified by us, or upon us.

Every creature should be used by us as a mean of raising our thoughts to its Creator, for what being is there that wants a tongue, to declare his glory to the rational mind? The dumb fishes will declare unto us that the hand of the Lord hath made them*.

But does not God lose his glory in some of his creatures? are not wicked men and devils dishonouring him every day to his face? Yet God shall never be disappointed of his great end. He will restrain a revenue of praise from those that will not give him the glory due unto his name, and will force the wrath and wickedness of his enemies to praise him. Pharaoh was an insolent rebel against the Sovereign of the world, and yet in very deed God raised him up, to shew in him his power, and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Tremble, ye stubborn sinners! God must be glorified in you, and if you will not be persuaded to give him glory before he cause darkness, by accepting of his gracious salvation, and turning from your sins, there remains nothing for you but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation. The Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy will be sanctified in righteousness. The day of evil is the day of the display of the glorious holiness of God. You cannot expect to escape, unless God could be persuaded to renounce his glory for you; and you may with much more reason hope, that the earth should be forsaken for you, and the rock removed out of its place. Aaron was a highly-favoured saint, and yet when his two sons affronted God by offering strange fire, they were immediately consumed; and the reason was, because God would be glorified in all that came nigh unto him. The flames of hell will shine for ever to the glory of God, and afford a subject for the songs of heaven*.

How admirable are the glories of the Lord! Every creature in every world, and every thing that falls out in any part of his dominions, concurs to shew forth his praise. Of him, and through him, and to him are all things; and to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The proud amongst those that do wickedly, shall be dreadful monuments of the vengeance of the Almighty, and not one of them shall escape.

Ver. 5. We have heard already, that a proud look is greatly offensive to God†; but although there be no appearances of pride in the countenance or behaviour to provoke the displeasure of the Almighty, yet he is the searcher of the heart, and if he finds it governed by pride, he will execute the vengeance written in his word upon the haughty sinner. Man looks on the outward appearance, and frequently makes false judgments. The demure Pharisees were counted humble and self-denied men, when they were hunting after the praise of the people; but their inward pride was well known to our Lord, who tells them, that what was highly valued by men was abhorred by God.

The proud abound in the world. This abominable sin is natural to the posterity of him that fell by attempting to be like God. The forms of it are very various, and the grounds of it cannot be reckoned up, for it is an insatiable monster that will find nourishment to itself in any thing. Some are proud of their dignity, and power, and high birth; others boast themselves because of their great riches. Some

are proud, like Goliath, of their stature and the vigour of their limbs; others boast of their beauty, and that pleasing form which shall soon be turned into corruption. Some are proud of their righteousness, and others (O the infatuation of the human race!) glory in their shame. But whatever shape pride may assume, and whatever is its ground, it is seen by the all-seeing eye of God, and makes the man in whom it dwells and reigns, an object of his abhorrence and avenging arm.

None can imagine the terrors of that punishment which is inflicted by the hand of the Lord, on those whom his heart abhors. But is there no possibility of avoiding it? None, unless the haughty spirit be humbled into a submission to the righteousness of faith. Though hand join in hand, those that walk on in pride shall be abased, and spurned into hell. Unknown myriads of angels fell by pride into the bottomless pit, and are groaning, and shall for ever groan, under the power of God's wrath. Although all the proud on earth should enter into a confederacy with all the legions of devils and damned spirits in hell, and exert their utmost combined force to oppose the execution of Almighty vengeance, they will only be like mountains of tow and rotten wood, reared up to oppose the progress of a raging flame*.

Ver. 6. It is plain from scripture, that Christ hath by himself purged our sins, and by one offering for ever perfected all them that are sanctified. To pretend to substitute any thing of our own in place of his perfect atonement, or to join our own works to his blood to procure our pardon, would be as foolish as an attempt to extinguish the sun, and supply its place with a candle; or to improve the brightness of that luminary, by lighting a torch at mid-day. We must not therefore imagine, that Solomon meant in this place to recommend mercy and truth to us, as means of procuring the favour of God and the pardon of our sins, for the scripture cannot contradict itself.

Some, by mercy and truth, understand the mercy and truth of God, two attributes which shine with illustrious brightness in our salvation, and are frequently mentioned together by the sacred writers, when they celebrate the glories of it*. Christ, our atonement, was the mercy promised unto the fathers, and when God bestows pardon through Christ, he discovers the riches of his mercy according to his word; for he is faithful and merciful when he fulfils that promise of the covenant, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

None shall receive the benefit of pardoning mercy but in consistency with the truth of God in his word; and therefore hopes of safety, not grounded on the scripture, shall end in shame and disappointment†.

The Hebrew word which we render purged, is sometimes used to signify the cause or mean of deliverance from temporal mischiefs, or death. In this sense I think it may be said, that by mercy and truth in men, iniquity is removed; according to that exhortation of Daniel to the king of Babylon, "Break off thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if so be it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity*."

It is a mighty recommendation of mercy and fidelity towards men, that we are so infinitely indebted to the mercy and faithfulness of God, to whom we are to shew our gratitude, by imitating those amiable attributes that appear with such lovely glories in our pardon and salvation; and whilst we thus shew forth the virtues of our God and our Saviour, in doing good to men, we are consulting and pursuing our own best interest and comfort.

But mercy and truth to men, must have the fear of the Lord joined to them, to make them Christian graces. Morality is not solid without piety, and piety is not genuine without morality. The fear of the Lord is a soul-purifying grace, and we must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. When Joseph's brethren were terrified that he would do them some injustice, he assures them that they might banish every anxious thought, for, says he, "I fear God." The fear of God will not only dispose men to abstain from manifest acts of injustice, but it will keep them from every instance of harsh and ungenerous conduct. Nehemiah would not oppress the people by exacting the ordinary perquisites of his office, because he was under the constraining influence of this gracious principle†. You may safely trust a man that has the fear of God in him, for herein he will exercise himself to have a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards man‡.

Ver. 7. It is very natural for men to endeavour to please those whom they love, and on whom their interests depend; and often they despise and provoke God, by preferring the favour of men to the approbation of their Judge*.

Every true Christian is disposed, by the grace of God, to endeavour to walk so as to please God; and if there were no other happiness but what this world affords, it would still be our wisdom to prefer the pleasing of God to the favour of men, because the hearts of all men are in his hand, and he disposes our neighbours to love or hate us, according to his will.

When we have lost the favour of our friends or superiors, we are disposed to reflect on them for their unkindness or ingratitude; but we should rather consider seriously, whether we have not provoked our great Benefactor to deprive us of the good-will of men, by our ingratitude to himself. Wolsey made this melancholy reflection, when he was turned out of his master's favour: "Had I served God as faithfully as I served my prince, he would not have forsaken me thus at last." But if he had served God more faithfully, it is probable that his prince had not forsaken him at last; or if this calamity had in that case befallen him, it need not have produced such a bitter reflection.

When we have lost the favour of our friends, or stand in fear of enemies, it is our wisdom to use proper means for softening their resentments; but that is not the first nor the chief thing we have to do; our first work should be, to make our peace with God, if we have offended him, for he fashioneth the hearts of men according to his pleasure; and whether they act as friends or enemies, they are ministers of his providence*. Jacob did well in giving so large presents to Esau, and addressing him in such submissive language; but neither his complaisance nor his gifts turned his brother's alienated heart to him. These were, indeed, means which

God blessed for that purpose; but the principal mean which Jacob used for this purpose, was weeping and supplication, and by these he had power with God, and, by consequence, with men, and obtained the glorious name of Israel.

God has often given favour to his faithful people in the eyes of strangers and enemies, which appears in the instances of Joseph in Egypt, David at Gath, and Daniel in Babylon. These and the like examples of God's sovereignty over the hearts of men, and goodness to his people, may satisfy us that God will sooner or later reconcile the hearts of enemies to his servants, when he sees it for their real benefit. Job was long an object of indifference to some of his friends, and aversion to others of them, yet at last the hearts of all his acquaintances were disposed to love and serve him.

If one endeavours to prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, and yet misses the favour of men, he may rest satisfied in this, that he is at peace with God, and that his providence will make the wrath of men to promote his noblest interests. The martyrs, when they lost their lives, were over-comers, and obtained brighter crowns than the mightiest of their adversaries ever wore†.

Ver. 8. The fruits of unrighteousness may be pleasant in the mouth, but they are bitter in the belly; and a man that consults his true interest, will rather live on bread and water, or starve, with a good conscience, than enjoy the revenue of kings, without the approbation of God and his own heart.

There are too many in the world who would rather be rich by unfair means, than enjoy the pleasures of a good conscience with poverty; and therefore the Spirit of God cries to us again and again, that a little with honesty and the fear of the Lord, is better than affluence without it*.

Ver. 9. The first verse of this chapter is in many translations made to express the same truth. "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue to the Lord†.

The Lord has a sovereign influence over the hearts and thoughts of men, and they can devise nothing without the concurrence of his providence, for in him we live, and move, and have our being. When men are even taking unhallowed means to determine their conduct, the holy providence of God, by undiscerned influence, overrules their minds, and decides in their councils. When the king of Babylon used divination to direct him whether he should direct his march to Rabbah or Jerusalem, it was the Lord that determined him to come against his own people, to punish them for their iniquities. Yet Solomon affirms with truth, that a man's heart deviseth his way, because man exercises full freedom of will in forming his projects. The decree and providence of God do not interfere with the free-will of rational creatures, far less can man's free-will preclude the absolute dominion of the Most High, over the hearts, as well as the fortunes of men*.

The sovereign dominion of God shines clearly in the disposal of men's ways. They either execute their counsels or not, as his wisdom has determined. They sometimes accomplish their own counsels, but whether they do or not, they never fail to accomplish the purpose of God. Those that know not God, those that will not acknowledge his decrees and providence, and those that set themselves in the most avowed opposition to God, are all of them employed as instruments in the execution of his decrees. The devil himself was deeply concerned in the accomplishment of the glorious purpose of God about our salvation.

God not only determines the event of a man's devices, but every step in his progress. He not only directs every step of his people†, but every step in the walk of every man, and even of his greatest enemies, is ordered by him‡. And accordingly, we find Isaiah and Micah, when they speak of the Assyrian invasion of Judea, naming the particulars of their march, as if they had been writing an history, rather than a prophecy; for they were inspired by Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, and makes use of all creatures as the ministers of his providence||.

What comfort to God's people may be derived from this point! Our heavenly Father has all hearts, and tongues, and hands under his management. A dog cannot move its tongue against any one of us, unless he give it commission*.

Whatever befalls us by the spite of men, should lead our thoughts to God; and when we consider it as a piece of his providence, we shall see that we have no reason to complain, but much reason to adore†.

Let us never lay down any plan of conduct, without acknowledging God. If we will not take notice of his providence in proposing our measures, we shall find in the prosecution of them, that there is a providence which will have its course, in spite of all the wisdom and strength of men.

Ver. 10. It is too evident that this sentence contains not the character of all kings, but only of those who deserve this noble title by their wisdom and goodness. It would not be a perversion of the original text, in this and other passages which speak of the excellent qualities of kings, to translate them as advices, rather than descriptions of their behaviour, — Let a divine sentence be in the lips of the king, and let not his mouth transgress in judgment.

Great sagacity and penetration is necessary, for those that govern whole nations. The higher men are exalted, they need the more wisdom, because ignorance and folly are attended, in men of station and power, with very destructive consequences. Kings are not born wiser than other men, but they are under stronger obligations than their subjects, to use with unceasing diligence the means of attaining wisdom, and to pray for it to Him who is the Fountain of wisdom and royalty. When God calls men to any station for which great degrees of wisdom are requisite, let them ask it of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not*.

Justice is equally necessary in kings, for without this, great talents only render them terrible scourges to their subjects and neighbouring nations†.

This text directs our sentiments about kings. We are not required to shut our eyes, and to believe manifest lies of the greatest men; but it is sinful and dangerous to entertain groundless prejudices against kings, and to weaken their government by speaking to their

disadvantage†.

How worthy is our Lord Jesus Christ to wear upon his head many crowns! He is the wisdom of God, and all his administrations are judgment and righteousness||.

Ver. 11. It was a custom among the nations who knew not God, to ascribe divinity to the inventors of useful arts; but the Scripture teaches us to ascribe all good inventions to the one living and true God. It was he who taught the merchant, as well as the husbandman, discretion; and the appointment of weights and measures, as instruments of justice in trade, is to be ascribed to him.

A man that puts the royal stamp upon base metal, is accounted a traitor to his prince; and it is a daring wickedness for men to use those weights and balances, which are God's appointments for the benefit of society, as means of injustice to their fellow-men. But a just weight and a just measure are approved by him, for he loveth justice and establisheth equity.

Ver. 12. Should not wickedness be abhorred by the poor on the dunghill, as well as the king on the throne? No doubt. But sin is greatly aggravated by the place that a man holds in society, and what is pernicious to one individual in a private man, is mischievous to a kingdom in a sovereign. Jeroboam not only sinned, but made Israel to sin, and his iniquity spread itself from Dan to Beersheba, and continued to diffuse its poison many hundreds of years after he was laid in his grave.

Kings must not only abstain from wickedness, but abhor it and punish it; and it is their interest to do so, for great hosts save not a king, nor is his throne secured by the largeness of his dominions, and the valour of his soldiers, but by righteousness, which brings down the blessing of God, and attaches to him the hearts of his subjects.

How greatly does God recommend righteousness to our love and practice! He makes it the instrument of safety and happiness to families and nations, as well as private persons. The histories of nations shew us, that the number of years has been hidden to the oppressor, that long and happy reigns have seldom been enjoyed but by good princes, and that national convulsions and revolutions have been the ordinary consequences of public injustice.

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. Why? The sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre; thou lovest righteousness, and hatest iniquity*.

Ver. 13. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him that speaketh right.

There have been too many kings that loved flattery much better than the lips of truth; but they have always found the smart of it. Jeroboam had almost lost an arm, and Ahab lost his life, because they could not bear plain dealing.

David was a wise prince, who would not suffer liars to abide in his sight, and loved Nathan for his sharp reproofs.

It is the duty of those who have the ear of kings, to give faithful and just counsels, and to tell them necessary though displeasing truths. By this they will at last gain favour, when flatterers are become the objects of their just abhorrence. Micaiah was honoured as an honest prophet, when Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah was obliged to flee into an inner chamber to hide himself; and even the proud kings of Babylon bestowed the highest honours upon Daniel the captive, for his sagacity and honesty in foretelling the most dreadful calamities.

If God requires his vicegerents upon earth to abhor liars and flatterers, how detestable must they be to himself! None of them are ranked by him among his own people, of whom he says, "Surely they are children that will not lie*."

Ver. 14, 15. It is the duty of all men to govern their passions, but especially of kings, because their anger may prove deadly. On the other side, their favour misplaced is of such consequence, and attended with so much honour and advantage, that it may give encouragement to wickedness. The good emperor Theodosius the Great, made the latter part of his life unhappy to himself, by the effects of his rash anger, in causing many of the Thessalonians to be murdered; and many princes have been ruined by means of unworthy favourites.

A wise man will not rashly incur the hatred of his prince, or if he has provoked his anger, will endeavour by proper submissions to appease it. And it is a very justifiable piece of prudence in those who are admitted to the presence of monarchs, to make themselves agreeable, by every mean that consists with a good conscience*. We have reason, however, to be thankful, that we are not plagued with arbitrary monarchs, as many nations were in ancient times, and still are in our own age. Let us do that which is good, and we need not much fear the frowns of princes.

If the wrath of kings, which reaches only the body, and is circumscribed within the limits of the present life, be dreadful as messengers of death, who can stand before the wrath of Him that can kill both soul and body, and torment them in an everlasting lake of fire! How infatuated are they that provoke his displeasure by wilful rebellion, and will not accept the benefit of that reconciliation which his grace has provided! Is it all one to us whether we are crushed for ever under the avenging arm of God, or blessed with the smiles of the King of heaven, infinitely more refreshing than the dew upon the grass, or the clouds of the latter rain, which mature the precious fruits of the earth? We are children of wrath; but Christ is our peace, and through him we are called to the enjoyment of that favour which is the fountain of felicity; and shall the favour of God be less esteemed by us than the smiles of a great man by his fellow-worms!

Ver. 16. If you ask a rich man that wants wisdom, whether gold or wisdom is best? he will answer, gold. But he is a fool, and his word deserves no regard. If you ask the same question at a poor wise man, he will give the preference to wisdom; but you will say he is not a competent judge, because he wants experience and impartiality. Here we have a clear and full answer to the question, by a man celebrated equally for his wisdom and riches; and he tells us that it is impossible to declare or imagine, how much wisdom is better than silver or gold. Most men prefer gold to wisdom, and thereby discover their ignorance and folly; for as much as heaven is higher than the earth, and eternity exceeds a moment in duration, so far does wisdom exceed riches in value. It is uncertain whether

riches will do us any service, but it is certain they can do little. It is uncertain how long they will continue with us, but it is well known, that they will in a few years at most be useless to us; whereas the least degree of saving wisdom is of immense value, and has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Receive wisdom, therefore, rather than silver, and the instructions of wisdom rather than choice gold*.

Ver. 17. To live in any known sin is utterly inconsistent with wisdom and uprightness. It is the property of a sincerely religious man to depart from sin of every kind, and in every degree. He will not allow himself in any sin, however profitable or pleasant, or however dangerous the opposite course of holiness may be. He will not indulge sin in his words, or in his most secret thoughts, more than in his actions; but keeps at a distance from every appearance of evil. He knows that there are many temptations surrounding his path, and that he has a corrupt nature within him, which is a constant and indwelling temptation; and therefore he walks circumspectly, not as a fool, but as a wise man, and daily prays that he may be led and kept in the way of uprightness by the good Spirit of the Lord.

Happy is the man that keepeth his way; he walks in a safe path wherein he shall not stumble, for it is the highway of the King of heaven. He preserveth his soul, for he is preserved from the paths of the destroyer. He walks in Christ, and is led by the Spirit of Christ, and no lion nor ravenous beast shall be let loose to destroy him; but he shall come at length to the Zion of blessedness with songs and everlasting joy upon his head.

By this mark we ought to try our uprightness, and by this rule to guide our steps*.

Ver. 18. Pride is a common and dangerous iniquity, and our kind instructor multiplies his cautions against it. The danger of pride is plain from every history of the great transactions that have come to pass in heaven and in earth. The prophets describe the destructive consequences of this sin with all the strength of their divine eloquence, and all the sublimity of the prophetic style†. The history of the evangelists shews us what amazing humiliation was necessary to expiate the guilt contracted by the pride of man. And the tendency of the preaching and writings of the apostles, was to cast down every high imagination of men, that no flesh might glory, but in the Lord*.

Might not this loathsome disease become a cure for itself? Can any thing afford us greater cause of humiliation, than to find ourselves guilty of a sin so exceedingly unreasonable and presumptuous as pride? Shall a worm swell itself into an equality with the huge leviathan? What is man that he should be great in his own eyes? or what is the son of man, who is a worm, that he should magnify himself as if he were some being greater than an angel? Was the Son of God humbled for us, that we might not perish for ever, and shall pride ever be suffered to reign in our souls†?

Ver. 19. Although pride were not followed by destruction, and humility were attended by the most afflicting circumstances, yet humility is to be infinitely preferred to pride.

The word here rendered humble might by an inconsiderable variation signify afflicted. Humility and affliction are often in scripture expressed by the same word, and described as parts of the same character. Low and afflicted circumstances are often useful, by promoting humiliation of spirit. The reverse sometimes takes place, but it is an evidence of a very intractable spirit, if we cry not when God bindeth us, and continue unhumiliated under humbling providences. The cottager that has his little Babylon of straw, is less excuseable than the mighty Nebuchadnezzar walking in his pride through the splendid chambers of his stupendous palace.

However mean the circumstances of the humble man may be, he is incomparably happier than the most prosperous of proud sinners. Alexander and Severus, after all their mighty conquests, are said to have lamented the emptiness of their acquisitions. I have been all things, said the last of these mighty men, and nothing is of any use. The joys and triumphs of the prosperous sinner are unsubstantial and fleeting as the wind. But the humble and afflicted Christian is a happy man, for his poverty of spirit makes him content and thankful. The God that knows the proud afar off, looks on him with complacency, and dwells with him, to revive his contrite spirit. He believes that he is in the circumstances which his heavenly Father knows to be best for him. Christ declares him blessed, and he shall be blessed through eternity.

Ver. 20. We ought not only to avoid every thing sinful and foolish, and to exercise ourselves diligently in our necessary businesses and duties, but likewise to do every thing that we undertake wisely and discreetly.

The prudent management of affairs is attended with great comfort and advantage. It will give us reasonable hopes of success, command esteem from others, and prevent the evil consequences that usually result from indiscretion. David's name was much set by when he was in the house of Saul, because he behaved himself prudently on every occasion; and Solomon's prudent administration filled the Queen of Sheba with amazement, and made her almost to envy the servants that had the pleasure of attending him, and seeing and hearing his wisdom.

In our religious course, we are required to do every thing in a decent, orderly, and prudent manner. This will conduce to our own comfort and happiness, to the glory of the God of order, and to the edification of the body of Christ; and it will prevent our good from being evil spoken of by those that desire to find occasion against us.

But whether we are employed in the business of the world, or in that of God, we must not trust to our own skill and prudence. To God we must look, and on him we must depend for direction, and help, and success; for a man's heart may devise his way, but the Lord directs his steps*.

Happy is the man that trusts all his concerns in the hands of God. His heart is freed from anxious cares. He receives all needful supplies of wisdom and strength. He is led in the way of safety, and shall at last inherit God's holy mountain.

Ver. 21. A good name is better than precious ointment, and this blessing is enjoyed by the wise in heart, and enables them to be

serviceable to other men by the communication of their wisdom. Although the heart is the seat of wisdom, it must not be buried there, but discover itself in the speech and conversation, that many may be edified; for we were not born for ourselves alone, but as we are made of one blood, and joined together by endearing relations, so we are bound to be useful to one another.

That our wisdom may be useful, we should endeavour to produce it to advantage, by a graceful and engaging manner of expression. It is not uncommon with bad men to set off their corrupt sentiments by dressing them in all the beauties of language, and by this means multitudes are seduced into error and folly. Is not wisdom far better entitled to this recommendation than folly? The expression of our thoughts in proper language will increase our learning, by making them more clear and distinct to ourselves, and thus enabling us to pursue them into their native consequences. And learning will be diffused amongst others, whilst it is conveyed to them in a clear and engaging manner. What satisfaction must it give a man to improve his neighbours in the most useful knowledge? It makes him a public good, as we are told in the next verse.

Ver. 22. Our plenty of water makes us less sensible than the inhabitants of Palestine, of the propriety of that metaphor, whereby every thing that is useful or pleasant is in scripture compared to water. It was one of the recommendations that God himself gave to his people of the land of promise, that it was a land of fountains of water, as well as a land of milk and honey; and the blessings of Christ are compared to water in many passages of the scriptures.

As waters in a thirsty land, so is a wise man to his friends and neighbours. He has in him a well of living waters, and these issue forth in quickening and refreshing discourse. His wise and edifying converse is not confined to those times when he is professedly instructing or counselling his family or friends, but when he acts in character, his familiar converse ministers grace to the hearers. But When fools are giving their instructions and counsels, they cannot hide that folly which cleaves to them continually. They must still be themselves, and it is to be lamented that fools are for the most part more consistent than wise men. Wise men have folly still remaining in them, and therefore are not wise in every thing; but fools are entirely destitute of wisdom, and discover their foolishness when they are most earnestly endeavouring to appear wise*.

Every man, when he builds a house, seeks a situation where he may be furnished with plenty of wholesome water; and if we believe the wise man when he commends the wise, we shall be desirous of their society and friendship, and account their neighbourhood a blessing†.

Ver. 23. The wise man commended a graceful manner of expression to us‡, but there is a false eloquence which he rather wishes to guard us against. Pompous words, and turns of wit, and fine thoughts that want solidity, will not make a man truly eloquent. The true excellency of language consists in expressing just and important thoughts with clearness and force, that they may be understood and felt by the hearer. A man that understands a subject well, although he is but an ordinary speaker, will do more justice to it than the finest speaker in the world, that has not a clear view of it. And we cannot expect to make others feel the importance of the things we speak, unless our own hearts are duly impressed with them.

This text is a good rule for preachers, and directs them to a proper taste for pulpit eloquence. They ought to understand and feel the truths they explain and recommend, and this will greatly assist them to find out acceptable words, by which their hearers will be edified.—It likewise directs hearers in the choice of their pastors. A voluble tongue may enable a preacher to entertain them for a time, but they cannot expect to be fed with knowledge and understanding by one whose heart is not furnished with the truths of the and impressed with a deep sense of their importance.

The tongue of every wise man is governed and taught by his heart. God is our great Teacher, and he has directed us to be teachers to ourselves. "My reins," says David, "instruct me in the night." The heart, by its wise deliberations, must instruct and guide the members of the body, the eyes, the hands, the feet, and particularly the tongue, which is hardest to be taught of them all. The tongue of the just is as choice silver, when that of the wicked is little worth; and it is the heart that makes this mighty difference*.

Ver. 24. Friendly converse is a very agreeable and useful thing. It relaxes and amuses the mind, dispels anxiety from the thoughts, furnishes us with useful information, promotes mutual kindness, and makes us to return with renewed vigour to the businesses of life.

Words that convey proper counsels and consolations to persons in perplexity and distress, are pleasant and medicinal like honey from the comb. They revive the drooping spirit, and strengthen the feeble knees.

"The words of the pure are pleasant words." The truths of God are unspeakably pleasant to every man that has not a most vitiated relish. They deserve to be expressed in the most pleasant language, but unless they are debased by a manner of expression quite below their dignity, they must be pleasant to the heart, and nourishment to the soul. The honey that drops of itself from the comb, is not so sweet to the mouth as the words of God to the spiritual relish. It is a feast to Christians to hear these truths delivered by the preachers of the gospel; but they are not entertainments merely for the Lord's day. Christians should accustom themselves to useful and religious communications. Our Lord, in the days of his humiliation, set us an example of entertaining one another with them at ordinary meals and social meetings. How greatly would our comfort and spiritual strength be increased by such useful converse! Such discourse is pleasant in the ears of God himself, and why should it not be pleasant to those who profess to be followers of God as dear children*?

Ver. 25. It is no evidence that a man is in the right way, that he thinks himself to be in it. There are some that toil themselves all their life in the practice of things which have not the stamp of divine institution, and yet are called by the name of religion. God, instead of saying to them as they expect, "Well done, good and faithful servant," will ask them that mortifying question, "Who hath required these things at your hands?" Some are treasuring up to themselves the fiercest indignation, when they are feeding their pride with

ungrounded imaginations of doing to God acceptable service. Let us therefore give earnest attention to the word of God, as a light shining in a dark place.

There are many of the human race who think they are in the high road to heaven, and yet know nothing experimentally of Christ, without whom no man shall see the Lord. How terrible will it be for those that imagine themselves in the way to heaven, to find themselves at last in the lake of fire and brimstone! Alas! why should men indulge themselves in their own deceivings? Will it make a man well when he is dying, to think he is in a good way? It will only keep him from employing the physician till his case is beyond recovery. Examine yourselves impartially by the word of God, by which you must be judged at the last day. If you are then found in a state of condemnation, there is no relief. But, behold, now is the accepted time, and the day of salvation. Judge yourselves, and fly to the hope set before you, and you shall not be judged.

So common and dangerous is self-deceit, that the wise man, directed by the Spirit, did not judge a single warning against it sufficient. Again and again he cries to us, to see that we are in the right way that leadeth unto life*.

Ver. 26. A man's industry in his calling is no sure sign of virtue, for although it is a duty commanded by God, and necessary to be practised, yet profit and: necessity may constrain a man to labour, who has no regard either to God or man.

But this proves that idleness is a most inexcusable sin. It is not only condemned in the scripture, but it is a sign that a man wants common reason, as well as piety, when he can neither be drawn by interest, nor driven by necessity, to work. Self-love is a damning sin where it reigns as the chief principle of action; but the want of self-love where it is required is no less criminal. They should be left to starve who have strength, and want will to labour.

But may those be idle who are exempted by their circumstances from the necessity of labouring for bread? By no means. Idleness wastes precious time, it enervates the body, and rusts the faculties of the mind. It is an endeavour to elude the sentence pronounced upon fallen man, and an introduction to every vice*.

Ver. 27. If the bishops of England will not learn diligence, said the godly. Latimer, from Christ and his apostles, they may learn it from the devil, who is still busy in his diocese. We may add, that slothful Christians, if they will not learn diligence from the example of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises, may be roused by considering the restless activity of ungodly men, who employ themselves in the service of sin, as busily as the slave who digs in a mine to supply the avarice of his unfeeling master. The service of sin is the worst of drudgeries, for that cruel master obliges the poor wretches who are enslaved by their own corrupt lusts, to fatigue their minds in contriving, and their members in executing their imperious commands.

Some of the ungodly dig up mischief, by reviving stories that ought to have been for ever buried in forgetfulness. Themistocles told one that proffered to teach him the art of memory, that he rather wished to learn the art of forgetfulness. There are too many that remember what ought to have been for ever forgotten, and thereby kindle up the flames of contention. In their lips there is as it were a burning fire; for their words are as dangerous as fire kindled in the thatch of a house, which threatens to burn it down, and set the neighbouring houses in a flame. When men have such a fire kindled in their tongues, it is easy to see by whose breath it is blown up. The devil was a liar and a destroyer from the beginning, and endeavours to make men as like to himself as possible. For this end he fetches coals from the bottomless pit, and sets the tongues of wicked men on fire, that they may spread the infernal flame around them, destroying peace and charity to the utmost of their power from the earth. What shall be given to these wicked tongues? Burning coals of juniper, and they shall not have a drop of water to quench them.

Ver. 28. He is a wretch that spreads dissensions and enmities among men, who ought to live as brethren in unity. Such a person, Solomon has already told us, is abhorred of the Lord*.

One of the most dangerous of these classes of men that sow strife, is that of the whisperers. These men do not think fit to slander their neighbours openly, but secretly defame one man to another. They report their idle or false stories by way of secrets, and generally endeavour to procure credit by pretending to lament these faults which they tell with pleasure, and which they often forge, or at least make them a great deal worse by their spiteful manner of relating them. This kind of evil-speakers is like serpents in the way, or adders in the path, which hiss and sting men when they are dreading no evil. Men may oppose open enemies, and ward off blows which they see, but how can a man guard himself from the invisible arrows that are shot by the whisperer, whilst he keeps himself concealed from view! By these agents of the wicked one, irreparable breaches are often made in families and neighbourhoods, and incurable jealousies excited amongst the dearest friends.

It is our duty never to lend an ear to the whisperer, nor to believe any thing bad of our friend and neighbour, unless the cowardly backbiter will venture to become an open accuser. If our own characters are in any danger from these arrows that fly about in darkness, let us commit them to God: "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

Ver. 29. The devil never did any good to any of his servants, and yet some of them seem to have more zeal for their master's interest, than many of the servants of Christ. These are too careless about gaining others to the obedience of their Redeemer; whilst violent men compass sea and land to make others as much the children of hell as themselves.

Such tempters to wickedness are to be abhorred as the greatest plagues of mankind. Thieves deprive us of our money, and murderers deprive us only of a short life; but these factors of hell who would seduce us to sin, attempt to rob us of heavenly treasures, and to destroy our immortal souls. The Spirit of God warns us at great length, in the first chapter of this book, to avoid their snares.

Whenever any man would lead us into a way that is not good, let us remember what the end of that way is, and hear his words with the same indignation as if he were persuading us to cast ourselves into a burning fiery furnace.

The character of the seducer might be sufficient to set us on our guard—

Ver. 30. He takes so much delight in wickedness that he shuts his eyes, to meditate mischief with an undisturbed mind, and vigorously employs the faculties which God has given him, in the service of his grand enemy.

His tongue is a fire, a whole world of iniquity; but it has not enough of wickedness in the compass of its power to gratify his infernal thirst for sin, and therefore he speaks with his feet, and teaches with his fingers, and winks with his eye, to express the malignity of his heart, and give the signal to his companions in wickedness.

Strange! that the sons of Adam should thus abandon themselves to wickedness, and serve sin with so much toil, when the wages of it is death. Men complain that the way to heaven is full of difficulty and danger. But broad as the way to hell is, there are many who undergo much more fatigue in it than the way to heaven requires, and they have not the comforts and joyful hopes to entertain them under their toil and sweat, that the travellers to Zion enjoy. They pass through a hell of labours and fears, to a hell of fire and brimstone.

Shall we join in a confederacy with these workers of iniquity? Let us rather abhor their company, unless we wish our souls to be hereafter gathered with sinners.

Ver. 31. Both Scripture and reason teach us to honour grey hairs. It is reported, that when an aged man went into a public assembly at Athens, and every seat was filled, none of the Athenians moved to give him place. Whereupon the Lacedemonians, who were in a seat by themselves, rose up to a man, to give him a place. All the Athenians applauded their polite behaviour; whereupon the old man observed, that the Athenians knew what was right, and the Lacedemonians practised it.

But old men are not always wise, neither do the aged always understand judgment, and thus they forfeit that honour which they might otherwise expect. Old age is an honour, and royalty is an honour; but better is a poor and wise child, than an old and foolish king who will no more be admonished. His self-conceit and intractable disposition, debase at once the lustre of his crown, and the glory of his grey hairs; but to be an old saint, is an honour that entitles a man to the highest respect. None but fools will despise him for those infirmities, which are the inseparable attendants of grey hairs. How provoking to God such insolence is, may be learned from the story of the two she-bears that tore forty and two children for saying to Elijah, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head."

The honour bestowed by God upon old Christians in lengthening their days, the experience they have gained, and the usefulness of their former life, should engage us to pay them great respect. We honour them whose heads have been encircled with crowns by the hands of men, and will we refuse honour to those whom God himself hath crowned with silver hairs!

It is a comfort to aged Christians to find due respect paid to them, and they should endeavour to secure this respect, by avoiding peevishness and covetousness, which are vices incident to this period of life, by bearing with young persons, although they have not learned so much wisdom as themselves, by submitting with cheerfulness to the unavoidable weaknesses of age, by trusting in God*, by shewing the faithfulness of God and the advantages of religion to the rising generation, and by bringing forth the various fruits proper to that time of life.

Young persons should remember that old age is fast hastening to them, and show that regard to the old, which they will then expect to meet with from the young. They ought to enter into the way of righteousness, that they may be found in it by old age or death. If age should find them in the way of sin, their situation is very dangerous, though not altogether desperate.

Ver. 32. The meek obtain the noblest victories, and enjoy the happiest kind of authority. They have power over their passions, which are brought under the dominion of reason, and are not suffered to make such insurrections as those which disquiet the spirits of the proud and haughty.

The conquerors of nations and cities have been celebrated by historians and poets, and their valour and success dazzle the eyes of the generality of men; and yet few of them deserve praise. Seneca observes, that such heroes as Alexander the Great deserve the same kind of honours with wild beasts, and earthquakes, and pestilences, or any other instrument of desolation to mankind. Some conquerors are nevertheless truly honourable, who have exposed their lives in just and necessary wars, for the service of their country and the suppression of tyranny. Gallant exploits of such true heroes, are celebrated in the inspired writings.

But he that is slow to anger and rules his passions deserves far higher praise, for he gains a nobler victory. Others conquer the bodies of men, but he conquers his own soul. The conquerors of nations fight with the arms of other men, but the meek have no soldiers to deprive them of any part of their praise. Most of the celebrated heroes conquered at the expence of their fellow-creatures, and spread horror and devastation around them like the tigers of the desert; but the meek of the earth are public blessings, and deserve the love of all men. Of earthly conquerors it may be said, that they have slain their thousands and ten thousands of men, by their swords and warlike artillery. But of the meek we may say, that they have put to flight armies of devils by the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith; for these malignant spirits fight against our souls, to support the dominion of our passions over our reason.

Other conquerors have their praise from men, and chiefly from men of foolish minds, for the wise look upon the generality of them as the plagues of the world; but those that are slow to anger have their praise from the unerring Judge, who exalts the meek to inherit the earth, whilst he looks upon the proud ravagers of nations with disdain, and spurns them into the dust. The conquerors of cities and nations are wretched slaves to their own imperious passions, which forced Alexander to kill some of his best friends, and made him so unhappy, that he almost killed himself. The meek enjoy the sweet and glorious liberty of the sons of God. The crowns of conquerors soon wither; but the honours of him that rules over his own spirit shall continue through every generation. Do we wish to

enjoy honour and power? Let us fight against the corrupt affections of our own mind, with the armour of righteousness on our right hand and on our left. To be our own masters, will be more glorious for us than if we were masters of the world.

Ver. 33. By lots men refer the determination of an event to that which in respect of men is purely casual, and comes not within the compass of men's knowledge or power; but it is wholly determined by the Lord, who does all things, great and small, according to the counsel of his own will. A remarkable instance of this truth we have in the division of the promised land amongst the tribes of Israel, which was done by casting the lot into the laps of men; but these lots were managed by divine providence in such a manner, that Jacob's predictions in blessing his children were exactly accomplished.

For this reason, lots are not to be used by way of amusement, but in matters of importance worthy to be referred to the arbitration of God, and incapable of being otherwise decided to advantage.

This proverb teaches us, that the things that fall out to our view by pure accident, are within the compass of Providence, which so entirely regulates every thing, however inconsiderable, that a sparrow falls not to the ground, nor a hair from our head, without our heavenly Father. Time and chance happen to all men, and the most important events of the life of men, and of kingdoms and nations, turn upon very small hinges, which do not come within the verge of our knowledge and care. The safety of the Jewish nation in the days of Esther, depended upon a very great number of accidents, that appear to us very unimportant, and very remote from the interests of God's people. But the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, was their saviour and hope in the day of evil. Time and chance are his, and the feast of Ahasuerus, the disobedience of Vashti, the pride of the king and his ministers, the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh, with the discovery of it by Mordecai, the beauty of Esther, the departure of sleep on a certain night from the king's eyes, the fancy that struck him to have the Chronicles of the kingdom read for his amusement, the superstition of Haman, the event of his lots, and the good-humour which Ahasuerus happened to be in when Esther came into his presence to petition for the life of her countrymen,—all these things wrought together, under the direction of the Lord, for the salvation of his chosen people.

Think not that your mountain stands immoveably Strong, for if God hide his face, you will be troubled. He can make the veriest trifle the instrument of destroying all the strength of your confidence, and the mighty are taken away by him without hand.

Trust in him at all times, and trouble not yourselves with anxious thoughts about the things that shall come to pass in the future parts of life. We never discover so much folly, as when we set up for prophets; for the things that are to come to pass, depend upon a very complicated chain of causes, consisting of innumerable links, which are quite out of the reach of our view, but are every one of them under the eye and in the hand of God. Blessed are those that give up all their fortunes to the will of God, with a cheerful resignation. Nothing shall befall them, but according to the will of Him that loves them better than themselves, and knows infinitely better what is good for them.

CHAPTER 17

Ver. 1. SOLOMON expresses the most delicious entertainments by the word sacrifices, intimating his hope, that none would presume to offer unto God a sacrifice, but of the best of their cattle, for the best of beings is to be honoured with the best we can give him*.

The flesh of the peace-offerings was a feast for the family and friends of the offerer, and there could not be a more delightful feast, when piety and friendship gave a relish to the entertainment. But the most delicate provisions are turned into gall and wormwood by variance, whilst the bitterest things are made sweet by love and friendship.

Solomon has already given us the instruction contained in this verse†. But it is useful to have it still before our eyes, for peace and friendship are not only the balm of life, but of great importance in our religious course. Strife is productive of innumerable sins, and renders us unfit for the duties we owe to God, as well as those of our various relations. Love and peace make every service to our families and friends pleasant, and prepare us to lift up holy hands to God, without wrath and doubting.

Ver. 2. A low situation does not disqualify men from obtaining and using wisdom, nor from enjoying the honours and benefits of it; nor will an elevated rank support men in folly, or hinder them from feeling its mischievous effects.

A poor wise man is too often despised, but it is only by the unwise; for those that have wisdom set an high value upon it, wherever it is found, and honour the meanest person that appears to possess it. It is perhaps owing to the partiality, and not the wisdom of parents, that this proverb has not been more frequently verified in the letter. Children that are a shame to their parents, have sometimes brought disgrace upon themselves, from those that once loved them with a tender affection, and still love them. Reuben was the beginning of Jacob's strength, and yet he lost his dignity to a younger brother, who, according to the fashions of those times, was to be in some degree under his government. But even when partiality prevails over reason in the behaviour of parents, folly, by its native consequences, and the just providence of God, does often reduce men from honour and wealth to poverty and disgrace, and place them below those over whom they once tyrannized; and wisdom exalts servants from poverty to wealth, or even to power. Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's house, and then a prisoner, but he was made lord over Potiphar himself.

Servants have often for their wisdom shared in the inheritance. Solomon himself married his daughters to two of his own subjects. Jarha, an Egyptian servant, was taken into the family of his master, and became the head of a family in Israel*.

This verse gives parents a proper hint about the distribution of their estates, and directs those who have the disposal of places of trust, to pay a greater regard to wisdom and integrity, than to high birth, or great estates, or the connections of friendship and kindred.

How excellent is wisdom, which raises the slave from grinding at the mill, and the beggar from the dunghill, to places of distinction, and to the truest honours, because they are the pure fruits of goodness! How miserable a thing is folly, which degrades the high, and brings misery upon the latter days of those who flourished like green bay-trees in the prime of their life!

Ver. 3. As the fire tries metals, and separates the dross from them, so the Lord tries the hearts of men; for his eyes are like a flame of fire, and he perfectly discerns all the secrets of the heart. Men are too often strangers to themselves, and mistake the principles by which they are governed; but God is greater than our hearts, and every thought is naked and open to his eyes. He knows our words before they are pronounced by the mouth, and our imaginations before they are framed in our minds.

This is God's prerogative. There is not a greater folly among those corrupters of Christianity, the Roman Catholics, than their practice of praying to saints and angels. Thou, Lord, even thou alone, knowest the hearts of all the children of men, and therefore oughtest to be feared, and to receive all religious homage.

It is vain for men to worship God with the lips, whilst the heart is removed from him; nor will our good deeds to our fellow-men be accepted of God, when they do not proceed from a principle of love*.

This proverb may likewise be understood of those awful providences by which the spirits of his people are tried, as gold and silver are tried by the fire. Afflictions and calamities are like a furnace which God has in Jerusalem, by which dross is discovered, and purged away†. But herein God discovers his kindness, that he does not keep his gold in the fire till it is entirely free from the dross, for if such a furious heat were applied to it as is requisite to make metals entirely pure, it would be altogether destroyed. "I have refined thee," says he, "but not with silver; I have chosen thee (or made thee a choice vessel) in the furnace of affliction‡.

Ver. 4. Solomon has often warned us against compliance with temptation; and every man that is not wicked will surely follow his advice, for he is a wicked doer that giveth heed to false lips.

Wicked men have a great treasure of evil in their hearts, and yet have not enough to satisfy their own corrupt dispositions. They are like covetous men, in whom their large possessions only increase their lust of having, and therefore they carry on a trade with other wicked men, who are able to add to their store of iniquity, by flattering and counselling them in sin. Their heart gathers iniquity to itself, not merely by its own corrupt imaginations and contrivances, but by hearing the devilish lessons of those that have made a greater proficiency in that wisdom which cometh from below. They are blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness, but cursed are they who add drunkenness to thirst in the service of sin, for they shall be filled with their own devices*. By hearkening to the wicked instructions of Jezebel, Ahab destroyed himself and his house; and the politic advices of Jonadab proved no less fatal to the apparent heir of David.

A liar is a wicked doer, and giveth ear to a naughty tongue, for by the lies of other men he increases his own stock, and is enabled to retail his abominable stories with a better grace. He can say that he gives the story as he heard it, (although he has no scruple to make some additions), and thinks this a sufficient justification of himself, if the falsehood of what he has told is detected. But a man shews himself to be a liar and slanderer, when he gives too easy belief to bad stories, that he may have the barbarous satisfaction of spreading them. An honest man will not wound his neighbour's character, by trusting the words of a talebearer, and divulging what may very possibly be false. And even when there is too much ground for believing the report, he will be backward to spread it any farther, without some good reason.

Ver. 5. It is our indispensable duty to compassionate the poor, and if Providence puts it in our power, to relieve them; and yet some are so destitute of bowels, that they will trample them lower in the dust, by insult and oppression.

The reason why poor men are more exposed than the rich to reproach, is, because they are supposed incapable of taking revenge; but it ought to be remembered, that God is mocked through their sides. If God should appear in human shape, would we dare to insult him? Would not the fear of a just and dreadful vengeance deter us? And to mock the poor, amounts to the very same thing. God did actually appear in our nature, and he was then poor for our sakes; and those that despise the poor, despise them for a reason that reflects upon our Saviour himself when he dwelt among us; and poor Christians are members of his body, and every injury done to them he considers as done to himself*.

The reason of this proverb extends the meaning of it to all persons that are despised, or held up to ridicule, on account of any defect of body or mind, or misfortune in circumstances, that does not affect the moral or religious character of men. When we are what God made us, and meet with calamities from the appointment of providence, every indignity or affront offered us reflects upon our Maker. Let no man, therefore, be ashamed of any circumstance in his condition that is not the fruit of sin, unless he is ashamed to own his Creator.

To rejoice in calamities, is a mark of a child of the devil. Christ wept for the miseries that were to befall his implacable enemies for their cruelty to himself. We find the people of God rejoicing and praising God at the destruction of their enemies, but their satisfaction was caused, not by any pleasure in the miseries of their enemies, but by the discoveries of God's mercy to themselves, and the vindication of his righteousness, by the infliction of deserved punishment on the irreconcilable enemies of God*. A savage delight in the misery of enemies, is often represented in scripture as the temper of the worst of men, who thereby expose themselves to signal vengeance†.

Ver. 6. Children are the means of preserving the name of their parents when they are dead; and whilst they are alive, it is their

delight and honour to be surrounded with descendants, except when they are so unnatural to the instruments of their being, as to disgrace them by their manners.

When persons are now on the verge of the grave, and every thing else becomes insipid to them, their children's children are a great comfort, and procure them much respect, when they are trained up in the way wherein they should go. Old men are therefore bound to give thanks to God for giving and sparing to them a posterity on the earth. "I had not thought," said Jacob to his beloved son, "to see thy face, and lo, God hath shewed me thy seed also." Children are an heritage from the Lord, and ought to be instructed in his ways, that parents may have pleasure in them, and in their young families, when the days come wherein they would otherwise be obliged to say, We have no pleasure in them.

It was a custom among the Romans, for men that wanted sons, to adopt young men, and give them the title and privileges of sons, that their name might not die with themselves. Christians to whom God has denied, or from whom he has taken away the blessing of children, may find a better method of having some to be their crown and glory. If, by their holy example and religious converse, they win souls to Christ, these shall be their crown of rejoicing in the day of Christ*.

Some children are so destitute of natural affection, that they care not how soon their parents die, that they may enjoy their estates, and become masters of their own actions. These are profane persons like Esau, who thought he would have it in his power to kill Jacob, when Isaac, who was now an old man, was dead. Dutiful children will think it an ornament to them to have their aged parents still alive, even when their poverty and weakness make it the duty of their children to labour for their support.

But are parents of every kind a glory to their children? The hoary head is not always a crown of glory to the man that wears it, or to his family, but only when it is found in the way of righteousness. The seed of the righteous are respected for the sake of their parents by good men, and even God himself has a regard to them. Perhaps no history but that of David's family gives us an example of a crown transmitted from father to son for seventeen generations. Why did not God make the house of Ahaz like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, or the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah? Because he would give a light to his servant David in Jerusalem.

Verily there is a reward to the righteous, which extends to their families and posterity. By righteousness children are a crown to their parents, and parents are a glory to their children; and therefore we ought not only to practise, but to promote and maintain it amongst our connections*.

Ver. 7. Fools make themselves ridiculous, by affecting to speak of things beyond their reach, or to use language too high for their abilities. For a wicked man to talk like a Christian, is equally unseemly. When a covetous man talks in praise of liberality, or a hypocrite commends the integrity of David, they condemn themselves.

For a beggar who wears rags to put upon his breast the coronet of a Duke, is ridiculous, because the agreement of things to one another is requisite to the beauty and propriety of any thing. Professions of religion joined to wicked practices, are equally absurd. In nothing is consistency to be more studied than in ordering our words and conversation.

When a bad man has the tongue of a saint, he discredits religion, and brings suspicion upon truly religious men. The profane world will say, Do you hear how finely that man talks? and yet he can take the advantage of his neighbour in a bargain: they are all alike, and their professions are but nets to catch the unthinking. Good words will do no good to a bad man, but aggravate his condemnation; out of his own mouth shall he be judged. They are not acceptable to God. As Christ would not suffer devils to make confessions of faith, even when their doctrine was sound; so God will not suffer the hypocrite to take his covenant into his lips, because such a holy thing is polluted when it comes into the mouth of dogs*.

Lying lips are no less unbecoming in the mouth of a prince, who ought to honour the dignity of his station by the dignity of his manners. A prince of our own is said to have frequently used this proverbial saying, "He that knows not how to dissemble, knows not how to reign." You may judge from the text before us, whether he deserved to be called the Solomon of his age. It was certainly a nobler saying of one of the kings of France,—that if truth were banished from all the rest of the world, it ought to be found in the breasts of princes.

A man's dignity obliges him to a behaviour worthy of it, and of him whose favour has conferred it. All Christians are advanced to spiritual honours of the most exalted kind. They are the children of God, and heirs of the eternal kingdom, and ought to resemble their heavenly Father, who is the God of truth. When a young prince desired a certain philosopher to give him a directory for his conduct, all his instructions were comprised in one sentence, "Remember that thou art a king's son." Let Christians remember who they are, and how they came to be what they are, and act in character†.

Ver. 8. Gifts have a very strong influence in gaining love. They are like precious stones in the eyes of those that receive them, charming their eyes, and powerfully turning their affections to the giver; and their influence is almost universal, for they work upon the heart of the wise and the self-denied, as well as of the foolish and selfish.

It was a sign of Abigail's prudence to meet David with generous presents, as well as a persuasive speech, when he was coming in fierce resentment to extirpate her husband's family; and when Jacob met his incensed brother, he not only endeavoured to pacify him by submissive words, but also loaded him with noble gifts, which were perhaps the most effectual means, (next to Jacob's prayers), to regain his lost friendship.

Such is the efficacy of gifts, that God expressly forbids them to be received by judges from parties that have a cause to be decided by them, because they blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

What influence should the gifts of God have upon our hearts! They are more numerous than the hairs upon our head, and far more

precious than pearls and diamonds. Surely they must have a constraining influence upon every heart that is not harder than the nether milstone.

Ver. 9. As we are required to love our neighbours as ourselves, so we ought to promote love in the world, and to seek the love of other men to ourselves. It is no piece of the self-denial that becometh the followers of Christ, to be unconcerned whether we are loved by our neighbours or not; for then we should be careless whether they obeyed God and performed their duty, or lived in the neglect of it. Whatsoever things are lovely, are to be minded and practised by us; and nothing is more lovely than to cover transgressions, as nothing is more hateful than the repeating of them.

To cover our own transgressions, like Adam, would be very dangerous, but we have the noblest examples to recommend to us the covering of other men's faults. How lovely was the behaviour of our Redeemer, when he excused the unfriendly behaviour of his three disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, and when he bestowed such high commendations on their fidelity in his discourse with them, and his prayers to his Father, although he knew that they would soon forsake him in his sufferings, and make the best shift they could for themselves! Nor was his goodness confined to his Apostles; he excused even his murderers, when he prayed to his Father for their forgiveness. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who covers our iniquities by his pardoning mercy, and removes them as far from us as the east is from the west! Surely the faith of his pardoning mercy must mightily persuade us to cover by the mantle of charity the offences of our fellow sinners.

Love covereth all sins*. Paul teacheth us how this is done†, and our self-love may give us much light and direction on this point. Had we a love to our neighbours like that which we bear to ourselves, we would not be ready to observe their faults, unless they were very glaring; we would make much allowance for the temptations that seduced them, and consider how liable we ourselves are to fall before temptation; we would not keep our eyes fixed upon their faults, but consider likewise what there is in them to provoke us to love; we would not be harsh in reproving, nor backward in forgiving them, nor would any consideration provoke us to cast in their teeth those old faults that seemed to be forgotten. By such a behaviour as this, love is sought and gained. Was it possible that Joseph's brethren, cruel as they had been, could refuse their love to him, after the apologies that he so kindly made for their faults*? But he that follows the contrary method of behaviour seeks hatred, and alienates the affections of the most cordial friends from one another. The censorious man, the tale-bearer, the person that revives old quarrels, is a mortal enemy to charity, a faithful servant of the accuser of the brethren, an enemy to him who is our peace with God and with one another. If such dreadful punishments are threatened to those who are destitute of love, what shall be the portion of those who scatter the seed of enmity and variance through a whole country, by the stories they tell, and by the lies and misrepresentations which they mingle with their idle tales!

The meaning of this proverb must not be stretched into a prohibition of punishments or censures necessary to be inflicted on offenders, or of friendly reproofs, all which are recommended in other places of this book.

Ver. 10. The wise man gives us many marks, by which fools may be distinguished from wise men; and does not insist more on any of them, than the different uses they make of rebukes and corrections. He not only tells us that the wise man hears rebuke, and the fool scorns it; but that one rebuke will have a better effect on a wise man, than an hundred stripes on a fool.

Fools have sometimes received correction, and made a good use of it; but they were fools no longer, for the rod and reproof gave them wisdom: but it is a sign that folly is deeply ingrained, when an hundred rods leave men as great fools as they found them.

Wicked men have uncircumcised ears, and they cannot hear the word of the Lord; they have hard hearts, and the works of God, in which he speaks louder than in words, leave no impression. On the contrary, we often find them walking contrary unto God, and making their faces harder by those means that should have wrought the very opposite effect. Ahaz, in the time of his distress, trespassed yet more and more against the Lord. This was that king Ahaz. David was of a very opposite spirit; and when Nathan said unto him, "Thou art the man," he replied, "I have sinned against the Lord," and immediately composed the fifty-first psalm, to testify his deep repentance to the church, and to every generation of mankind.

We must not be so strict in trying other men by this mark of wisdom, as ourselves, for wise men are not wise in every piece of their behaviour. Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord his God all his days, and yet he was very angry with a prophet for giving him a just reproof in the name of the Lord. But such is not the ordinary temper of God's people, for God takes away from them the heart of stone, and gives them hearts of flesh, and they have the Spirit of God dwelling within them, who opens their ears to discipline, and seals their instruction.

It is good to have tender hearts, susceptible of impressions from reproof, and from the providence of God. As a lively faith will enable the Christian to bear the greatest trials, so a tender conscience will enable him to derive spiritual improvement from the gentlest afflictions, which are not to be despised, because they come to us on a message from God*.

This text likewise teaches us to make a difference, according to the dispositions of men, in the reproofs or chastisements that we are called to dispense unto men. Eli reprov'd his children with words, when they deserved an hundred stripes, if the law had allowed it; and some parents provoke their children to wrath, instead of reforming them, by their severities.

Ver. 11. Some of the wicked are very pestilent members of society, who, casting off all fear of God and the king, employ themselves in those wicked courses which expose them to the vengeance of the laws, so that the messengers of justice must be employed in their disagreeable task of punishment for the benefit and peace of society.

But others of the wicked have some fear of the king, although they have no fear of God before their eyes; and their corrupt dispositions take another course, which exposes them to equal danger, though from a different quarter. Their employment is to carry

weapons against the King of the world, and they pursue their rebellious courses without intermission. There is much iniquity in their actions, there is a world of iniquity in their tongues, and the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts are only evil continually. They are blind, and know not what they are doing; for whilst they think they are only gratifying their own dispositions, and making use of their liberty, they are provoking God, by a continued course of disobedience to his will.

A cruel messenger shall be sent against these rebels; for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry, God has innumerable messengers of justice, for every instrument of vengeance is at his command, and employed at his pleasure, to avenge his quarrel upon the breakers of his laws. Beasts and men, diseases and death, angels and devils, are in arms at his call, to seize upon the criminals whom he means to punish.

The weakest creature, considered as a messenger of the Almighty, is irresistible by transgressors. The proud spirit of Pharaoh was humbled to the dust by flies and frogs, as well as by the evil angels, which were sent among the Egyptians. The hornets fought with success against the accursed Canaanites in the days of Joshua, as well as the destroying angel who fought for Hezekiah against the Assyrians.

God sometimes employs terrible messengers to chastise his own people. When David numbered his subjects, 70,000 of them were destroyed in three days by a visible messenger of severity, under the direction of an invisible minister of providence. If God takes such vengeance of the rebellions of some whom he pardons, what will the end be of them that seek only rebellion!

Let the wicked cast down their weapons of iniquity, and acquaint themselves with God, and be at peace with him through Jesus Christ, otherwise they may expect that dreadful messenger of God, the king of terrors, to be sent against them, to plunge them into everlasting burnings*.

Ver. 12. What a mercy is it that a fool is not always in his folly, under the irresistible impulse of domineering passions, driving on in his career of mischief, without fearing God or regarding men! If a gracious providence did not rein the wicked of the world by a strong bridle, the world would become more uninhabitable than those deserts, where lions and bears are constantly prowling and destroying.

No creature is fiercer than a bear bereaved of her whelps. Hushai thought he could not use a better argument to affright Absalom from following the dangerous counsels of Ahitophel, than by comparing the fierce valour of David and his mighty men to the rage of a bear bereaved of her whelps. And yet this animal in its greatest fury is not so dangerous as a fool in the heat of passion. A bear in its rage makes no distinction between those that have robbed her and others, but falls upon any one she sees, and tears him in pieces; and yet you may by proper means escape from her, or secure yourself from her violence. But a fool in his folly will neither be reduced to reason by just reproofs, nor soothed by the mildest language, but behaves like the venomous adder, that will not be charmed by the wisest charmer. The most furious of beasts are men whose passions rule their reason, and make use of the understandings they have, to enable them to behave more brutishly than natural brute beasts can do.

Alas! that rational creatures, made after the image of God, should debase themselves to such a degree, that the savage animals should not furnish sufficient emblems to represent their folly! Why should any human creature chuse to be a beast, or a devil, rather than a man!

Let those that give up themselves to the government of passion, consider this text, and be ashamed, and shew themselves at length rational creatures; and let us all beware of rousing the sleeping passions of such madmen, if we value our own safety and innocence.

God's people ought to be on their guard lest they should, under provocation, be seduced into an imitation of such folly. David behaved too like a bear in her rage, when he was inflamed by a provocation from Nabal, and swore that he would destroy all the males in his house, although he afterwards found that some of them had pleaded his cause. However, let us not debase that noble character by applying to his behaviour the comparison in our text, for before he had time to execute his cruel purpose, he was again himself, the persuasions of Abigail having made him meek as a lamb.

Ver. 13. Ingratitude is one of the vilest sins, and gives a clear discovery of a disposition base beyond expression; and the punishment of it shall be proportioned to the degree of its guilt. The ungrateful man brings evil, not only on himself, but likewise on his house; and this misery, which so great a sin procures, does not come like a stranger to the house, to tarry for a night, but takes up its residence, and abides in it for ever.

Ingratitude to Gideon kindled a fire in Shechem, which consumed the inhabitants of that place and its environs, together with Abimelech their tempter*. But the most striking illustration of this sentence, is the history of the Jewish nation. Never was such ingratitude shewed to any benefactor, as they shewed to the Son of God, and never was the punishment of any people so dreadful, and of so long continuance. That scattered people proclaim to every nation under heaven how dangerous the sin of ingratitude is, especially when God our Saviour is the object of it.

Although we are grateful to men for their favours, yet if we take no notice of God as the supreme Benefactor, we are as justly chargeable with this sin, as those who have a present sent them by a friend, and return all their thanks to the carrier that brings it.

The worst ingratitude in the world is a continuance in unbelief or disobedience, in opposition to the gracious declarations of the gospel. Those that despise the riches of gospel-grace, must burn for ever in fiercer flames than those to whom the grace of God that bringeth salvation never appeared, although they lived in constant disobedience to the will of God, as far as nature discovered it.

Ver. 14. No creatures are more dangerous than fire or water, when they become masters instead of servants to us; and the mischiefs that arise from contention are illustrated from the rage of both these elements*.

When a breach is made in the bank that confines water, the water seizes the opportunity, widens the breach more and more, pours itself forth in mighty currents, and gathering new force continually, it soon becomes altogether irresistible, breaks through every obstacle in its way, and sweeps along every thing that meets it, with a violence which cannot be controuled.

Such are the dismal effects of contention, which might have been checked at the beginning, but gathers fury in its progress, and will soon lay desolate a man's peace, and credit, and comfort, and conscience, and hurry him on to speak and to act in such a manner as if he were altogether bereaved of his reason, and transformed into a raging bear.

The effects of debate do not always stop at the persons with whom it begun. This deluge often sweeps away houses, and countries, and nations, and leaves a scene of confusion and ruin in those places which formerly were the seat of prosperity and peace*.

We must therefore endeavour to get out of contention, whenever we find ourselves engaged in it, with as much haste as a man that endeavours to make his escape from a deluge of waters, by which he is in danger of being overwhelmed†.

But it is still better to leave off contention before it be meddled with. The banks of rivers are more easily preserved, than repaired after a breach is made. To keep ourselves out of this snare of the devil, it is our duty to mortify every selfish disposition, to keep every passion under the government of sanctified reason, to avoid every thing that may give offence, to be backward in conceiving offences against others; and in our dispositions, words, and actions, to observe that great rule of doing to others as we wish that others should do to us‡.

There are some cases in which contending is a duty. The apostles write unto us, and exhort us to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints; and a zeal for truth and holiness is a necessary branch of Christian temper. But in striving for the faith of the gospel, we must avoid the wrath of man, which worketh not the righteousness of God, and carefully preserve the holy fire of religious zeal, from all mixture with that unhallowed fire of selfish passions which has so often usurped its name, and brought it into discredit with superficial observers.

Ver. 15. That condemning the just is a grievous crime, there is no doubt. But some will be startled at the wise man's assertion, that justifying the wicked is a crime of the like nature and malignity.

But we rebel against God by turning to the right hand, as well as by turning to the left, from that way in which we are commanded to walk. Justifying the wicked has an appearance of mercy in it, but there is cruelty to millions in unreasonable acts of mercy to individuals. It was not altogether without ground observed by a senator to the emperor Cocceius Nerva, when his detestation of his predecessor's cruelty seduced him into extremes of clemency,—That it was bad to live in a state where every thing was forbidden, but worse to live in a state where every thing was allowed. Historians tell us, that the provinces of the empire suffered more oppression under the administration of this mild prince, than in the bloody reign of Domitian.

Judges are guilty of this detestable sin, not only when they pronounce unrighteous sentences, but when they obstruct unnecessarily the judging of causes, whereby the righteous have their righteousness in part or for a time taken from them. Lawyers, and witnesses, and jurymen, are guilty in various degrees of these crimes, when they wilfully contribute their influence to the perversion of justice, or withhold their influence in their respective situations from the support of a righteous cause, where they are called to its defence.

Private persons in common life are not frequently chargeable with justifying the wicked, because they are not called in most cases to condemn them; and yet they may incur this guilt on some occasions, by pleading the cause of the wicked in opposition to truth, or to that justice which they owe to the innocent and oppressed, or by taking the part of transgressors in such a manner as to countenance their sins.

But the sin of condemning the righteous, or pronouncing too severe sentences upon those that have been overtaken in a fault, is very common in ordinary conversation, and the scripture often warns us against it*.

Ministers are guilty of this sin when they preach doctrines unscripturally rigid, making those things to be sinful which are not condemned in the word of God, or carrying the marks necessary to discover grace to a pitch too high to suit the generality of true Christians, or applying to particular persons those terrors that do not justly belong to them. Such was the fault of Job's friends.

It is a more dangerous error in preachers, to explain away the commandments of God like the old Pharisees, to accommodate the characters of real Christians to many hypocrites by unsound representations of them, or to flatter the sinner into a false belief that he is a righteous man‡. By all these methods righteousness is discouraged, and wickedness favoured, in contradiction to the mind of God.

God never condemns the righteous, but it is his peculiar glory to justify the ungodly, through the execution of the curse upon his righteous Son. In each of these divine transactions, the injustice condemned in our text is discovered to be detestable to God, for righteousness shines with more awful splendour in the infliction of punishment upon our Surety, and in our absolution from guilt, than in the flames of the lake of fire and brimstone. God would not justify his own elect to the disparagement of his inflexible justice, but condemned all their sins, and punished them in Christ; and so he is just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Ver. 16. If fools had no means of obtaining wisdom put into their hand, their folly would be excusable; but when they have a price allowed them for procuring wisdom, and yet have no heart to it, what apology can be made for them?

Every thing that gives us an opportunity of becoming wise, is a talent for which we must account to our great Lord. Bibles, and divine ordinances, and time, and leisure, and wealth, which enables us to furnish in greater abundance the means of knowledge, are a price put into our hands to get wisdom, and if we use them not to this valuable end, we despise the riches of God's goodness, and act like unreasonable creatures. Nay, the meanest animals reprove us, for the stork and the crane observe their seasons for flying to

warmer climates; and the ants, though a feeble people, never neglect the gainful business of the summer and harvest.

How is the fool so stupid as to neglect such important business as the gaining of wisdom, and trifle away his time and talents in vanity? Surely if he were informed of a rich inheritance to be got on easy terms, he would shew a proper regard to his own interest. Does he not know that wisdom is infinitely more precious than land or gold? No; this is the reason of his carelessness. He has no heart to wisdom, he knows not its value, and has no relish of its pleasures. That which is more precious than rubies, is to him more worthless than a pebble. That which is more sweet than honey, is tasteless as the white of an egg.

Is this price, then, put into his hand in vain? To himself it is worse than in vain. Every mean of wisdom shall prove galling to his remembrance, when his eyes are opened, for opened they shall be at last, to discern the glory of that which he despised. The worm that is to prey upon him for ever, will be continually fed by the recollection of sermons despised, and days of the Son of man wasted in idleness. But this price will not be lost to those who put it into the hands of the fool; for their generous endeavours to turn the foolish to the wisdom of the just, will be as graciously rewarded as the more successful attempts of others to serve their generation*. Nor will God be a loser of glory by the self-ruining folly of sinners, but his justice will for ever triumph in the revenges executed upon the despisers of his long-suffering and grace.

Ver. 17. There are many false friends that profess love for their own advantage, and discover their insincerity when they have no more ground to hope that their interest will be served by it. There are fickle friends that love for a time, and grow indifferent to our interests, without any reason but their own inconstancy. But a true friend is steady in his love, and prosperity and adversity, honour and dishonour, evil report and good report, make no more difference to him, than the changes of the air to a man of a healthy constitution.

Some false friends become cool in the day of prosperity, for they grudge to see their equals exalted above them; but a true friend rejoices in the prosperity of those whom he loves, although he possesses a share in it only at second hand. Jonathan was one of the noblest instances of this truth, who loved David, and rejoiced in his prospects of advancement at his own expence*.

Adversity is commonly reputed the touchstone of friendship. That is the season when our hollow friends forsake us, but a real friend then acts the part of a brother, and discovers his friendship more than ever. Jonathan encountered the fury of a tyrant in a father, and risked his life for David, for whom he had formerly given up with cheerfulness his prospects of a crown.

We must not, however, be too rigorous in trying our friends by this mark, for perfection is not to be found any where among men, and the strength of prejudices or fears, may sometimes make real and worthy friends to act in a manner unworthy of themselves. The love of the disciples to Christ was approved by himself, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations;" and yet through fear they forsook him, and fled in the day of his strongest temptation. Job's friends, through an unhappy mistake, added greatly to his afflictions, and behaved like enemies; yet that patient sufferer still calls them his friends, and solicits their sympathy†.

We ought to shew proper attention to our friends in their distresses, that we may approve the sincerity of our former professions, and in the day of our own distress to make due allowances for the weakness of human nature‡. But no friend but Christ deserves our unlimited confidence. In him the text received, and still receives, its most glorious accomplishment. He remembered us in our low estate, and forgets us not in his own exaltation. Afflictions are the seasons when his kindness is most richly experienced, and our provocations do not alienate his affection from us. This is our beloved, and this is our friend. In him we will trust, and to him we will devote our hearts.

Ver. 18. Solomon warns us often against rash suretiship, and yet many professors of religion have opened the mouths of enemies by the temptations into which they have run themselves by forgetting this exhortation. Why should religion bear the blame of what it testifies so often against, that every man who reads this book must observe it, and have it in his mind, unless he wilfully despises the instructions of the wise man? If we would hearken to Solomon, he would teach us to be richer and happier, as well as better Christians*.

Ver. 19. Pride is a destructive sin, in whatever form it discovers itself; and the Spirit of God, by Solomon, gives us many warnings of the danger of it, and of those sins that are produced by it.

Only by pride cometh contention, and from the love of contention spring an innumerable multitude of iniquities; for as charity is productive of every virtue, so that he who loveth another hath fulfilled the law, and will do no hurt to his neighbour; so he that takes pleasure in strife hath broken the whole law, and is ready to do every bad thing, for where there is envying and strife, there is confusion and every evil work.

But who is the man that loveth contention? Those who are engaged in it, allege that they love peace as much as any man, but they are forced into it by the perverseness of other men. However, when men are almost always engaged in strife, they afford too strong presumption that they love it. If a man is always engaged in law-suits, or in angry contentions with his neighbours either about religion or politics, or those things that concern his private interest, he is surely a lover of strife. It is an evidence no less clear of love to contention, when persons seize every opportunity for beginning a quarrel, and cannot make the least sacrifice of self-will, or interest, or humour, for the sake of peace. Now, if strife be productive of so many sins, it must be attended with a proportionable train of miseries, and therefore our interest as well as duty requires us to avoid every thing that may lead us into angry disputes. If we love God, we will love our brother also; and if we live in the faith of reconciliation with God, we will follow peace with all men.

The love of expensive vanities, is another sign or pride, and is likewise censured by the wise man. He that exalts his gate, and builds to himself a house magnificent beyond what his station requires, or his circumstances allow, seeketh destruction. The slothful man

exposes himself to misery; but he waits for it till it comes upon him like a traveller. The aspiring man, that cannot be happy without a stately dwelling, and a splendid manner of living beyond what his estate will bear, seeks for destruction, and sends a coach and six to bring it to him. Let us hate pride, for it makes a man miserable in this world as well as the next. It makes men unsatisfied with the condition allotted them by God, and tempts them to waste their substance, and to cheat and oppress their neighbours, in order to gratify their own ambitious disposition, and leads on the person in whom it reigns, to the practice of many sins which bring down destruction from the Almighty*.

Ver. 20. A man of a froward and perverse spirit, makes use of art and dissimulation to gain his ends, and thinks himself so wise, that he has no reason to fear a disappointment; but he indulges himself in an error which the whole scripture condemns, and which no man of real honesty can fall into, that some profit may be gained by sin.

The froward in heart is an abomination to the Lord*. And the Lord is the universal Ruler, and will never suffer a man to enjoy any solid satisfaction in that which he detests. He will most certainly frustrate those expectations which are founded upon a contempt of his majesty, and a presumptuous notion that the power and wisdom of a creature can successfully oppose the Creator†.

The froward in heart and in tongue will not only meet with a total disappointment of his hopes, but fall into extreme misery. And this is the most deplorable condition that we can imagine, when one is not only divested of every thing comfortable and good, but loaded with the opposite miseries. This severe punishment is begun in this world, as experience teaches every day, and it is consummated in that punishment of loss and of sense, which the wicked suffer in the everlasting world.

How foolish are the men whose wisdom lies in a skill to do evil! Their own feet cast them into a snare, and their own tongues, by which they hope to execute their wicked contrivances, fall upon themselves, and grind them to powder. Honesty and integrity is our best wisdom; and upright men walk on firm ground, when the men that boast of their crooked arts fall into their own snares.

Ver. 21. How little are earthly objects to be trusted! Men's families are the sources of their expected joys, and the birth of children is generally accounted a joyful occasion; but many children are the causes of grief, and not of joy, to their parents. By their folly they are a disgrace to those that might have expected better returns of their fondness, and fill those evil days of old age with additional pains, when it was expected that the sight of them would have relieved every pang. He that has the unhappiness to be father to a fool, hath no joy, either in his son or in any thing else, for every pleasure is deadened, and every distress embittered and poisoned, by the sight of a child despising the very instrument of his existence, and treasuring up endless miseries for himself.

Unnatural are those children who make their parents miserable, by means of that fond affection to their unworthy children, of which they cannot divest themselves. Unwise are those parents who look for comfort to their children, and do not look above them to the Father of lights, who alone makes any thing a blessing to us. It must greatly increase the affliction of those who meet with this sore calamity, to have occasion of reflecting, that they have been careless in using those means that might have driven away foolishness from their children, or in praying for that blessing on which the success of all means depends.

Ver. 22. The intemperate mirth of sensualists is a slow poison to the body, and therefore cannot be here meant Innocent amusement is here allowed, as a mean of promoting or preserving health; only it must not be turned into a business, to consume our days in vanity, and make our health useless to us; but the mirth principally recommended by the inspired writer, is that cheerfulness which religion bestows; for he tells us, that the ways of wisdom are all pleasantness and peace, and that sorrow and wretchedness are inseparable attendants of sin.

The things of this world are so incapable of affording permanent satisfaction, that Solomon wrote almost a whole book to shew that they are vanity and vacation of spirit; but wisdom, he tells us, makes the face to shine, and inspires the heart with pleasure.

A merry heart diffuses its influence through the body, and preserves its vigour and health, or tends to restore it where it is lost; but a broken spirit crushes the frame of the body, enfeebles its powers, makes the flesh to wither and decay, and burns the bones like an hearth. Christ himself, in his agony, felt the effect of strong sorrows in his flesh.

Every thing that tends to spread a gloom over the mind, is to be avoided. There are cases, indeed, where we are called to mourn and weep, but that grief which religion requires and infuses, is not dangerous to the animal frame, because it brings the sweetest joys in its train. It is sin that brings the most dangerous sorrows along with it, and not repentance, which is a medicine to remove the cause of the worst distempers. When David was stubborn, and did not confess his sins, his bones waxed old, because of his roaring all the day long. But when he confessed his sin, the joys of pardon healed his bones, and renewed his vigour, so that he praised God, not only for pardoning all his iniquities, but likewise for renewing his age like the eagle's.

The joys of God's salvation will be a mighty antidote against every grief, and strengthen the body and soul against those bad impressions which the multiplied calamities of life too often make*.

Ver. 23. It is said of Sir Matthew Hale, that glory of the English Bench of Justice, that when a cause was brought before him by a gentleman who had sent the present of a buck, he called for the gentleman, and desired him either to withdraw his plea, or name the price of his present; and although the judge was told that it was no more than he used annually to send to the circuit judges, yet he absolutely refused to admit the cause, unless he was allowed to pay down the full price of the present; whereupon the gentleman chose to lose his cause, that he might not suffer the affront of taking money for a gift. He is a wicked judge that accepts of bribes, and an honest man would rather lose his cause, however just, than gain it by such a base thing as a bribe. It must have been a great bondage for Paul to be confined to a prison, when he loved the pulpit so well, had not his will been sunk in the, will of God; yet he would not offer the least bribe to his covetous judge, who detained him in prison, expecting that money would be offered for his freedom.

Wicked men take their gifts out of the bosom, that they may do it without public observation; but why should men thus affront the omniscient God? Can any man do a thing so secretly, that God shall not see it? Or will it be any profit to us to have our sins hidden from the eyes of men, when they are all before the great Avenger? That which is done in secret, shall one day be revealed to the view of an assembled world, and then the omniscience of God will be vindicated from all the insults put upon it in this world, by those foolish men who were not ashamed to do those things before the face of God himself, in which they would not have wished the meanest of their fellow creatures to detect them.

Ver. 24. Knowledge is often useless to the possessor of it, either because he is ignorant of those things which he ought to know, or because he wants wisdom to make the proper use of his knowledge; but true wisdom is of constant use to him that possesses it, for he does not suffer it to be buried in his mind, but applies it for the direction of his life. It guides him in the choice of his great end, and makes him steady in the pursuit of it. He keeps it still before his eyes to guide all his steps, and walks in his way safely, for wisdom preserves him, and discretion keeps him*. Thus we find David regulating his life. He hid the word of God in his heart, and kept it before his eyes, and so he did not wickedly depart from his God†.

We must not only learn wisdom, but keep it in our eyes, that it may be a light to our feet; for a man that has wisdom in his mind, and forgets to use it, is like one that has money in his chest, but forgets to carry some of it with him when he is going a long journey, to bear his necessary expences. He will be at a great loss, on many occasions, that has money in his house, but none in his pocket.

But a fool wants wisdom in his heart, and there is no wisdom before his eyes; for instead of employing his understanding to fix upon the great end of life, as the mark at which he aims, his eyes are at the ends of the earth, roving up and down to look at every thing that comes in his way, except that on which his view should be constantly and steadily fixed. He has a roving fancy that is perpetually misleading his mind, and never minds what he ought to mind in the first place. He is either doing nothing, or nothing to purpose, or nothing of what he should do, but lives at random, and tosses to and fro like a ship in the sea, without a pilot and a helm. Such a man is perpetually in chase of shadows, and when he has overtaken one of them, and finds no substance in it as he expected, he begins to pursue another; and so his days are spent in vanity, and he enters into the eternal world without any serious thought of making provision for his long home.

Our duty is, to fix our eyes upon the things that are not seen, and to live under the powerful influence of an eternal world; and whatever lesser objects we may be called to regard in our journey through life, to tread that path which leads to eternal life, without turning out of it to the right hand or left, on any consideration whatever.

Ver. 25. This instruction would not be repeated so often, if it were not useful for many excellent purposes.

It teaches parents to avoid that common fault of too fond indulgence to the faults of their children, for a child left to himself is for the most part a grief to his father, and bitterness (which is the greatest degree of grief,) to his mother, whose maternal tenderness was more likely to spoil him by its excess, than the fondness of a father.

It is a lesson to children, to beware of converting the kindness of their parents to themselves into a torment, by bad behaviour.

It instructs those that have not the pleasure of a rising family, to acquiesce in the providence of God, when they recollect that children are but an uncertain comfort.

It instructs those that have not yet entered into family-connections, to chuse their partners in life with prudence, and to marry none that are likely to set a bad example before their children, or to neglect their religious education.

If parents have the misfortune to be plagued with foolish and wicked children, let them remember David, and the afflictions he suffered from his family, and the comforts that refreshed his soul under this distress*. Let those that can look upon their children with pleasure, bless God, and ascribe the praise to his name.

Ver. 26. It is a bad thing when children, that ought to be a joy to the hearts of their parents, under every misfortune, prove their heaviest cross. But here is a worse evil censured; when magistrates, that are the ministers of God for good by their office, prove the ministers of Satan in the administration of it, by punishing the just, and perverting an institution of our gracious Creator, into an instrument of unrighteousness.

To punish the meanest of men without ground, is a very bad thing, for it is a discouragement to virtue, and a strong incentive to wickedness; but it is doubly wicked to strike princes for equity, by punishing inferior rulers for acting according to the eternal rules of righteousness, and refusing to truckle to the humour and caprice of their sovereigns. It was the fear of this that determined Pilate to condemn the holy One and the just.

Subjects may be guilty of striking princes for equity, by smiting them with their tongues, or seditious practices against their authority, whilst they endeavour, in the administration of their office, to serve the true interests, rather than gratify the unreasonable wishes, of those whom they govern. Moses had a large experience of this rebellious disposition, in the people whom he led through the desert; and it is probable, that Solomon himself saw reason to complain of it in his reign.

Parents and masters of families may be charged with the crime of punishing the just, by groundless severities to those who are under their charge*.

Rulers in the church are in like manner worthy of censure, when they administer the ordinance of discipline to the injury of those whom they rule, by rebuking them for things that are not criminal, or for real crimes which cannot be proved.

Ver. 27. As we must not be hasty with our mouths to utter any thing before God, so it is foolish to be swift to speak even before men. The empty vessel makes the greatest sound, and the man that has nothing to say that deserves hearing, is commonly most prodigal of his words. When Xenocrates the philosopher was quarrelled for silence in a meeting of friends, he answered, That he had often

repented of speaking, but never of silence.

Persons should not be fond of hearing themselves speak at any time, but double caution is necessary when we meet with provocations that put our minds into a ferment. The wise man's knowledge teacheth his mouth to speak the words of truth and soberness, but angry passions are the worst instructors to the tongue in the world. Floods of venom are poured from them when they have mastered reason, and obtained the command of the lips*.

A man of understanding having the government of his tongue, shews the excellency and coolness of his spirit, either by silence, or by the meekness of his words, as the occasion directs him. David had such a command of his passions through the power of faith, that he said nothing amiss when he was tried with the most provoking usage in the time of distress, a season when the spirits of other men are discomposed by mere trifles. He was like a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs, "for in thee, O Lord," says he, "do I hope. Thou wilt hear, O Lord my God†."

But if a man spare his words, may he not lay himself open to the suspicion of being an ignorant man or a fool? No.

Ver. 28. The silence of a fool is almost always a covering to folly, and a sign of some degree of wisdom, yet it is not always a sign that his folly is in any degree cured. Absalom held his peace when his sister was ravished by Amnon; but his silence proceeded from sullenness and cunning, and prepared the way for the execution of his furious revenge.

It is a good sign that a fool is not incurable, when he has learned to hold his peace from a sense of his own ignorance, and a desire to learn from others. It is as difficult a thing to learn to be silent, as to learn to speak, and although unseasonable silence is not a good thing, yet unseasonable speaking is far worse.

It is often a point of real wisdom to be silent, for there is a time to be silent, and a time to speak, and the wise man's heart knoweth both time and judgment. When men have no call to speak on a subject, or when they have not duly considered it; when they are discomposed by passion, or in the company of those whose passions render them incapable of hearing reason; and finally, when they are more likely to expose themselves to damage than to do good to others by speaking,—then to hold their peace altogether, will be their best method of behaviour.

It is sometimes our duty to hold our peace even from good, but we must not run into one extreme to avoid another. Silence which is occasioned by cowardice, when we are manifestly called to bear testimony for truth, is a dangerous sin*. Nor must we desert the defence of oppressed innocency, to prevent inconveniency to ourselves†.

CHAPTER 18

Ver. 1. MEN'S wisdom in this world is imperfect, and appears much more in desires than attainments‡. But these desires are not feeble and ineffectual wishes, like those of Balaam, when he desired to die the death of the righteous, and yet had a prevailing love to the wages of unrighteousness. Genuine desires of wisdom and holiness will dispose a man to separate himself from every thing that would obstruct the attainment of it, and to use every proper mean for obtaining it.

We are not called to give up every connection with the world, but in the calling wherewith we are called, we are directed to abide with God. But we must lay aside every unnecessary incumbrance, and avoid that load of worldly cares which would press us down to the earth, and keep us from travelling in that way of life which is above to the wise. Worldly cares, and the lusts of other things, are the thorns that choak the good seed of the word, and hinder it from bringing forth good fruit. David was called to the government of a kingdom, but he did not suffer the weighty cares of government to alienate his soul from the word of God, which was still his meditation day and night. How far it is a man's duty to separate himself from other things to learn wisdom, depends upon his particular circumstances; for the same person, in different situations, is required to employ a greater or lesser part of his time for this purpose. The labourer, that must attend upon his own business with diligence in its proper season, should employ himself in beholding God's work, when his hand is sealed up by stormy weather*.

The person that desires wisdom with earnestness will seek and intermeddle with it: although he depends on God for this precious gift, yet he will not make the freeness of divine grace a pretence for laziness; but by reading and hearing, meditating and conversing, praying, and practising what he knows already, he will follow on to know the Lord, and on such means the blessing of God may be expected*.

It is not one branch of wisdom only that the lover of wisdom will seek after. It is his earnest wish and endeavour, that the word of Christ may dwell in him richly in all wisdom. He regards both knowledge and practice as necessary parts of wisdom, that his eye may be clear, and his whole body full of light. He wishes and endeavours to be sound in the faith, and to attain a large measure of acquaintance with the law and the gospel. He is careful to understand his own way exactly, and to have every one of his steps ordered in the word of God. Every branch of religion is valuable in his eyes, and the Spirit shall lead him into all truth.

Ver. 2. The disposition of fools is entirely opposite to that of the lovers of wisdom, for they have no pleasure in understanding. Novelty, or curiosity, or a desire to make a figure by their knowledge, may sometimes induce them to bestow some pains to procure knowledge; but their eyes were never opened to discern the divine beauty of truth and holiness, and they have no spiritual sensation, to relish the sweetness of that which every Christian declares from experience to be sweeter than honey from the comb. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things because of him; but his obstinate continuance in the sin of incest was an evidence that he had no true delight in wisdom, for that would have disposed him to abhor every false way. In the 58th chapter of Isaiah, we

read of wicked men that delighted to know God's way; but we learn from the following part of that discourse, that their delight in wisdom was an empty pretence. They hoped to make satisfaction to God for their sins by their observation of ordinances, without seeking any experience of their sanctifying influence. Their delight was not placed on God or his ways, but on those advantages to themselves which they fondly hoped to obtain by bodily exercise. The hearers resembled by the stony ground received the word with joy, and for a time seemed to profit by it; but they had no cordial relish of the gospel. Their delight was only a transient flash of affection, and it soon appeared that they loved their bodies more than their souls, and preferred their ease and safety to the gospel of salvation.

The delight of a fool is, that his heart may discover itself. Some of the wicked are decent in their outward conduct, and their pleasure lies in the inward indulgence of their corrupt disposition; but others of them are not ashamed of their folly, and take delight in making it visible to all men by its fruits. They discover their pride and vanity, their sensual and irreligious dispositions, by their tongues and practices; so that you may easily see that they are corrupt trees, because they bear nothing but corrupt fruit.

This proverb instructs us to distinguish between fools and wise men. A wise man seeks and intermeddles with all wisdom, because he delights in it after the inward man. If we love not wisdom, but take pleasure in the thoughts of foolishness or in the outward expressions of folly, we must be ranked in that black catalogue of which so many bad things are said in this book, for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

Foolish thoughts too often come into the minds of the wise, but we must suppress them as soon as they enter, lest by giving them licence to pollute our hearts, and stain our conversation, we should incur the reputation of folly*.

Ver. 3. Pride is one ingredient of the wicked man's character, and this disposes him to treat those with contempt who are better men than himself. When he makes his appearance, you need not wonder if you find contempt, and ignominy, and reproach in his company, for he wishes to exalt himself upon the ruins of the honour and good name of his neighbours.

The proud man has sagacity to find materials in great abundance to furnish him with those titles of scorn and reproach which he heaps on other men. Poverty and calamity, natural infirmities, or ungracefulness in behaviour, foibles and failings, are all employed by him for exposing his neighbours to contempt and laughter. But good men are the chief objects of his spleen, and if he can find nothing else to afford him a handle for holding them up to scorn or reproach, he can make a dextrous use of their very virtues to serve his pride and malice.

To expose our innocent neighbours as the objects of contempt or ignominy, is a very wicked thing, especially when they are saints who are treated in this disrespectful manner. He that mocketh the poor, reproacheth his Maker; he that casts dirt in those faces that shine with the beauties of holiness, is an enemy to Christ, and to his beauteous image. What a pity is it, that even the saints themselves should reproach or insult one another! And yet it cannot be denied, that party disputes have sometimes afforded instances of this melancholy fact.

When we meet with contempt and reproach, let us remember that our Lord Jesus Christ met with it in a much larger degree for our sake, and hath left us an example of bearing it with patience. He hid not his face from shame and spitting; but gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.

But wicked men shall be paid in their own contempt. Michal despised David for his piety, and lived all her days under the reproach of barrenness. The text may admit of another meaning besides that we have given, that dishonour and disgrace follows wickedness at the heels. The wickedness and pride of men shall be recompensed with shame and everlasting contempt*.

Ver. 4. The words of a crafty man may be compared to deep waters, because it is impossible to turn his thoughts from them; but this is not owing so much to his wit as his want of conscience, for he scruples not to speak in direct contradiction to his real sentiments; but God knows, and will reveal and punish his iniquity†.

The wise man seems here to speak of the words of a man that is furnished with a rich treasure of true wisdom. His words are like deep waters, not because he delights to express himself in riddles, and to conceal his treasures of wisdom from the eyes of others. He uses great plainness of speech; but there is more of solid sense and useful instruction in his words, than another man can apprehend at hearing them. Whilst men of shallow understandings pour forth a flood of words, in which there is scarcely a drop of matter, the truly wise man spares his words; but what he says contains much in its narrow compass. Such were the words of Solomon himself, which filled the queen of Sheba with amazement, for the sagacity of that wise princess could not penetrate the depths of that wisdom which he conveyed in his discourses.

How valuable is the conversation of the wise! Their words are like oracles that deserve to be remembered, and to be the subject of our thoughts; and they supply us with refreshment and pleasure, like a flowing brook which never runs dry, but is ever ready to afford drink to the thirsty traveller*.

It is the word of God which furnishes the heart of a wise man with all those treasures of knowledge which are so justly compared to a spring of living waters. And the faithful sayings of God deserve this high character above all the words of the wisest men, that they are like deep waters. Our ears can receive but a little of them†, and therefore they ought to be our study day and night. We cannot expect much benefit by a cursory view of the scriptures; but when we search into any part of them, with a dependance on the Father of lights, we shall find not only treasures, but rich mines of what is more valuable than the purest gold.

Ver. 5. It is a very bad thing to justify the wicked, and a worse thing to condemn the righteous; but both these iniquities meet in the sin condemned in the text.

Although God loves the righteous, he will not accept their persons, so as to give wrong judgment for them against the wicked; and

therefore, when David prays against his enemies, we usually find him pleading the goodness of his cause*. And Peter exhorts oppressed Christians to commit their souls in well-doing to God as to a faithful Creator.

If it were possible to accept the person of God himself, yet God hates partial dealings so much, that he would certainly reprove it†. Job's friends condemned that good man out of zeal for the glory of God, for they could not conceive how God could be righteous unless Job were wicked; and yet God did not approve of their conduct, but sharply censured them for endeavouring to vindicate his glory at Job's expence.

This sin of partiality in judging is no less detestable in ecclesiastical than in civil administrations. When men of riches and power are allowed to trample upon the liberties of the poor and mean, and when those that ought not to have a place and a name in the church, are permitted to usurp those powers that evidently belong, by Christ's appointment, to the body of the faithful, is it not plain that church-rulers are become partial in themselves, and judges of evil thoughts? Whatever property men may have in manses and stipends, they cannot from thence infer a right to constitute spiritual relations, which ought to be founded in mutual choice‡.

There are other instances of partiality in church managements equally condemned in this place||. When we take it on us to judge other men, without any call, against the command of Christ§, we too often run into this iniquity of partial judgment, by censuring the same faults in different persons, with different degrees of severity, as our affections lead us.

Ver. 6. Solomon has already represented very clearly the folly and danger of contention, and observation abundantly verifies his words; and yet there are many people so foolish that nothing will warn them. Their lips enter into contention, and their mouth calls for strokes. Whilst they pour forth the venom of ill-nature in a torrent of spiteful reflections against their neighbours, they do not consider that they are calling for a stroke to themselves, by kindling up those passions which may provoke their antagonists to return their rage with good measure. That profane apostate, the emperor Julian, used to banter the Christians with that precept of our Lord, "When thine adversary smites thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also:" but Christians consult their ease as well as their consciences when they obey this precept in the spirit of it; whereas proud and passionate fools, when they give vent to their rancorous spirits, because they cannot bear the shadow of an indignity, not only turn the other cheek to their adversary, but smite, and urge, and almost force him to strike and destroy them. It may be justly said, that—

Ver. 7. For men to be destroyed on account of the transgression of their lips, is a grievous though just punishment; but the text represents the calamity which they bring upon themselves, in a still stronger light. They are not only the causes, but the agents of their own destruction; by their lips they are caught in a snare, and by their lips they are ruined. It was a severe, though unjust censure, which Eliphaz passed on Job, when he said, "Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I, and thine own lips testify against thee." But here Solomon tells us that fools, who have not the command of their tongues, are not only condemned, but punished by their own mouths. Their own tongues, as David expresses it, shall fall upon them; and when men's tongues fall upon themselves, they are crushed under the weight. The tongues of other men may pierce into our vitals, but the sharpest and most envenomed words of other men can never wound a man so incurably as his own.

It was a more mortifying punishment for Haman to be hanged on a gibbet erected by himself, than if he had been hanged in the most disgraceful manner on any other gallows. The contentious fool is like Haman; he erects a gallows for himself, and twists those cords by which he is strangled. But Haman could not well know that he was working for himself; whereas the lover of strife has fair warning of his danger from the word of God, and therefore must fall unpitied if he will not be reformed.

Ver. 8. It is just that a fool's mouth should become the instrument of his own destruction, for his words are arrows that make deep, and sometimes fatal wounds in other men.

Men may in some cases report the faults of others, without exposing themselves to the censure of this text. Joseph reported the faults of his brethren to his father, that his authority might reclaim them; and we are authorised by our Lord to complain to the church of an offending brother, when he will not suffer himself to be gained by a private admonition. But when men publish bad things of their neighbours through spite or levity, or to have the pleasure of hearing themselves talk, then they deserve the name of tale-bearers, and incur the reproofs given to such pestilent members of society in this book.

The tales which this kind of men tell are sometimes entirely false, and at other times have some truth in them, although they seldom want some dash of slander, to heighten their relish to those who love to feed on the faults and misfortunes of their fellow-creatures.

The words of tale-bearers are as wounds, and these wounds are of a very dangerous kind, for they pierce into the inmost parts of the belly. They wound the character, and often destroy the usefulness of those who have the misfortune to be the mark of these arrows of the tongue. Those who give these deadly wounds do not always mean all the mischief they effect, being instigated, not by downright spite, but by a pleasure they have in speaking, whilst they are destitute of good materials for conversation. But why can they not hold their peace? If you kill your neighbour in sport, or for want of better employment, will it be a sufficient excuse for you to allege that you had no intention to do it, or that you did it for want of better employment? Know you not that a man's name is as dear to him as his life, and his usefulness perhaps dearer to him than either of them? By wanton cruelty to others, men often bring serious misery upon themselves.

Ver. 9. Slothfulness in business is commonly a companion of tale-bearing; and both of them are more dangerous iniquities than men generally apprehend, and need to be seriously and frequently remonstrated against.

A man with half an eye may see that the prodigal will soon reduce himself to husks; and with a little attention, we may know that a slothful man is only a younger brother to him, and will come to poverty as certainly, though not with so much speed. The man that runs will speedily arrive at the end of his journey, but he that follows him with a slower pace, will arrive at it in good time. He that

spends his days in riot, takes his estate and casts it into a devouring gulph; but he that neglects his business, suffers a moth to devour his substance. Both these sins are breaches of the eighth commandment, though in different degrees.

There is the like difference between the careless Christian and the profane sinner. Sloth in religion is a consumption which preys upon the vitals, but open profaneness is a burning fever, which will more rapidly destroy the constitution. Let us not be slothful, otherwise we are followers, though at a distance, of those who have already plunged themselves into perdition by their wickedness. But let us follow them, who by faith and patience inherit the promises.

Ver. 10. Nations use to provide fortifications and arms for their defence, even in time of peace; and if they are so imprudent as to neglect these precautions, they are in imminent danger of destruction when an enemy makes an attack. In like manner, when we know that life is exposed to the incursions of calamity, and that we are surrounded with legions of invisible enemies, it is our wisdom to be provided with a sure defence, that we may be safe in the day of battle and war.

No creature in heaven or earth can defend us against the assaults of misfortune, or the more dangerous attacks of invisible adversaries, nor have we any power or wisdom of our own to afford us security. Our safety is only in the name of the Lord, that God with whom is everlasting strength and sufficiency, and who reveals himself through his blessed Son our Saviour, as the refuge of fallen men. In this great name protection is to be found from the distresses of the present life, from the tyranny of sin, from everlasting wrath, from the temptations of the devil, from the terrors of death, from every evil, and from every fear.

David in the day of his distress haunted the caves of Engedi, and the mountains of the wild goats; but we find in his history, and in many of his psalms, that these were insufficient for his protection, and that his confidence was ever placed on God himself as his tower of salvation. In him he trusted, and was helped; and therefore his heart greatly rejoiced, and with his tongue did he praise him. But he was not the confidence of David alone; he has ever been the dwelling-place of the generation of the righteous. They run by faith and prayer into this high tower in the day of their calamity and danger, and they are not at a loss when unexpected dangers are ready to overwhelm them, for no enemy can be so near to distress as God is to preserve. He is ever a present, a very present help in the time of trouble*.

But are poor sinners excluded from this refuge? Will they be expelled from it, if they come to shelter themselves under the protection of the merciful God? No, in no wise. The righteous runneth into it, and none that run into it continue unrighteous. But it is accessible to sinners also, for the name of the Lord is "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity†," &c. And sinners are invited into this tower of salvation by God himself‡.

Eternal safety is enjoyed by all that run into this tower, for it can never be undermined, or scaled, or destroyed, by all the devils in hell; and no enemy can break into it by force, or find a way by fraud to enter. None can so much as climb up to this refuge, to endanger the safety of those happy persons who have made it their habitation; nor is there any want of necessaries ever felt in it, for he that is the defence of his people is their all-sufficient portion, and heavenly Father. The place of their defence is the munition of rocks; bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure.

Surely if we have any wisdom, we will endeavour diligently to learn the way of running into this tower; and we cannot learn it better than by taking David for our pattern, whom we see, in many of his psalms, fleeing unto God to hide him. Let us read these divine compositions, and pray for the same spirit of faith which animated that holy man, and endeavour to follow the steps of his faith*.

Ver. 11. Few of the rich are righteous. God is the hope and strength of his people; but the rich are generally dazzled with the lustre of their gold and jewels, and mistake those precious metals for gods; and so they say unto the gold, Thou art our hope, and to the fine gold, Thou art our confidence. They trust not to the Rock of ages, but lean upon a broken reed which will soon break, and pierce their arms, and leave them to fall into perdition, after they have been pierced through with many sorrows.

Riches are good things when they are well used, but confidence in riches is a grievous sin, because it is an alienation of the spirit from God, who requires the homage of the heart still more than the worship of the knee. It is a source of many iniquities, because it prompts men to injustice and oppression, to despise God, and to forget death and judgment. It shuts up men's bowels of compassion from the indigent, and makes it as difficult for men to get into the kingdom of God, as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

This second warning the wise man here gives against this vain confidence. Examine yourselves, ye rich men, and see whether you have not the symptoms of this vain confidence. Trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God, and shew that your confidence is in God by a readiness to lend unto the Lord*.

Murmur not, ye that are poor, because you are not under the same temptation with some others, to make to yourselves god's of gold. Trust in the Lord, and you shall want no good thing.

Ver. 12. The ruin of all mankind, and of millions of angels, is a tremendous proof of the first part of this text. The abasement and exaltation of our Redeemer, is a glorious illustration of the other clause.

Solomon gives us repeated warnings of the danger of pride, and the necessity of a humble spirit; but we need them all, for vile and worthless as we are, humility is a very great stranger in our world, and pride is a sin so insinuating, that most men's hearts, and even their religion, is quite corrupted by it.

Proud men stand on the edge of a fearful precipice, from whence they will soon tumble into destruction. But blessed are the poor in spirit; they may be at present in the valley of abasement, but they shall dwell for ever with God in his holy hill, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Ver. 13. Men pique themselves upon their penetration and quickness of discernment, and to display this talent, are often too hasty to give their judgment upon a point, before they are well informed of it; but this rash manner of judging, especially in matters of consequence, is their folly and shame; they discover their ignorance and pride, when they expect to have their sagacity applauded. Instead of pronouncing peremptorily upon a half hearing of a thing, it is often needful to hear it once and again, and to hear different persons concerning it, that we may not be drawn into false conclusions by the prejudices and partiality of those whom we first heard on the subject.

This is a necessary instruction to magistrates, who may be guilty of crying injustice, by pronouncing a hasty sentence in a cause that comes before them. Philip king of Macedonia, having given sentence against a widow in a cause she had before him, was so sensible of his injustice upon second thoughts, that he condemned himself to pay her damages. But kings are seldom so honest as to acknowledge their mistakes, and therefore they ought to be very careful that they do not fall into them. The pride of sovereigns established that law in Persia, that the royal decrees should not be reversed; and other princes, although they do not make such pretences to royal infallibility, have nevertheless too high a sense of dignity to be easily brought to an acknowledgment of errors.

Ministers of the word of God are instructed by this rule, not to be rash with their mouths to utter any tiling as the word of God in the pulpit, but to consider well what they are to say in the name of the Lord; and to use due deliberation and enquiry before they give their judgment in cases of conscience, lest they should make sins and duties which God never made, by a wrong application of the word of God to particular cases, or distress the minds of God's people, and encourage sinners, by giving a rash opinion on the state of their souls.

This rule is to be observed by all men in giving advice, or in judging of men's characters or actions, when they have any call to judge on them.

The Jews condemned our Lord as a Sabbath-breaker, because he made a man whole on it; but he tells them that they sinned by judging too rashly: "Ye judge according to outward appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

We ought to be the more cautious in forming and pronouncing opinions, because we are so little disposed to admit conviction if we fall into mistakes, or to retract them upon conviction. It is commonly supposed that ministers cannot repent, although they do not claim, like the Pope, the gift of infallibility; and there is too much reason for the supposition, provided it be not restricted to that order of men; for the same pride that makes one set of men stubborn in their wrong opinions is to be found in other men, although it is not perhaps so much strengthened by particular circumstances, nor so visible in their conduct, because they meet not with the same temptations to discover it. How many do we find who will not change their sentiments about religion, or about persons and things, upon the clearest evidence, and give way to anger upon the least contradiction to their favourite notions, as if their dearest interests were attacked! Saints themselves are not entirely delivered from this selfish disposition, as we see in the behaviour of David to Mephibosheth, after he had pronounced a rash sentence in his case.

Ver. 14. When the spirit of a man is free of wounds, it will enable a man to bear an incredible load of distress. That courage which is derived from natural constitution. or moral principles, enabled some of the pagan heroes to behave with astonishing firmness under the greatest pressure of calamity. Cæsar subdued all the world except the invincible soul of Cato, and Epictetus suffered his barbarous master to break his leg, without the least expression of resentment. But the true Christian is the true hero. Thousands, through the faith of Christ, have encountered with resignation and joy the rage of beasts, and flames, and tyrants. Cato and Brutus were cowards compared with the apostle Paul. They killed themselves, and deserted their country, that they might escape from the miseries of life. But Paul was content to die every day for the service of the church, and yet still live absent from the Lord, the life of all his joys.

But a wounded spirit is absolutely intolerable. It is a very hell upon earth, and has often made the most courageous of men, and the best of saints, to roar through the disquiet of their hearts. When the conscience is pierced with a deep sense of guilt, and the heart alarmed with the dreadful apprehensions of eternal misery, then the affrighted eye seems to behold upon the walls the hand-writing that amazed the mighty king of Babylon, and unsinewed all his joints. Every earthly comfort is to a man in this situation like the white of an egg; mirth appears to be madness, and nothing has any relish, but what gives some prospect of deliverance from this intolerable anguish.

Blessed be Jesus, whose soul was amazed, and environed with sorrows not his own. He never knew sin, and yet he felt the tremendous impressions of wrath upon his blessed soul, for he bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that by his stripes we might be healed.

If the presages of hell are so astonishingly dreadful, what must hell itself be? May we have grace to flee to Jesus, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come.

It is sin that causes this terrible anguish which none can endure, and sin unpardoned will cause it sooner or later in every transgressor. Why then should we thus wound and mangle our own souls, by fighting against God? If we shoot these arrows against the Almighty, they cannot wound his honour; but he can soon dip them in the venom of his wrath and curse, and shoot them back into our own souls*.

Ver. 15. The prudent man has a due apprehension of the value of knowledge, and seeks it with all his heart, and finds it. The Spirit of God writes the word of truth upon his heart, and inscribes it in his inward part; and whilst others have it only in their memories or tongues, he has it in his heart, which is filled with the love of knowledge, and enriched with this precious treasure.

But he is not satisfied with that measure of knowledge he has already got. He would not part with it for mines of gold, or mountains

of prey, but he wishes still to add to his stock, and therefore his ear is employed in seeking knowledge.

The ear is the learning sense, and the wise man will hearken attentively to any man that can give him useful information; but he attends chiefly upon the ministry of the word, because that is the appointed mean of increasing his knowledge and animating his soul. Although he meditates daily on the testimonies of God, yet he does not satisfy himself with the suggestions of his own mind, but feeds his meditating faculty with the word read and heard†.

Those that wish for no more knowledge or grace than they think absolutely necessary for getting to heaven, all that think their stock of knowledge sufficient, and all those that neglect the means of grace, are excluded from the class of prudent men by this sentence of Solomon.

Ver. 16. It is a shame for great men to love, Give ye. They should remember what our Lord says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Great men have received their great power, to do good to others; and poor men should not find the way so strait to their presence, as to have occasion for gifts to widen it. The King of glory admits the meanest of men freely into his presence, and will do justice to the poor and needy, and send them every needful supply*.

It appears from this proverb, that riches cannot satisfy the heart of man; the great and rich of the world are as eager to receive, and as much under the influence of money, as the poor. Silver and gold may dazzle the eyes, but they cannot fill, even whilst they encumber the heart.

Yet it is not in every case unlawful for great men to receive gifts, nor for men of inferior station to bestow them. Great men may cheerfully receive them as expressions of gratitude, for favours of a higher kind conferred, or to be conferred on their inferiors. And poor men may lawfully give them to procure favours, though not to obtain justice in a court of law†.

Blessed be the Lord, who makes us welcome to come to his throne without money and without price, to receive the richest gifts. May his gifts make room for him in our souls!

Ver. 17. When God came down to take vengeance on the men of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, he said, "I will see whether the wickedness is as great as the cry that is come unto me; and if not, I will know." God is not ignorant of any thing that men do, but he speaks in our language, and intends, by this manner of expression, not only to represent his own justice, but to teach righteousness to earthly judges. By judging in a cause without searching it out, David injured the son of his generous friend; and Ahasuerus, by the like conduct, exposed the people of his queen to destruction, and signed a warrant for her own death, and was forced to see that the Persian laws could not make their kings infallible.

An eloquent speaker will make his own cause appear a great deal better, and that of his adversary a great deal worse than it really is; and therefore a just judge will not decide, nor even form a judgment within his own mind, till the parties are both heard Claudius the emperor, who had no malignity but what was put into him by others, has rendered his name for ever infamous by judging causes after hearing only one of the parties, and sometimes neither of them.

Rome, in its pagan state, would never have allowed of a court so manifestly contrived by the father of wickedness, as that of the Inquisition; but made it a rule that no man should be reputed guilty till he had seen his accuser face to face, and enjoyed the liberty of answering for himself.

In private life, it is proper that we should know what a man can say for himself and his behaviour, before we punish him in his character. If we will judge our neighbours, we should certainly act the part of impartial judges, and not believe bad things of men, upon the report of tale-bearers, or those who are too plainly under the influence of prejudice against the persona whom they accuse. In religious disputes, it is a great injustice to depend for the character of a sect, or an impartial representation of their doctrines, upon one whom partiality has blinded, and rendered unfit, however honest he may be, to do them justice. Party-spirit has as much influence as gifts, to blind the eyes of the wise, and to pervert the words of the righteous.

It may, however, be a great satisfaction to us, that we may judge, as far as we have any occasion to do so, for ourselves, in the most important religious contentions, without hearing either of the parties. A man may easily know from the Bible, whether Christ is the supreme God, without the help of either Clark or Waterland. The Bereans could readily judge whether Paul's doctrine was true or not, by searching the scriptures, without putting themselves to the trouble of hearing what the Jewish doctors could say against it.

Causes between private persons are thus to be decided by an impartial judgment, founded upon good evidence; but how shall those contentions be decided, that arise between princes, who are too high to have any magistrate above them, and too proud to refer their differences to an arbitrator?

Ver. 18. The contentions of princes are very dangerous, because pride will not suffer either party to yield, and their power enables them to interest millions in their cause. How often have oceans of blood been spilt, and nations been loaded with the most oppressive taxes, and great kingdoms utterly subverted and laid desolate, in the prosecution of their quarrels! The good agreement of kings, is like ointment on Aaron's head, which descended to the skirts of his garments. Their animosities are like dangerous wounds in the head, which are felt to the sole of the foot.

Why may not the lot determine their quarrels? They are too great to refer their causes to an earthly judge, but the whole disposing of the lot is of the Lord.

It is a mercy to men that God has provided a method so safe and easy for determining controversies, that must otherwise be decided by the sword; but it is the sin of men, that they will rather have matters settled their own way, whatever it may cost, than by means of an ordinance of God.

As the whole disposing of the lot is of the Lord those who agree to have their businesses determined by it, must reverence the

providence of God in it, and rest cheerfully satisfied with the determination, and thus it will make contentions to cease.

Let us never prostitute to trifling uses, an ordinance designed for such great and merciful ends.

Ver. 19. That law which binds us to love our relations, obliges us, if we have unhappily differed with them, to be easily pacified, and even to seek peace with them, although we have been the wronged party. Abraham would not live in a state of contention with Lot, because they were brethren; and to put an end to the strife of their servants, he yielded to him, though only his nephew, the power of chusing what part of the land he would take to himself.

But such is the perverseness of human nature, that contentions between brethren are generally more irremediable than any others. When we meet with provocation where we thought we had all the reason in the world to expect a contrary behaviour, we can scarcely find in our hearts to bestow forgiveness; and thus it is easier to win a strong city, or to break in pieces the bars of a castle, than to heal breaches in families and amongst near friends.

It is therefore our duty to guard against those mischiefs which are so much easier prevented than removed; and with this view, we must not wantonly provoke our friends, nor be ready to take offence at their conduct. But if we are involved in contention with them, the authority of God should constrain us to mortify that unforgiving disposition which would prevent a cordial reconciliation. The love of Christ has broken in pieces for us the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the iron bars of our infernal prison; and why should not our most stubborn enmities be dissolved by the apprehensions of it?

Jacob used all possible means to obtain the good graces of his brother Esau after their unhappy difference, and yet it is a question whether their reconciliation was cordial and lasting. Their posterity kept up the strife, and Edom did tear perpetually, and kept his wrath for ever, as Obadiah tells us. This example teaches us what means we should use for healing such breaches, but at the same time admonishes us to prevent, if possible, the need of using them.

Ver. 20. Bad men are never satisfied with their vain or wicked discourse, and a good man never thinks he has served God or his generation sufficiently by the good use of his tongue, which is his glory. But both good and bad men shall be filled with the product of their tongues, in happiness or misery.

If a man were possessed of a field exceedingly productive, either of good fruits, or of noisome and poisonous herbs, according to the cultivation bestowed on it, what pains would he use to clear it of every weed, and to have it sown with good grain! and yet when the harvest is come, he may take his choice whether he will eat of the product or not. Such a field is the tongue of man, with this difference, that a man is obliged to eat the fruit of it, although it should be worse than hemlock. What care, then, should we use to pluck from our hearts every root of bitterness, and to have them furnished with knowledge and prudence, that our discourse may be good, to the use of edifying!

The fruits of the tongue are either very bitter, or very pleasant.

Ver. 21. Our tongues, as we have been frequently told in this book, are often the instruments of life or death to others. But it is the fruit of our own tongues with which we must chiefly be filled. A fool's mouth is his destruction*, and a wise man's mouth is oftentimes his safety. He that would live a long and a happy life, let him take care how he uses his tongue†. And at the last day, when evil-speakers are east into a fiery furnace‡, the fruits of the sanctified tongue will be produced as evidences of a man's title to everlasting life.

It is not the use of the tongue on some particular occasion that will determine a man's happiness or misery, but the love of a good or bad tongue. Saints may, through the influence of provocation and passion, speak unadvisedly with their lips; and sinners may speak many good words, when their hearts are not right with God. But he that loves to speak as becometh a saint, shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth; and he that takes pleasure in vain or ungodly discourse, shall meet with a just and dreadful recompence.

If, after all that the wise man has said, we bridle not our tongue, with what eyes will we look to Solomon at the last day! or rather, how shall we look our Judge in the face, who speaks to us in this book, and who taught the same lessons by his own blessed mouth in the days of his flesh*!

Ver. 22. It was not good for man in the days of innocence to be alone, and an help meet for us is still more needful, amidst those calamities that embitter the life of fallen men; for two are better than one, because when one of them meets with a misfortune, the other is ready to afford some relief.

A wife that is rottenness in her husband's bones, is no doubt a bad thing, for sin and folly will turn the choicest blessings of life into oppressive burdens. Such a woman deserves not this endearing title.

A good wife is an excellent thing, and is to be sought from the Lord. When Abraham wanted to have a wife for his son, he prayed to God. His servant prayed, and Isaac went out into the fields to meditate, and probably to pray likewise.

The man that has found a wife, has obtained favour from the Lord, and ought to acknowledge him with thanksgiving. It is God who made the woman for the man, and has preserved an equality between the sexes by his providence, and appointed marriage, and directs every man to his own wife, and disposes her heart to this tender union. If we are to thank God for the pleasures of friendship, what thanks are due to him for the pleasures of the most delightful union, whereby of twain are made one flesh!

Ver. 23. It cannot be denied that the rich have many particular advantages; but the poor have no reason to repine, for poverty has also its gains, one of which is, that it teaches us one of the best lessons,—that of humility. The poor have a daily experience of their dependent condition, which instructs them in the language of submission and lowliness; and when the Spirit of God sanctifies this condition of life to a man, it leads him to great improvements in that grace on which Christ pronounces the first of his blessings—

poverty of spirit. A little of this holy and humble temper is worth all the gold and silver in the world.

Some, indeed, are poor and proud, and they are the most inexcusable of all the proud persons that can be found on the earth, for they not only sin without a temptation, but in opposition to a providential remedy. However, their poverty still preserves them from many bad fruits of pride that are to be found with the rich.

The rich answer roughly, for their riches produce self-confidence, and that makes them insolent towards God himself*. And it need not surprise poor men, that those who can say, Who is the Lord? can give rough and uncivil words to them.

We should all consider the advantages of our different situations, that we may be thankful, and make a good use of them, and the temptations that are incident to our respective situations, that we may be on our guard. Let poor men take heed that the necessity they lie under of using intreaties, may not degenerate into a slavish meanness of spirit, disposing them to sell their consciences for bread; and let the rich remember, that they are infinitely more dependent on the great Patron of the poor and needy, than the poor on them. Those that give nothing but good words to the poor in their distress, are declared to be destitute of charity. In what class, then, must they be placed, who cannot afford even this poor favour?

The poor and the rich are alike poor before God, and without his rich bounty must be eternally wretched. If poor men supplicate the rich for their favours, with what words shall we express our meanness and absolute dependence, before Him who regardeth not the rich more than the poor! But he never gives a rough answer to his suppliants. Let us therefore come boldly to his throne of grace, that we may obtain every needful supply*.

Ver. 24. A man that hath found a wife must shew himself affectionate and tender; a father must discover kindness; every person must endeavour to fill up the offices of the various relations in which he stands. A neighbour must shew himself a social man; and he that has a bosom friend, must discover in his behaviour all that union of souls that is the very essence of friendship. Religion requires us to perform all those kind services to one another, which, if they were duly discharged and returned, would still make our world in some measure a picture of paradise.

We must not suffer unreasonable disgusts to alienate our affections from our friends, but cleave to them while we live; we must often gladden their hearts by our company, and share in all their joys and sorrows. We must not renounce their friendship for their imperfections, nor even for those temporary coldnesses which they may discover in the day of our distress, unless their behaviour is such as to shew that their professions of regard were not sincere. Above all, we must shew our tender sympathy in the time of their calamity, otherwise our alienation will greatly embitter their distress*.

To excite us to this duty, we are told that friends sometimes stick closer than the nearest relations. The greatest acts of generous heroism have perhaps been performed by those who were not connected by the bonds of relation or affinity. None of David's brothers ever gave him such proofs of their attachment as Jonathan; and even his wife Michal, though she loved him, did not love him so well as that gallant friend did. She lied to his prejudice, to screen herself from the resentment of her father; but Jonathan bravely incurred the resentments of his father, and cheerfully gave up his prospects of a crown, for David. When our Lord was crucified, his disciples forsook him and fled, and James and Jude, who had the honour of being our Lord's brethren, among the rest; but the beloved disciple looked on his sorrows with the eye of a friend, and received his charge about his mother with thankfulness and obedience.

If this is a reason for our friendly behaviour to our friends, what regard ought we to shew to our Lord Jesus Christ, who sticks to us infinitely closer than any friend! Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. Neither death, nor sin itself, can separate us from his love. What shall we render to him for his marvellous loving-kindness? Love and obedience; for we are his friends, if we do whatsoever he commands us.

END OF VOL. I.